

**TOWN OF ATHENS**  
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February 20, 2017

**Certified Mail  
Return Receipt**

To: Planning Commissions for the Towns of  
Brookline, Grafton, Rockingham,  
Townshend and Westminster.  
Windham Regional Commission  
Department of Housing & Community Affairs

**Re: Proposed New Town Plan for the Town of Athens, VT**

Dear Commissions and Department of Housing & Community Affairs:

Enclosed is a notice of our first "Public Hearing" and a copy of our new proposed Town Plan.

If you have any questions in regards to the contents of this Plan, please feel free to call or email me at the information above.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Oberling".

John Oberling – Chair, Athens Town Planning Commission  
TOWN OF ATHENS



### **Public Hearing Notice for Proposed New Town Plan**

The Town of Athens, Vermont will hold a "Public Hearing" on Thursday, March 30, 2017 at 7:00 p.m. in the Athens Town Office located at 25 Brookline Rd.

The meeting will be held to receive and consider comments on the proposed new Town Plan. The Planning Commission will be on hand to answer any questions and to receive your comments. This notification is to comply in part with 24 VSA §§4384, 4385, 4444 and 4447 of the Vermont State Statutes.



RECEIVED

FEB 22 2017

Department of Housing  
and Community Development

**ATHENS,**  
**VERMONT**

**TOWN PLAN**

**DRAFT**

**2017**

Funded by a Municipal Planning Grant awarded by the Vermont Department of Housing and  
Community Development

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## LEGAL AUTHORITY

The Athens Town Plan has been prepared under § 5 of the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act as amended through 2015 (24 V.S.A Chapter 117). The Plan addresses the 12 goals listed in Chapter 117, Section 4382, and includes the elements required of town plans under paragraph 4382.

This Plan will become effective upon adoption by the Select board after required public hearings held first by the Planning Commission and then by the Select Board. As required by law, copies have been sent to bordering towns, the Windham Regional Commission, and the State Agency of Commerce and Community Development for review and comment and to any community or interested group, organization requesting a copy prior to the first hearing.

Under Vermont law, a town plan expires eight years from the date of adoption. Thus the Town must review its plan, revise where necessary and readopt or replace it every eight years.

Additionally, the Athens Planning Commission will conduct an annual public review of the Town Plan, and include a statement of our findings and recommendations in the Annual Town Report

## INTRODUCTION

*ATHENS* is a small irregularly outlined town lying in the county of Windham. It was granted by Vermont in March 11, 1780 and chartered May 3, 1780, to Solomon Harvey, John Moore, Jonathan Perham and associates. On October 27, 1794, a portion of the town was set off towards forming the towns of Brookline, and October 30, 1816, a portion was set off to Grafton, and November 2, 1846, a part of Rockingham and a part of Grafton were annexed to Athens.

The surface of the town is uneven, though the elevation is not generally abrupt, and affords a good, well-producing soil, though much better adapted to grazing than tillage. The natural growth is mixed timber. One stream of importance is Bull Creek, which, with its tributaries, flows in a northerly course through the eastern part of the township. One of its tributaries originates in Athens Pond a body of water about twenty-one acres in extent lying in the western part of the town. Lily Pond is another small body of water lying in the southwestern part of the town, deriving its name from the large quantities of white lilies growing in it. The principal rock entering into the geological structure of the territory is of soapstone formation, though there are small beds of steatite and azoic limestone found, and in the southwestern part considerable quantities of calciferous mica schist.

In 1880 Athens had a population of 284, and in 1882 it had three school districts and three common schools. The school from District 2, known as The Red School, has been serving as the Athens Town Office since 1981 when Athens built a larger school.

According to the 2010 Census the population of Athens is now 442.

## **PURPOSE OF A TOWN PLAN**

It is important for citizens of Athens to understand that this Athens Town Plan does not represent or include zoning bylaws.

The Athens Town Plan provides an understanding of where the Town came from, its current attributes and assets, and a clear direction that the property owners and residents of the Town desire to continue.

The Athens Town Plan sets forth goals and policies that establish a standard for review in Act 250 proceedings and other State regulatory processes. Its language is intended to be sufficiently clear for any citizen to understand and be guided accordingly. It can be amended at any time during the life of the plan, which is eight years after adoption.

The absence of a plan makes it difficult for neighboring towns to know what development is appropriate adjacent to Athens' town borders and to adjust their own plans and policies accordingly.

The absence of a plan makes it difficult for the Windham Regional Commission to include Athens' perspective in the regional plan, including land use.

The absence of a plan also diminishes the town's impact and effect in state regulatory processes. Act 250 requires conformance with local plans (Criterion 10). In the absence of a plan, especially a plan with clearly defined and unambiguous policies, town positions and comments have minimal effect in Act 250 decisions by the District Environmental Commission and the courts. Similarly, Section 248 (energy development and transmission) and Section 248a (telecommunications facilities) require consideration of town plans and it is the policies in those plans that are to form the basis of town recommendations.

The Athens Town Plan is also intended to serve as a source of information for Town residents, a reference people can use to learn about resources and services that exist within our community, and help provide a direction based on community input.

## **INTENTION OF THE TOWN PLAN**

It is the intent of the Town of Athens through the implementation of this Town Plan, to encourage the development of the community in a manner which promotes the health and general welfare of the public, land development and growth, and retains the highest characteristics of a rural-residential area, with large blocks of forest land that provide remarkable recreational opportunities.

Specifically, the objectives, policies and recommendations expressed within this plan, along with the various Town Plan maps, will serve to guide the Town's efforts in land use planning and growth management, in the provision of public services and facilities, and in economic development and resource conservation.

### **Public Input**

#### **Results of Planning Commission Survey of June 2014**

As part of its work in drafting an Athens Town Plan, the Athens Planning Commission mailed a survey to the 250 Town property owners to determine their concerns. We received 42 responses, within the self-addressed envelopes supplied, which was 16.8%.

The dominant concern was Tax Burden (31), followed by Natural Resources (22) and maintaining the Rural Quality of Life (22). In order of importance, the others concerns expressed were Environment (18), Roads and Bridges (16), Emergency Services (11), Telecommunications (11), Education (9), Regulation and Development ((8), Cultural and Community Issues (8), mobile home park issues (4), use of ATVs on property and public roads (1), less government interference (1).

### **March 2015 Town Meeting to vote on approval of first version of Athens Town Plan**

There was much discussion about the first version of the Athens Town Plan that was not approved at Town Meeting in March of 2015. The key area of concern was that the town plan was a regulatory document and would likely turn into town zoning forcing people to follow restrictive ordinances on how they used their property. A second area of concern was related to the power that a proposed Town Budget Committee would have in the town and how this could diminish the ability of the Select Board to manage town finances.

These discussions helped to inform this current version of the Athens Town Plan.

### **Community Questionnaire**

In February of 2016 a questionnaire was mailed to all Athens households. There were three questions: *What I Like About Athens – What I Don't Like About Athens – What I'd Like to see in the Future in Athens.*

Thirty residents responded in writing with a wide range of likes and dislikes. The “like” most often mentioned related to Athens’ rural nature, the quiet, natural beauty with neighborliness and helpful people also often mentioned. For “dislikes” the main item was decaying & junk properties, road and yard trash. High taxes and lack of transparency in government were also often mentioned. For “the future” transparency in government was the most common item, cutting taxes and enforcing existing regulations were also often mentioned.

### **Community Forum**

A Community Forum was held on May 4, 2016 to discuss what residents liked or disliked about Athens.

Twenty people attended and again the rural character of Athens was most mentioned.

As the following document demonstrates, we have written the Athens Town Plan so that it addresses these concerns as best as we can, but especially the primary ones of Tax Burden, Natural Resources, and Maintaining the Rural Quality of Life.

### **STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES**

The statements listed below represent the overall objectives of the Town of Athens and further establish a foundation upon which specific Town Plan policies have been based.

**It is the objective of the Town of Athens:**

- To encourage Athens' growth in a manner which helps to assure that the basic needs of the health, safety, welfare, education and housing of the Town's residents are met and maintained at satisfactory levels within the financial means of the Town.
- To maintain the Towns' characteristic pattern of settlement, with residential areas separated by rural countryside, and to encourage continued use of lands for agriculture, forestry and recreational uses.
- To encourage the conservation and enhancement of the community's cultural, historical, architectural, recreational, and scenic resources.
- To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

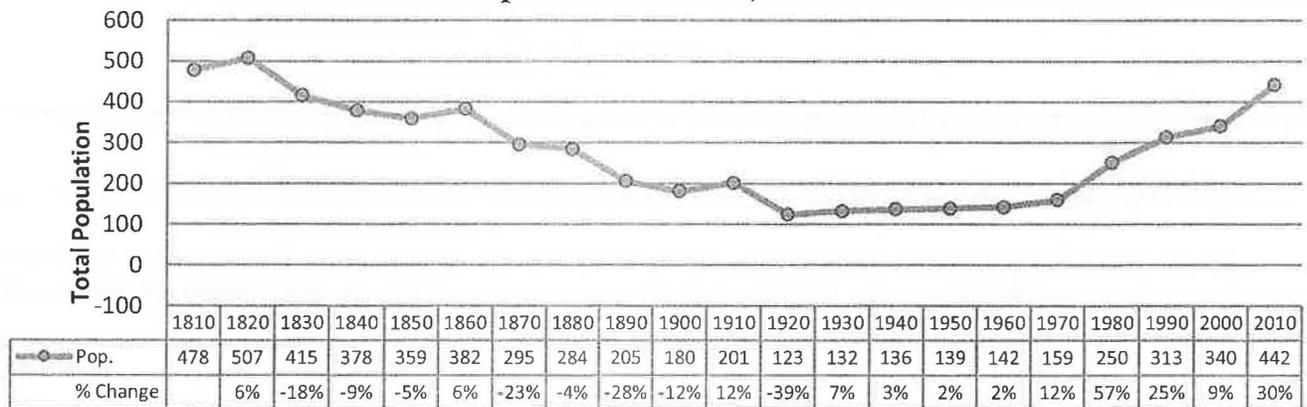
**COMMUNITY PROFILE**

Athens is but one town in a region of diverse and changing communities. The town is a member of the Windham Regional Commission and borders, Westminster, Grafton, Townshend, Rockingham, and Brookline. It is linked to these communities via roadways, waterways, contiguous forestland and wildlife habitat, and through the sharing of important community facilities and services. In addition, many of Athens residents have strong social and economic ties to the region's important employment and cultural centers.

