

Tuesday, April 28, 2014

Athens Planning Commission

Town of Athens

56 Brookline Road

Athens, Vermont 05143



The Athens Planning Commission will hold a public hearing for the purpose of soliciting comments on the proposed Athens Town Plan on **Thursday, June 26, 7:00 PM, at the Athens Elementary School.**

Enclosed you will find a copy of Athens Town Plan draft, as well as a report on the proposal.

We hope you can attend this hearing, and welcome any comments you have about the proposed Athens Town Plan.

Thank you.

Sandi Capponcelli, Athens Planning Commissioner

Lois Sippel, Athens Planning Commissioner

Tim Stevenson, Athens Planning Commission Chair

Report on the Proposed Athens Town Plan

In accordance with 24 V.S.A. 4384(c)

If the Proposal would alter the designation of any land area, the report should cover the following points:

- 1. The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use. NONE**
- 2. The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on**
 - (A) The municipal tax base: NONE**
 - (B) The need for public facilities: NONE**
- 3. The amount of vacant land which is:**
 - (A) already subject to the proposed new designation: NONE**
 - (B) actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose: NONE**
- 4. The availability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of:**
 - (A) appropriate alternative locations;**
 - (B) alternative uses for the area under consideration; and**
 - (C) the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated**
NONE
- 5. The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability and existing development in the area. NONE**

TOWN PLAN
FOR
ATHENS,
VERMONT

Proposed Draft by the
Athens Planning Commission

May 2014

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LEGAL AUTHORITY

The Athens Town Plan has been prepared under Subchapter 5 of the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act as amended through 1990 (24 V.S.A Chapter 117). The Plan addresses the 12 goals listed in Chapter 117, paragraph 4302, 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 Development and Community Affairs 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 five years from the date of adoption. Thus the Town must review its plan, revise where necessary and readopt or replace it every five 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. The only 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 440.

PURPOSE OF A TOWN PLAN

The Athens Town Plan has been developed for the community as a whole. No part of the Plan should be interpreted to limit a person's liberty or property rights. The planning process engages the town as a whole in a discussion about what it wants its future to be, and what needs to happen to make that future possible. This includes not only policies to guide decisions, but what steps are needed to get from A to B as well.

The plan can inform all kinds of decisions within the town. Plans are not binding. They provide guidance. For instance, the select board can use the plan in the annual budget development process as a basis for understanding what the citizens have said they want, and what kind of public investment they are willing to support. This is arguably more important for smaller towns with fewer resources at their disposal.

Concerning the Act 250 process, town plans have standing in the Act 250 process, and establish the basis for a town's participation in an Act 250 application review. Not having a plan causes the town to ostensibly cede local control and sit on the sidelines during the process. Town plans don't have the same standing in the Section 248 permitting process, but they do provide the only basis for "due consideration" of a town's position in the Public Service Board's consideration of an application.

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 WRC to include Athens' perspective in the regional plan, including land use.

Finally, 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.

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, mitigates problems associated with land development and growth, and retains the highest characteristics of a rural-residential and recreational area.

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 environmental protection, economic development and resource conservation.

Results of Planning Commission Survey

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), Tenney's Mobile Home Park (4), use of ATVs on property and public roads (1), less government interference (1).

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:

1. To accommodate the changing needs of the Town through a continuous planning program that is sensitive to the limited financial ability of the Town residents, and encourages public participation. The Planning Commission is open to and will consider proposed changes to the Plan by the Athens citizens.
2. 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.
3. To maintain the Towns' characteristic pattern of settlement, recreational areas, and residential areas separated by rural countryside.
4. To encourage continued use lands for agriculture, forestry and recreational uses in order to ensure availability of open spaces and non-renewable resources, and to preserve the rural character of the area.
5. To encourage the conservation and enhancement of the community's cultural, historical, architectural, recreational, and scenic resources.
6. To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, which meet the needs of the individual property owner, but will not negatively impact the natural resources and scenic areas of the Town.
7. To ensure the policies and recommendations outlined in the Town Plan are carried out in a manner which balances both the shared and individual property rights of Athens' citizens.

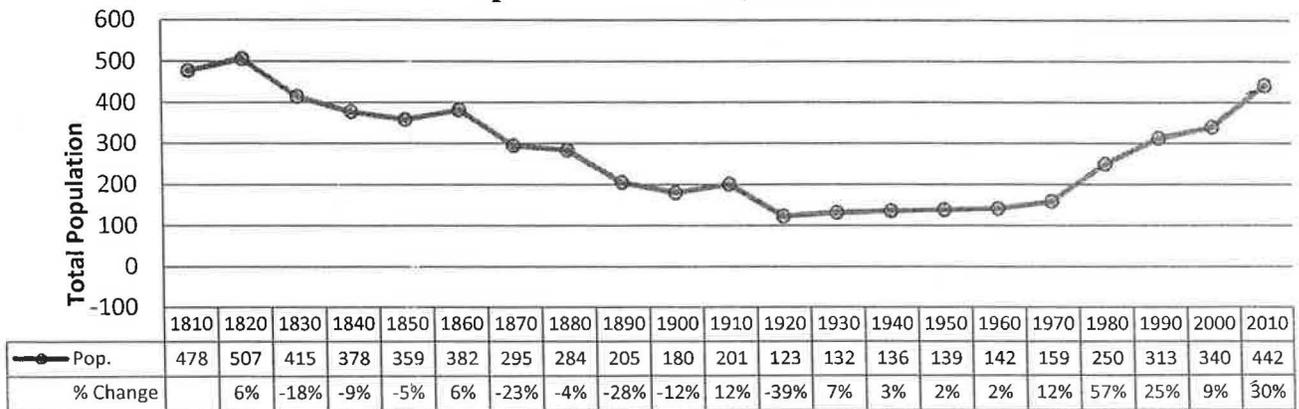
8. To encourage food security through policies and practices that allows locally-produced food to be accessible and affordable to all citizens.

**ADJACENT TOWNS AND THE REGION:
HOW THE TOWN OF ATHENS PLAN RELATES**

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.

Overall, the objective, policies, and recommended land use patterns outlined with this Town Plan, including those along the Town's borders, are generally compatible with those of neighboring communities. In addition, the Athens Town Plan is compatible with the Windham Regional Plan, both in terms of overall regional policies and general recommendations for regional land use.

