

# DHCD Municipal Plan and Bylaw Intake

Submitted by: Anonymous user

Submitted time: Jul 24, 2025, 11:35:51 AM

Municipality Name

**Bennington**

Municipality

**Bennington**

County

**Bennington**

Regional Planning Commission

**Bennington County RC**

Submitter Details

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Submitter's Title

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Submitter's Email

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Select your Submission

**Municipal Plan**

Type of Municipal Plan Submission

**Proposed**

Date of Public Hearing

**Aug 27, 2025**

Upload Public Hearing Notice

**DOCX**

PC Notice of Public Hearing\_CORRECTED.docx  
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Upload Municipal Plan

**PDF** Bennington Town Plan\_PlanningCommissionHearing\_7-23-25.pdf  
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Have you submitted the Municipal Plan to your Regional Planning Commission?

**Yes**

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING  
BENNINGTON TOWN PLAN**

The Bennington Planning Commission will conduct a Public Hearing on Wednesday, August 27, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. at the Bennington Fire Facility, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Assembly Room, 130 River Street in Bennington, Vermont for the purpose of adopting the new Town Plan for the Town of Bennington.

**A. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:**

The Bennington Town Plan is a comprehensive long-range plan for the Town of Bennington. It states objectives and policies to guide the growth and development of the Town. It is intended as a framework upon which to base future actions and regulatory bylaws.

**B. AREA COVERED**

The proposed Town Plan affects the entire Town of Bennington.

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  - Chapter 1: Land Use
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  - Chapter 6: Climate Hazards
  - Chapter 7: Energy
- Appendices
  - Community Engagement Summary
  - Act 181
  - Implementation Matrix

**D. WHERE THE FULL PLAN MAY BE EXAMINED:**

Copies of the full text of the Bennington Town Plan, and accompanying maps, are available for examination at the Bennington Town Office at 205 South Street, in Bennington, Vermont and online at: <https://benningtonvt.org/townplan>.

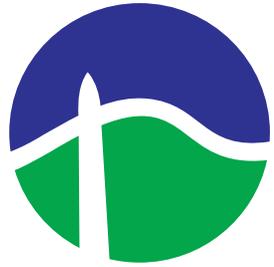
Evan Yadeski, Chairperson, Town of Bennington Planning Commission



# Bennington Vermont



# 2025 Town Plan



# Bennington Vermont

*Adopted: XX/XX/XXXX*

*Assistance provided by the Bennington County Regional Commission*

*Funded in part by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development*

## *Acknowledgements*

### **2025 Select Board**

Clark Adams  
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Jackie Matts  
Sarah Perrin  
Jim Sullivan  
Ed Woods  
Nancy White

### **2023–2025 Planning Commissions**

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*Bennington is a welcoming, engaged, inclusive, and resilient community where everyone regardless of identity shares in our vitality and benefits from an outstanding quality of life.*





A map of Bennington in 1887.

## Welcome to Bennington

Bennington, Vermont, is a town of historical significance, great natural beauty, and strong community ties. A town of about 42 square miles located in southwestern Vermont, Bennington has the distinction of being Vermont’s first town after its charter was established in 1749. Prior to European settlement, the Mohican people and the Alnobak, the Western Abenaki people, first lived in what is now southern Vermont and western Massachusetts for 12,000 years.

Bennington’s character is shaped by its location among the mountains and valleys of southwestern Vermont. The town’s steep upland areas—including

the Green Mountains, Mount Anthony, and Whipstock Hill—have supplied important natural resources to the town while remaining largely free from development. Two major valleys intersect in Bennington: the north-south running Valley of Vermont and the Walloomsac Valley that follows its namesake river west toward New York State. As a result, Bennington contains extensive lowland areas that historically have supported important transportation corridors and have attracted significant agricultural, residential, commercial, and industrial development.

In the nineteenth century, Bennington became an important manufacturing center with mills and factories constructed in the area that is now downtown

and along the Walloomsac River and Paran Creek. In the meantime, agriculture transformed the landscape as farms spread through the valleys and hill-sides were cleared for pasture. These early agricultural and industrial ventures shaped much of what Bennington is still known for. (For more information about Bennington’s rich history, visit the [Town’s website](#) and the [Bennington Historical Society](#).)

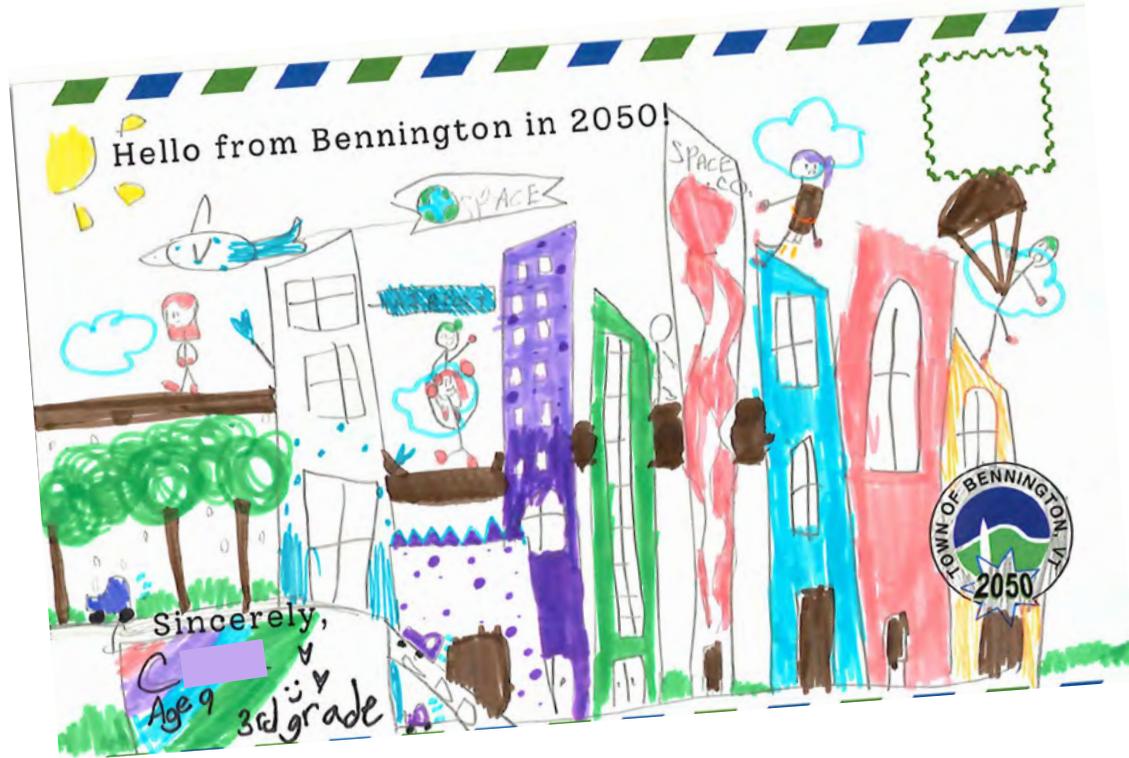
Today, Bennington is the largest town in southwestern Vermont and home to around 15,100 people. The town is a hub of employment, commercial activity, healthcare, education, and more for a region that includes communities across state borders in New York and Massachusetts.

This plan explores the many elements that make Bennington a unique and lively place and envisions affordable, sustainable, and enjoyable futures for all community members. In August 2020, the Bennington Select Board adopted a vision statement that guides all aspects of the town:

***Bennington is a welcoming, engaged, inclusive, and resilient community where everyone regardless of identity shares in our vitality and benefits from an outstanding quality of life.***

These values, shared at the beginning of every Select Board meeting since April 2021, have informed the purpose, process, and vision for this town plan. The Bennington Planning Commission, in fulfilling its statutory duty to prepare the town plan, has aimed to embody the Town’s vision of inclusion, engagement, and resilience throughout the process of developing a reenvisioned planning document, from the earliest brainstorming stages and community engagement events, through the drafting and design, to consideration of how the plan would be used by the community after adoption.





*Quotes from community members are included throughout this plan! Look out for speech boxes like this one to see what Benningtonians had to say.*

**Purpose**

The town plan provides a framework for decisions that will guide the future of Bennington. The plan’s scope includes planning for the development of land, provision of public services, operation of community facilities, and protection of the environment, among other subjects.

The town plan considers the current conditions in Bennington and sets new goals for the town, based on the input of many different community members. While this plan is guided by the needs and desires of the Town of Bennington, care was taken to ensure that it is compatible with the Bennington Regional Plan, with the plans of the villages of Old Bennington and North Bennington, and with the plans of neighboring towns.

This plan will guide the actions of many community members and institutions, including the Select Board, municipal offices, non-profit organizations, community groups, and businesses that work to respond to community-wide priorities.

Additionally, one purpose of the town plan is to comply with state requirements and keep the Town of Bennington aligned with the state’s planning goals. This town plan was prepared and adopted pursuant to Title 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117, the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act, and meets all state requirements for a municipal plan.

**Planning Process**

This plan is informed by the participation of community members, whose input was gathered during an extensive public engagement process. With the support of the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC), the Planning Commission reached out to community members for their ideas and opinions throughout the winter of 2024, and it shared findings from that community engagement in May 2024.

For more information on the community engagement process, see **Appendix A**.

This public engagement effort was designed to reach a broader segment of the community than the Town has ever reached before. Community members participated in roundtable conversations,

**BENNINGTON TOWN PLAN  
PUBLIC INPUT  
BY THE NUMBERS**





gathered for group discussions coordinated with community partners, and completed surveys to share their views on key topics.

Some of the most inspiring input was from Bennington's public-school students. Nearly 1000 students at Bennington's elementary, middle, and high schools completed "Postcards from 2050." The students expressed their desires for more places to spend time together, a drug-free community, housing for everyone, and a healthy environment—many of the same themes that surfaced through the community-wide engagement efforts.

All of the feedback gathered from the community was synthesized and distilled into key takeaways, themes, and values that the Planning Commission used to inform the structure and content of this plan.

### Values

The responses from the public highlighted community values that span across individual issues. These values give guidance for *how* the Town of Bennington and any other groups following this plan should act on the recommendations laid out in this document:

***Planning for the future of Bennington will always be: people-centered, transparent, creative, strategic, compassionate, conscious of affordability, and sustainable.***

These values are integrated throughout this plan as guiding principles that are essential to building a future for Bennington that reflects the aspirations of its current community. These values give important community-driven context to how the Town of Bennington will work toward specific goals that state law requires municipal plans to address.

### Vision

The key takeaways and themes that emerged during the public engagement phase were used to develop a new organizational structure for the town plan as well as identify important policies and action items that the Town should prioritize.

Key themes that emerged from public engagement were:

- a vibrant downtown
- mobility for all
- the place to be
- community-oriented public safety
- innovative spirit
- strategic programming
- informed and educated public
- climate resilience.

Although each theme doesn't stand alone as its own section, these community priorities are reflected throughout the town plan.





Deer Park at the Vermont Veterans Home.

These themes informed the structure of the plan, which is organized into four larger thematic parts: **The Place to Be, Bennington for All, Connected Community, and Resilient Community**. The development of these sections was guided by community priorities and the state-required elements of a municipal plan.

Each section includes a vision statement, a list of goals, and bolded action items embedded throughout the narrative.

- Visions are ambitious descriptions of what we want Bennington to be. Each of the plan's four thematic sections opens with a vision.
- Goals are the broad outcomes that are meant to bring about the Town's visions. Each of this plan's chapters opens with a set of goals.
- Actions are next steps that the Town of Bennington and the community should take to achieve their goals. Action items are bolded throughout the plan and are also listed in **Appendix C. Implementation Matrix**.

**Part 1: The Place to Be** describes Bennington's current and future land uses and promotes the goal of compact development in downtown areas and existing neighborhoods. This section also discusses Bennington's natural and historic resources and working lands.

#### **Vision**

Bennington will be home to a vibrant downtown surrounded by welcoming neighborhoods, a thriving agricultural community, and well-protected scenic and natural resources.

#### **Goals**

- A lively downtown with commercial, cultural, institutional, governmental, residential, tourist, and community activity
- Cherished, preserved, and actively occupied historic architecture and landmarks throughout town
- Welcoming residential neighborhoods served by nearby community institutions and businesses
- Working landscapes of local farms and forestry

- operations throughout Bennington's rural areas
- Healthy forests, scenic ridgelines, clean waters, and protected wildlife connections
- Active, maintained, and well-marked recreational areas

**Statutory elements** included in this section are:

- A land use plan
- Policies on the preservation of natural, scenic, and historic resources

**Part 2: Bennington for All** discusses economic development trends and the local food system. This section also describes the current state of housing in Bennington and establishes housing development goals.