The Athens Town Plan is compatible with the Windham Regional Commission plan and is also compatible with the town plans of neighboring communities.

**TABLE 1:**

**Athens Population Trends, 1810 to 2010**



Source: Vermont Indicators, <http://www.vegi.org/indicators/> & 2010 U.S. Census

<b>TABLE 2: POPULATION TRENDS IN NEARBY TOWNS</b>					
Town/Area	1990	2000	2010	Total Increase 2000-2010	% Change 2000-2010
Athens	313	340	442	102	30
Brookline	403	467	530	63	13.5
Newfane	1,555	1,680	1,726	46	2.7
Townshend	1,019	1,149	1,232	83	7.2
Putney	2,352	2,634	2,702	68	2.6
Westminster	3,026	3,210	3,178	-32	-1
Source 2010 US Census Bureau					

**Table 2** shows Athens growth as compared to neighboring towns. The towns surrounding Athens have also shown growth over the last 15 years.

<b>TABLE 3: COMMUTING</b>		
	Estimate	Percent
Workers 16 years and older	150	
Car, truck or van - drove alone	121	80.7
Car, truck or van – carpooled	3	2
Walked	0	0
Worked at home	23	17.3
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	39.4	

## ◆ TOWN GOVERNMENT

### Goal:

To maintain a stable and affordable tax rate.

### Recommendations:

- Maintain strong local government, with elected, and appointed officials and volunteers.
- Maintain fair and up-to-date appraisal of property, consistent with Vermont Law, as the basic source of Town funding.

- Participate in proceedings under Act 250, Sections 248 and 248a, as well as any Federal regulatory proceedings on new developments affecting the Town
- Under the direction of the Select Board, continue to evaluate and strengthen the local government with technical and financial assistance from appropriate agencies.
- Hold joint meetings of the Select Board and the Town Committees and Commissions twice a year (April and October) to facilitate communication on issues and matters of mutual interest, including discussing plans for the upcoming year.
- Under the direction of the Select Board, continue to evaluate and strengthen the local government with technical assistance from appropriate agencies.
- Inform citizens of all town ordinances, regulations and standards and make these documents available when requested.

The officials business of the Town is conducted at the annual March Town Meeting and at occasional special Town Meetings. The three selectmen conduct most of the regular business of the Town between Town Meetings. All elected officials are chosen by voice or written ballot. Other items on the Warrant are voted at the Town Meeting.

#### POLICY

- Growth and development should not exceed the capacities of local facilities and services.

#### ◆ **Taxation and Public Finance**

##### **Goal:**

To maintain a stable and affordable tax rate.

##### **Background:**

Primary residential properties carry more than half of the tax burden while second homes and woodland properties carry the rest. Between 2001 and 2011 the percentage of residential property owners in Athens has remained in the 60% range.

Since Act 60, the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1997 which changed the landscape of property taxes through the usage of common level of appraisal and it's amended version Act 68 in 2003, Athens struggles with its tax base as there are no commercial businesses and a lack of houses with a high assessed value within the town in which to help spread out the tax burden.

In response to this burden which was felt by many residents state wide in 2004 it became possible to file for a 'Homestead' in Vermont if you were a resident here. In doing so most citizens become eligible for 'income sensitivity' prebates, which in turn is used by the town towards the state education tax.

At present the following non-profit organizations own real estate in the Town, Christian Community Church, Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association (WHPA), and the Town of Athens.

Certain non-profit organizations may under state law request special tax treatment and the Town may vote to reduce or fix assessments at a specific level for a specific period of time. The townspeople are, understandably, reluctant to grant special tax status unless the benefits to the Town as a whole are clear.

**Athens 10 year Tax Rates (homestead rebates started in 2004)  
Figures from the Athens Town Reports 2006 -2015**

TAX YEAR	EDUCATIONAL	MUNICIPAL	TOTAL
2006	1.4382	1.14	2.57
2007	1.4653	1.88	3.3456
2008	1.6836	1.6	3.2836
2009	1.8979	1.61	3.5079
2010	1.5145	.87	2.3845
2011	1.3767	.92	2.2967
2012	1.3629	1.12	2.4829
2013	1.2735	1.33	2.3935
2014	1.2707	1.11	2.3807
2015	1.3961	1.13	2.5261

**Description:**

Maintain a Budget Committee to submit to the Selectmen each year a recommendation for the Budget for the next fiscal year and a revised five-year projection. Included in the Program should be fire and police protection, public education, land acquisition, municipal buildings, roads and bridges, and capital equipment.

**Recommendations:**

Require that special tax considerations not be granted as a “favor” to a particular non-profit organization, but only as an equitable adjustment in exchange for significant benefits to the Town as a whole.

Maintain a Budget Committee to submit to the Select Board each year a recommendation for the Budget for the next fiscal year and a revised five-year projection. Included in the program should be fire and police protection, public education, land acquisition, municipal buildings, roads and bridges and capital equipment.

The Budget Committee should look into other sources of revenue for the Town.

**POLICY**

- If an offer is made to give property to the Town for recreation or conservation purposes, in exchange for reduced or stabilized taxes, that the cost in reduced taxes be carefully balanced against the short and long-range benefits to the Town.

- It would not be in the Town's best interest to encourage large lot sub-division development of its open space and forest lands as a means for developing additional tax revenues that would place an even greater burden on Town facilities and services.
- The Select Board should consider offering time-limited tax incentives to new enterprises providing jobs and ultimately adding to the tax base.

◆ **Capital Investment for Equipment**

**Goal:**

To plan for necessary budgetary investments for equipment with special attention to the impact on property taxes.

**Recommendations:**

A Budget Committee that develops a five-year and ongoing Capital Budget Program to be submitted at each Town Meeting. The Select Board communicates to the Budget Committee each year the Town's capital projects to be funded. The responsibility for capital investment in police protection and decision will remain with the Select Board.

- Any capital improvements over and above the Capital Budget Program must be financed by special action of the voters.
- The Capital Budget Program must cover all tax-supported capital expenditures, including the schools, roads, bridges, municipal facilities, and debt service on long term loans. The responsibility for capital investment for police protection, fire and ambulance, and decisions of large-scale developments, will remain with the Select Board and Planning Commission.

**POLICY**

- Funding of capital improvements shall be planned to tax appropriations for such improvements at as stable a level as possible.
- Capital improvements shall be planned to maintain Town Facilities appropriate to the existing level of population and activity in the Town and the current growth rate, with consideration of the financial ability of the Town tax base. The Capital Budget Program does not provide for any large-scale development.
- Proposals for large-scale development shall be accompanied by economic and environmental impact studies prepared by developer or responsible agency, and reviewed by the Planning Commission.

◆ **Town Services:** The Town does not maintain it's own Fire, Police or Health Services.

- The town should look for and apply for additional grant funding for town owned properties.

## ◆ Fire Protection Services

### Goal:

To maintain an effective fire protection and fire prevention system.

### Description and Inventory:

- Currently our coverage is provided by the Saxtons River Fire Department, a volunteer department containing 20 active members available 7 days a week 24hrs a day for the community needs. Saxtons River covers the Village of Saxtons River along with Athens, VT. Athens belongs to the Southwestern New Hampshire District Fire Mutual Aid System.
- Athens has dry hydrants located at the junction of Walker Road and Rte 35, as well as near the junction of Brookline and Valley Cemetery Roads and on Reed Road near the junction of Christian Rd.
- On an annual basis the Town will contract for adequate fire protection.
- Periodic review of the effectiveness of the service is recommended.

### Recommendations:

- The Town will support a contracted fire protection service through annual appropriations.
- Fire ponds and hydrants should be maintained under supervision of the contracted fire protection service.
- Develop an effective communication program between the contracted fire protection service and the Select Board.
- Install more dry hydrants to provide adequate access to fire control water.

## POLICY

- Large developments and major subdivisions shall be responsible for providing adequate water sources and/or dry hydrants.

## ◆ Emergency Medical Services:

### Goal:

To provide timely emergency medical care by qualified personnel through contracted services.

### Recommendations:

- Town will support a contracted ambulance service.

- Develop and effective communication program between the contracted ambulance service and the Select Board

#### ◆ **Police Protection**

##### **Goal:**

To ensure adequate police services for the Town. The Vermont State Police from the Westminster Barracks respond to 911 calls. We also have our one elected part-time constable who is the law enforcement officer for the Town (24 VSA 1031), who can respond to certain public safety issues within the town.

- Currently the Town contracts with Windham County Sheriff's Department for police protection.

#### ◆ **Health Services**

##### **Goal:**

To effectively use services available to the community.

##### **Description:**

The Athens Health Officer is appointed by the State Secretary of Human Services on the recommendation of the Select Board and has the major responsibility of making certain sanitary inspections and responding to complaints regarding public health hazards.

At the present time, there is no doctor with office hours in Athens.

Then nearest hospital is Grace Cottage Hospital in Townshend, VT. 6 miles from Athens. The Rockingham Medical Group, a Springfield Hospital affiliate, located in Bellows Falls, VT, 10 miles from Athens, has a daytime Urgent Care Center for minor emergencies. Both Springfield and Grace Cottage Hospital have full-time emergency room services. The Veterans Administration has a center in Brattleboro, VT and White River Junction to serve veterans.

The Vermont State Department of Health provides various services to Athens residents, including well-child immunization clinics, various screening clinics, including epidemiology and public health nurse visitations, consultations and home-making services.

#### ◆ **Campbell Fund**

Started in April, 1876, the Fund began with \$4000 cash presented to the residents of Athens by David Richard Campbell "to support and aid the paupers, indigent, and poor of said town of Athens." The principal amount is to remain unused with the interest or income to be used in the aid and benefit of Athens residents. This fund is administered by three (3) elected Trustees by the Town of Athens.

##### **Recommendations:**

- The Select Board should be kept up to date about available health services in the community. Athens needs to participate actively in assuring adequate access to health services.

- Continue to fund special services such as Visiting Nurse, Grafton Cares and others by vote at Town Meeting.

#### ◆ **Liquid Waste Disposal (domestic)**

##### **Recommendations:**

- Co-operate with the State Agency of Natural Resources to ensure septic systems are installed correctly and maintained to prevent contamination of surface water.
- Follow State statutes and guidelines lands where soil conditions and topography may cause failure of waste disposal system or contamination of ground and surface waters.

##### **POLICY**

- Support efforts to eliminate existing sources of ground and surface water contamination. The development of property shall not contaminate ground and surface water.