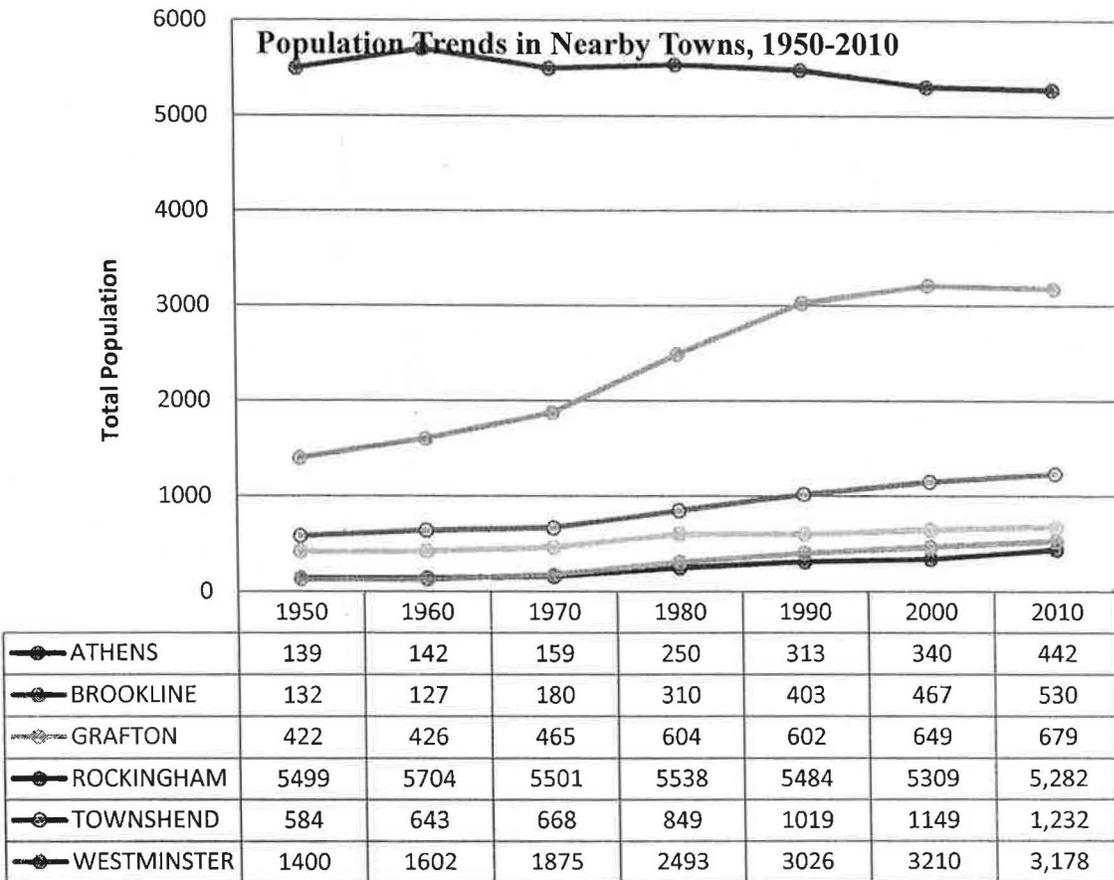
Athens Population Trends, 1810 to 2010



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

TABLE 1: ATHENS POPULATION TRENDS							
1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
136	139	142	159	250	313	340	442
Source: VT history Explorer and the 2010 Census							

Table 1 shows that Athens population has slowly grown over the past seventy years.



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

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

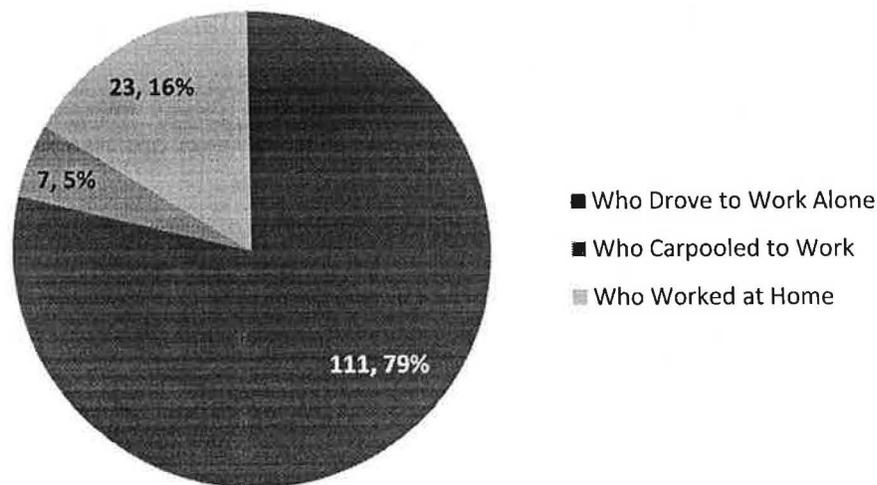
Table 2 shows Athens growth as compared to neighboring towns. The towns surrounding Athens have also shown growth over the last 15 years.

**TABLE 3: OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY OF TOWN RESIDENTS,
AGE 16 and OLDER**

Category	Number	Percent
Management, business, science & arts	51	33.1
Service	23	14.9
Sales and office	22	14.3
Natural resources, construction and Maintenance	20	13
Production, transportation and material moving	38	24.7

2010 US Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

Athen's Residents Commuting Method, 2010



Source: 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

TABLE 4: COMMUTING		
	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 AND SERVICES

A. Town Government

Goal:

To provide public services and adequate facilities at an affordable cost to the residents of Athens.

Policies:

1. Maintain strong local government, based on broad citizen participation and voluntary, elected, and appointed officials.
2. Maintain fair and up-to-date appraisal of property, consistent with Vermont Law, as the basic source of Town funding.
3. Growth and development should not exceed the capacities of local facilities and services
4. Participate in proceedings under Act 250 on new developments affecting the Town, whether within the Town or in neighboring communities.

Recommendations:

1. Under the direction of the Select Board, continue to evaluate and strengthen the local government with technical assistance from appropriate agencies.
2. Establish a Budget Committee whose responsibility would be to draft, and then submit to the Select Board for its direction and approval, an annual Town Budget, as well as a Capital Budget for each fiscal year, along with a revised five-year projection. The purpose of Capital Budgets are for anticipatory, long-term, high value items (e.g., grader, sanding truck, bridge replacements, road paving, municipal facilities)
3. 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. The April meeting shall be to discuss plans for the upcoming year; the October meeting shall be to discuss the next year's budget.
4. Make available all Town ordinances, regulations and standards to property owners when requested.

Description:

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.

B. Taxation and Public Finance

Goal:

To maintain a stable and affordable tax rate.

Policies:

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 resident 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 is no commercial businesses 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 mandatory to file for a 'Homestead' in Vermont if you were a resident here. In doing so you became eligible for an 'income sensitivity' prebates which in turn is used by the town towards the state education tax.

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.

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.

Explanation of Tax Categories for Highest and Best Use

- R1:** Resident Property with less than six acres.
- R2:** Resident Property with six or more acres.
- V1:** Vacation Property (seasonal building) with less than six acres.
- V2:** Vacation Property with six or more acres of land.
- MHU:** Mobile Home - unlanded
- MHL:** Mobile Home - landed
- C:** Commercial: Those which provide goods and services for sale as hotels, grocery stores, gift shops, gas stations, not manufacturing.
- I:** Manufacturing use. Making products, such as cheese, from raw materials.
 - UE: Electric Utility, such as transmission lines.
- F:** Farm, operating farm with buildings

W: Woodland, vacant with woods

M: Miscellaneous, most wooded but with building of little value

Table 1: 10 year tax review for Athens

TAX YEAR	EDUCATIONAL	MUNICIPAL	TOTAL
2001	1.5202	0.6578	2.1781
2002	1.22	0.88	2.66
2003	1.22	0.68	2.91
Homestead 2004	1.8253	0.94	2.7653
2005	1.3944	1.05	2.444
2006	1.4382	1.14	2.5782
2007	1.4653	1.88	3.3453
2008	1.6836	1.6	3.2836
2009	1.8979	1.61	3.5079
2010	1.5145	0.87	2.3845

Source - Property Valuation and Review, Vermont Tax Dept.

Goal:

To maintain a stable and affordable tax rate.

Policies:

1. 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.
2. Require that 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 advantages and benefits to the Town.

Recommendations for Action:

1. The Select Board should consider offering time-limited tax incentives to new enterprises providing jobs and ultimately adding to the tax base.
2. Consider that the 'Budget Committee' should look into other sources of revenue for the Town.

C. Capital Investment

Goal:

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

Description:

The Select Board appoints 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.

Policies:

1. Funding of capital improvements should be planned to tax appropriations for such improvements at as stable a level as possible
2. Capital improvements are 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 Budget Program does not provide for any large-scale development.
3. Any capital improvements over and above the Budget Program must be financed by special action of the voters.
4. The 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.
5. Proposals for large-scale development should be accompanied by economic and environmental impact studies prepared by developer or responsible agency, and reviewed by the Planning Commission.