#### **Vision**

Bennington will have a thriving, diversified economy that is deeply local and acts as a regional hub, as well as an ample supply of housing that is affordable and desirable for all of the town's residents.





Better Bennington Corporation Sponsored  
Event at Merchants Park.

### Goals

- A diverse, sustainable, and resilient economy that provides a variety of job opportunities while maintaining environmental standards
- A robust local food production and distribution system, affordable and available to all residents, students, workers, and visitors to Bennington
- A healthy housing ecosystem that offers an ample and varied supply of housing for all income levels that is of good quality, and energy efficient
- Accessible resources for finding and securing housing

### Statutory elements included in this section are:

- An economic development element
- A housing element

**Part 3: Connected Community** includes discussions of the town's educational, childcare, and

transportation systems, and public utilities and services in town. This section also discusses the goals of creating a welcoming community, cultivating civic participation, and fostering Bennington's relationship to the broader region. This section also includes current demographic data.

### Vision

Bennington will be well connected through a robust network of facilities and services that support a high quality of life and provide opportunities for community cohesion.

### Goals

- A transportation system that is safe, efficient, affordable, and sustainable for all users
- A public transit system that provides efficient and accessible transportation throughout Bennington and the broader region
- A vibrant, welcoming, and accessible

community where residents feel a sense of belonging

- A strong educational system that supports learners of all ages, from early childhood care to vocational training and post-secondary education
- Accessible and affordable health services that support community members' long-term health and overall quality of life
- Expanded facilities and services that support all community members, especially those struggling with housing insecurity, addiction, and other challenges
- Effective emergency services and community-oriented public safety systems
- Affordable broadband and telecommunication services throughout Bennington
- Robust and safe water and wastewater systems
- A solid waste management strategy that emphasizes reduction, reuse, and responsible





Bennington Horseshoe Club at Willow Park.

- disposal
- Ample and accessible opportunities for recreation that foster healthy lifestyles and social connection
- An engaged citizenry that participates in town governance on appointed citizen boards and commissions that represent a broad swath of the town's residents, including people of all ages, abilities, and income levels
- Extensive connections with the broader region, including playing an appropriate role in regional institutions

**Statutory elements** included in this section:

- A transportation plan
- A utilities and facilities plan
- An educational facilities plan
- A description of the relationship to the region and adjacent municipalities

**Part 4: Resilient Community** discusses flooding and other climate hazards and how Bennington

can mitigate the impacts of hazardous events and build resilience, physically and socially. This section also includes an enhanced energy plan that meets the requirements of [Act 174](#) and establishes energy conservation goals and renewable energy policies.

**Vision**

Bennington will be proactive, forward-thinking, and inclusive in addressing the hazards of a changing climate.

**Goals**

- Up-to-date emergency management policies and procedures that address the needs of all community members, especially vulnerable residents
- Infrastructure, buildings, and critical assets that are resilient to extreme weather events, especially flooding
- Healthy rivers, streams, wetlands, and upland forests that mitigate flooding
- Climate-resilient neighborhoods

- Informed residents who are prepared for emergency situations
- Energy-efficient residential, municipal, commercial, and industrial buildings
- Reduced energy consumption in municipal operations
- An energy-efficient transportation system with a diversity of options
- Local, renewable sources of energy that strengthen the local economy and are accessible to all residents
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions that align with Vermont's Global Warming Solutions Act

**Statutory elements** included in this section are:

- A flood resilience plan
- An energy plan





*The Bennington Mill on Benmont Avenue houses a variety of businesses in a repurposed mill building.*

## Implementation

The town plan is intended to be implemented over the course of the coming months and years; it is not an abstract document that will sit on a shelf. First and foremost, the plan will be a guiding document for leadership in the Town of Bennington: by the Select Board, by municipal staff, and by other boards and commissions. They will use the goals articulated in this plan to guide decision-making and shape policies for the future of Bennington. The Planning Commission and Select Board will consider the plan when preparing amendments to municipal bylaws and ordinances, pursuing grant opportunities, and considering a major purchase as defined in the Town's purchasing policy.

Additionally, the Town should encourage other local, regional, and state officials and organizations to refer to this plan when embarking on actions that may affect Bennington, and to implement plans and projects compatible with the town plan.

Because the plan provides the basis for many of the Town's regulations, it should be consulted by developers interested in investing in the town and by local and state regulatory boards when reviewing land use applications. Non-profit organizations and other community groups should use the town plan as support for their initiatives that align with broader community goals articulated within the document. The town plan can also highlight areas where greater community mobilization is needed to advance goals that are otherwise left unattended. The Town should also establish a mechanism for the ongoing collection and review of comments and questions about the town plan. Such advice and critique can inform future amendments and updates and ensure community engagement as the planning process continues.

Finally, **Appendix C** includes an implementation table, which provides details on the implementation of this plan's goals through specific action items,

such as who will be involved in taking action, when, and what funding might be available to support their work.

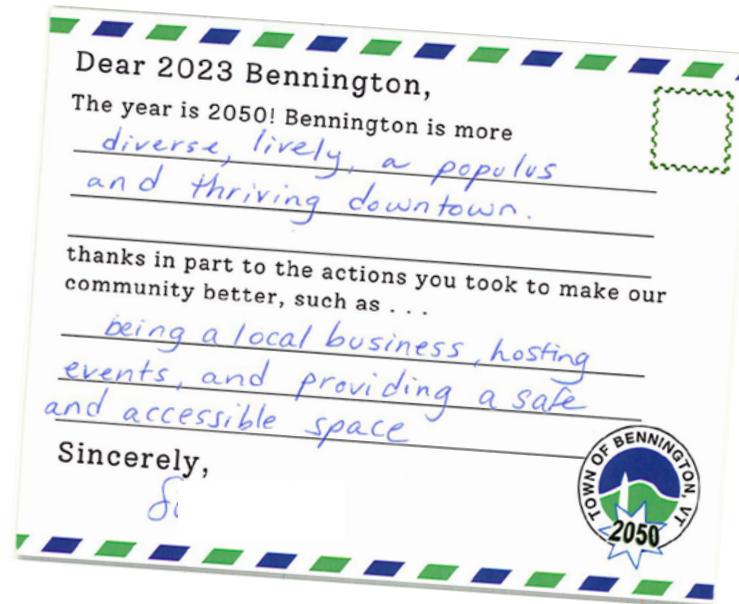
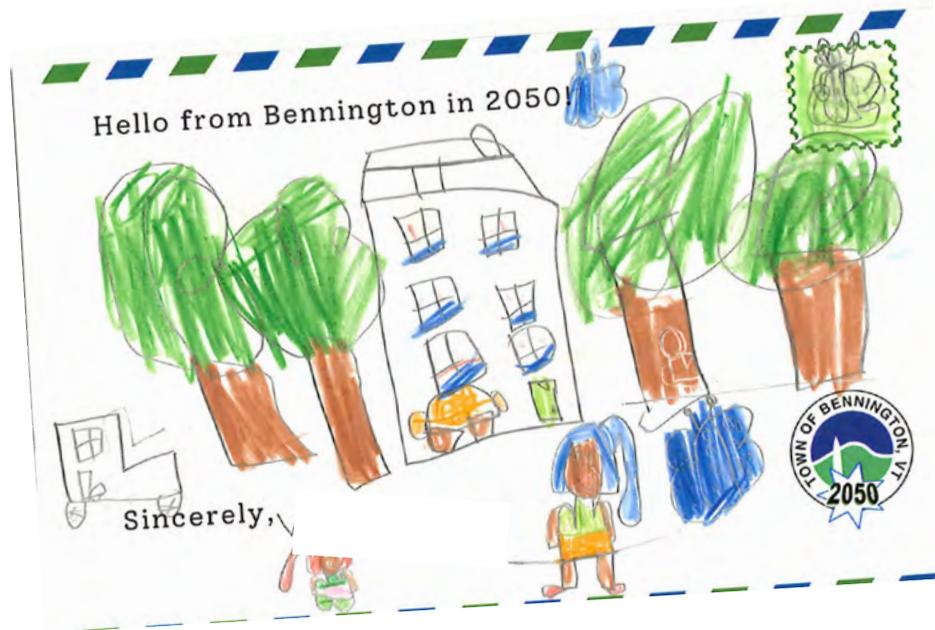




***Bennington will be home to a vibrant downtown surrounded by welcoming neighborhoods, a thriving agricultural community, and well-protected scenic and natural resources.***

- A lively downtown with commercial, institutional, governmental, residential, tourist, and community activity
- Cherished, preserved, and actively occupied historic architecture and landmarks throughout town
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- Working landscapes of local farms and forestry operations throughout Bennington's rural areas
- Healthy forests, scenic ridgelines, clean waters, and protected wildlife connections
- Active, maintained, and well-marked recreational areas





Bennington's commercial center includes traditional streetscapes of tightly clustered multi-story buildings that face the sidewalk.



Residential neighborhoods near the downtown maintain historic character, contribute to an attractive walking-friendly environment, and complement commercial uses on primary local roads.



Bennington is home to several large institutions, whose campus-style areas unite large-scale facilities with thoughtful landscaping, site planning, and access points to other parts of town.

## Chapter 1: Land Use

Bennington's center is a robust downtown that includes the greatest density of commercial, residential, and institutional uses in town. The downtown is home to historical assets that shaped Bennington's early development and contributes important cultural value to the town today. Adjacent to Bennington's downtown are a variety of neighborhoods, areas of mixed uses, higher density existing settlements, and future growth areas. Surrounding areas of lower residential density, industrial uses, working landscapes, and natural resources make up the rest of the town's land uses and contribute to the economic vitality and scenic beauty that is essential to Bennington's character.

The land use goals described in this section of the Bennington Town Plan reflect the expressed vision of the Bennington community and the statewide

planning goals that prioritize concentrated development in the town's compact urban center, surrounded by rural countryside. This focus on growth in Bennington's existing urban areas, while preserving the town's open space and protecting natural resources, reflects "smart growth" planning principles. Smart growth's emphasis on compact development, walkability, diverse housing options, and sustainability aligns with the Bennington community's values of accessibility, affordability, and resilience.

In 2021, Bennington adopted revised [Land Use & Development Regulations \(LUDR\)](#) that include form-based design areas in the central part of town. These regulations established zoning districts and policies that encourage a settlement pattern with a concentration of mixed uses in the town center surrounded by open rural countryside. This plan reinforces that vision and aims to strengthen that plan of development with recommended regulatory

tools (such as updates to the bylaws) and non-regulatory strategies (such as collaboration with stakeholders and advocacy groups, and pursuit of grant programs).

The Land Use & Development Regulations divide the town into several zoning districts, each of which has a specific set of allowed uses and dimensional requirements, and some of which have special design or resource protection standards. The Town's zoning bylaws are a system of specific regulations that govern how land can (and cannot) be used. Zoning bylaws are often updated after a new town plan is adopted, to ensure that the Town's land use regulations are in harmony with the vision laid out in the plan.

In contrast to the zoning bylaws' specificity, this town plan takes a "big picture" approach to describing land use in Bennington. The town plan is a visionary policy document that describes general





A barn on Carpenter Hill Road is part of the FLU Rural Agriculture and Forestry Zone.

### Municipal and Regional Future Land Use Maps

Act 181 (2024) established new categories for the regional planning commissions to use in their Future Land Use Maps. These regional maps must use specific land use categories defined in statute. While municipal Future Land Use Maps and regional Future Land Use Maps should align, they do not need to perfectly match. Bennington's Future Land Use Map includes some locally relevant land use categories and slightly different labels than those used in the Bennington County Regional Commission's Future Land Use Map, but they identify the same areas for growth, transition, and preservation.

categories of land use, but does not directly regulate development the way zoning does.

The primary land use categories described in this plan are shown on the Future Land Use map (Figure 1.1) as follows: Downtown (Center), Neighborhoods, Transition/Infill Areas, Rural Residential, Rural Agriculture and Forestry, and Natural Resources.