#### ◆ **Solid Waste Disposal**

##### **Goal:**

To provide ways of disposing solid waste which are legal, affordable and ecologically safe, and to encourage waste reduction, recycling and reuse to reduce the total waste stream.

##### **Recommendations:**

- Support recycling and reuse activities, as well as waste reduction strategies appropriate to the Town's situation.
- The Town should maintain membership in the of the Southern Windsor/Windham Counties Solid Waste Management District (SWWCSWMD)
- The Town provides access to disposal facilities for certain items not suited to incineration at the Solid Waste Project, e.g., tires, construction and demolition waste, non-regulated hazardous materials, household batteries, etc.
- The Town should keep providing information to residents on disposal options for non-traditional trash.
- The Town should consider having an annual large-item and hazardous waste pick up day.

#### ◆ **Cemetery Services**

- The Athens Cemetery Commission is elected at Town Meeting to provide supervision of the two local cemeteries.

◆ **Meeting House**

- Meeting House Committee members are elected at Town Meeting to oversee Meeting house matters.

◆ **Housing Grant Commission**

- The members of the Housing Grant Commission are appointed by the Select Board to oversee housing grants within the Town.

◆ **Town Planning Commission**

- The Town Planning Commission members are appointed by the Select Board to oversee town planning matters.

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICES:  
POLICE, FIRE, RESCUE & HEALTH CARE**

◆ **Fire Department**

Saxtons River Fire Department is a volunteer department containing 20 active members available 7 days a week 24 hours per day for the community needs. Saxtons River covers the Village of Saxtons River along with Athens, VT. Athens belongs to the Southwestern New Hampshire District Fire Mutual Aid System.

◆ **Ambulance Service**

Athens contracts ambulance service from an area service provider.

◆ **Emergency Planning & Disaster Preparedness:**

The town has a FEMA and Town-approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. If you wish to view a copy you may do so at -

[http://windhamregional.org/images/docs/towns/Athens/athens\\_hazmitplan\\_2015-08-04.pdf](http://windhamregional.org/images/docs/towns/Athens/athens_hazmitplan_2015-08-04.pdf)

Athens has a town Emergency Committee whose responsibilities are:

- To open and run an emergency shelter at the Athens Community Church, should circumstances warrant, and should the Red Cross not be able to run the shelter; and
- To conduct a post storm assessment of and response to citizens throughout the town.

The Committee is only active in the event of a natural, weather-related emergency, working in cooperation with other town and regional officials and services. It is NOT a 911-type service, and does not have responsibility beyond weather-related emergencies.

The Town has made an application to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP); and is in the process of adopting Town road, bridge and culvert standards and an Emergency Operations Plan.

◆ **Health Care:**

The Town has no health care facilities and relies on services in adjacent towns which include Grace Cottage Hospital in Townshend, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, Springfield Hospital and Rockingham Medical Group and Urgent Care which is under the jurisdiction of the Springfield Hospital.

**Health & Safety Recommendations:**

- Regional hospitals, clinics, rescue services and other health facilities exist throughout the region. The Town should continue to support the rescue and health services which directly serve Athens residents, businesses and visitors including, but not limited to, The Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA), the Townshend Food Shelf, the Bellows Falls Area Senior Center, Health Care and Rehabilitation Services, Inc., Visiting Nurse Association and Hospice of VT and NH, Grafton Cares, Senior Solutions, and the Christian Community Church Food Shelf.
- The Town should consider an ordinance that prohibits the placements of household and personal items within the right of way of Town roads, beyond normal trash and recycle pickups. These could attract rodents and wild animals, and is a serious threat to public health and safety.

**POLICY**

- Necessary common fire protection features such as fire ponds and/or dry or charged hydrants shall be installed where practical by developers and sub-dividers to ensure the safety of the public.

**SOLID WASTE & RECYCLING SERVICES**

The Town does provide for refuse collection and single stream recycling.

**Solid Waste Recommendations:**

- The Town should support methods for reducing the overall quality of waste generated and encourage recycling.
- The Town should consider having an annual large-item and hazardous waste pick up day.

**POLICY**

- No hazardous waste shall be produced or disposed of anywhere in the Town unless in conformance with all applicable local, Federal and State laws.
- Developers of commercial and industrial uses which are responsible for unique or large amounts of solid waste shall demonstrate that the methods of disposal will not adversely affect the environment. Businesses generating such waste are responsible for disposal and associated costs.

## EDUCATION & EARLY CHILDCARE SERVICES

### ◆ **Primary Education:**

Athens belongs to the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU) and the Union High School District #27. Seventh and Eighth grade students can tuition to a middle school of their choice, as outlined in Vermont State statute. Students in grades 9-12 may attend the Bellow Falls Union High School, Leland and Gray, Green Mountain Union High School, Brattleboro or Springfield under the guidelines of Vermont School Choice.

Other secondary schools in the area are available with tuition such as: Vermont Academy a private preparatory school in Saxtons River (Grades 9 – 12), and the Compass School in Westminster (Grades 7-12).

A preschool and kindergarten education is provided for children ages 3 to 6 by the Saxtons River Montessori School.

Transportation is provided to various schools within the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union for grades K – 12. The town of Athens does not provide transportation to students who choose to attend a school outside of the WNESU.

In 2004 Athens joined with the town of Grafton to form The Athens/Grafton Joint Contract School District. All kindergarten through sixth grade students attend the Grafton Elementary School while pre-school students attend the Athens Early Education Center in the Athens Elementary School

The Grafton Elementary School houses 5 classrooms, a library, a gym, and a tutoring/resource room. In addition, it has office space and a nurse's room. Art and music are offered once per week and take place in each classroom. All students and staff have access to technology through a wireless network, a mobile laptop lab and SMART boards in each classroom. Community members make use of the building on a regular basis for all kinds of activities. The school has an active volunteer program in which residents give many hours of their time

### **Goals:**

- To provide effective and efficient educational facilities and programs for Athens/Grafton students.
- To develop a process for responding to changing educational needs and for assessing progress toward meeting those needs, in keeping with the values and aspirations of the Athens/Grafton community.
- To help each student realize his/her potential, lead a successful and satisfying life, and to help make a meaningful contribution to our local and global communities.
- Assure that Town residents have input into the decision-making process and be aware of actions being considered by the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU), the Union District #27 High School Board and the Athens/Grafton Joint Contract School Board.
- Make certain that all Town students have an educational program, which motivates and equips them to become self-supporting and participating members of a democratic society.
- Encourage total literacy for all Town adults.

- Encourage Athens/Grafton residents to apply for educational programs, which will equip them for new job opportunities.
- Work to assure that all elementary school graduates are literate, mathematically competent, and emotionally prepared for the next level of education.
- Work with regional educational organizations to encourage adult education at all levels and to make all adults aware of available courses.
- Encourage the Grafton Library and other community groups, including businesses, to be partners with the school to make full use of the human and organizational resources in Athens/Grafton.
- Encourage the school boards to integrate technology into appropriate classroom activities and instruction.

**Recommendations for Action:**

- The Athens/Grafton School Board should continue its efforts to maintain enrollment in the elementary school at an optimum class size through arrangements with neighboring school districts or with students that tuition in from outside the District.
- Develop communication between the elementary school and pre-school programs.
- Encourage the use of both the Athens and Grafton school facilities by making them available to adult education, programs, Town functions, and physical fitness opportunities. Such activities could take place during school vacations and evenings.

◆ **Secondary Education:**

- While there are no secondary education facilities in the Town of Athens, the Town does provide tuition for Athens students to secondary schools.
- Athens graduates of the Athens-Grafton School are eligible for the **Memorial Fund**. Established in 1996, this fund is to recognize the many years of devotion to the elementary school of Athens by serving on the school board. The fund is open to Athens graduates requesting assistance with books needed for further education. The request may be made in writing by the student to the Athens Town Clerk.

◆ **DAY CARE:**

Currently there are no licensed childcare providers in Athens.

**Recommendation:**

- Survey the Town residents to determine if there is a need for day care services, and whether it would be supported.

## ADULT EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

Adult Basic Education, a State-funded program for those 16 or over not enrolled in school, providing one-on-one instruction for literacy and basic mathematical skills. Offices in Springfield (885-5502) and Brattleboro (257-9449) are available to Windham County residents.

Community College of Vermont and Vermont Technical College are part of the State of Vermont College system, offering associate degrees, career-related certificates, and credit and non-credit training programs. Their curriculum includes liberal arts, business, human services, technology, and allied health.

Howard Dean Center in Springfield and Windham Regional Career Center in Brattleboro, have a wide range of learning opportunities presented by leading educational institutions in northern New England. All of this is offered in one convenient location in Springfield, Vermont.

Parks Place Resource Center in Bellows Falls also provides adult education.

### **Goals:**

- To provide effective and efficient educational facilities and programs for Athens residents.
- To develop a process for responding to changing educational needs and for assessing progress toward meeting those needs, in keeping with the values and aspirations of the Athens community.
- To help each student realize his/her potential, lead a successful and satisfying life, and making a meaningful contribution to our local and global communities.

### **◆ Education Recommendations:**

- Provide high quality, cost-effective educational opportunities, facilities, and amenities to all students residing in Athens.
- In order to meet the needs of Athens' elementary students, the Town encourages the "small-school environment" which currently exists at the Grafton School.
- Encourage the Athens School Board to adopt strict residency requirements for all Athens parents and children.
- To encourage that the Town retains a system that offers students and parents a choice of primary and secondary schools.
- The Town recognizes that existing educational facilities may not be adequate to meet the needs of Athens future population. In order to better understand and address the community's future needs, the Athens School Board and the Town should monitor the pace of new local development and population growth and continuously evaluate the existing and projected capacity of Athens/Grafton school system in relation to growth.

**POLICY**

- New development, which directly or indirectly results in an increase in the number of school-age children, shall take place in a manner which does not exceed the Town's fiscal capacity so identified in the municipal budget or any duly adopted Town and/or School capital budget and program.

**TRANSPORTATION**

Town of Athens Highways is under the general supervision and control of the Athens Select board.

Town Highways are classified from Class 1 to Class 4, as well as town trails and pent roads, depending on use and condition; this classification assists in determining the distribution of the State's annual Town Highway allocation. Athens roads fall into the following classifications from V.S.A. 19 Chapter 3 -

**Class 1 - 0 miles**

None

**Class 2 - 6.75 miles**

Class 2 town highways are those town highways selected as the most important highways in each town. As far as practicable they shall be selected with the purposes of securing trunk lines of improved highways from town to town and to places which by their nature have more than normal amount of traffic. The Selectmen, with the approval of the agency, shall determine which highways are to be class 2 highways.