Recommendations:

1. Establish 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.

D. Fire Protection Services**Goal:**

To maintain an effective fire protection and fire prevention system

Policies:

1. Developments and major subdivisions shall be responsible for providing adequate water sources dry hydrants.
2. Fire ponds and hydrants should be maintained.
3. Year-round access to properties shall be maintained by the owner.

Recommendations:

1. The Town should continue to support the Saxtons River Volunteer Fire Department through annual appropriations.

2. Develop an effective communication program between the Saxtons River Volunteer Fire Department and the Select Board.

Description and Inventory:

1. 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.
2. 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.

E. Emergency Medical Services

Goal:

To provide timely emergency medical care by qualified personnel through the contracted service that Athens has with Golden Cross Ambulance from of Bellows Falls, VT.

F. Police Protection

Goal:

To ensure adequate police services for the Town. The Vermont State Police from the Rockingham 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)

G. Health Services

Recommendations:

1. The Select Board should appoint a volunteer to keep them informed about the rapid changes taking place in health services in Bellows Falls, Springfield, Chester and Townshend. Athens needs to participate actively in assuring adequate access to health services.

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. Should a Town sewage ordinance (for the building of septic systems) be adopted, the Health officer should be the administrator of these regulations.

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

Then nearest hospital is Grace Cottage Hospital in Townshend, approximately 6 miles away. The Rockingham Medical Group, which is now operated by the Springfield Hospital, has a daytime Urgent Care Center for minor emergencies. Both Springfield and Grace Cottage Hospital have full-time emergency room services.

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.

H. 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.

I. Liquid Waste Disposal (domestic)

Policies:

1. Prevent development on lands where soil conditions and topography may cause failure of waste disposal system or contamination of ground and surface waters.
2. Eliminate existing sources of ground and surface water contamination

J. 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.

Policies:

1. Support recycling and reuse activities, as well as waste reduction strategies appropriate to the Town's situation.
2. Keep recycling and reuse disposal free-of-charge, and pay for any actual costs through the charges for disposal of non-recycled trash.

Recommendations:

1. The Town should consider becoming a member of the NH/VT Solid Waste Project.
2. The Town should consider providing access to disposal facilities for components of the waste stream not suited to the incineration at the Solid Waste Project, e.g., tires, construction and demolition waste, non-regulated hazardous materials, household batteries, etc.
3. The Town should keep track of, and provide information to residents on disposal options for non-traditional trash, e.g., non-regulated hazardous waste, batteries, metals, tires, construction and demolition debris, etc.
4. The Town should consider an ordinance that prohibits the placement of household and personal items within the right of way of Town roads, beyond normal trash and re-cycle pickups that attracts rodents and wild animals, and is a serious threat to public health and safety.
5. The Town should consider having an annual large-item and hazardous waste pick up day.

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 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.

Ambulance Service

Athens has contracted service with Golden Cross Ambulance from of Bellows Falls, VT. When calling 911, residents can also request ambulance service from Grace Cottage Hospital because of its proximity.

Emergency Planning & Disaster Preparedness:

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 hopes 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.

Cellular Service:

The lack of cellular (cell) service for both safety and convenience is a concern of Athens residents. Alternative answers to a tower are being developed. Vermont Telephone (VTel) has received a grant to provide wireless internet cell service, which when complete, will cover 95% of the state. The Town should pursue any effort that will satisfy our concerns and offer a solution in keeping with our desire to retain a rural, residential town.

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:

1. In addition to the two dry hydrants located at Athens Pond Rte. 35 and Walker Road and near Valley Cemetery Road on Brookline Rd., necessary common fire protection features such as fire ponds and/or dry or charged hydrants should be installed where practical by developers and sub dividers to ensure the safety of the public.

2. 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 and Senior Solutions.

SOLID WASTE & RECYCLING SERVICES

The Town does provide for refuse collection.

The Town of Athens started in April 2013 with a trial recycling process. Success of the program depends upon the participation of the residents and its effect on the trash removal expenses. Recycling will be mandated by the State of Vermont by 2014.

Solid Waste Policies:

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

Solid Waste Recommendations:

1. The Town should support methods for reducing the overall quantity of waste generated and encourage recycling.
2. The Town should consider an ordinance that prohibits the placement of household and personal items within the right of way of Town roads, beyond normal trash and re-cycle pickups that attracts rodents and wild animals, and is a serious threat to public health and safety.
3. The Town should consider having an annual large-item and hazardous waste pick up day.

EDUCATION & EARLY CHILDCARE

Primary Education

Athens belongs to the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union and the Union High School District #27. Seventh and Eighth grade students are tuitioned to a middle school of their choice, as outlined in Vermont State statute. Students in grades 9-12 may attend the Bellows 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:

1. To provide effective and efficient educational facilities and programs for Athens/Grafton students
2. 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.
3. 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.

Policies:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Encourage total literacy for all Town adults.
4. Encourage Athens/Grafton residents to apply for educational programs, which will equip them for new job opportunities.
5. Work to assure that all elementary school graduates are literate, mathematically competent, and emotionally prepared for the next level of education.
6. Work with regional educational organizations to encourage adult education at all levels and to make all adults aware of available courses.
7. 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.
8. Encourage the school boards to integrate technology into appropriate classroom activities and instruction.

Recommendations for Action:

1. 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 by tuitioning students from outside the District.
2. Develop communication between the elementary school and pre-school programs.
3. 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.

DAY CARE:

Currently there are no licensed childcare providers in Athens.

Recommendation:

1. 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:

1. To provide effective and efficient educational facilities and programs for Athens residents
2. 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.
3. 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.

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 Chair of the Athens School Board.

Education Policies:

1. Provide high quality, cost-effective educational opportunities, facilities, and amenities to all students residing in Athens.
2. Require new development, which directly or indirectly results in an increase in the number of school-age children, 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.
3. In order to meet the needs of Athens' elementary students, the Town encourages the "small-school environment" which currently exists at the Grafton School.
4. Encourage the Athens School Board to adopt strict residency requirements for all Athens parents and children.
5. To encourage that the Town retains a system that offers students and parents a choice of primary and secondary schools.

Education Recommendations:

1. 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.

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

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.

Total, traveled highways, as of Feb. 10, 2008 in Athens is 17.890 (excludes Class 4 and legal trail mileage).

ATHENS TOWN HIGHWAYS BY CLASS				
CLASS 1	CLASS 2	CLASS 3	CLASS 4	TOTAL
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 Westminister, Vermont. It is located on the Windmill Ridge, straddling the Brookline/Westminister 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 1,800 acres in Athens, Rockingham, Brookline, and Westminister. These publicly-accessible lands include an extensive hiking trail system (22 miles!) and wildlife sanctuary.

About 400 acres around Athens Dome have now been preserved as public land as a wildlife management area. It borders the northern border of Athens at the Grafton town line.

Transportation policies:

1. Require that the scenic value of the Town roads and the impact of greater, faster traffic burden be carefully evaluated when improvements on Town roads must be undertaken.
2. Ensure that roads are widened and/or paved only when necessary for safety and year-round maintenance.
3. Healthy trees are removed from the right-of-way only when necessary to improve safety and road maintenance.
4. Ensure that road cuts and embankments are properly graded and seeded to minimize erosion and to maintain their scenic character.
5. 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.
6. Require that no tract of land be allowed to become "inaccessible" by the relinquishment of a public right-of-way per Vermont Statute Title 19, sub-chapter 6, #958.