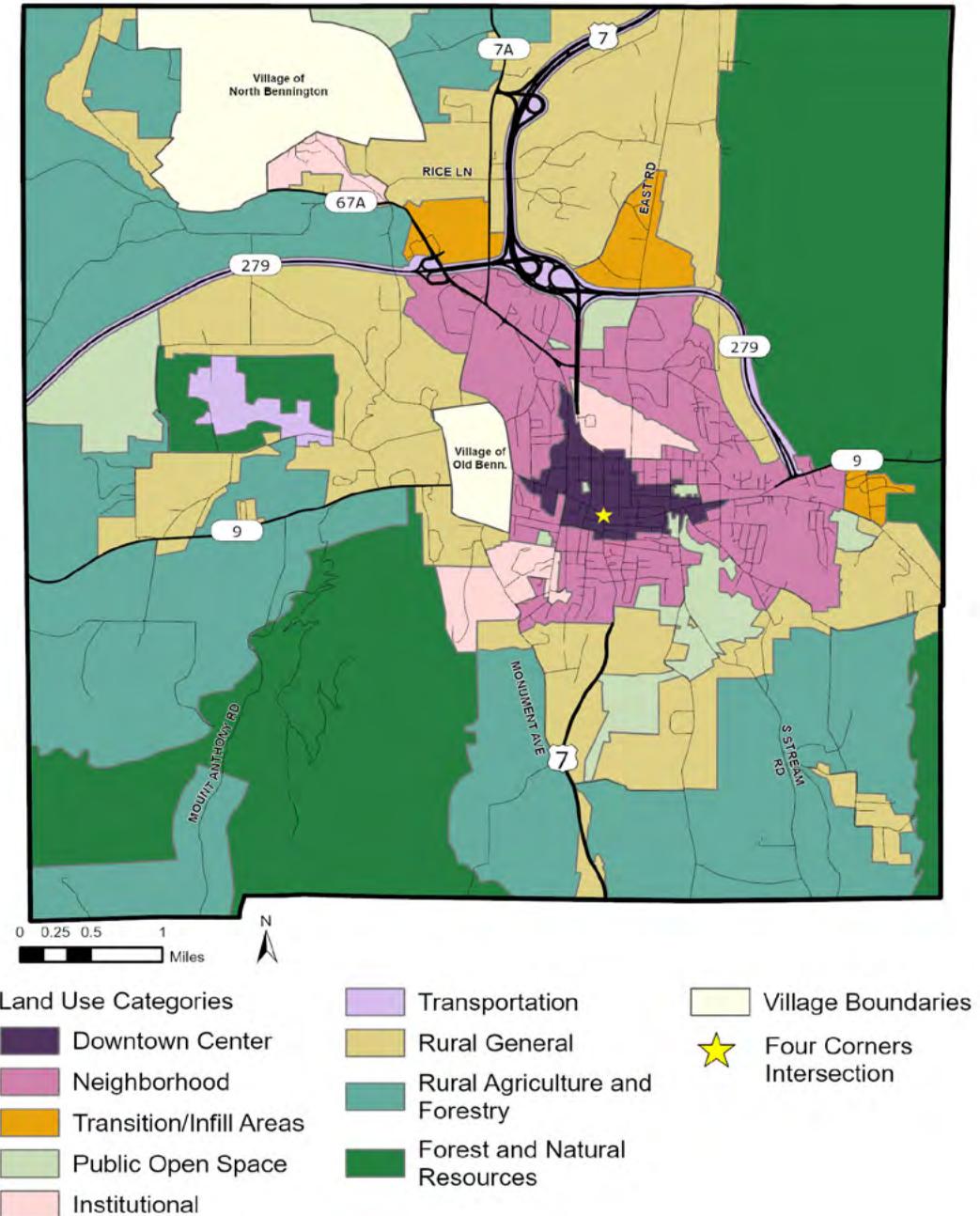
Some areas shown on the map straddle different land use categories. These include:

- Public Open Space—Parks and publicly-owned conserved lands in Bennington. These parts of town shall remain available for the enjoyment of the public in perpetuity, and can be found all over Bennington.
- Transportation—Highway corridors and the

airport. These lands serve important roles connecting Bennington to surrounding towns and states, and development in these areas shall not lead to unsafe conditions or inhibit their effective use.

- Institutional—Large campuses for educational and healthcare organizations. These parts of town should maintain cohesive design within each campus, and shall not adversely impact the character of adjacent residential or mixed-use neighborhoods.

Figure 1.1. Future Land Use



### Downtown

Bennington’s downtown is the most densely developed part of town with the widest mix of uses, including housing, businesses, civic and educational institutions, and key public services and facilities. This mixed-use environment is critical to ensuring a vibrant town center.

In 1999, the Town received one of the first downtown designations from the Vermont Downtown Development Board (now the Community Investment Board). The Department of Housing and Community Development’s Downtown Designation program allows landowners within the downtown access to tax incentives for redevelopment, and gives the Town an advantage when applying for state grants. The designation has given the Town valuable incentives, tax credits, and grant opportunities that have helped to improve the town’s central commercial, civic, and residential area.

Act 181 (2024) changed the state’s designation programs, which are now simplified into two categories: centers and neighborhoods. The boundaries for those areas are established through future land use maps, which are developed by the regional planning commissions in conversation with municipalities and approved by the statewide Land Use Review Board (LURB). Within the designated centers, there are three steps, indicating beginner, intermediate, and advanced centers. Each step allows the municipality to access an increasing number of benefits. As Bennington already has a downtown designation under the previous designation program, the Town will automatically be considered by the Land Use Review Board for a Step 3 designation—the highest level of benefits available under Act 181.

For more information about Act 181, the steps, and other changes to the designation program, see **Appendix B. Act 181 and Municipal Planning.**

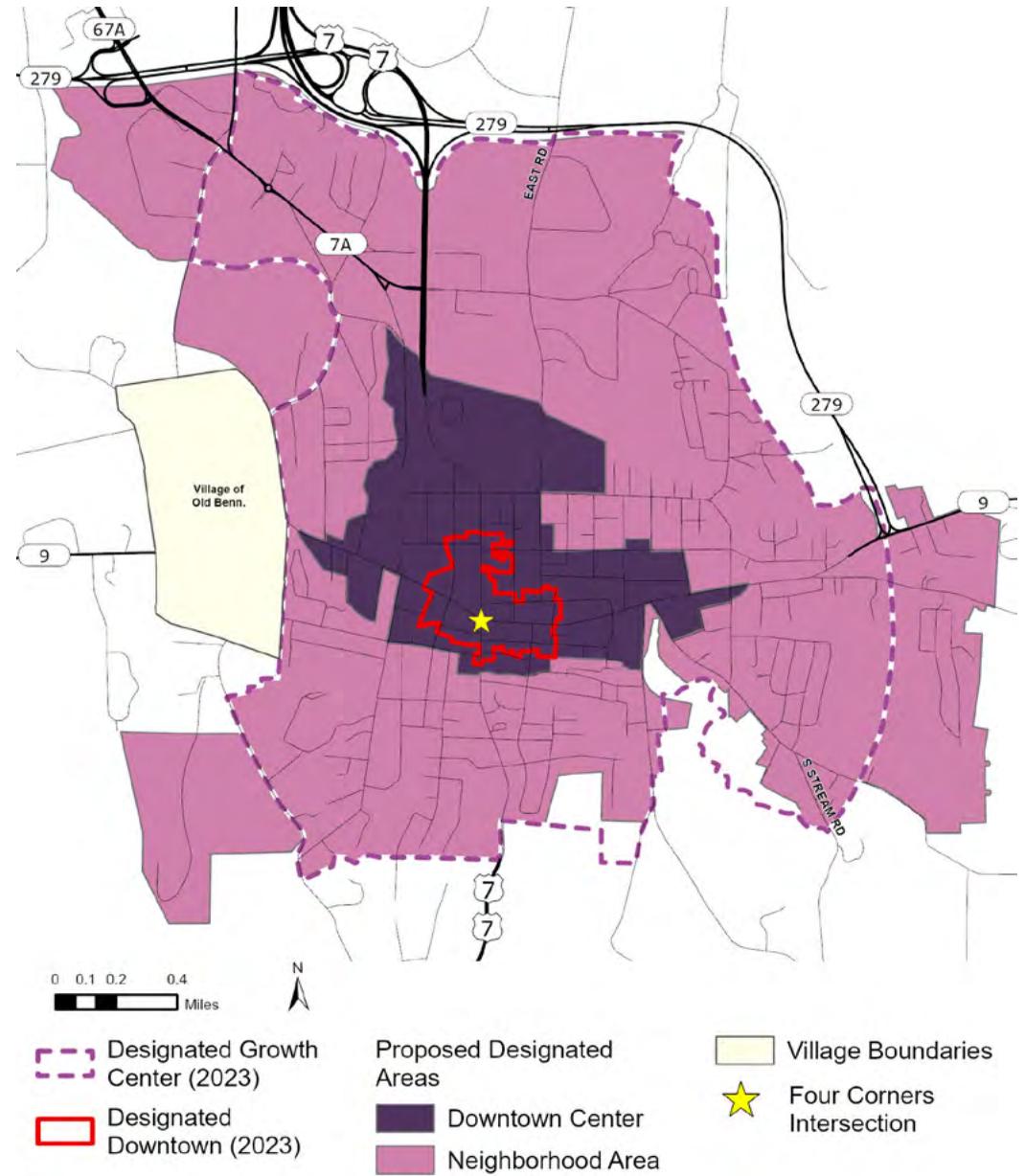
#### Better Bennington Corporation

The Better Bennington Corporation (BBC) is the town’s official non-profit designated downtown organization, providing access to grants, technical assistance, and networking opportunities for businesses and property owners in the Downtown Improvement District. BBC programming is funded by grants, donations, and a special assessment tax on downtown properties in the Downtown Improvement District. The mission of the Better Bennington Corporation is to lead and support public and private efforts that enhance downtown as the vital commercial and cultural heart of the community.

To continue making the most of the state’s resources for downtowns, **the Town shall secure an expanded downtown center to broaden eligibility for tax and permit incentives for mixed-use and housing projects.** With assistance from the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC), the Town can propose expanded downtown boundaries in line with the Proposed Designated Areas Map (Figure 1.2) and pursue recognition from the Land Use Review Board.

**Within the downtown center, the Town should continue to provide incentives for investment in the downtown,** including the continuation and possible expansion of the **Bennington Revolving Loan Program (BRLP)** in support of local businesses located in or relocating to the downtown. The BRLP was created in the 1990s to increase the economic vitality of Bennington by offering loans at lower interest rates to small businesses located in town.

Figure 1.2. Proposed Designated Areas





The historic Putnam Hotel in downtown Bennington was redeveloped into retail and commercial space on the street level and 31 units of housing on the upper floors. Future phases of development will include additional commercial space and housing.

*“We appreciate the efforts to adaptively reuse old buildings, especially for new housing.”*

The Town should also collaborate with local organizations that support investment and development in the downtown area. Bennington’s designated downtown organization is the Better Bennington Corporation (BBC). **The Town should strengthen marketing of downtown assets through continued partnership with the BBC.** Other valuable partners in creating a lively and active downtown are non-profit housing developers such as Cornerstone Housing Partners, and private local housing developers. **The Town should encourage and support non-profit and private local housing developers to realize development opportunities for all types of housing (market rate, workforce, and affordable) in downtown Bennington.** In addition to addressing a critical need for additional housing of all types, strengthening the housing

options in the downtown is an effective way to keep the downtown active throughout the day and sustain commercial, cultural, and recreational activities in the area.

**To further support creative redevelopment in the downtown, the Town should encourage adaptive reuse of existing structures, including residential use of the upper stories of commercial buildings, and incentivize adaptive reuse of historical buildings** rather than their demolition and replacement.

For more information about policies to encourage housing development, see **Chapter 3: Housing.**

Adaptive reuse of existing structures in Bennington’s downtown has proven to be a valuable strategy for

**Adaptive Reuse**

Adaptive reuse is the process of repurposing an existing building for a new use, rather than demolishing it. It involves renovating and adapting a structure to meet modern needs while preserving its historical and architectural character. This approach is sustainable and beneficial for cultural preservation, community revitalization, and economic development.



The BBC operates their Downtown Welcome Center out of the Old Blacksmith Shop, which was built around 1845. Over the years the building was also an auto garage, gift shop, and interior design studio.



The Bennington Station building is a former rail depot that now is home to offices for MSK Engineers and Goldstone Architecture.



Built in 1851, this former home to the Stark Hose Volunteer Fire Company is now two units of housing.



giving new life to historical structures and creating fresh opportunities for commercial and residential use in the heart of downtown. One important tool for enabling redevelopment has been the Vermont Brownfields Program, which mitigates the costs associated with the reuse or redevelopment of sites, especially historical properties that are contaminated or suspected of being contaminated with hazardous materials. **Bennington should promote the use of the Brownfields Program to incentivize the redevelopment of underutilized formerly productive properties throughout the downtown.** The BCRC can also support the redevelopment of brownfields through site assessments and clean-up planning for contaminated properties.