**Class 3 - 11.14 miles**

All traveled town highways other than class 1 or 2 highways. The minimum standards for Class 3 highways are a highway negotiable under normal conditions all seasons of the year by a standard manufactured pleasure car. A highway not meeting this standard will be classified as a provisional Class 3 highway if within five years of the determination; that it will meet all Class 3 highway standards.

**Class 4 - 2.96 miles**

Class 4 town highways are all town highways that are not class 1, 2, or 3 town highways or unidentified corridors. The Select Board shall determine which highways are class 4 town highways. Class 4 roads are not maintained under all conditions for standard manufactured pleasure cars.

Total, traveled highways, as of May 2015 in Athens is 17.890 (excludes Class 4).

<b>ATHENS TOWN HIGHWAYS BY CLASS</b>				
<b>CLASS 1</b>	<b>CLASS 2</b>	<b>CLASS 3</b>	<b>CLASS 4</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
0	6.75	11.14	2.96	17.89

Source: State of Vermont - Highway Mileage - For the Year of 2009, Vtrans,  
<http://www.aot.state.vt.us/planning/documents/highresearch/publications/pub.htm>

## ◆ Hiking Trails

The Pinnacle is the highest and most scenic peak (+/-1683 feet) in Westminster, Vermont. It is located on the Windmill Ridge, straddling the Brookline/Westminster line. The view from the Pinnacle overlooks Hedgehog Gulf in Brookline and westward to Mount Snow and Stratton Mountain, over 20 miles away.

The dream of conserving The Pinnacle developed as a use of the Jamie Latham Memorial Fund, established in November 1991 to honor a young man who had loved this beautiful spot. From this beginning, the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association was formed. It is now a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation under both State and Federal law.

Its lands now consist of 1,850 acres in Athens, Rockingham, Brookline, Westminster and Grafton. These publicly-accessible lands include an extensive hiking trail system (25 miles!) and wildlife sanctuary.

About 1000 acres around Athens Dome have now been preserved as the Turner Hill Wildlife Management Area. This public land is a state wildlife management area and is located at the northern border of Athens at the Grafton town line.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Town Highway Department removes healthy trees from the highway right of way only when necessary to improve safety and road maintenance.
- Ensure that road cuts and embankments are properly graded and seeded to minimize erosion and to maintain their scenic character. Require that highway maintenance adhere to all applicable Vermont regulations.
- Maintain road ditches, bridges and culverts for roadbed drainage, storm water capacity and prevention of roadside erosion, and to meet the standards of the Vermont Clean Water Act.
- All bridges and culverts maintained by the Town should be posted as to the allowable limit. Heavy equipment users causing damage to the bridge or rendering it unusable will be responsible for replacement or repairs. A bond should be considered to offset any excessive use or damage and will make the Town aware of anticipated heavy trucking.
- All trucks exceeding the 24,000 pound limit should apply for an over-weight permit
- Continue the timely maintenance of bridges through capital planning and budgeting.
- Maintain and amend local road and bridge standards that reflect the Town Plan and are compliant with state and federal regulations.
- Enforce speed limits through contract with an appropriate law enforcement service provider.
- Maintain a five year paving plan for repaving of the paved roads with the Town.
- Contract to purchase as best market price sufficient gravel for road maintenance and wither sand and salt.

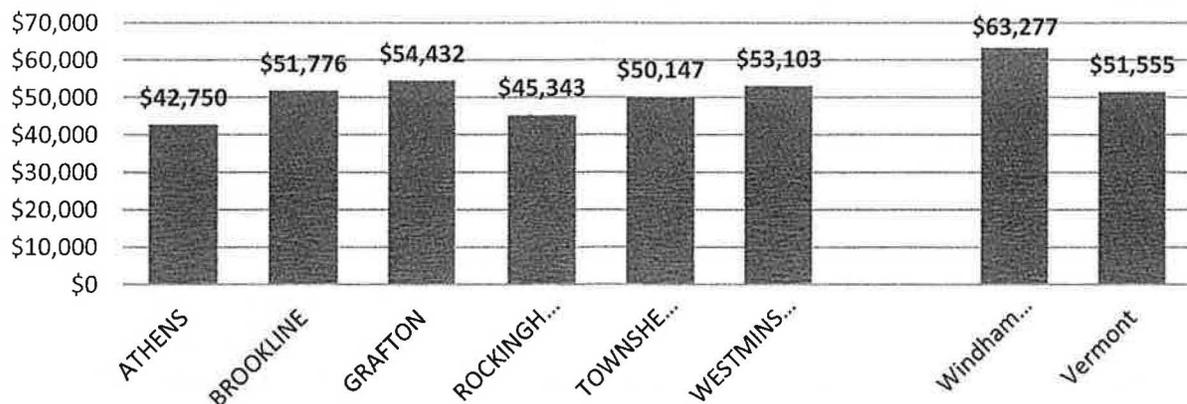
## POLICY

- The scenic value of the Town roads and the impact of greater, faster traffic burden shall be carefully evaluated when substantial improvements or upgrades on Town roads must be undertaken.
- Roads are to be widened and/or paved only when necessary for safety and year-round maintenance.
- Preserve access and provide for future growth, by retaining all existing public rights-of-way whether or not they are presently being maintained by the Town.
- No tract of land shall be allowed to become “inaccessible” by the relinquishment of a public right-of-way per Vermont Statute Title 19, sub-chapter 6, #958.
- Development and expansion of public utility facilities and services generally occur within highway or public utility right-of-way corridors in order to reduce adverse physical and visual impact on the landscape and achieve greater efficiency in the expenditure of funds.
- Maintain functional and safe roads that are aesthetically pleasing and respectful of local character.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The history of Athens economy has been diverse. At present it includes small farms producing agricultural products, independent contractors, and cottage industries producing value added products. The increased number of vacation second home homes has stimulated the economy, creating opportunities such as construction, landscaping, care-taking and maintenance. In addition to these jobs within the town many residents commute to jobs in neighboring towns. Larger towns such as Brattleboro and Springfield offer manufacturing, health care, education and service jobs, and many Athens residents make these longer commutes.

**Median Household Income Comparison, 2009**



Source: 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

**Recommendations:**

- Town planning for change and growth within the Town should be guided by the following considerations: (1) future town land needs (e.g., roads, schools, public safety , services, etc); (2) encouragement of residential and commercial uses; (3) provision of adequate municipal services and facilities; (4) preservation of architecturally and historically significant buildings; (5) preservation of open spaces and large forest blocks; (6) in an effort to be guided by preference for telecom infrastructure, especially locations of towers, the Town will be in touch with VTEL. Communications and energy infrastructure should be at a scale appropriate to the Athens rural landscape.

**POLICY**

- Encourage economic development, which maximizes the circulation of dollars within the community and nearby surrounding communities, provides diversified local employment opportunities, and enhances Athens small-town rural character while promoting the wise and sustainable use of Athens natural resources.
- Encourage the strengthening and diversification of tourism and recreation in a manner which maintains high environmental quality.
- Encourage the local manufacture and marketing of agriculture and value-added agricultural, sugaring, home gardens, forestry products, and cottage industries.
- Development must be compatible with existing uses or which will otherwise negatively impact Athens rural, natural, physical, or social environment.

**HOUSING**

An adequate supply of year-round housing that offers varieties of size, cost and location is essential to the economic and social health of every town in the Region.

**Comparison of Housing Types, Athens, Windham County and Vermont, 2010**

*Source: 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate*

<b>TABLE 1: HOUSING TYPES AVAILABLE IN ATHENS</b>		
<b>2007-2011 ESTIMATES</b>		
Housing	Count	Percent
1 unit, detached	151	71.6
1 unit, attached	Revision to be done by WRC	0
2 units		2.8
3 or 4 units	0	0
5 to 9 units	0	0
Mobile homes	54	
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	<b>211</b>	

Source: US Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey, Selected Housing Characteristics

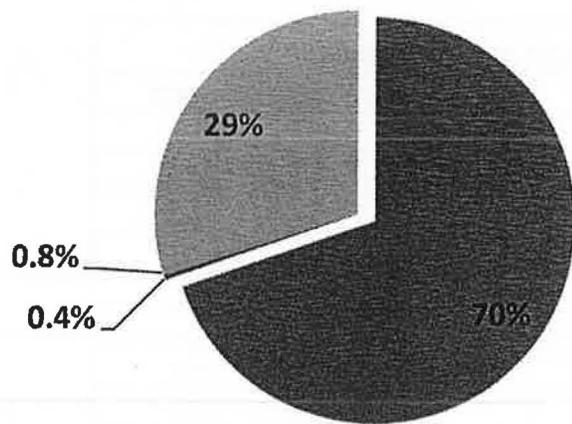
**HOUSING OCCUPANCY**

<b>TABLE 2: HOUSING OCCUPANCY IN ATHENS</b>		
	Estimate	Percent
<b>Housing Occupancy</b>		
Total Housing Units	211	
Occupied housing units	153	72.5
Vacant housing units	58	27.2
<b>Housing Tenure</b>		
Occupied housing units	153	
Owner-Occupied	119	77.8
Renter-Occupied	34	22.2

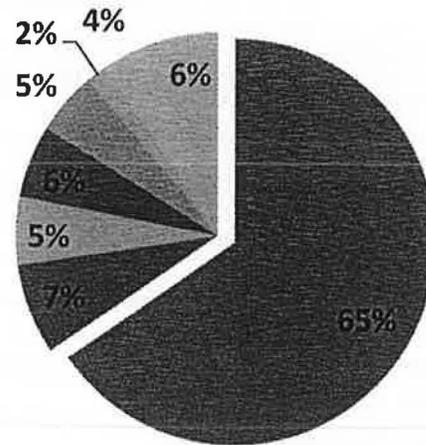
**AGE OF HOUSING**

<b>TABLE 3: AGE OF HOUSING IN ATHENS 5-Year Estimates</b>		
	Estimate	Percent
<b>Year Structure Built</b>		
Built 2005 or later	3	1.4
Built 2000 to 2004	10	4.7
Built 1990 to 1999	23	10.9
Built 1980 to 1989	47	22.3
Built 1970 to 1979	41	19.4
Built 1960 to 1969	19	9.0
Built 1950 to 1959	6	2.8
Built 1940 to 1949	0	0
Built 1939 or earlier	62	29.4
Total housing units	211	

## Athens

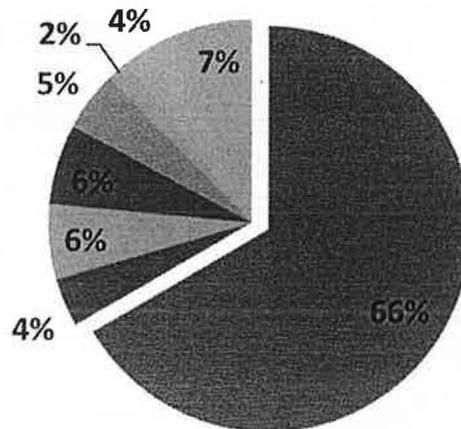


## Windham County



## Vermont

- 1-unit, detached
- 1-unit, attached
- 2 units
- 3 or 4 units
- 5 to 9 units
- 10 to 19 units
- 20 or more units
- Mobile home



### Housing Recommendations:

- Property owners are expected to notify the listers of new construction, renovation, and/or demolition for the purpose of the grand list notification.
- The residents of Athens should be made aware of the Athens Housing Rehabilitation Fund which is designated for repairs and improvement of their homes. The loan program is administered by the Town's Housing Grant Commission. Applications may be requested through the Town Treasurer, and submitted to the Commission for review.