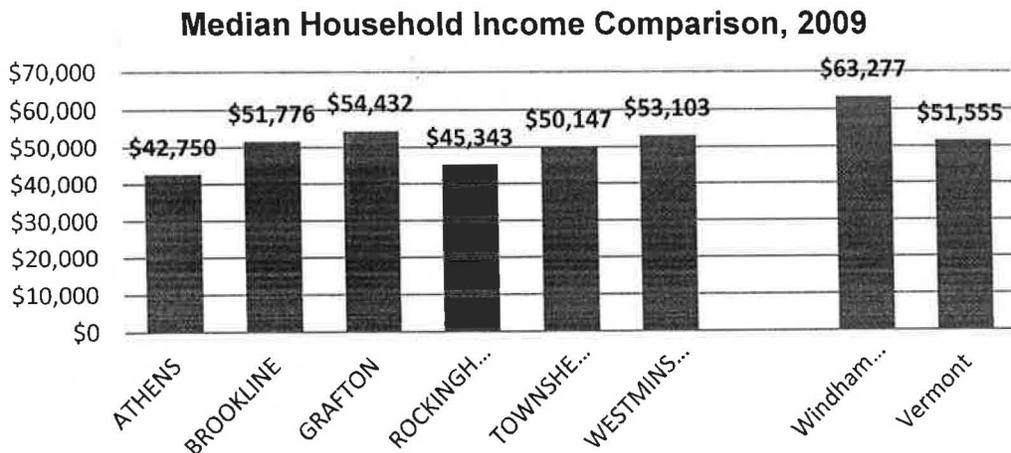
7. Ensure that development and expansion of public utility facilities and services generally occur within highway or public utility right-of-way corridors in order to reduce adverse physical and visual impact on the landscape and achieve greater efficiency in the expenditure of funds.
8. Continue to maintain functional and safe roads that are aesthetically pleasing and respectful of local character.
9. Whenever gravel or paved roads are reconstructed incorporate VT Agency of Transportation standards.
10. Maintain road ditches, bridges and culverts for roadbed drainage, storm water capacity and prevention of roadside erosion.
11. All bridges 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.
12. All trucks exceeding the 24,000 pound limit should apply for an over-weight permit

Transportation Recommendations

1. Continue the timely maintenance of bridges through capital planning and budgeting.
2. Maintain and amend local road and bridge standards that reflect the Town Plan and are compliant with state and federal regulations.
3. Enforce speed limits.

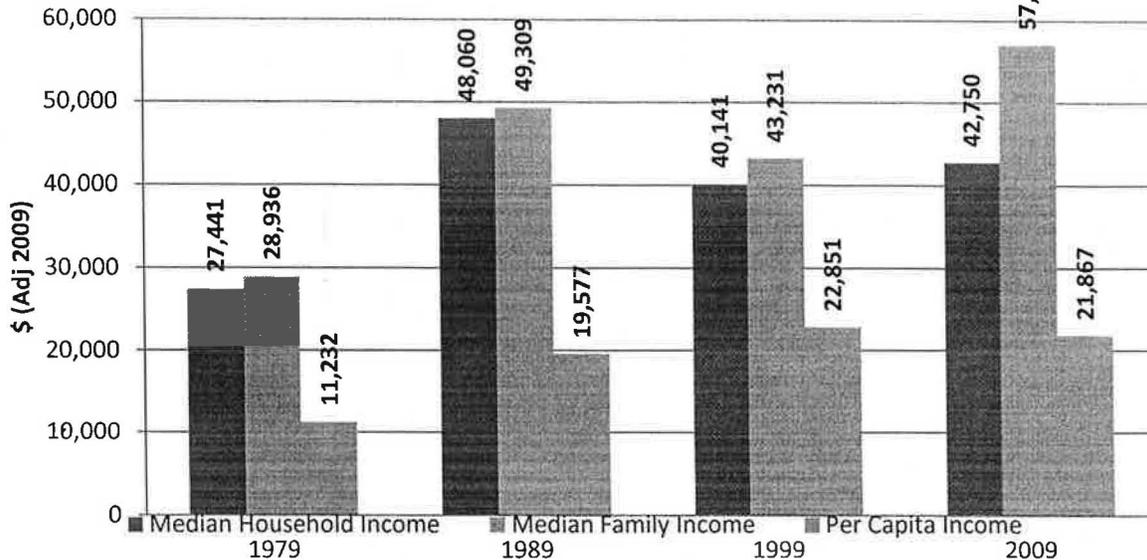
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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, caretaking and maintenance.



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

Athen's Resident Income Indicators, 1979- 2009



Source: Vermont Indicators Website, <http://www.vcgi.org/indicators/> & 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, CPI from Consumer Price Index History Table, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/cpi/cpiiai.txt>

Economic Policies:

1. Encourage economic development, which maximizes the circulation of dollars within the community and nearby surrounding communities. It provides diversified local employment opportunities, and enhances Athens small-town rural character while promoting the wise and sustainable use of Athens natural resources to protect its overall environmental quality.
2. Require the town planning for change and growth within the Athens be guided by the following considerations: (1) future Athens land needs; (2) provision of adequate municipal services and facilities; (3) preservation of architecturally and historically significant buildings; (4) preservation of open spaces. (5) Future energy needs.
3. Encourage the strengthening and diversification of tourism and recreation in a manner which maintains high environmental quality.
4. Encourage the local manufacture and marketing of agriculture and value-added agricultural, sugaring, home gardens, forestry products, and cottage industries.
5. Discourage development incompatible with existing uses or which will otherwise negatively impact Athens rural, natural, physical, or social environment.

Town Policies:

1. 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 and of open spaces; (6) in an effort to be guided by preference for telecom infrastructure, especially locations of towers, the Town will be in touch with VTEL.

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. Communities benefit when employees are able to live close to their workplace young adults are able to buy or rent in their hometowns and elderly residents are able to remain in the community where they have family, friends and history.

GOAL:

To notify the listers of new construction, renovation, and/or demolition for the purpose of the grand list notification.

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

TABLE 1: HOUSING TYPES AVAILABLE IN ATHENS		
2007-2011 ESTIMATES		
Housing	Count	Percent
1 unit, detached	151	71.6
1 unit, attached	25.6	0
2 units		2.8
3 or 4 units	0	0
5 to 9 units	0	0
Mobile homes	54	
Total Housing Units	211	

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

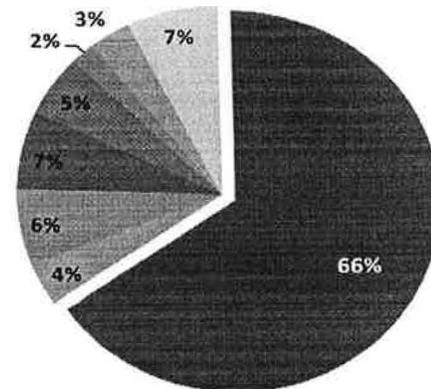
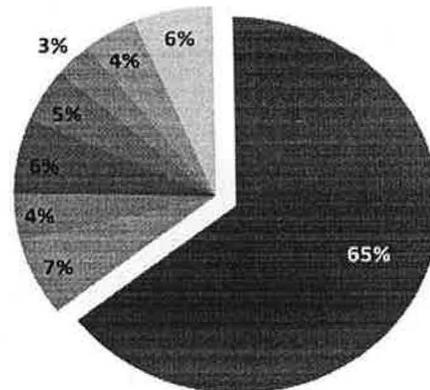
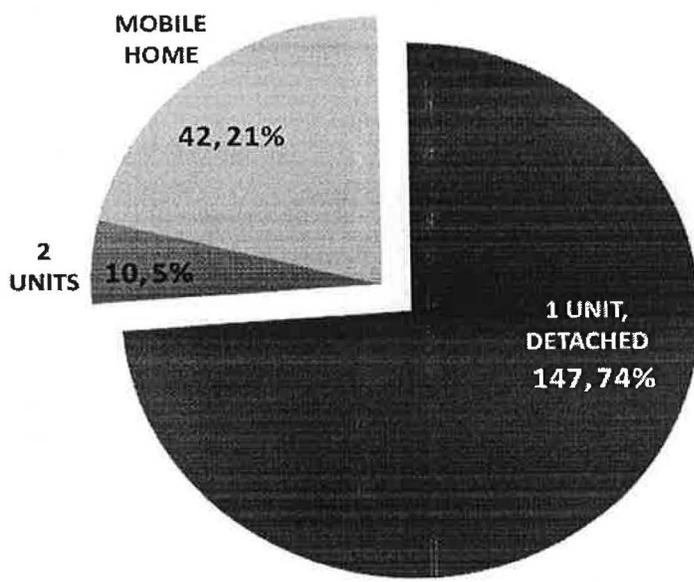
Source: 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