Another strategy for revitalizing downtown is to minimize long-term vacancies. **The Town should review local ordinances and tracking mechanisms to discourage long-term vacancies of properties and recommend revisions to activate currently vacant and underutilized properties in the downtown. The Town, BCRC, and the BBC should work collaboratively to maintain an up-to-date inventory of downtown properties available for commercial and residential infill and redevelopment and work with partners to promote their purchase or lease.**

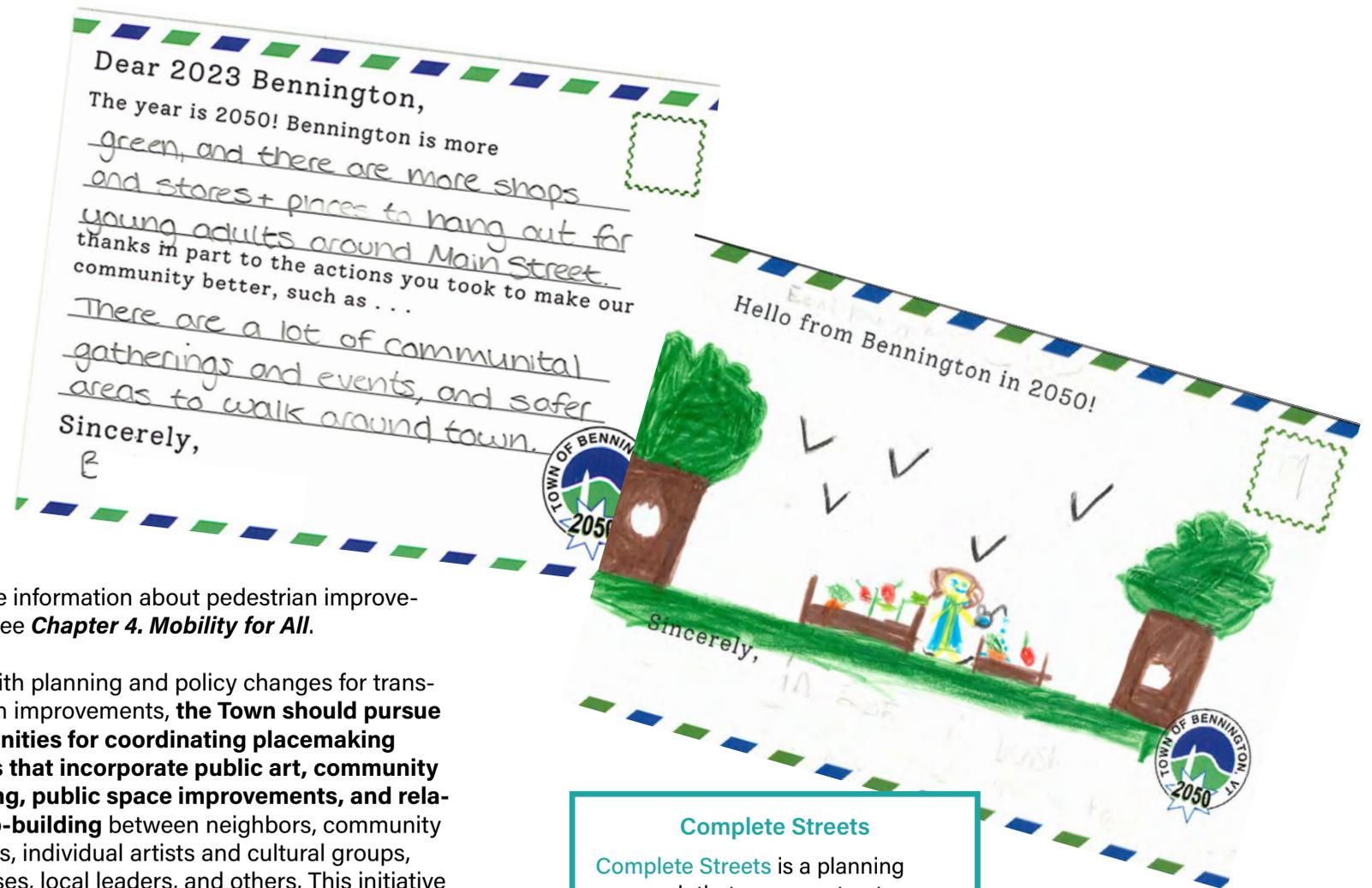
Reflected in the community input that informed this plan is a desire for a more pedestrian-friendly and personalized downtown. To achieve greater walkability, **the Town should devise and adopt a streetscape improvement plan to expand accessibility and pedestrian-oriented amenities within the public rights-of-way. The land use regulations should also be reviewed and updated, if necessary, to ensure new downtown development meets “Complete Streets” and transit-oriented design standards.**

For more information about pedestrian improvements, see **Chapter 4. Mobility for All.**

Along with planning and policy changes for transportation improvements, **the Town should pursue opportunities for coordinating placemaking projects that incorporate public art, community gathering, public space improvements, and relationship-building** between neighbors, community members, individual artists and cultural groups, businesses, local leaders, and others. This initiative could include pursuing funding for installation and construction of improved streetscape amenities, such as benches, lighting, and public art.

For more information about placemaking and community building, see **Chapter 5. Community, Utilities, Facilities, and Services.**

For new developments in downtown Bennington, the Downtown Form-Based-Design Area provides



### Complete Streets

**Complete Streets** is a planning approach that ensures streets are designed, built, operated, and maintained for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders, regardless of age or ability.





*Pedestrian-oriented infrastructure is an important amenity that makes downtown Bennington an attractive and accessible destination.*

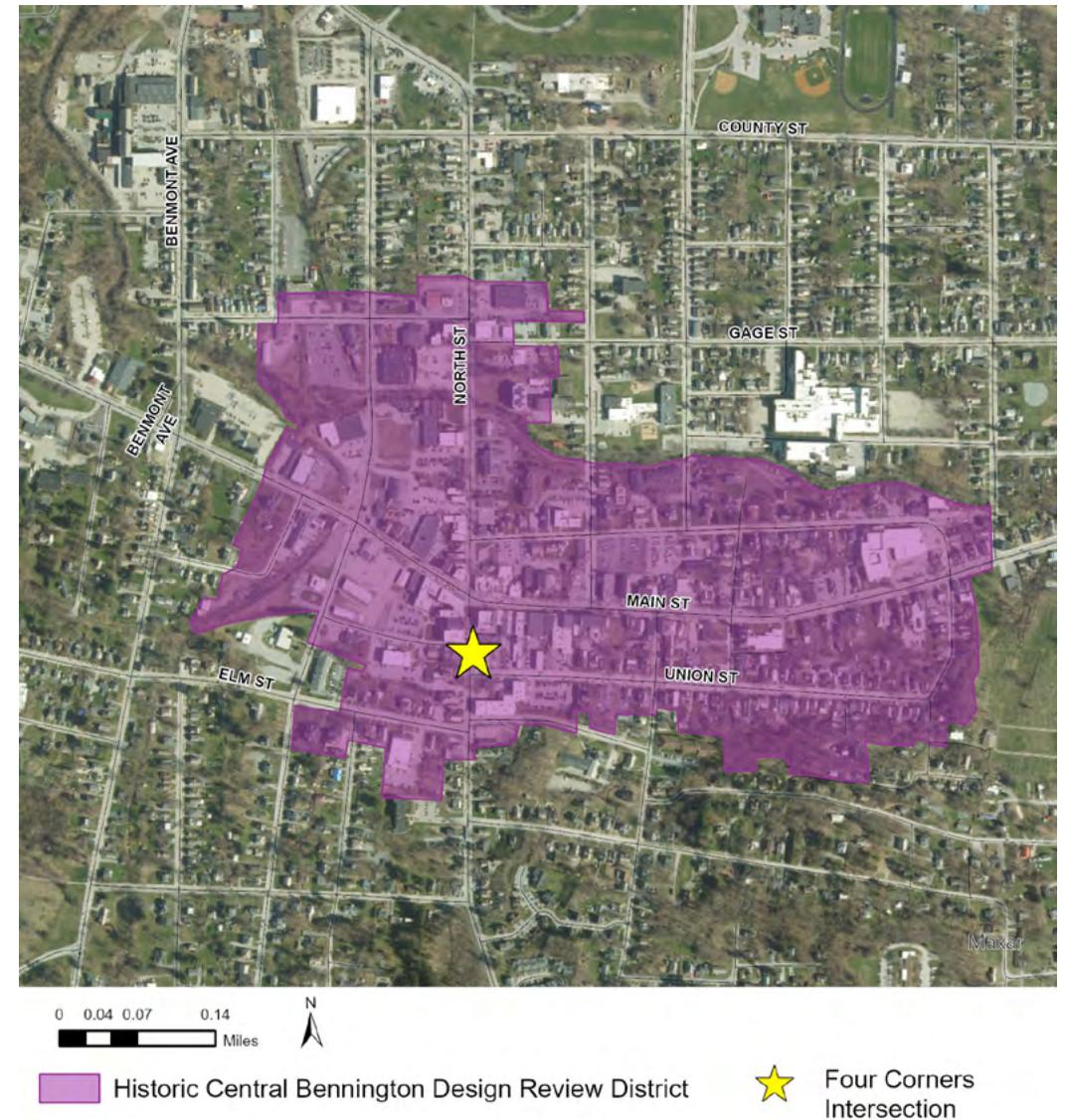
important regulatory guidance on a range of topics. The purpose of the Downtown Form-Based-Design Area is to reinforce the dense, vibrant, and walkable development pattern of the town's mixed-use center.

This downtown design area is characterized by:

- multi-story buildings to capture the eyes of passers-by building frontages with façades that include engaging street entrances and transparent windows set close to the street with minimal or no interruptions between buildings
- a wide public street realm welcoming to pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists
- an integrated network of sidewalks, alleys, and parking area access points that allows the public to move swiftly and safely throughout the downtown
- parking available on-street, behind buildings, and in well-landscaped, shared public lots and structures
- an abundance of amenities such as sidewalks, shade trees, pocket parks, benches, and waste receptacles.

**The Planning Commission should review and evaluate the design standards of the Land Use and Development Regulations for effectiveness at shaping a downtown that is lively, affordable, accessible, and resilient.** This could include scheduling an annual joint meeting between the Planning Commission, the Town's Planning/Zoning Department, and other stakeholders to review the effectiveness of the LUDR in shaping desired development outcomes.

**Figure 1.3. Historic Design Review District**



**Historic Preservation**

Historical architecture and landmarks are an essential element of Bennington’s character; these cultural assets should be protected and promoted. The Historic Central Bennington Design Review District was established to protect historical resources in a defined area and encourage new construction that will reinforce the best qualities of the area through both traditional and innovative design approaches. It is also critical that site design (e.g., location and orientation of buildings, parking areas, drives) be sensitive to the historical character of the area and that appropriate site features and amenities (e.g., signs, landscaping, street furniture) be provided.

Multiple public bodies play a role in preserving and celebrating Bennington’s historic structures, including the Historic Preservation Commission, the Development Review Board (DRB), the Planning Commission, and the Select Board, among others. The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) serves an important role in advising the DRB and Planning Commission on their own work evaluating proposals and shaping development regulations.

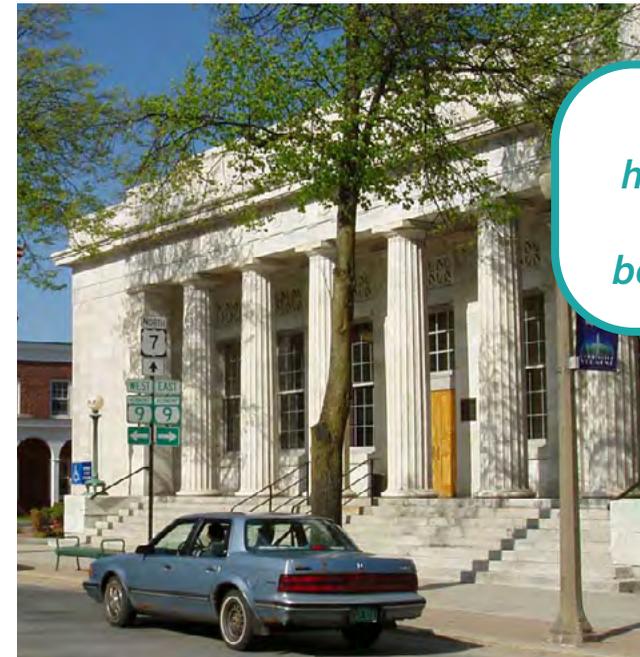
**The Select Board shall ensure that the Historic Preservation Commission is composed of individuals that have background and interest in historic preservation, architecture, or design.**

The HPC shall continue to advise the Development Review Board concerning development proposals affecting historical sites or districts and advise the Planning Commission concerning development regulations and planning for the protection of the town’s archaeological, historic, and architecturally significant resources. The HPC has developed preservation guidelines to protect the character of the historic district. Many of those guidelines and recommended actions are contained in its publication, *Time and Place in Bennington, A Handbook for the Central Bennington Historic District*.