### POLICY

- Insure moderate and low income housing are part of the housing mix.

- Encourage nonprofit housing organizations, such as Windham/Windsor Housing Trust, as well as private developers, to identify the needs, in Athens that meet the guidelines for affordable family and elderly housing. Affordable and elderly housing need to take into account the rural character of the town, as well as the resources of the Town to sustain such a development.

## ENERGY

### **Background:**

Athens is strongly subject to energy supply and usage patterns that are both national and international in scope. Freeing ourselves of global influences is not practical; hence town officials should do as much as can be done to support the mitigation of these influences.

Technologies exist for residents to generate and store energy within their own homes. Electric energy in excess of one's own needs can be sent into the local grid through net metering arrangements with the electric utility. Government can encourage self-generation by not counting renewable improvements as enhancements of taxable property.

Residents can realize the most energy savings through conservation and efficiency. Whole structure energy audits, that can diagnose sources of heat loss, are encouraged and available through Efficiency Vermont, SEVCA and private contractors.

Buildings in Athens are, like so much of the rest of Vermont, built at a time when energy efficiency was not considered important, and the insulation technology did not exist. Along with transportation, housing consumes most of our energy.

Settlement in Athens is dispersed. Currently there are few job opportunities that exist within the Town, forcing residents to drive to other towns for their living. The distance residents have to travel to work increases the energy consumed for transportation.

### **Recommendations:**

- Encourage energy conservation - reducing the use of energy in all aspects of our lives.
- Encourage energy efficiency—use the least amount of energy needed for any task.
- Idling of motor vehicles shall follow the state regulations.
- All Town buildings should have an energy audit. This work, in turn, can also be used to educate Athens' residents about the techniques and benefits of energy auditing.
- Encourage public transportation carriers to include Athens in their routes, public schedules.
- Continue participating in regional programs for resource recycling. The Town should make a reasonable efforts to purchase products that can be easily recycled and take steps in reducing energy use in town buildings.

- To help make home energy efficiency and/or renewable energy improvements more affordable to our Town residents, the Vermont's Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program should be explored by the Select Board, and presented to the voters at Town Meeting.
- Developing a neighborhood ride sharing program might help, as well as encouraging reasonably priced public transportation to include Athens on their routes, and a town park and ride.

## **POLICY**

- Renewable energy development shall be socially and environmentally responsible.
- Encourage new housing to follow design and construction principals that are energy efficient, conserve energy and important natural resources, encourage alternative energy production for individual use, and minimize our contribution to greenhouse gasses and follow Vermont standards.

### **◆ FOOD SECURITY (Healthy, affordable, accessible, and sustainable for all)**

The town of Athens recognizes the importance of food security to a healthy community, as well as the fact that we've entered a time when food security will increasingly be an issue for our fellow residents and neighbors. Hence, we will encourage and support policies and practices that provide greater food security for everyone.

**Goal:** Every resident in Athens be food secure.

#### **Food Security Recommendations: Support the formation of a volunteer group to:**

- Encourage the practice of gardening by all residents, as well as the development of neighborhood and community gardening, and grow-a-row efforts.
- Encourage the development of local food skills, through the organization and sponsorship of workshops in gardening, cooking, putting food by (e.g., root cellaring, canning, freezing, fermentation), and extending the growing season.
- Support local agriculture through direct purchasing of farm products from area farmers (farm stands, CSAs), as well as locally-produced food from area stores.
- Encourage farming, and the development of farms in Athens.
- Encourage the practice of collaborative, community efforts, and the sharing of resources, to meet the food needs of all citizens.
- Support a food shelf to not only provide easy access for low-income citizens to Vermont Food Bank resources, but to also provide emergency food for all citizens in times of weather emergencies.
- Encourage residents to grow-a-row and share the produce by giving it to their neighbors or at community events such as the monthly Community Supper or any of the groups or organizations mentioned above.

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

**Athens Town Office:** Located at 25 Brookline Rd., Athens, VT. This Town facility houses the offices of the Athens Town clerk, Athens Select board, Planning Commission, Town Listers, Town Treasurer, and 911 Coordinator, and provides meeting space for Athens residents and Athenians who are voted, appointed or volunteer committees or commissions who conduct business pertaining to the Town.

**Athens Town Garage:** Located at 121 Brookline Rd. houses the Town's road maintenance equipment and supplies and is headquarters for the Athens Road Department.

**Athens Cemeteries:** Two public cemeteries are located in the Town of Athens; the Athens Valley Cemetery at 19 Valley Cemetery Road and the West Cemetery at the east junction of Reed Road and 258 Rte. 35 as well as the private G.W. Stevens Estate Cemetery.

**Athens School:** Located on 28 Brookline Road, is the property of the Athens School District, and presently educates pre-school children from both Grafton and Athens. Public use of the building is encouraged with permission of the School Board.

**Athens Brick Meeting House:** Located at 2 Meetinghouse Road. There has been a concert, a historical representation of Daisy Turner, a pig roast, ice cream socials and several flea markets to raise money for the needed renovation and rehabilitation of the Meeting House.

**Facility Recommendations:**

- Athens Community Facilities are an important community resource and should be adequately maintained for current and future use.

Facility Policy

- Existing or planned municipal facilities and lands, or adjacent lands shall be used in a manner that is consistent with a rural character.

**RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

**Outdoor Recreation:**

Athens has an abundance of important outdoor recreational opportunities, including hiking, bike riding, skiing, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, ATVs, and picnicking are made available to the public by private landowners with their permission and through the use of the Turner Hill Wildlife Management Area and the Windmill Hill Pinnacle land. The Town appreciates and supports the continued availability of these opportunities.

**Historic Sites:**

Athens has a number of historic sites, including the Athens Brick Meeting House (1817), the Athens Town Office (1858), the Athens Christian Community Church (1859), as well as the town cemeteries located on the east junction of Reed Road and 258 Rte. 35 (at the beginning of the dirt road), and the other on 19 Valley Cemetery Road. Also, there are numerous old abandoned homesteads with cellar holes, many dating back to the late 1700's scattered about the town.

Athens has four groups which are dedicated to preserving its historic sites: the Athens Brick Meeting House Committee, Athens Historic Preservation Society, the Cemetery Commission and Town Office Volunteers.

**Recreational & Cultural Recommendations:**

- Maintain and enhance the Athens Brick Meeting House, Town office and Town cemeteries.
- Encourage opportunities for people of all ages and abilities of the Town.
- Encourage activities that support area library services in Rockingham, Grafton and Townshend, and historical services in Grafton, Townshend and Athens, as well as the Windham Historical Society.
- Athens Valley Cemetery and West Cemetery are important Town resources. They should not be damaged, relocated or otherwise destroyed.

**Recreational and Cultural Policies**

- Lands adjacent to or including areas of historical and cultural value shall be used in a manner that will not destroy the value of the site or area.
- Large tracts of contiguous land shall be preserved for outdoor recreational activities.
- Encourage varied and accessible opportunities for public and private recreation in a manner which maintains high environmental quality.
- Historic structures shall be protected from destruction, incongruous alteration, and the introduction of incongruous elements.

**LAND USE**

◆ **EXISTING LAND USE**

The Town of Athens is primarily rural with a variety of land uses. The vast majority of town land is forested with limited access to the Town's roads. The areas in close proximity or directly accessible from Town roads are primarily developed as residential. The forest lands provide land for the practice of game hunting and recreation, as well as shelter and forage for a variety of larger game including bear, moose, and deer. The area along Bull Creek has rich farm soils and is used extensively for agricultural production. Large forested tracts play an important role in the local economy providing jobs to loggers, truckers, foresters and provide income from timber sales to land owners. Several large parcels of land have been conserved primarily through the private conservation efforts of the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association.

Because of the topography, and the lack of building codes, zoning regulations, etc., the majority of residential areas are developed in a linear pattern along the Town's roads, which allow for an easy commute to Brattleboro, Bellows Falls and other employment centers. The areas of concentrated development are on Rte. 35, Brookline Road, Valley Cemetery Road, Reed Road, Walker Road, and

McKusker Road. Such as it is, the town center consists of the Town Office, Athens Elementary School, and Community Christian Church located on Brookline Road

Athens has not experienced any measurable industrial or commercial development. The Town has a number of economic activities including home businesses, farming and timber production.

#### ◆ FUTURE LAND USE

The Athens Town Plan is not a regulatory device except in state development review processes such as Act 250. The Planning Commission will advise on Act 250 projects within the Town. The Plan can also inform, without regulatory authority, the Public Service Board in Section 248 proceedings, i.e., a Certificate of Public Good. It will require further definition, adjustment and clarification as the Town considers how it will choose to reach its objectives as outlined in the various recommendations presented throughout this Plan. The classification of Athens's lands described below is consistent with the Town Plan maps that identify resources, opportunities and limitations for development.

The land use plan described herein is intended to maintain Athens's rural character that has defined the Town for centuries. Additionally, it provides for the protection of the natural resources and scenic areas as well as provides for economic growth.

