

Tools for Improving the Planning Process

Towns that used the new [Planning Manual](#) offered this advice for updating their municipal plans.

Before You Start

Meet with all town boards, commissions and staff first to invite their engagement, identify key issues, and help focus the town plan steps.

How will the plan be used? All plans should guide town priorities but will it guide regulatory processes like town zoning or Act 250? If so, the plan may need more definitive policies than otherwise.

Determine if you will rewrite or work with your existing plan – see page 80 of Planning Manual for guidance.

Write the plan the way you would want to read it.

Step 1 – Assessment

Keep the data and analysis as relevant to your town's goals and policies as possible.

Avoid getting bogged down with information-gathering and describing existing conditions.

Keep the initial assessment process simple, using readily available data and analyses – such as those in the regional plan.

Avoid investing time and money in additional data and analyses unless you need more to make good policy decisions for the community.

Step 2 – Vision

Use multiple media for announcing the town plan outreach – the techniques suggested in the Planning Manual work.

One-on-one conversations make a difference. Each planning commissioner could personally invite 10 or more people to participate. Talk with nay-sayers directly to hear their concerns.

Use the town plan process to strengthen community and bring people together.

Step 3 – Goals and Objectives

Simplify the levels of recommendations in the plan. Consider using just two categories – one high level like a goal, and a second category of statements that are [SMART](#) (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound).

Briefly address all the required town plan elements but focus on those that are meaningful for your town.

Step 4-5 – Map and Identify Priorities

Determine if recommended actions belong in your town plan by applying a [SMART](#) screen and organize your implementation strategies in ways that are easy to track like the chart on page 79 of the Planning Manual.

Examine the activities that the town currently spends money and time on. Do they support your vision and goals and if not, how can the town re-align its budget, staffing and volunteer time?

Use a facilitator to help work through any tough issues.

Implementation and Review – Make It Happen

Conduct an annual review of your plan to determine progress and adjust approaches. See page 83 of the Planning Manual.

Use your consultations with the regional planning commission to review your implementation strategies and learn about resources to help reach your goals. See page 92 of the Planning Manual.



Bolton 2017 Town Plan

Population

1,182 residents (Chittenden County's smallest town).

Character

Mountain town with ski area, a few steep roads, floodplain along the Winooski River, two small hamlets and an elementary school.

Town Plan Team

Planning commission, some staffing from assistant town clerk, regional planning commission staff and graphic designer.

Funding

\$20,000 Municipal Planning Grant, \$6,000 Town Match, plus additional town and RPC staff time.

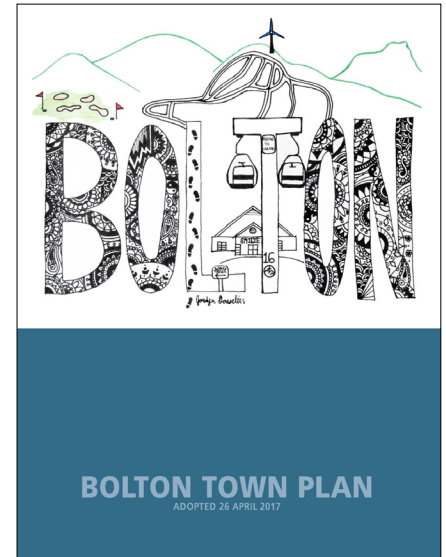
Highlights

Effective public outreach engaged over 100 people, brought the geographically dispersed community together and included:

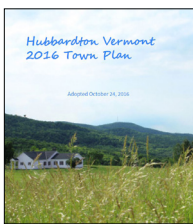
- Public survey
- [Art contest](#) with local K-12 school and adult submissions
- Planning commission member who went door to door inviting neighbors to participate
- Announcements on VPR and other news outlets for each stage in process reinforced the invitation
- Well-attended kick-off meeting with pizza
- Neighborhood forums engaged residents of each geographic area – with light refreshments
- Tables and displays for feedback at town meeting
- Regularly updated [town plan webpage](#) on town website

Used the **Maintain-Evolve-Transform (MET)** process introduced in Step 4 of the [Planning Manual](#) that stimulated thoughtful neighborhood discussions and led to new and refined land use districts in the plan.

Final Plan: <http://boltonvt.com/2017-town-plan-and-planning/>



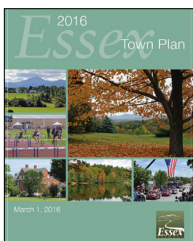
Notable Town Plans



Hubbardton 2016 Town Plan

Personal invitations to households throughout the town of 706 people, brought the community together and with help from the Rutland Regional Planning Commission, produced a succinct, actionable and up-to-date town plan that is attractive and easy to read. Funded through a \$9,990 Municipal Planning Grant with a \$995 local match. Vermont Planners Association 2017 Plan of the Year.

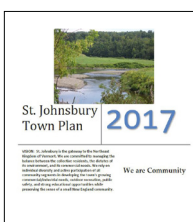
Final Plan: [https://www.dropbox.com/s/oyhan6i9b8xp1d7/Hubbardton Town Plan Adopted Oct 24_2016.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/oyhan6i9b8xp1d7/Hubbardton%20Town%20Plan%20Adopted%20Oct%2024%202016.pdf?dl=0)



Essex 2016 Town Plan

A vision and action plan, formed with participation from over 1,000 citizens through the [Community Heart and Soul](#) process (supported by the Orton Family Foundation) opens the town plan. Written and produced by town staff, additional mapping, graphic design and printing cost about \$14,000. Images from a town photo/art contest animates the plan. Vermont Planners Association 2016 Plan of the Year.

Final Plan: http://www.essex.org/vertical/sites/%7B60B9D552-E088-4553-92E3-EA2E9791E5A5%7D/uploads/2016_Essex_Town_Plan-FINAL-030216.pdf



St. Johnsbury 2017 Town Plan

The Planning Commission wrote and produced this clear and concise plan with mapping from the regional planning commission, using the momentum, ideas and volunteers generated by a [Vermont Council on Rural Development community visit](#). The plan uses Maintain-Evolve-Transform to organize priorities. Supporting data and maps are provided in the appendix.

Final Plan: <http://stjvt.com/index.php/town-documents/town-initiatives/2017-town-plan-draft-docs/859-5-2017-town-plan-final/file.html>

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