**The HPC, DRB, and Planning Commission should meet jointly and evaluate the design standards of the Land Use and Development Regulations for effectiveness at protecting historic resources throughout Bennington. The HPC and Planning Commission can also advise the Town on how best to incentivize and require adaptive reuse of historic buildings rather than their demolition and replacement to the greatest extent practicable. The Town should explore and pursue opportunities for funding and financial incentives to support historic preservation efforts.**

**The Historic Preservation Commission should also serve an educational role for the town to increase awareness and appreciation of Bennington’s historic resources through website content, displays, walking tours, educational materials, and other means. The HPC should continue its efforts to maintain a comprehensive inventory of recognized archaeological resources, historical districts, sites, and structures to be appreciated and protected.**

In 2024 the Town grappled with street naming conventions, and current policy states that road naming should reflect local historical content and not commercial entities. **The Town should revise the street naming ordinance to require new road names reflect local natural, cultural, or historical subject matter** (including named individuals) rather than non-local commercial or corporate entities.



*This historic U.S. Post Office building is now home to the Bennington Police Department.*

*“Bennington has a rich history that should be better marketed.”*

**Design Review District**

Many original buildings and details of the historical downtown remain intact and are protected by the Design Review District, a zoning overlay district encompassing the historical mixed-use core. All proposed development or redevelopment within the district are reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission before being approved by the Town’s Development Review Board or zoning administrator.

**Historic Preservation Commission**

The Historic Preservation Commission plans and advocates for the protection and appreciation of Bennington’s historical and architecturally significant resources. The HPC is tasked with reviewing signage and façade changes within the Downtown Historic District. The commission also provides education and guidance on the preservation of all historic resources within Bennington.



*“We need more options for smaller housing within walking distance of downtown.”*



*The Park Street neighborhood is close to downtown and includes Bennington Elementary School.*

**Neighborhoods and Transition/Infill Areas**

Bennington’s central downtown is surrounded by vibrant, mixed-use neighborhoods that offer a variety of residential, commercial, and civic assets. Immediately surrounding the downtown are concentrated residential neighborhoods served by a traditional grid network of streets. Newer, moderate-density residential areas supported by municipal water and sewer services lie further from the downtown, but largely within the town’s current growth center boundary. High-volume commercial activities are found north of the downtown along the Northside Drive and Kocher Drive corridors and adjacent to the Vermont 279 interchange. These include supermarkets, big box retailers, car dealerships, fast food restaurants, motels, and other retailers. The varying uses, densities, and characteristics

of these neighborhoods in Bennington’s compact settlement area contribute many of the amenities that people love and want to see flourish.

The Town recognizes that maintaining a compact urban center is an important planning element that is imperative to sustaining and improving the vitality of Bennington. It is important to community members that this central area support walking, public transit, and alternative forms of transportation. In maintaining a compact neighborhood area around the downtown center, Bennington is supporting Vermont’s traditional land use pattern, as well as smart growth principles, which emphasize creating livable, sustainable, and equitable communities.

In addition to the designated downtown, Bennington’s adjacent urban area is recognized as



*The Lower Grandview neighborhood offers sidewalk access to homes close to downtown and green space.*



a designated growth center (established in 2008). The Growth Center Program provides incentives for municipalities to plan for growth in and around downtowns, and to preserve the surrounding working landscape. Growth centers are defined as areas with concentrated, higher density, mixed-use developments.

In 2024, Act 181 introduced reforms to the state’s designation programs. Going forward, the growth center designation will be replaced with the “neighborhood” designation, which is delineated in the Proposed Designated Areas Map (see Figure 1.2). In collaboration with the BCRC, **the Town of Bennington shall secure a neighborhood designation to expand eligibility for tax and permit incentives for housing projects throughout the town’s compact settlement area.** Together, the downtown and neighborhoods areas will also be eligible for exemptions from Act 250 under reforms from Act 181. This aligns Bennington’s land use priorities with state planning goals to promote the development of missing middle and infill housing, new housing, rehabilitated housing, senior housing, and transitional housing throughout Bennington’s urban settlement area to meet established housing targets.

For more details on housing policies and Act 250 exemptions, see **Chapter 3: Housing.**

Another goal of the neighborhood and transition areas is to transform existing strip development into inviting pedestrian-oriented and mixed-use areas that increase the town’s tax base while utilizing municipal services more efficiently. The auto-oriented development along Northside Drive is an important retail area in town, but the environment is unfriendly to people who access those sites by foot, bicycle, or means other than a car. **The Town should continue to improve bicycle and pedestrian access in that area through the**

*“It’s great to have lots of compact neighborhoods that are convenient to restaurants and corner stores. And they’re good for people without cars.”*



*The Putnam Block features a pathway to connect Main Street to parking.*

**expansion of the Walloomsac Valley Path (part of the Bennington Community Pathways network), while also reviewing land use and development regulations to ensure that future developments include non-motorized transportation modes in site access.**

For more details on bicycle and pedestrian improvements throughout town, see **Chapter 4. Mobility for All.**

To effectively implement this plan, **the Planning Commission shall review and update the Land Use and Development Regulations to be**

**consistent with the land use categories mapped and described here.** Coordinating Bennington’s zoning bylaws with this plan follows best practices to align the Town’s regulations with the town plan’s vision for development. Additionally, **the Planning Commission should expand the use of form-based design districts to align with the broader view of the neighborhood area and its corresponding development.**

A defining characteristic of the neighborhood area is that it is served by both public water and sewer. This provision of public utilities makes development easier throughout these neighborhoods by





*Pleasant Valley, in southwestern Bennington, is a scenic part of town cherished for its beautiful views and important agricultural resources.*

eliminating the costs of adding wells or septic systems to new residential projects. Additionally, in the HOME Act (2023) the state recognized the advantages of developing in areas served by both public water and sewer and established statewide land use minimums for those dually served areas where residential development is already allowed. These statewide changes include a minimum residential density of 5 units per acre, the allowance of 3- and 4-unit dwellings by right, and the provision of density bonuses for affordable housing developments. **The Planning Commission should revise zoning district boundaries to reflect the requirements of the HOME Act, and/or create an overlay district that maps where both public water and sewer are available in Bennington.**

### Rural Residential and Rural Agriculture and Forestry

Preserving Bennington's working lands and rural areas is just as important as bolstering its lively commercial center. The Future Land Use map (Figure 1.1) indicates areas where the Town should protect the long-term viability of natural-resource-based industries by preserving rural open spaces and forests through good stewardship of the land. As part of this commitment, **the Town should aid efforts to preserve productive agricultural lands, support economically viable farming operations, and support economically and environmentally viable forestry operations.**

Forested lands cover much of Bennington. These

forests stabilize soils and slopes, prevent flooding, provide valuable timber, wildlife habitat, and recreational resources, filter air pollutants, and have important recreational, economic, and aesthetic value. Bennington's forested ridgelines are key to the town's identity.

There are also areas of the Green Mountain National Forest in eastern Bennington that allow for some extraction of forestry materials. While national forest lands do not need to comply with Vermont's state regulations, businesses on private lands in Bennington are encouraged to balance the needs of their operations with state guidelines to protect natural resources. Logging, timber, and forestry activities must, at a minimum, follow the state's Accepted Management Practices for maintaining water quality. In addition, loggers should employ strategies that ensure a long-term sustainable yield of timber, maintain and enhance the ecological integrity of forest ecosystems, and minimize or prevent adverse impacts upon the land.

According to the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets, Bennington is also home to nearly two dozen farms, apiaries, and nurseries. **To aid local farmers, the Town should support efforts to promote production, assist local producers in applying for funding opportunities from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets, and foster connections between local farmers and local and regional businesses (especially restaurants and stores) to bolster financial viability of farming operations.**

For more information about connecting local farmers and businesses, see **Chapter 2: Economic Development**.

Another concern in Bennington's rural areas is sprawl. Rural sprawl is a significant driver of forest fragmentation in Vermont, which has experienced

### Conservation Tools for Landowners

To learn more about conserving forested lands on private property, see the following resources:

- [Vermont Coverts](#) helps landowners meet forest management goals and enhance diverse wildlife habitat and healthy ecosystems.
- [Foresters for the Birds](#) helps landowners integrate the practices of timber and song-bird habitat management (Audubon Vermont).
- [Managing your Woodlands](#) (Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation) directs landowners to a variety of resources to support learning about and conserving forested land.
- [Community Strategies for Vermont's Forests and Wildlife: A Guide to Local Action](#) (Vermont Natural Resources Council)] speaks to community members looking to take local action to ensure the future of their forests and wildlife.



Figure 1.4. Natural Resources—Wildlife

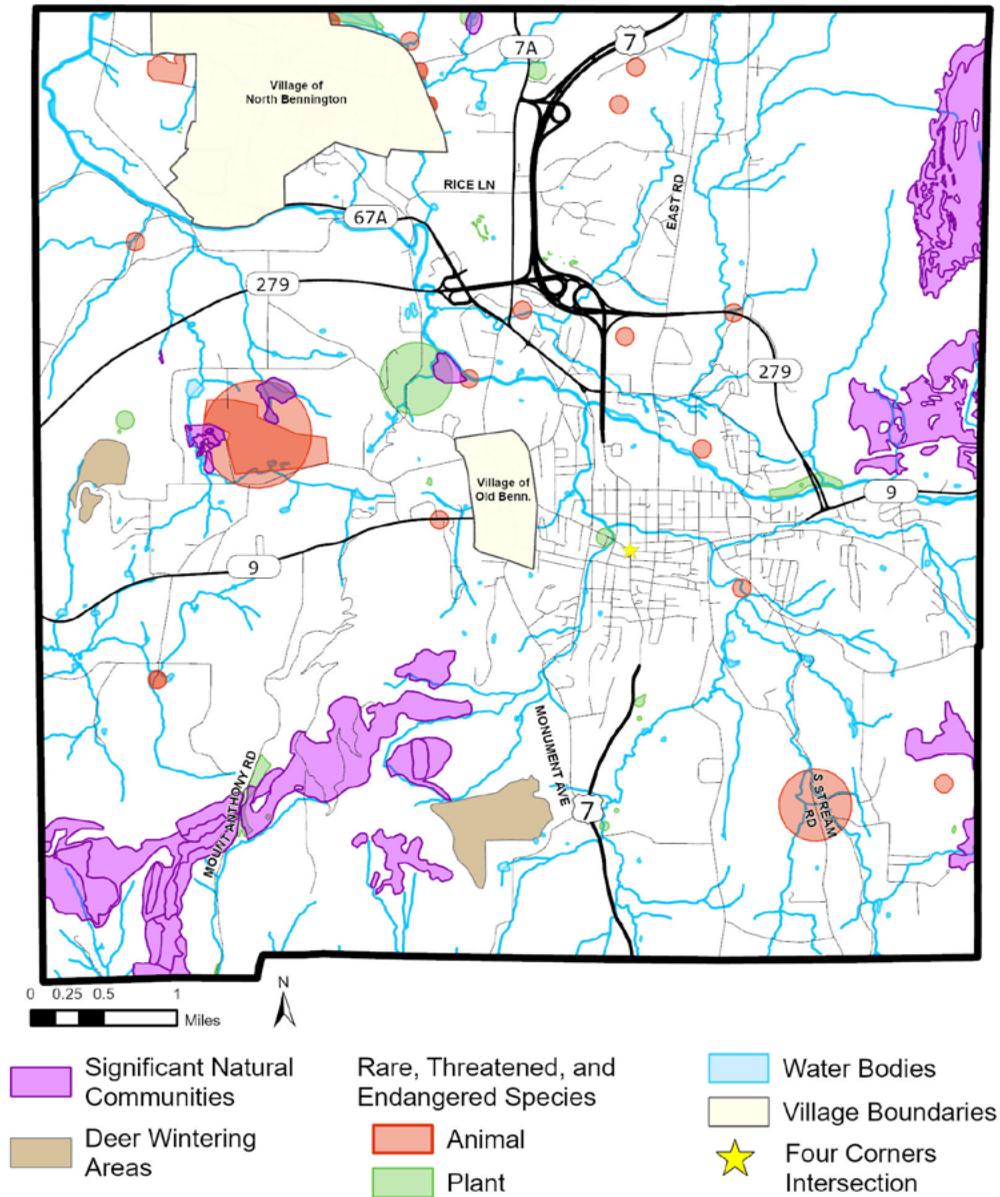
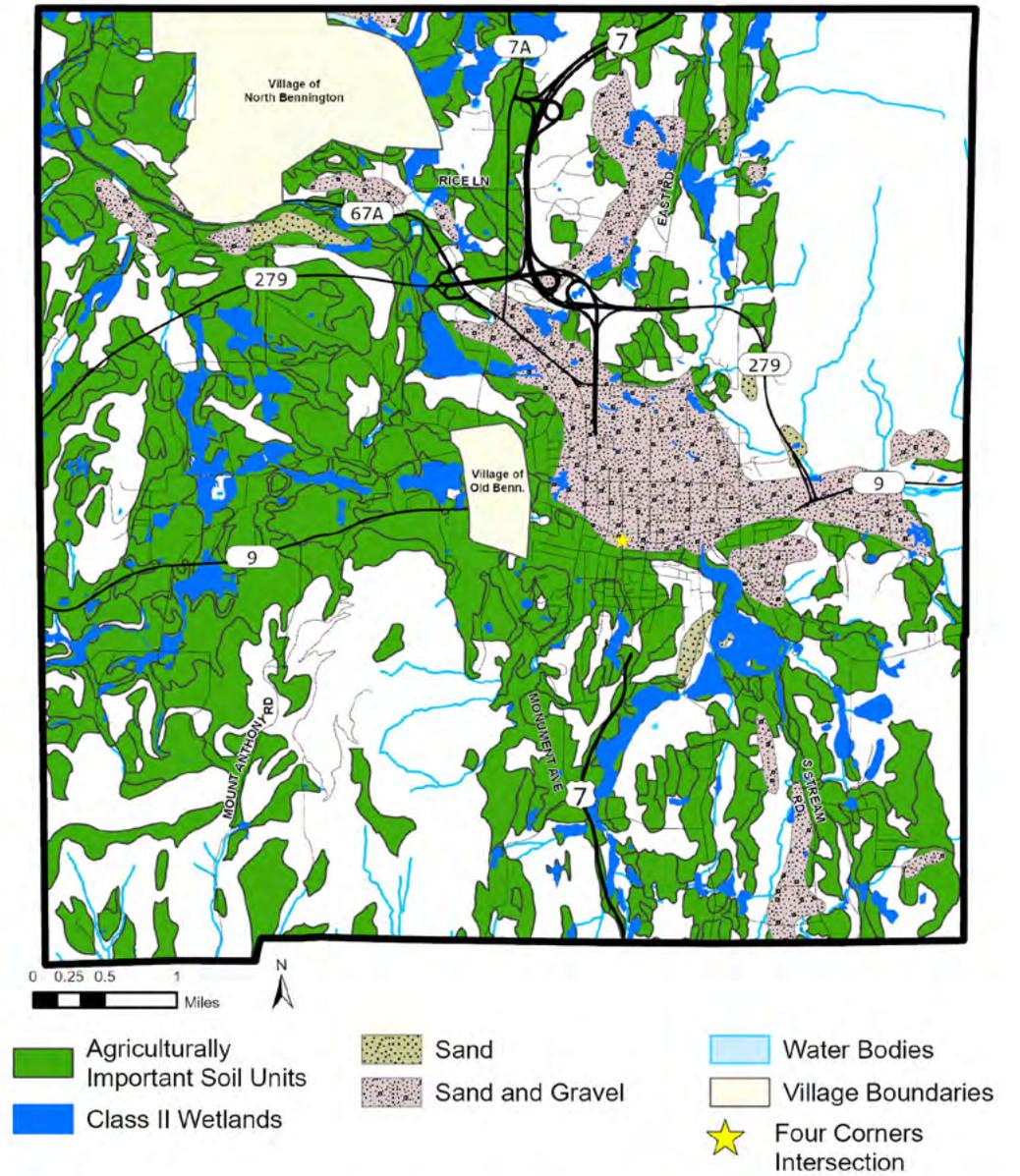