The Town Office and the Athens School are centrally located and are a good location for social and cultural activities. Most New England towns have an area which is clearly the town center, and keeping services in a central location is more efficient.

The Town Center should be maintained as that of a rural community with high scenic and historic value.

#### **Residential Lands:**

These include lands which have already been committed to residential development, are easily accessible from the existing road system, or have the potential to be developed at a moderate density. These areas should accommodate low to moderate densities of mixed use development which is compatible with existing land uses sensitive to the limitations of the land. Rural land uses such as agriculture, forestry, recreation should be maintained and encouraged.

Commercial and light industrial uses may be appropriate. However, uses other than residential should be carefully controlled to prevent adverse impacts such as noise, light, and heavy traffic from affecting abutting and nearby properties. Road construction should be carefully planned so as to respect the natural environment and to promote the clustering of houses on appropriate sites. Long roads, whether public or private, are encouraged to be designed to serve more than one property.

#### **Rural/Residential Lands:**

Rural/Residential land areas in the Town of Athens have special value and development should occur at a lower density than residential. Any development which occurs in these areas should be designed to have minimal impact on the these areas. Rural/residential lands often include undeveloped forest lands which have limited access to an improved public road, areas with steep slopes, wetlands, scenic areas and agricultural lands.

#### **Forest Lands:**

Forest lands are so designed because of their special and unique value to the public and the region's ecosystem. They are not yet committed to development at intensities that reduce the land's value or function. This land use category includes all lands which are currently in conservation by public ownership, such as the 1,000 acre Turner Hill Wildlife Management Area along with the private

conservation efforts of the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association. There are also private land owners that have conservation easements on their lands.

Residential development in these areas is not encouraged. Any development that occurs in, or near, these areas shall be designed to have minimal impact on the special resource values of the area. When evaluating the special resource value of the area, the view from the off-site must be taken into account. These areas are more suitable for forests, farms, wildlife and recreation.

**Land Use Recommendations:**

- Encourage the use of existing non-profit land trusts (e.g. Vermont Land Trust) to acquire or hold conservation easements on significant resource and conservation lands.
- Ensure that the Town is represented at Act 250 hearings.
- Encourage participation by the Planning Commission in the Town planning process by residents and property owners.

**POLICY**

- Growth and development shall be conducted in a manner that protects Athens’ natural resources, preserves the area’s rural character and does not negatively impact Town facilities and services, or property taxes.
- Support the retention and acquisition of public or private conservation lands to promote recreation, reforestation, water conservation and suitable forest practices.
- Public utilities and transportation facilities shall use the same corridors in order to minimize the impact on the environment and to assist desired development patterns.
- Agriculture, forestry, open space and recreational land uses shall be maintained.
- Development shall be limited on lands where soil conditions and topography may cause failure of waste disposal systems or where development activity may cause pollution or contamination of ground or surface water.
- To safeguard public investment, lands adjacent to Town facilities, services, or lands, shall be developed in a manner that must not jeopardize or interfere with the public’s use or enjoyment of or access to the facility, service or lands. These include but are not limited to the Town Office building, Town School, Town Garage, Cemeteries, and the Athens Brick Meeting House.

**NATURAL RESOURCE USE & CONSERVATION AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

**◆ GROUND & SURFACE WATER RESOURCES**

Athens residents depend upon groundwater wells and springs for their potable water supply. The amount and quality of groundwater appears to be adequate for continued growth, but problems of supply and quality may well occur if the land is used more intensively. Protecting these water resources from pollution is critical to maintain adequate clean water supplies for area residents.

Both surface water and ground water sources face threats to their water quality. The two main categories of pollution are point source and non-point source pollution. Point sources are those that can be traced to a specific source, such as a pipe or sewer outfall. Non-point sources of pollution are more diffuse in origin. They can include storm water runoff, septic system effluent, snow dumps, road salt, soil erosion, etc. The State of Vermont regulates the construction and use of individual On-Site Sewage Disposal Systems. Athens currently enforces a Health Ordinance for compliance with State regulations for Septic Systems.

### **Water Resources Policies**

- Protect ground and surface waters quality by requiring that development minimize impact on:
  - ✓ Watersheds of upland streams
  - ✓ Areas characterized by steep slopes and shallow soils
  - ✓ Areas supplying large amounts of recharge waters to aquifers
  - ✓ Public water supplies
- Plan development in order to conserve the Town's water resources.
- Developers must provide a water supply sufficient to serve all units within a planned development, as well as to provide for fire protection.
- A new water supply system does not diminish, and any waste disposal system does not contaminate, an existing water supply.
- Individuals storing, using or transporting hazardous chemicals do so in such a manner so as not to have any adverse effects of streams or sources of water in the Town.
- Watercourses, ponds, and shore lands shall be retained and maintained in accordance with state regulations.
- Wetlands should be protected in accordance with state regulations. Support surface water classification and management strategies which are consistent with town and regional planning objectives for the affected watershed, and which will also effectively maintain or enhance existing water quality.
- Support state, regional and local efforts to inventory and map aquifer recharge areas and wetlands.
- Storm water management along Town roads shall meet state guidelines.

### **◆ FLOOD HAZARD AREAS**

A flood hazard area may be defined as the land areas adjacent to rivers and streams that are periodically inundated during periods of high surface water runoff. The Flood Disaster protection Act of 1973 states that towns regulate development in designated flood areas and that property owners in flood plain areas purchase flood insurance. Should the community or property owners fail to meet these requirements, any federal or federally related financial assistance for buildings in the flood plain will be unavailable to either the community or property owners.

According to the Flood Insurance Rate Map of Windham County (2007), the Athens flood hazard area goes from the Ober Hill Road Bridge, crossing Bull Creek; follows the Creek area north, then north again to the Grafton-Athens line, and east along the Rockingham line, to the junction of the Athens-Grafton town line.

#### ◆ FISH AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES

The following general habitats have been identified in Athens:

**Upland habitats:** include forested areas on steep slopes or coniferous or mixed forests which provide substantial winter cover for a variety of wildlife. Areas known to provide winter shelter and browse for deer and other wildlife are particularly important. Activities which can destroy or greatly diminish capacities of wildlife habitats include housing, recreational and industrial development, highway construction, commercial wind towers, cell towers, and commercial solar fields.

**Water habitats:** include small ponds and watercourses which provide the conditions necessary for healthy fish life, and may be attractive to a variety of migratory waterfowl. These are abundant and include Athens Pond, Lily Pond, Reed Road Beaver Pond and marshy areas (Athens Dome, Sam Farr Road, vernal pools along the Windmill Hill Pinnacle trails).

**Shore land habitats:** include shoreline areas around ponds along with stream side (riparian zones) which are undeveloped and attractive to a variety of amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.

**Wetland habitats:** include wetlands (e.g., Beaver Pond on Reed Road) which are important for a wide variety of song birds, game birds and other wildlife including beaver, otter, mink, grouse, woodcocks, Canada geese, and turkeys.

**The sedge at the Athens Dome:** The 'Southern Loop Project' (SLP) which was a project by Vermont Transco, LLC concerning the building of new electrical substations in Vernon and Newfane, expansion of another substation and adding 52 miles of new transmission lines came into the Athens, Grafton area in 2007. At that time they purchased over 600 acres of land from various owners and estates in both towns.

One area of land, the 'Turner Hill Site', which lies both in Athens and Grafton, was purchased. The majority of the land lies in Athens. It contains 29.9 acres of wetland, 16 potential vernal pools and nearly 3 miles of streams. This satisfied the mitigation of wetlands requirement of the SLP. Partial access to this area can be reached via Grafton on the Turner Hill Road.

The wetlands lie within the Athens Dome land and has been turned over to the Vermont Agency of Fish and Wildlife. It is now known as the Turner Hill Wildlife management Area. The Nature Conservancy stepped in to purchase an additional 80 acres when it was found that the Northeastern Bulrush (*Scirpus ancistrochaetus* is a rare species of flowering plant in the sedge family), an endangered plant in Vermont was found.

The Windham Hill Pinnacle Association (WHPA) has built a kiosk at the quarry area near the Athens Dome with information furnished by the Grafton Historical Society. Four miles of trails from route 35 in Athens (there is a kiosk marking the beginning of the trail) to Turner Hill Road in Grafton are clearly marked and open for public use. In all WHPA has over 14 miles of hiking trails between Athens, Grafton, Rockingham and Westminster, the entrances clearly marked with kiosks.

#### **Fish and Wildlife Resources Policies**

- Plan development to minimize impact upon necessary fish and wildlife habitat.
- Minimize fragmentation of large blocks of necessary wildlife habitat and maintain connectivity between habitat blocks as corridors for wildlife migration.
- Work with area residents with specific knowledge of the community, wildlife habitats and natural areas, and the State District Wildlife and Fisheries Biologists and the Vermont Natural Heritage Program to better identify and map significant wildlife habitats in the Town.
- Conduct a Natural Resources Inventory to identify important lands for protection.

#### ◆ SOILS AND TOPOGRAPHY (informational)

Soils are the most important determinate of the land's development capability, especially in areas with no municipal underground infrastructure. Knowing the important aspects of soils is necessary for understanding road fills, septic systems, flooding and water damage. Soils are classified into groups and sub groups, and each has individual characteristics and consistencies. A soil's depth to water table, susceptibility to flooding, depth to bedrock, stone content, and permeability present potential constraints to the construction of roads, buildings, and septic systems. The Town of Athens is comprised of two soil types: (1) along the Bull Creek flow excessively to moderately drained soils in sandy deposits and on stream terraces, out-wash areas, and on flood plains; (2) shallow, gently sloping to very steep hillsides and are excessively drained and well drained in loamy glacial till, and in compact, loamy glacial till on hills and mountains.

Topography can be described in terms of elevation and slope, elevations range from 1740' in the NW at the Grafton border; Lily Pond in the SW at 1600', 1300' in the Hedgehog Gulf; 1300' in the NE junction near Rockingham. Steep slopes coupled with two types of soils affect development and sets logging limitations. Lower elevations are found where roads exist and homes are built. For instance, along Grassy Brook, on the west side of Brookline Road in the south and on the east side along Bull Creek, homes are built as the steep slope of Hedgehog Gulf decreases. The entire elevation along Bull Creek to the north into Rockingham is 600'. Moving west from the divide of Rte 35 and Brookline Road the elevation rises gently to Athens Pond at 1180' to the Townshend line at 1200'. The elevation is 1240' to the western border with Townshend, where Sam Farr road exists.