HOUSING OCCUPANCY

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

AGE OF HOUSING

TABLE 3: AGE OF HOUSING IN ATHENS 5-Year Estimates		
	Estimate	Percent
Year Structure Built		
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	



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

Housing Recommendations

1. Understanding the efforts of nonprofit housing organizations, as well as private developers, to identify the needs, in Athens that meet the guidelines for affordable family and elderly housing, and are in accordance with the rural character of the town, as well as the resources of the Town to sustain such a development.
2. 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.
3. The town should look for and apply for additional grant funding for housing

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 injected 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.

Unquestionably, residents can realize the most energy savings through conservation and efficiency. Whole structure energy audits, that can diagnose sources of heat loss, are encouraged.

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. 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.

Settlement in Athens is dispersed. There are no commercial opportunities; hence, few job opportunities 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. 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.

The Select Board should support a volunteer Town Energy Committee whose responsibilities could include pursuing some of the examples cited above (organize energy audits, present the PACE plan to the Select Board and Town Meeting, create a ride share program), as well those mentioned below in Goals and Recommendations for Action

Goals:

1. Encourage energy conservation—not using or reducing the use of energy in all aspects of our lives.
2. Encourage energy efficiency—use the least amount of energy needed for any task.
3. Educate residents about energy issues and options so that they make informed decisions about energy.
4. Promote the socially and environmentally responsible development of renewable energy resources within Athens. This development should conform to our Land Use plan, i.e., the intent to respect the topography and protect Athens rural character which has defined the town.
5. Support a volunteer Town Energy Committee.

Policies:

1. Idling of motor vehicles should follow the state regulations.
2. 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.
3. 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..
4. Form a volunteer Energy Committee. This committee could be ad hoc committee (like the Emergency Committee); to promote the energy related goals, policies, and recommendations of this plan.
5. Encourage public transportation carriers to include Athens in their routes, public schedules.
6. Develop a ride share program from Athens residents, a project developed by the Energy Committee.
7. Continue participating in regional programs for resource recycling. The Town should made reasonable efforts to purchase products with a bias for those items that can be easily recycled.

FOOD SECURITY

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.

Food Security Policies:

1. Encourage the practice of gardening by all residents, as well as the development of neighborhood and community gardening, and grow-a-row efforts.
2. 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, lacto fermentation), and extending the growing season.
3. Support local agriculture through direct purchasing of farm products from area farmers (farm stands, CSAs), as well as locally-produced food from area stores.
4. Encourage farming, and the development of farms in Athens.
5. Encourage the practice of collaborative, community efforts, and the sharing of resources, to meet the food needs of all citizens.

6. The Town Service Officer is in place to provide emergency assistance, including food.

Food Security Recommendations:

1. Support the development of a satellite food shelf for Our Place Drop In Center 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.
2. Support the efforts of local groups, such as Grafton Cares, the Athens Food Group, the Townshend Food Shelf, and Our Place Drop-In Center, to provide food security for all citizens, and especially our most vulnerable neighbors.
3. 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 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.

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. Currently, there has been a concert, a historical representation of Daisy Turner, a pig roast, and several flea markets to raise money for the renovation and rehabilitation of the Meeting House.

Facility Policies:

1. Require an adequate tax base to support adequate municipal facilities and services.
2. New development should be weighed against necessary and anticipated increases in municipal services and facilities.
3. Require that existing or planned municipal facilities and lands, or adjacent lands be used in a manner that's consistent with a rural character.

Facility Recommendations:

1. Prepare a budget which addresses fire and police protections, public education, town land acquisition, solid waste disposal, and town highway and bridge program(s). In general, the growth of Athens should not exceed the Town's fiscal capacity as identified in the budget program.
2. Encourage the formation of a Budget Committee to assist the financial planning for the town, planning for long term anticipated expenses, and to assist the Select board in the development of the annual budget.

RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

A. Outdoor Recreation:

Athens has an abundance of important outdoor recreational opportunities, including hiking, 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 public lands and private lands such as Windmill Hill Pinnacle and the Athens Dome. The Town appreciates and supports the continued availability of these opportunities.

B. 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.

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

Recreational & Cultural Policies:

1. Encourage the provision of varied and accessible opportunities for public and private recreation in a manner which maintains high environmental quality.
2. Protect historic structures from destruction, incongruous alteration, and the introduction of incongruous elements.
3. Assure that lands adjacent to or including areas of historical and cultural value are used in a manner that will not destroy the value of the site or area
4. Preserve the Athens Brick Meeting House and Athens Town Office.

Recreational & Cultural Recommendations:

1. Encourage opportunities for people of all ages and abilities of the Town.
2. Encourage appropriate activities which serve to support and enhance the provision of area library services in Rockingham, Grafton and Townshend, and historical services in Grafton, Townshend and Athens, as well as the Windham Historical Society.

3. Two public cemeteries are located in the Town of Athens; measures should be implemented to protect the integrity of these areas and to ensure that they are not damaged, relocated, other destroyed.
4. Public cemeteries, the Athens Valley Cemetery and the West Cemetery should not be relocated.
5. Any burial of human remains must conform to State of Vermont regulations
6. Encourage preservation of large tracts of contiguous land for the continued use of the land for recreation.
7. The use and development of land and water should support the availability of outdoor recreational activities including hunting, fishing, hiking skiing, snowmobiling, and other activities.

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. 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, 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's industries are small in scale and are related primarily to residences

FUTURE LAND USE

The Athens Town Plan is not a regulatory device, except for the possible application in the Act 250 review process. The Plan can also inform, without regulatory authority, the Public Service Board in Section 248 proceedings, i.e., a Certificate of Public Good for telecommunication and power lines. Its implementation 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 into various districts 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 protect 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.

Rural/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 adjacent 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.

Resource Lands

Resource land areas in the Town of Athens have special value and should be preserved and protected to the extent possible. Any development which occurs in these areas should be designed to have minimal impact on the resource area. Resource lands include essentially undeveloped forest lands which have limited access to an improved public road, areas with steep slopes, wetlands, scenic areas and agricultural lands.

Use development is to be primarily agriculture and forestry, clustered residential development, and recreational activities.

Conservation Lands

Conservation 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 400 acres around Athens Dome (now officially known as the Turner Hill Wildlife Management Area), the private conservation efforts of the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association, as well as individual property owners, or have restrictive easements on them.

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 recreation, forest growth, and wildlife habitat

Land Use Policies:

1. Encourage growth and development in a manner that protects Athens' natural resources, preserves the area's rural character and does not negatively impact municipal facilities and services, or property taxes.
2. Support the retention and acquisition of public or private conservation lands to promote recreation, reforestation, water conservation and suitable forest practices.
3. Require that public utilities and transportation facilities use the same corridors in order to minimize the impact on the environment and to assist desired development patterns.
4. Maintain and encourage agriculture, forestry, open space and recreational land uses.

5. Development shall be limited, restricted, or prohibited 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.
6. To safeguard public investment, lands adjacent to public facilities, services, or lands shall be planned and used in a manner that will 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 Athens Meeting House.