Figure 1.5. Natural Resources—Soils, Sand, and Gravel



*“We have beautiful natural areas that are valuable community resources.”*

an overall loss of forest cover in recent years. This type of fragmentation occurs incrementally, until eventually the contiguous forest is reduced to scattered and isolated forest islands surrounded by land uses that threaten the health, function, and value of these forests as animal and plant habitat. Forested lands and important wildlife habitat areas exist throughout Bennington, and not just in areas of protected natural resources. In fact, many of these lands are in Bennington’s Rural Conservation zoning district, which allows for low-density residential development with a minimum lot size of 80,000 square feet, or nearly 2 acres.

Bennington’s Land Use and Development Regulations already include strong protections against the disruption of natural resources, wildlife habitats, agricultural land, scenic ridgelines, hillsides, and other scenic resources as defined in Bennington’s Scenic Resources Inventory which is incorporated by reference as part of the town plan. The Town’s regulations for Planned Residential Developments and Planned Unit Developments also

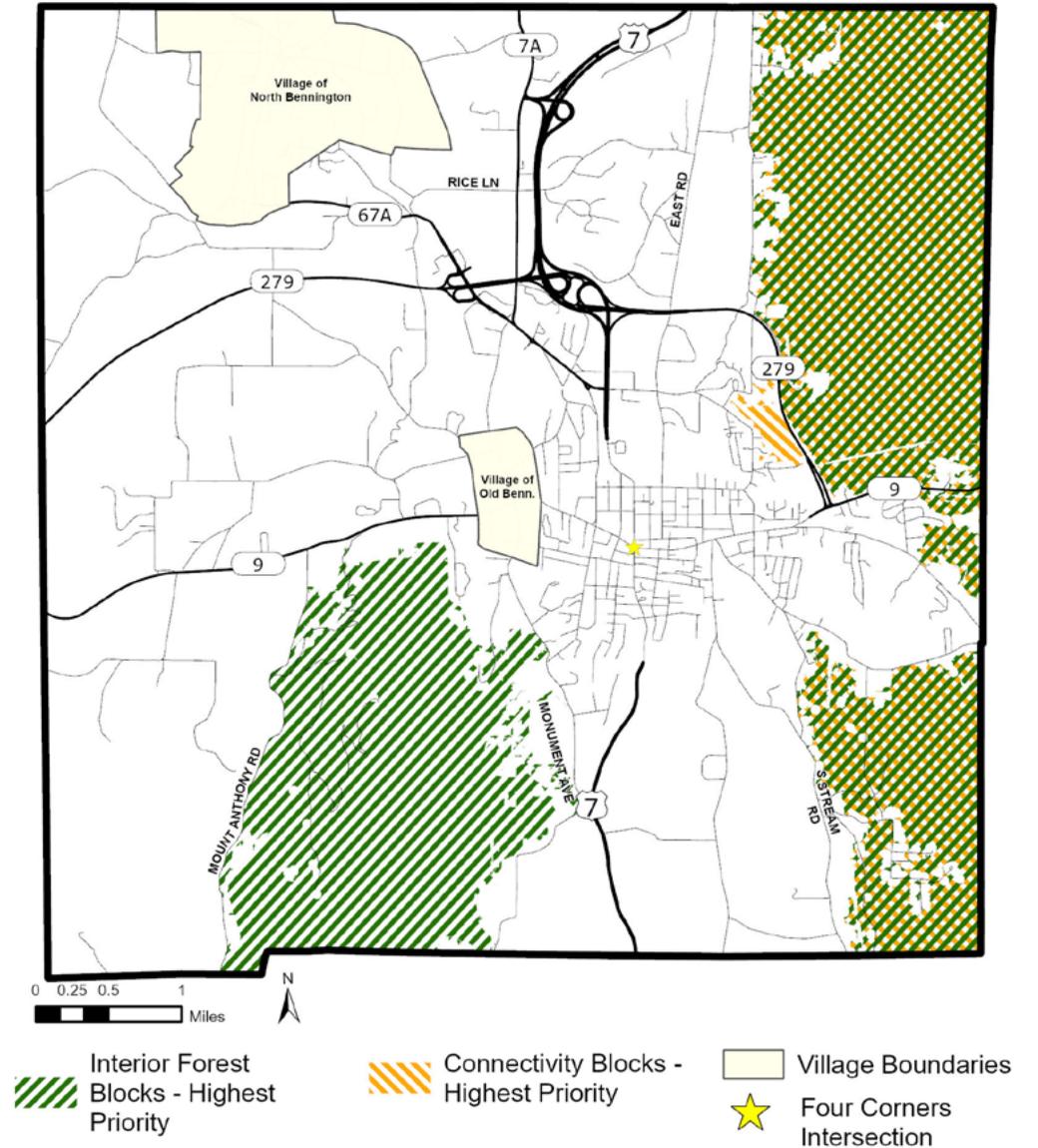
**Forest Blocks**

A healthy forest pattern is one in which an area’s largest forest blocks connect to one another via smaller forest blocks and riparian areas. Such continuity can help sustain viable populations of native plant and animal species for future generations and can help an ecosystem withstand and recover from catastrophic events like storms or wildfires, support breeding populations, and provide habitat for species sensitive to human disturbance.

Habitat connectors refer to land or water that link larger patches of habitat within a landscape to allow for the movement, migration, and dispersal of animals and plants. They can be a forest block, riparian area, or a specific road crossing that wildlife repeatedly use. Without connectors, habitats become fragmented ecological islands that cannot sustain wildlife, leading to long-term declines in biodiversity and ecosystem health.

Highest priority interior forest and connectivity blocks are considered to be the highest priority because of their interior or core forest conditions (Forest Blocks) or because of their connectivity function (Connectivity Blocks). These areas are critically important to create enough connectivity among populations of single species, allowing for genetic exchange between wildlife populations.

**Figure 1.6. Highest Priority Interior Forest Blocks and Connectivity Blocks**





*Flora and fauna on Mount Anthony make up a critical part of the area's natural ecosystem.*

include provisions for open space preservation to maintain a rural character outside of Bennington's urban core.

In Bennington's rural areas, proposed development plans and subdivision designs must demonstrate preservation of agricultural resources, preservation of open space, protection of scenic resources (as described in the Scenic Resources Inventory), and efficient provision of public services. The Town's current Land Use and Development Regulations reflect these requirements, and they should continue to do so. A Planned Residential Development with clustered house sites will often satisfy these goals better than a traditional subdivision

design utilizing larger building lots. **The Planning Commission should review the Land Use and Development Regulations requirements to determine if requirements for clustering and strategic siting of developed features in applicable areas should be strengthened.**

Another strategy for preventing irreversible development of valuable working lands is for the Town to **encourage owners of valuable agricultural and forest lands to participate in the Vermont Use Value Appraisal Program.**

## Natural Resources

Bennington's natural resources are deeply valued by the community and should continue to be protected. To highlight areas of concentrated natural resources, **the Planning Commission should create an overlay district to provide supplementary provisions for areas with highest priority forest blocks, highest priority habitat connectors, prime agricultural lands, and other significant natural resources.** This overlay could be used to identify areas where development plans should first consider natural resource constraints, and then appropriate design and site developments. This could also include planning and permitting developments in a manner that will not preclude the future utilization of important natural resources.

**The Town should continue to protect groundwater resources by strict adherence to state health and environmental regulations. Locally, Bennington should continue to pursue watershed management,** including erosion and stormwater control and maintenance of undisturbed buffers between development and stream banks and shorelines. Bennington's current regulations require a 50-foot buffer from surface waters and wetlands, in addition to other protections. The Land Use & Development Regulations also include protections for groundwater source areas.

**Bennington shall also continue to strictly regulate development in floodplains and river corridors according to the standards established in the Land Use and Development Regulations, and it shall work to keep those regulations up to date with state guidelines.** FEMA is currently in the process of updating Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for the entire state of Vermont, and Bennington should be prepared to review and update flood hazard area bylaws as needed to meet current standards for continued participation

*A statue of Colonel Seth Warner and the Bennington Battle Monument commemorate the Battle of Bennington in 1777.*



*"We should support solar and wind development without eroding scenic values by encouraging development on preferred sites."*



in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). **The Planning Commission should work with the Bennington County Regional Commission and the Regional Floodplain Manager to update bylaws in line with current best practices.**

For more information about flood hazard and river corridor regulations, see **Chapter 6: Climate Hazards.**

#### **Scenic Resources**

The scenic quality of the landscape is one of Bennington's most important assets. The visual appearance of the town's natural setting and the quality of life that it represents is important to residents, tourists, businesses, and the environment alike.

Many individual factors come together to create Bennington's special visual landscapes. These "scenic elements" reflect characteristics that are unique to Bennington and features that are widely

recognized as adding visual interest to a landscape. The Town's [Scenic Resources Inventory](#) (December 2004), incorporated by reference in the town plan, discusses each of these elements in detail: open fields, mountains, water, distant views, gateways, scenic roads and public places, historical sites and districts, and the Bennington Battle Monument.

The Scenic Resource Inventory also discusses how those features are organized in the landscape to create pleasing views. **Bennington should update its Scenic Resource Inventory to ensure it accurately reflects current resources and best practices for their protection.**

A number of landscape features are particularly sensitive to change, among them: views across open fields, prominent ridgelines or hillsides, and historical buildings, districts, and gateways to those districts. One area for Bennington to focus on is regulations around scenic views, especially

the unbroken eastern Green Mountain and Mount Anthony ridgelines and the primacy of the Bennington Monument. **The Historic Preservation Commission and Planning Commission should review and update the Land Use and Development Regulations to prohibit the installation of developed features that would significantly detract from these views.** They should consider height and use restrictions, solar and wind resource development, and siting guidelines in this plan. The forest lands on the steep slopes of Mount Anthony, Whipstock Hill, the Green Mountains, and other high-elevation forest lands should remain free from development and be reserved for forest and low-impact recreation-related uses.