Although elevation alone does not constrain development, higher elevations tend to coincide with thinner soils and steeper slopes. Slopes of less than 8 percent are generally most suitable for building. The erosion potential of such slightly sloping land is low, its ability to absorb runoff is high, and soils are usually of adequate depth and composition for septic systems. Exceptions are extremely flat areas, some of which may classify as wetlands, where drainage is poor. As slopes increase, the suitability of the land for development decreases. In areas of steep slopes, the velocity of runoff, and therefore the potential for erosion, increases. The ability of the soil to filter septic leachate is decreased. Overcoming constraints to development and slopes exceeding 25% present severe constraints and should be avoided.

#### ◆ AGRICULTURAL AND FOREST RESOURCES

Primary agricultural soils are those which have high potential for growing food or forage crops, and are sufficiently well drained and fertile or are highly responsive to the use of fertilizer. Primary agricultural soils are on lands with less than 15% average slope and on lands of size capable of supporting or contributing to an economical agricultural operation. Most of the primary agricultural soils in Athens are located in the valley areas.

There are (1) large, open, privately-owned fields that are hayed for local farmer use; and (2) small, non-commercial animal and produce farms where food is grown for homeowner consumption.

### **Agricultural and Forest Resources Policies**

- Preserve and maintain farms, agricultural land and related agricultural services required to ensure a viable agricultural community.
- Encourage the use of forest and land for wood products, maple syrup, recreation, wildlife habitat and scenery.
- Development that shall not hinder the productivity of these soils or preclude their future use for agriculture and forestry.
- Any non-agricultural development proposed to be located on important agricultural lands should be reviewed by the Planning Commission for suggestions to minimize any adverse impact on existing or potential agricultural uses.
- Encourage the development of local industries which produce “value added” agricultural and forest products.

### **◆ EARTH AND MINERAL RESOURCES**

There are three, privately-owned sand pits in Athens that have been used in recent history for the repair of damage from storms like Tropical Storm Irene.

#### **Earth and Mineral Resources Recommendations:**

- Work with the Agency of Natural Resources and the Vermont State Geologist to identify and map important earth and mineral resources in the Town.
- The Town would support application for grants or other sources for acceptable land reclamation practices.
- Encourage the use of new sources of local gravel for road and construction when these sources of gravel have appropriate state permits.

### **FLOOD RESILIENCE PLAN**

This plan identifies flood hazards as the Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA0 shown on the National Flood Insurance Program and Flood Insurance Rate Maps (D-FIRM) and identifies fluvial erosion hazard areas as those shown on the Agency of Natural Resources River Corridor maps. Further, this plan designates both those identified areas as areas to be protected, including

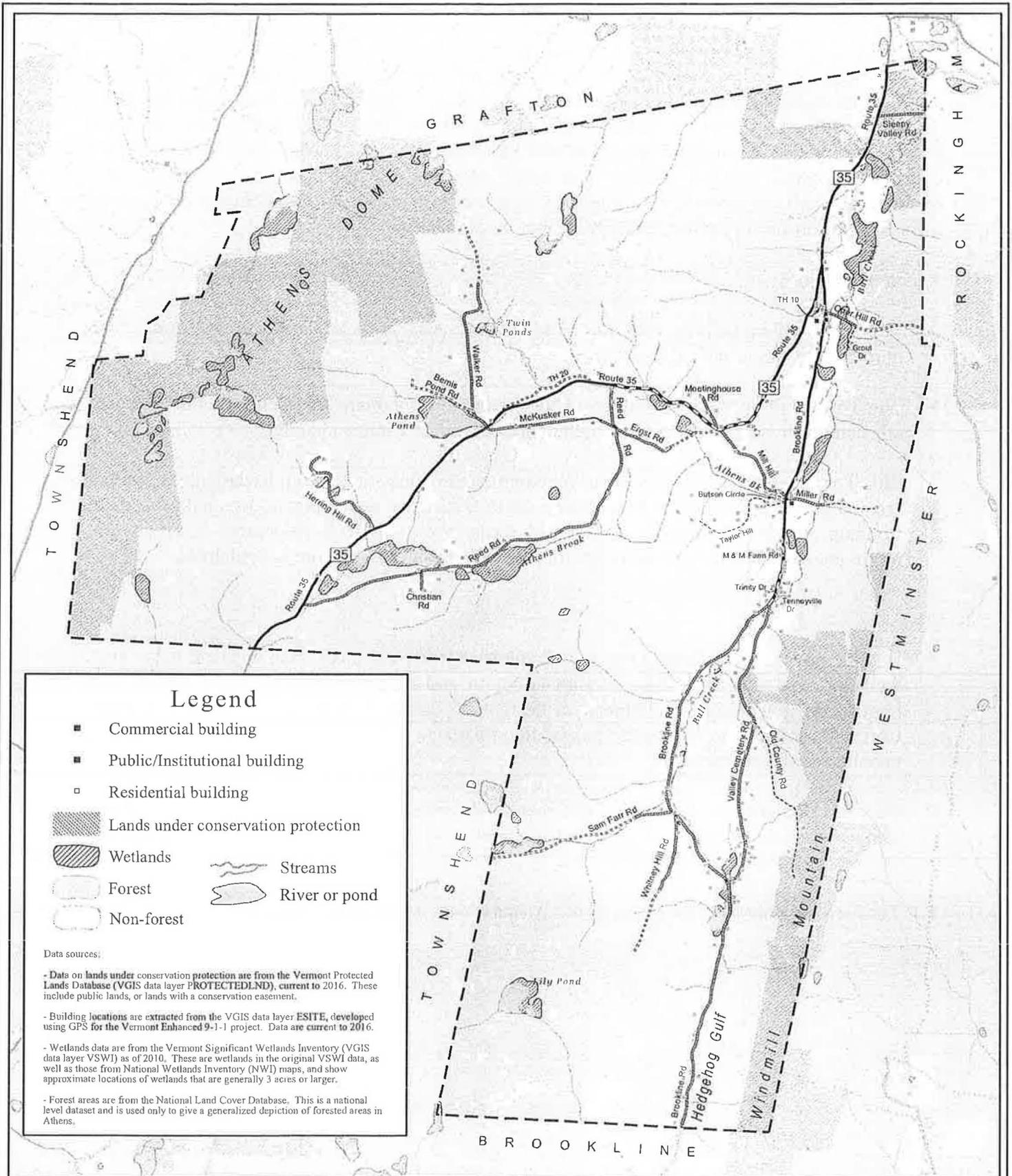
flood plains, river corridors, and land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property. In addition, this plan incorporates by reference the Town of Athens Flood Hazard Regulations and the Athens Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. Finally this plan recommends the following policies and recommendations to protect the designated areas to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.

Recommendations:

- The Town will be familiar with Flood Insurance Rate Maps that delineate areas that could be inundated by water during flooding.
- The Town will be familiar with the ANR River Corridor Maps that delineate the land area adjacent to streams and rivers required to accommodate a stable channel.
- The Town will regulate any new development in identified flood hazard areas, fluvial erosion hazard areas, and/or River Corridors to ensure that development does not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion, and extend these provisions to development activities that might increase the amount and/or rate of runoff and soil erosion from upland areas.

**POLICY**

- It is the policy of the Town to protect floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests through adoption and administration of flood hazard area regulations governing development in designated Special Flood Hazard Areas and River Corridors, in order to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure, improved property, people, and the environment.
- New development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas should be avoided. If new development is to be built in such areas, it should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.
- The Town encourages flood emergency preparedness and response training.