Land Use Recommendations:

1. To notify the listers of new construction, renovation, and/or demolition for the purpose of the grand list notification.
2. Continue to study changes in land uses such as camp conversions, subdivisions of land, and new development to better understand land use patterns in Athens.
3. Encourage voluntary action to ensure the policies of the Land Use section of the Athens Town Plan are implemented
4. Encourage the use of existing non-profit land trusts (e.g., Vermont Land Trust) to acquire or hold conservation easements on resource and conservation lands.
5. Encourage participation in Act 250 review process.
6. Encourage participation by the Planning Commission in the Town planning process by residents and property owners.

NATURAL RESOURCE USE & CONSERVATION AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

A. 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 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:

1. Protect ground and surface waters by requiring that development minimize impact on
 - a. Watersheds of upland streams
 - b. Watersheds characterized by steep slopes and shallow soils
 - c. Areas supplying large amounts of recharge waters to aquifers
 - d. Watersheds of any public water supplies

2. Plan development in order to conserve the Town's water resources and to minimize the cost of waste disposal systems.
3. Provide a water supply sufficient to serve all units within a subdivision, as well as to provide for fire protection.
4. Assure that any new water supply system does not diminish, and any waste disposal system does not contaminate, an existing water supply
5. Assure that any individual storing, using or transporting hazardous chemicals does so in such a manner so as not to have any adverse effects of streams or sources of water in the Town.
6. Assure watercourses, ponds, and shore lands are retained and maintained in accordance with state regulations.
7. Significant 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.

Water Resources Recommendations:

1. Support state efforts to collect data for the protection of all ground and surface waters.
2. Septic systems causing pollution or having an adverse impact to adjacent property groundwater should remedied
3. Work with state, regional and local efforts to inventory and map aquifer recharge areas and wetlands.

B. 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 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.

C. FISH AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES

The following general habitats have been identified in Athens:

1. Upland habitats: include forested areas on steep slopes or coniferous or mixed forests which provide substantial winter cover for a variety of wildlife. Areas know 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.
2. 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).

3. Shore land habitats: include shoreline areas which are undeveloped are otherwise attractive to a variety of amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.
4. 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, turkeys.
5. 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:

1. Plan development to minimize impact upon necessary fish and wildlife habitat
2. Minimize fragmentation of large blocks of necessary wildlife habitat and maintain connectivity between habitat blocks as corridors for wildlife migration.
3. Habitats of threatened, endangered and economically significant species shall be identified and protected.

Fish and Wildlife Resources Recommendations

1. 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.
2. Conduct a Natural Resources Inventory to identify important lands for protection and to strategize means of protection (i.e., conservation easements, purchase of development right, and land trusts).
3. Prohibit development in habitats which support endangered or rare species of wildlife in a manner that will destroy or imperil those species.

D. SOILS AND TOPOGRAPHY

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, outwash 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 northern exist into Rockingham is 600'. Moving west from the divide of Rte 35 and Brookline Road the elevation rises gently to Athens Pond and is 1180' to its exit at the Townshend line is 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.

Soil and Topography Policies:

1. Avoid development in areas dominated by slopes greater than 25 percent
2. Minimize areas of earth disturbance, grading, and clearing of vegetation on slopes over 15 percent.
3. Land clearing, grading, and filling practices shall be used to minimize erosion and sedimentation flow into streams, wetlands and other waters.

C. 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.

Commercial farms in Athens: Wild Shepherd Farm on Rte 35

Additionally, 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:

1. Help to preserve and maintain farms, agricultural land and related agricultural services required to ensure a viable agricultural community.
2. Encourage the wise use of forest and land for wood products, maple syrup, recreation, wildlife habitat and scenery.
3. Construction or extension of public services and utilities by the Town, state, and private companies shall be permitted only where such construction or extension will not discourage agricultural activities or will be compatible with important agricultural land and in keeping with the aesthetics of the area.
4. Timber harvesting should follow a professionally prepared management plan. Timber harvesting practices shall protect surface waters, shorelines, and stream banks, and should minimize adverse short-term and long-term environmental impacts, including those on neighboring properties.

Agricultural and Forest Resources Recommendations:

1. The town should support development that will not hinder the productivity of these soils or preclude their future use for agriculture and forestry.
2. Identify and map significant agricultural and forest parcels in Athens.
3. Any non-agricultural development proposed to be located on important agricultural lands should be reviewed by the Planning Commission to minimize any adverse impact on existing or potential agricultural uses.
4. Support the development of local industries which produce “value added” agricultural and forest products.

D. EARTH AND MINERAL RESOURCES

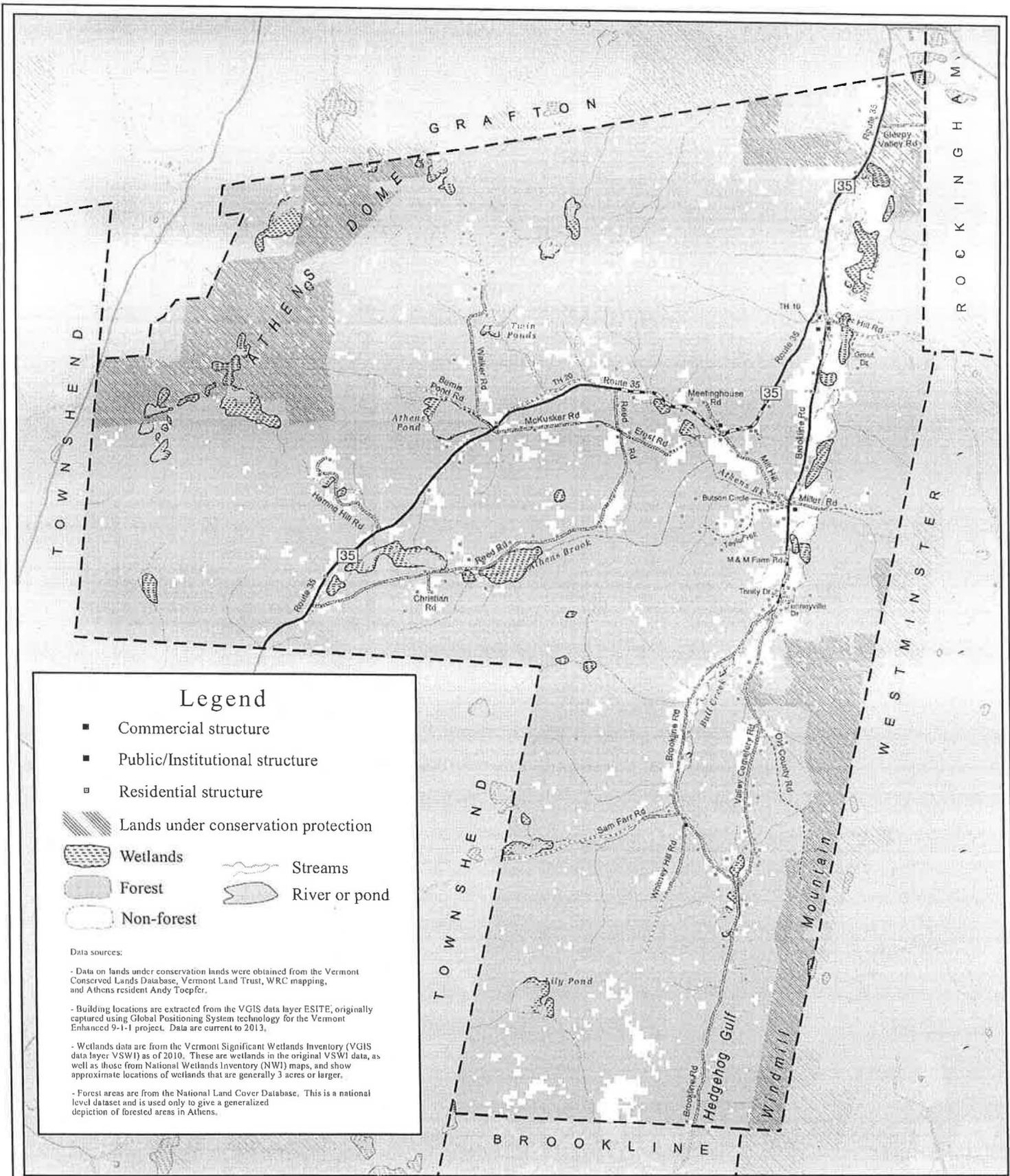
There are three, privately-owned sand pits in Athens that have been used in recent history for the repair of damage from storms like Irene.