Many of the strategies to preserve low-density or prevent further development in designated parts of town also overlap with actions to protect Bennington's working lands from sprawl. **The Town should support the efforts of conservation**





*A scenic view of Bennington from Harmon Hill, featuring the Battle Monument surrounded by forested hillsides.*

**organizations to preserve lands containing critical or vulnerable natural resources**, such as mountain ridgelines, headwaters, wetlands, river corridors and flood hazards, surface waters, and forest blocks and wildlife habitat connectors. Collaborating with conservation organizations to acquire properties—or conservation or scenic easements to properties with particular scenic significance—could advance the town’s goals. Also, land use and development regulations that require clustering and strategic siting of new development to the greatest extent practicable will preserve Bennington’s forests, waterways, and wildlife connections. More broadly, **all development (including all buildings and structures) located within the Rural Residential, Rural Agriculture and Forestry, and Natural Resources areas shown on the plan’s Future Land Use Map (Figure 1.1) shall be sited below ridgelines (and not on highly visible slopes or hillsides), shall minimize clearing of natural vegetation, and shall utilize earth tone colors and**

**non-reflective materials on exterior surfaces. In addition, the Town’s Land Use and Development Regulations should be reviewed by the Planning Commission to ensure that the regulations effectively implement this requirement.**

Additionally, recent interest in the development of renewable energy resources has raised some aesthetic concerns; the environmental and scenic impacts of those operations must be considered. Bennington’s renewable energy siting policies and selection of preferred sites work to advance environmental goals, while preserving important scenic vistas in town.

For more information about renewable energy siting policies, see **Chapter 7: Energy**.



*Bennington will have a thriving, diversified economy that is deeply local and acts as a regional hub, as well as an ample supply of housing that is affordable and desirable for all of the town's residents.*

- A diverse, sustainable, and resilient economy that provides a variety of job opportunities while maintaining environmental standards
- A robust local food production and distribution system, affordable and available to all residents, students, workers, and visitors to Bennington
- A healthy housing ecosystem that offers an ample and varied supply of housing for all income levels that is of good quality, and energy efficient
- Accessible resources for finding and securing housing





The moose outside the downtown visitor center on South Street welcomes residents and visitors.

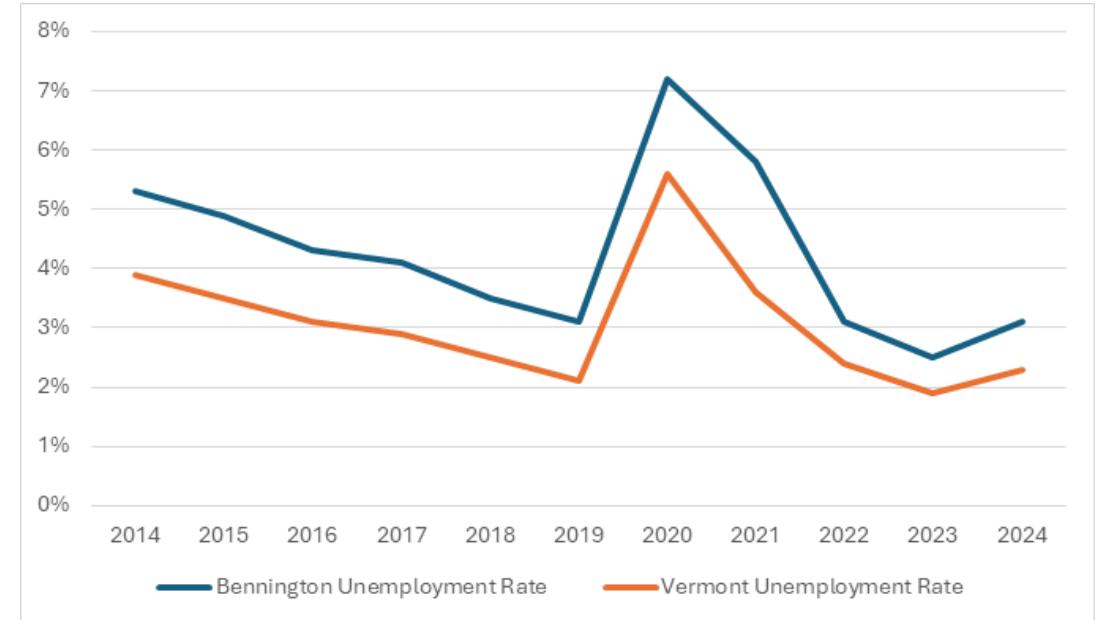
## Chapter 2: Economic Development

Bennington is an important economic center serving southwestern Vermont as well as nearby communities in New York and Massachusetts. Economic conditions in Bennington have changed over time, as they have in other parts of the state and the country. Although some industries have contracted and others have expanded, the economic strength of the town continues to lie in its diversity, adaptability, and proximity to the Capital District of New York and the Berkshires. The town should continue to capitalize on these assets and look for opportunities to promote sustainable economic growth.

Bennington is home to a variety of industries, major regional employers, and local businesses. Additionally, the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the expansion of high-speed broadband internet, have led to a significant increase in remote work, allowing many people to move to Bennington while working for employers located elsewhere.

In recent years, Bennington has also seen a small but significant increase in immigrants, refugees, and temporary or long-term visitors, who have come to the United States and are actively contributing to its social, civic, and economic life. The Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) is a refugee resettlement agency that has been helping refugees settle in Bennington and Windham Counties since 2021. Bennington was designated as an official refugee resettlement site in 2022, and

Figure 2.1. Bennington Unemployment Rate, 2014-2024. Source: Vermont Department of Labor



### Circular Economy

A diversified economy also means considering other systems of production and exchange. One such alternative is the so-called “circular economy,” which emphasizes maintenance, reuse, refurbishment, recycling, and composting. Mutual aid is another community-based system in which people voluntarily cooperate and help each other by exchanging resources and services to meet common needs and maintain community resiliency in uncertain times. These alternative approaches align with the community values that emerged from the public engagement phase of this plan and can be further supported through creative collaborations between local government, businesses, non-profit organizations, and members of the public.





The Multicultural Community Center on Union Street houses the Bennington office of the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), which provides support to refugees and New Americans.

ECDC opened an office and multicultural community center in downtown Bennington in 2023. The refugees who have made Bennington their home have contributed to the vibrancy of the local economy by joining the workforce, starting small businesses, and bringing new skills to the region.

Throughout the community engagement phase of this town plan, the public expressed their interest in continuing to grow the diversity of Bennington's economy, in terms of who lives and works here and where they work, eat, and shop. Community members envision more opportunities for young people and people of color to find jobs, start businesses, and thrive in Bennington, while acknowledging that these aspirations are interrelated with other community goals around housing, education, and community building.

### Regional Context

Bennington is part of the SoVermont Zone, which is a partnership between various agencies in Bennington and Windham Counties to foster economic development and collaboration in Southern Vermont. SoVermont maintains and updates **The Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**.

The CEDS—updated in 2024 and encompassing Bennington and Windham Counties—outlines four objectives to enhance the regional economy:

- Address critical population needs for the future
- Empower businesses to thrive long-term
- Foster resilient, adaptable communities
- Promote greater regional economic development alignment

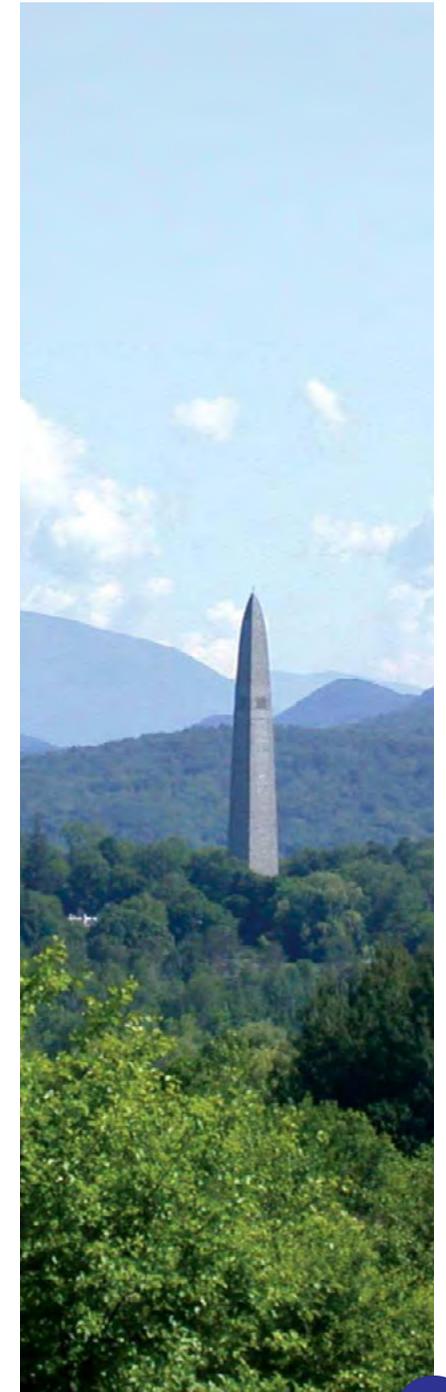
*Views of the Bennington Monument, and other beautiful historic and natural resources, are a big driver of tourism in Bennington's economy.*

### Current Economic Trends and Conditions

Bennington's unemployment rate has been consistently higher than the state rate for the past ten years. The unemployment rate spiked in 2020 at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, but it has been declining for the past few years as the economy has recovered, although there was a slight increase in from 2023 to 2024 (see Figure 2.1).

As shown in Table 2.1, the largest employment industries in Bennington have consistently been health care and social services, government, retail, and manufacturing. Employment across several industries has declined in recent years, and Bennington, like much of Vermont, is facing a workforce shortage. Working with local employers, Southwest Tech, Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce, and other stakeholders **the Town will support programs to welcome newcomers and provide education and training opportunities to those making up a diverse workforce.**

For more information about Bennington's demographics, see **Chapter 5. Community, Utilities, Facilities, and Services.**



**Table 2.1. Bennington Employment (Number of Employees) and Average Wage by Industry, Selected Years 2013–2023. Source: Vermont Department of Labor**

Industry	2013		2015		2017		2019		2021		2023	
	Employment	Avg. Wage										
Healthcare & Social Assistance	2354	\$46,772	2426	\$49,856	2538	\$50,636	2582	\$52,344	2376	\$59,776	2432	\$65,631
Retail Trade	1521	\$25,867	1425	\$27,771	1472	\$28,531	1409	\$32,092	1329	\$37,490	1390	\$40,585
Local Government	906	\$38,396	917	\$39,518	922	\$39,883	1002	\$41,260	977	\$44,950	1107	\$45,211
Manufacturing	1601	\$45,575	1413	\$47,087	1217	\$47,186	1155	\$48,370	879	\$53,183	858	\$57,722
Educational Services	575	\$42,310	560	\$46,319	618	\$45,407	695	\$41,623	528	\$48,634	688	\$43,051
Accommodation & Food Service	656	\$15,898	710	\$16,945	752	\$17,337	690	\$18,430	586	\$21,076	623	\$23,525
State Government	469	\$43,288	464	\$43,976	458	\$49,286	440	\$50,395	391	\$54,761	383	\$61,068
Administrative, Support, and Waste Management	402	\$21,431	354	\$23,675	398	\$25,521	417	\$31,896	332	\$34,513	282	\$73,390
Other Services	246	\$21,825	243	\$22,651	226	\$23,526	216	\$26,447	199	\$28,092	266	\$27,917
Construction	174	\$38,335	-	-	207	\$41,041	223	\$45,371	211	\$48,843	200	\$54,913
Information	221	\$41,984	211	\$48,317	193	\$50,730	182	\$53,873	141	\$54,927	145	\$66,353
Finance & Insurance	157	\$53,196	152	\$53,498	132	\$56,698	149	\$77,218	151	\$97,333	143	\$80,594
Federal Government	100	\$61,367	111	\$63,431	113	\$68,899	122	\$78,273	132	\$89,636	132	\$94,372
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	85	\$19,369	78	\$21,445	70	\$23,528	81	\$20,756	72	\$22,044	92	\$23,118
Transportation & Warehousing	99	\$29,883	106	\$33,096	110	\$31,418	129	\$33,058	97	\$37,757	91	\$42,617
Wholesale Trade	54	\$54,746	-	-	-	-	90	\$58,449	79	\$70,199	72	\$80,334
Real Estate	55	\$33,526	64	\$38,564	70	\$34,435	64	\$35,656	62	\$41,644	69	\$43,973
Ag, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	-	-	-	-	25	\$34,429	22	\$42,672	13	\$53,854	18	\$44,250
<b>Total</b>	<b>9675</b>		<b>9234</b>		<b>9521</b>		<b>9668</b>		<b>8555</b>		<b>8991</b>	



## Key Economic Sectors and Community Assets

The town will continue to support its major economic sectors, some of which include the following.