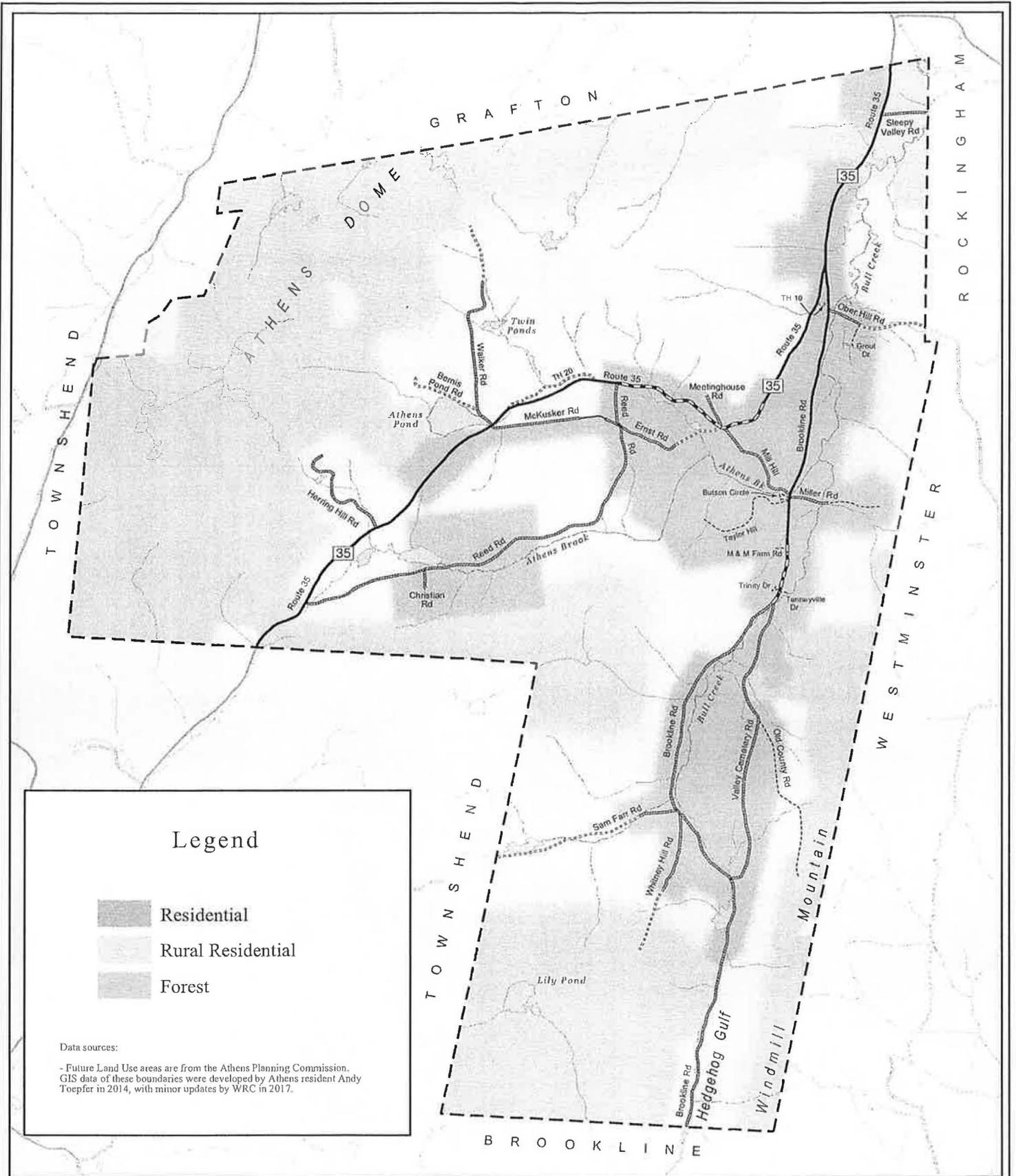


# Existing Land Use Town of Athens, Vermont

January 2017



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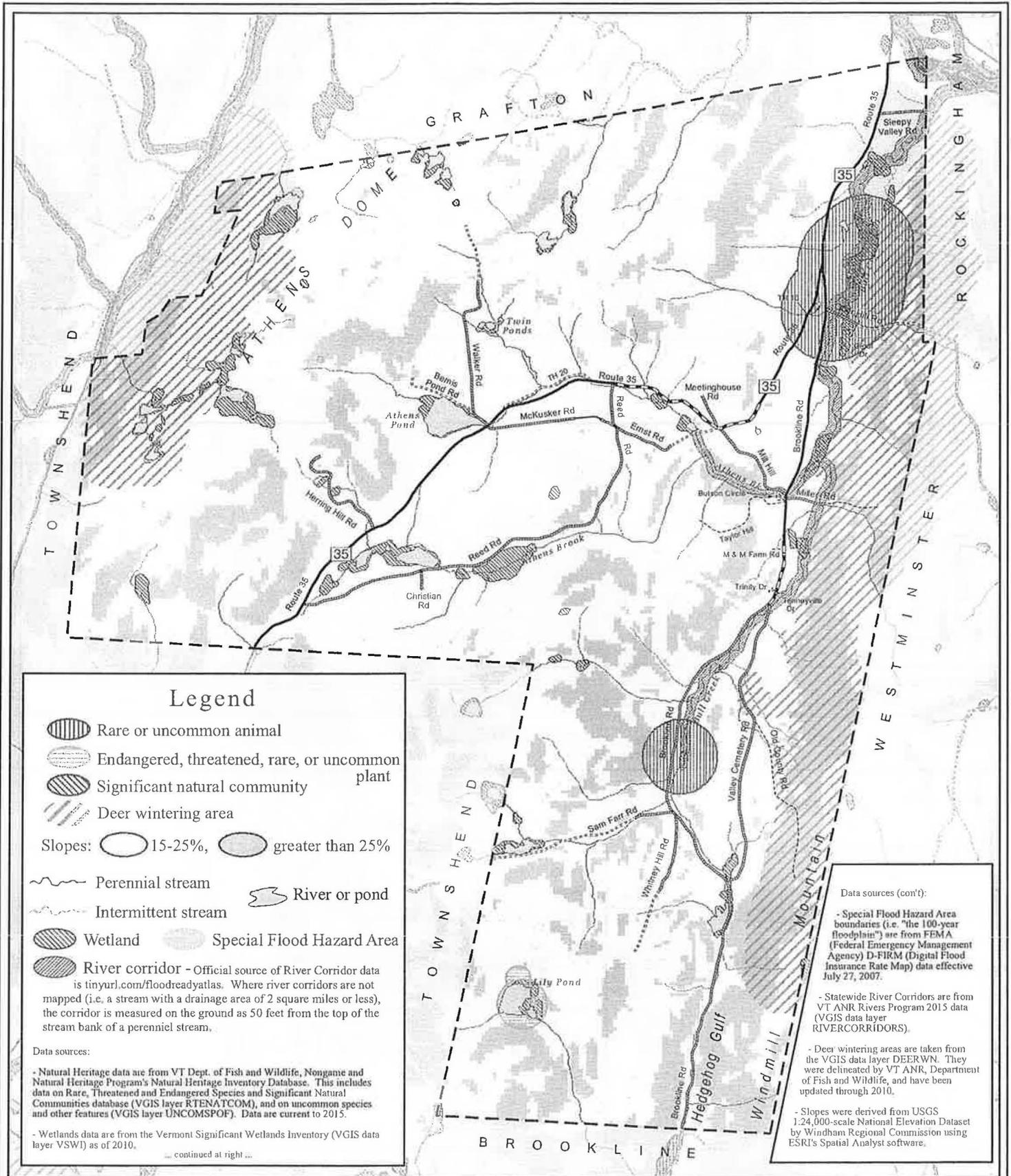


# Future Land Use Town of Athens, Vermont

January 2017



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**Legend**

- Rare or uncommon animal
- Endangered, threatened, rare, or uncommon plant
- Significant natural community
- Deer wintering area
- Slopes: 15-25%, greater than 25%
- Perennial stream
- Intermittent stream
- Wetland
- Special Flood Hazard Area
- River corridor - Official source of River Corridor data is [tinyurl.com/floodreadyatlas](http://tinyurl.com/floodreadyatlas). Where river corridors are not mapped (i.e. a stream with a drainage area of 2 square miles or less), the corridor is measured on the ground as 50 feet from the top of the stream bank of a perennial stream.

Data sources:

- Natural Heritage data are from VT Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Nongame and Natural Heritage Program's Natural Heritage Inventory Database. This includes data on Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species and Significant Natural Communities database (VGIS layer RTENATCOM), and on uncommon species and other features (VGIS layer UNCOMSPOF). Data are current to 2015.

- Wetlands data are from the Vermont Significant Wetlands Inventory (VGIS data layer VSWI) as of 2010.

Data sources (con't):

- Special Flood Hazard Area boundaries (i.e. "the 100-year floodplain") are from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) D-FIRM (Digital Flood Insurance Rate Map) data effective July 27, 2007.

- Statewide River Corridors are from VT ANR Rivers Program 2015 data (VGIS data layer RIVERCORRIDORS).

- Deer wintering areas are taken from the VGIS data layer DEERWN. They were delineated by VT ANR, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and have been updated through 2010.

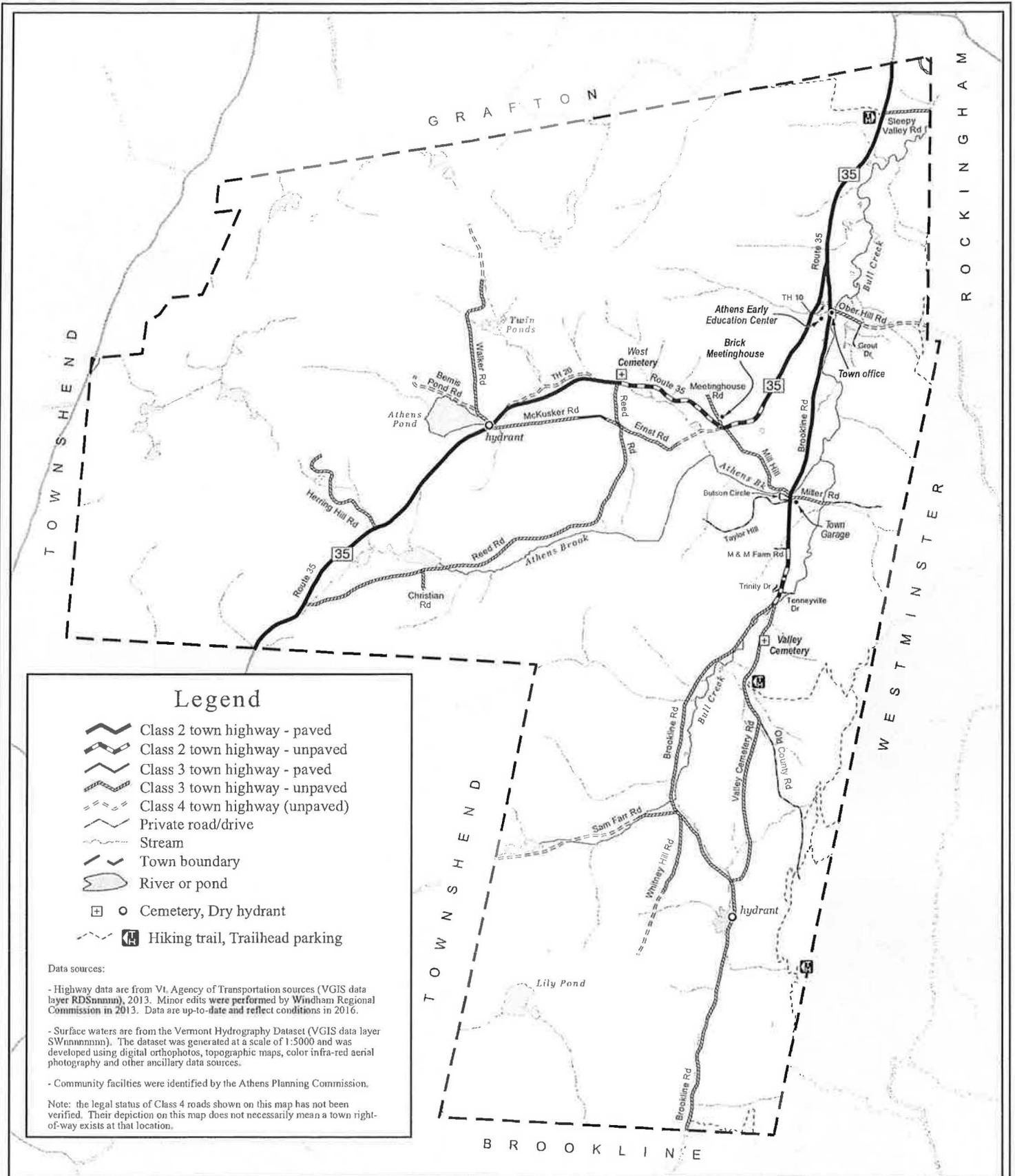
- Slopes were derived from USGS 1:24,000-scale National Elevation Dataset by Windham Regional Commission using ESRI's Spatial Analyst software.

# Natural Resources Town of Athens, Vermont

January 2017



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# Transportation and Community Facilities

## Town of Athens, Vermont

January 2017



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