Earth and Mineral Resources Policies:

1. Assure that lands with high potential for the extraction of mineral and earth resource not be developed in such a manner that will adversely affect future extraction or processing.
2. Assure that the extraction or processing of minerals and earth resources does not have an adverse environmental impact, resulting in inconvenience to neighboring property owners nor represent a burden on municipal services or facilities.
3. All proposals for earth and mineral extraction shall include a site rehabilitation plan that ensures the possibility of future use of the land and prevents any erosion situations.

Earth and Mineral Resources Recommendations:

1. Work with the Agency of Natural Resources and the Vermont State Geologist to identify and map important earth and mineral resources in the Town.
2. Make available information on acceptable land reclamation practices.



Legend

- Commercial structure
- Public/Institutional structure
- Residential structure
- ▨ Lands under conservation protection
- ▩ Wetlands
- ▧ Forest
- Non-forest
- ~ Streams
- ⊃ River or pond

Data sources:

- Data on lands under conservation lands were obtained from the Vermont Conserved Lands Database, Vermont Land Trust, WRC mapping, and Athens resident Andy Toepfer.

- Building locations are extracted from the VGIS data layer ESITE, originally captured using Global Positioning System technology for the Vermont Enhanced 9-1-1 project. Data are current to 2013.

- Wetlands data are from the Vermont Significant Wetlands Inventory (VGIS data layer VSWI) as of 2010. These are wetlands in the original VSWI data, as well as those from National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) maps, and show approximate locations of wetlands that are generally 3 acres or larger.

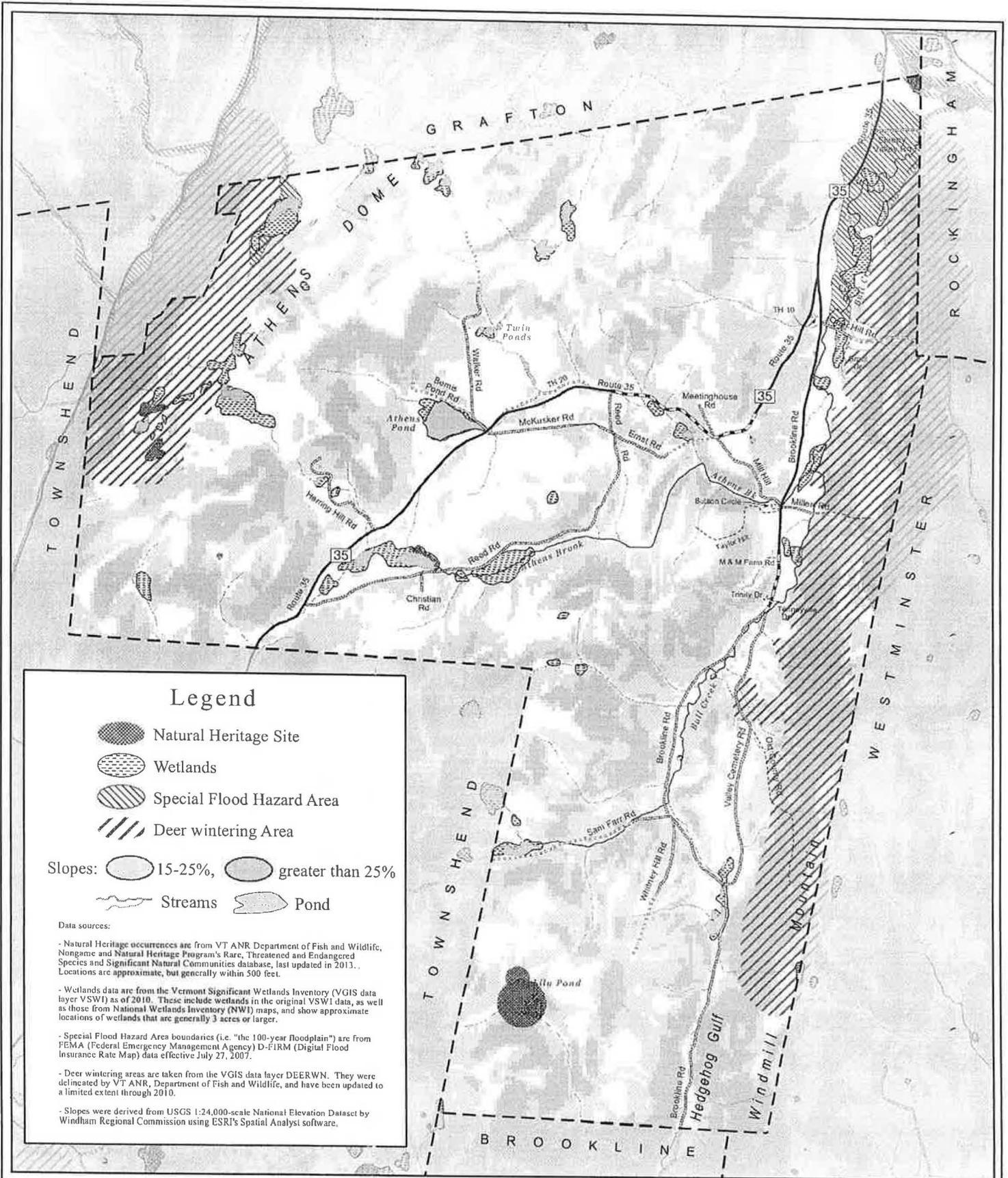
- Forest areas are from the National Land Cover Database. This is a national level dataset and is used only to give a generalized depiction of forested areas in Athens.

Existing Land Use Town of Athens, Vermont

January 2014



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Legend

- Natural Heritage Site
- Wetlands
- Special Flood Hazard Area
- Deer wintering Area

Slopes: 15-25%, greater than 25%

Streams Pond

Data sources:

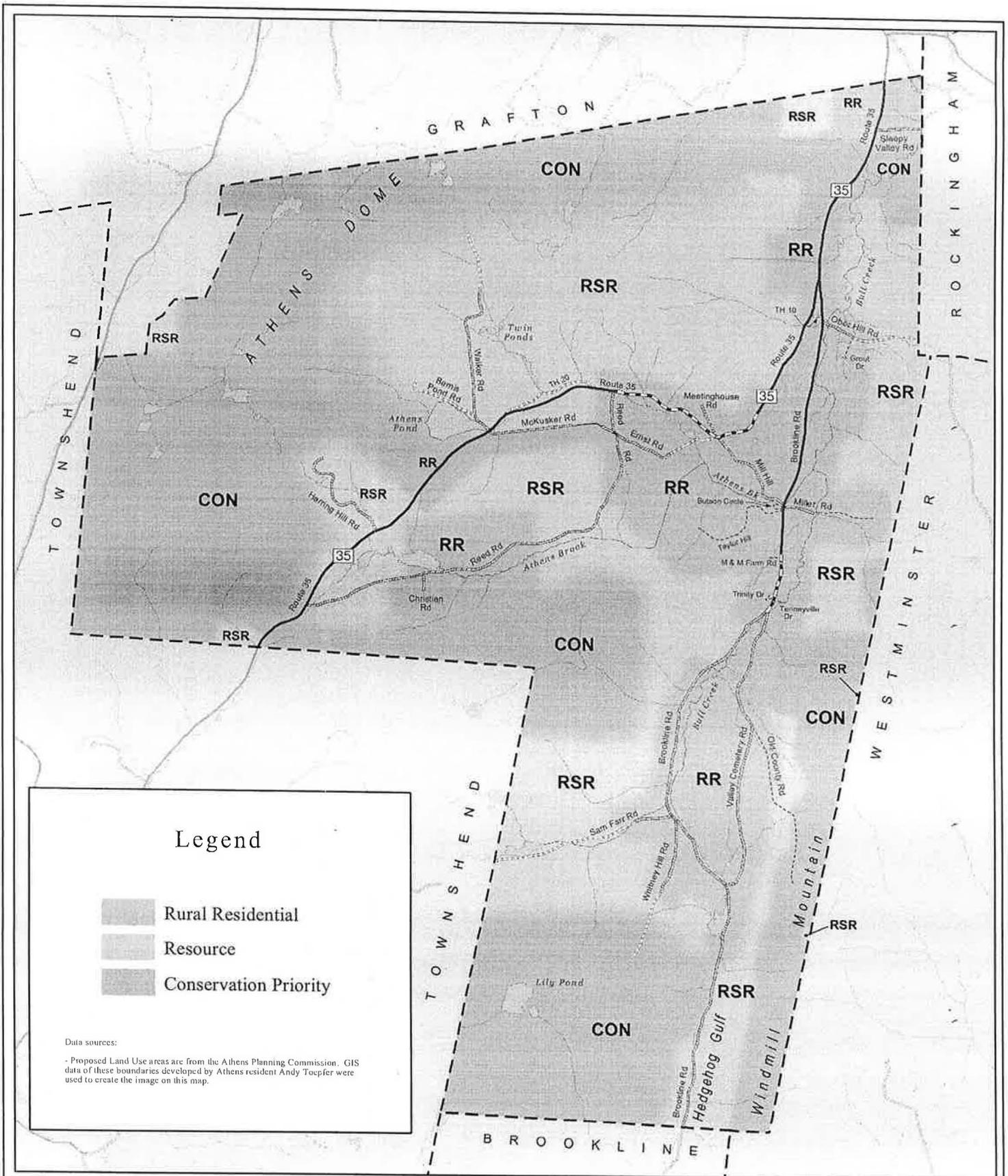
- Natural Heritage occurrences are from VT ANR Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nongame and Natural Heritage Program's Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species and Significant Natural Communities database, last updated in 2013. Locations are approximate, but generally within 500 feet.
- Wetlands data are from the Vermont Significant Wetlands Inventory (VGIS data layer VSWI) as of 2010. These include wetlands in the original VSWI data, as well as those from National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) maps, and show approximate locations of wetlands that are generally 3 acres or larger.
- 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.
- 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 to a limited extent 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 2014



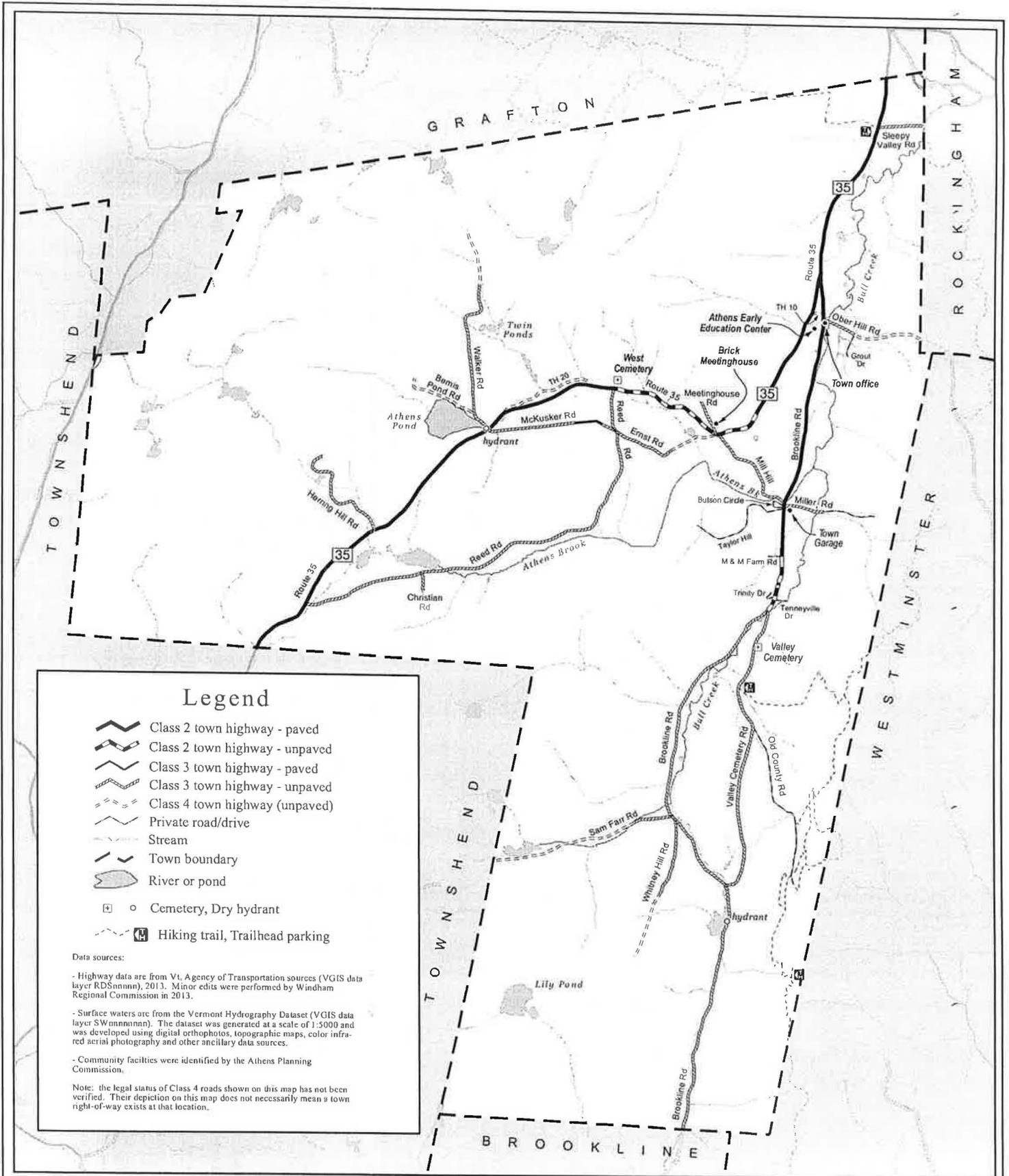
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Proposed Land Use Town of Athens, Vermont

January 2014

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Legend

- Class 2 town highway - paved
- Class 2 town highway - unpaved
- Class 3 town highway - paved
- Class 3 town highway - unpaved
- Class 4 town highway (unpaved)
- Private road/drive
- Stream
- Town boundary
- River or pond
- Cemetery, Dry hydrant
- Hiking trail, Trailhead parking

Data sources:

- Highway data are from VT, Agency of Transportation sources (VGIS data layer RDS00000), 2013. Minor edits were performed by Windham Regional Commission in 2013.
- Surface waters are from the Vermont Hydrography Dataset (VGIS data layer SW0000000). The dataset was generated at a scale of 1:5000 and was developed using digital orthophotos, topographic maps, color infrared aerial photography and other ancillary data sources.
- Community facilities were identified by the Athens Planning Commission.

Note: the legal status of Class 4 roads shown on this map has not been verified. Their depiction on this map does not necessarily mean a town right-of-way exists at that location.

Transportation and Community Facilities Town of Athens, Vermont

January 2014



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