### **Health Care and Social Services, Education, and Government**

The health care, social services, education, and government sectors combined provide the highest number of jobs, around 4,700. The facilities and services they provide are of great importance to the town's residents and to the other economic sectors. Maintaining excellence in health care, education, and other services is fundamental to ensuring a high quality of life for current residents of Bennington and for attracting new people and new business to the community.

The major regional hospital, Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC) is the town's largest employer. There are also several medical offices, treatment centers, residential care facilities, and mental health services throughout Bennington. United Counseling Service (UCS), another major employer in the region, offers support for mental health, rehabilitation, childcare, and other family services.

A public high school, three public elementary schools, a vocational training center, a middle school, and several private schools serve Bennington and employ many education professionals and support staff. Bennington is a center of post-secondary education as well, with Bennington College in North Bennington, and the Community College of Vermont maintaining a campus downtown. There are also two smaller higher education institutions in Bennington: a satellite campus of Vermont State University, that focuses on health-care education, and Northeast Baptist College.



*Offices for town and county-wide government entities are centrally located on South Street in the downtown.*

For more information about education facilities in Bennington, see **Chapter 5. Community, Utilities, Facilities, and Services.**

In addition to municipal government and state judicial facilities, several Vermont state offices serving the entire region are located in or adjacent to the downtown. There are also several employees of the state and federal government that work remotely and live in Bennington.

Competitive wages and a high quality of life are needed to attract and retain the employees that will make these enterprises successful. Housing availability, affordable childcare, educational opportunities, and recreational and cultural attraction are all important elements that contribute to quality of life and are discussed in more detail in subsequent sections.

### **Retail Trade**

The retail stores where residents and visitors purchase goods are an important part of the local economy. Historically, retail businesses have been concentrated in the downtown, and that area continues to support a significant number of stores today. There are a variety of small, locally owned businesses downtown that attract visitors and downtown workers, including several specialty shops, cafes, and restaurants. Bennington's downtown businesses are supported by the **Better Bennington Corporation**. Larger department stores and retail chain outlets have become established in the commercial districts and plazas along Northside Drive, VT 67A, and Kocher Drive, but small businesses have also found a foothold there as well.

For more information about fostering a thriving downtown, see **Chapter 1: Land Use.**

*A breakfast corndog from one of Bennington's cafes, the Angry Egg 2.*





Robotics at Abacus Automation a locally owned manufacturing business with a facility on Shields Drive.

### **Large Chain Retail**

The large department, grocery, home supply, and chain outlets in neighborhoods surrounding Bennington's downtown provide goods to consumers and employment for many residents. The town recognizes that a balance must be achieved between allowing large chain retail developments, which provide access to goods and employment opportunities, and supporting small businesses which contribute to the uniqueness and entrepreneurial spirit of Bennington. The Town has implemented regulations that require careful building and site design as well as community impact studies prior to the establishment of major new retail outlets. These studies should also project the impact on wages and benefits offered in this sector. The downtown and planned commercial areas support Bennington's position as the retail hub for the region, and **the Town will promote Bennington as a regional economic hub.**

For more information about land use, see **Chapter 1: Land Use.**

### **Manufacturing**

Manufacturing has been a vital part of the local economy since shortly after the Town's founding. Factories and mills were developed near the town's center and along streams and rivers to serve the needs of area businesses and residents. The products manufactured at those sites have changed over time and some of the buildings have been replaced or converted to alternative uses, but several manufacturing enterprises continue to operate successfully in the town, and provide employment to several hundred workers.

The Town wants to ensure that these high-quality businesses and employers remain in the community and grow, and that new manufacturing businesses are attracted to Bennington. **The Town will work to ensure that an adequate supply of industrial land remains for future growth.**

### **Multi-Modal Transportation**

Because Bennington is a major regional shopping destination, adequate transportation infrastructure

*“Wages and salaries are not high enough for many families to make a comfortable living, even with parents having multiple jobs.”*

(including bike and pedestrian facilities), attractive streetscapes, and wayfinding signage must be maintained and improved when necessary.

Careful site planning and access management along highways and commercial corridors are necessary to ensure that traffic congestion and safety concerns do not discourage people from driving into the commercial areas of the town. Adequate parking and pedestrian facilities are similarly important to providing a convenient and enjoyable shopping experience. Local business organizations and local government must continue efforts to enhance the downtown and provide amenities for residents and visitors. Marketing programs and facilities, tourism websites such as [Vermont Begins Here](#), and the Downtown Visitor Center will further enhance interest in the downtown area.

For more information about transportation planning, see **Chapter 1: Land Use** and **Chapter 4. Mobility for All.**





The Bennington Appalachian Trail Committee hosts an annual Trailfest in July, welcoming AT hikers and enthusiasts to Bennington.

In addition to a diversity of businesses, Bennington has many economic assets that make it an attractive place to live, work, and visit.

**Educational Opportunities**

Bennington is fortunate to have several educational institutions in town, including post-secondary institutions as mentioned in the previous section, and opportunities for adult and continuing education, such as Southwest Tech and the Tutorial Center.

**Proximity to Other Economic Centers**

Bennington is located in close proximity to both New York’s Capital District and the Berkshires, as well as several major transportation corridors. This makes the town a convenient and attractive location for businesses that want to connect to major

economic centers. **Bennington will work cooperatively with nearby towns, the broader economic region, and the State of Vermont to further regional economic development opportunities.**

**Recreational and Cultural Attractions**

Bennington’s abundant recreational and cultural assets make it an important tourist destination and a gateway to Vermont. Outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy easy access to the Green Mountain National Forest, the Appalachian/Long Trail, and a variety of local trails, such as the Bennington Area Trail System (BATS). Bennington capitalized on its proximity to the Appalachian Trail by becoming an official Appalachian Trail Community in 2021. An active local Appalachian Trail Committee hosts an annual Trail Fest in July and works to make the



Signs along the riverwalk interpret Bennington’s rich history.



Bennington has several signs like this one to direct people to recreational areas throughout town.



Interpretive signage promoting recreational opportunities in town.

town welcoming to hikers. Bennington is also close to several ski areas and scenic lakes and rivers. Bennington and the surrounding area also contain a network of scenic, quiet town roads that provide low-stress cycling opportunities. Gravel roads have become an increasingly popular recreational and travel resource.

For more information about recreational facilities, see **Chapter 5. Community, Utilities, Facilities, and Services.**





*“Bennington has a strong arts community.”*

*The Bennington Theater is a downtown arts & entertainment venue with seating for 135 people.*

**Bennington History, Arts & Culture, and other Assets**

Visitors and residents can also appreciate the rich history and culture of Bennington, including the historic character of Old Bennington, home of the Old First Church and the cemetery where Robert Frost is buried, and the Bennington Monument, a Vermont state historic site that commemorates the Battle of Bennington. Just steps away from the Old First Church, the Bennington Museum preserves Bennington’s history and offers a variety of exhibits and cultural events. From Bennington, there is also convenient access to the scenic Shires of Vermont Byway, and the Molly Stark Byway, as well as several classic Vermont covered bridges.

Bennington also has a vibrant creative economy dating back to its time as a major pottery producer in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This legacy

continues today through the various large and small-scale pottery manufacturing operations throughout the town and the region.

According to 2024 data from the Vermont Department of Labor, the arts and entertainment industry in Bennington employs approximately 90 people, and generates around \$2.3 million in annual wages, however this industry category does not capture all of the creative jobs that exist in town, nor does it measure the full economic and socio-cultural benefits of the creative sector.

Since 2015, the **Data Arts project of Southern Methodist University** has published an annual list of the most arts-vibrant communities in the U.S. by three size categories. From 2015–2023 Bennington County consistently ranked among the top 10 most arts-vibrant communities in the Small Communities

category. The rankings rely on several different metrics, but notably, Bennington ranked highly in the number of arts and culture nonprofits, and compensation to arts professionals. The vitality of Bennington’s arts and creative sector can be seen in the many murals and public art projects throughout town, festivals and pop-up events that celebrate local makers, and the various arts and culture organizations and businesses. More information about the importance of the creative economy from a statewide perspective can be found in **CreateVT Action Plan**.

Bennington’s downtown has a variety of shops and restaurants, many of which are located in historic buildings. Residents and visitors can also enjoy the scenic riverwalk along the Walloomsac River. The riverwalk meanders through the downtown and features interpretive signage about Bennington’s



*Local publisher Hemmings Motor News hosts a monthly “Cruise-In” classic car show downtown from May-Sept. smmer*



natural and cultural history. Throughout the year, downtown Bennington comes alive during major events such as Mayfest, Harvest Fest, and Garlic Town which bring thousands of visitors to Bennington each year and celebrate local and regional entrepreneurs.

Information and facilities for visitors to the area are critical to successful tourism and recreation related economic development. Marketing campaigns through the Chamber of Commerce, Better Bennington Corporation, and other organizations need to reach a wide market through a variety of channels. Information on area attractions also should be readily available at local businesses. The Vermont Welcome Center, located at the intersection of Route 7 and Route 279, north of downtown Bennington, provides information on a variety of tourist, retail, and recreation activities in the town and region. It has the potential to serve a large population of out-of-state tourists due to its location at the major vehicular entry point into southwestern Vermont. The Downtown Visitor Center located on South Street within the historic blacksmith shop, provides information about downtown Bennington, which is useful to both visitors and residents alike.

### Working Lands

Bennington includes a number of businesses based on agriculture, forestry, and the manufacturing of value-added products derived from local resources. Agricultural areas in Bennington are located primarily in the western and southern valleys. Forest resources are found in woodlots in rural areas of the town and in the Green and Taconic Mountains.

The working landscape of the town once emphasized dairy and animal fodder production; recently, considerable diversification into specialty areas such as tree farms, maple products, orchards, and the manufacture of wood products has taken place. These businesses occupy a large portion of the



*The Bennington Pizza house is a resilient local business that reopened after an electrical fire in 2022.*

town's rural lands. The retention of the traditional landscape and employment provided by these economic sectors is important to the local economy. Important agricultural and forested areas should be preserved for the present and future viability of economic ventures that rely on the town's natural resources. Support for such businesses is available through state and federal technical assistance, purchase of conservation easements by land trusts, use-based property taxation, and other programs. **The Town will protect the long-term viability of natural resource industries by preserving rural open spaces and through promoting good stewardship of the land.**

*"It would be great if Bennington had an incubator for start-up and to support small businesses and BIPOC-owned businesses."*

For more information about resource-based industries, see **Chapter 1: Land Use**.

### Entrepreneurial Spirit

Bennington has a wealth of local businesses, including micro and home-based businesses. Downtown Bennington is the heart of the local business economy. Community input collected during the development of this plan expressed concern about vacant and underutilized spaces detracting from the downtown. **The Town will continue to support the reuse and redevelopment of existing physical and structural assets wherever possible, including improvements to accessibility.**

Since the 1970s the town has operated the Bennington Revolving Loan Fund which has provided capital to several local businesses and contributed to economic growth and the rehabilitation of downtown structures. **The Town is committed to continuing this program and will engage with existing employers to support their expansion as well as entrepreneurs who wish to enter the market. The Town will also ensure the ongoing provision of community and economic development programs.**



*Sunnyside Diner on West Main Street.*



*An axe-throwing pop-up at an event in downtown Bennington.*



## A Vibrant Economy for Everyone

The town recognizes the importance of maintaining a diverse and sustainable economy and increasing job and career opportunities that offer a living wage. Education and training opportunities are important for developing a skilled workforce, and **the Town will encourage programs that support workforce development that meet the needs of area employers.** These include internship and career exploration programs for youth.

Economic development in Bennington is inextricably linked with the availability of housing and child-care. To address the challenges of a declining population and an aging workforce, Bennington needs to attract and retain talented people. Investing in housing, affordable childcare, and other services that are attractive to young people and families will encourage people to stay in the community. **Community development staff will work with employers and social service agencies to incentivize an increase in the number of available childcare spaces and facilities throughout Bennington.**

For more information about childcare resources, see **Chapter 5. Community, Utilities, Facilities, and Services.**

Employers can attract and retain workers by creating workplaces that are welcoming to the broadest variety of workers including those who may be underrepresented in the current workforce. The Town and BCRC can help by connecting employers with social service agencies and resources to help them support a diverse workforce.

As Bennington continues to pursue economic development, it is important for growth to be sustainable and meet the needs of people and the environment.

## Local Foods

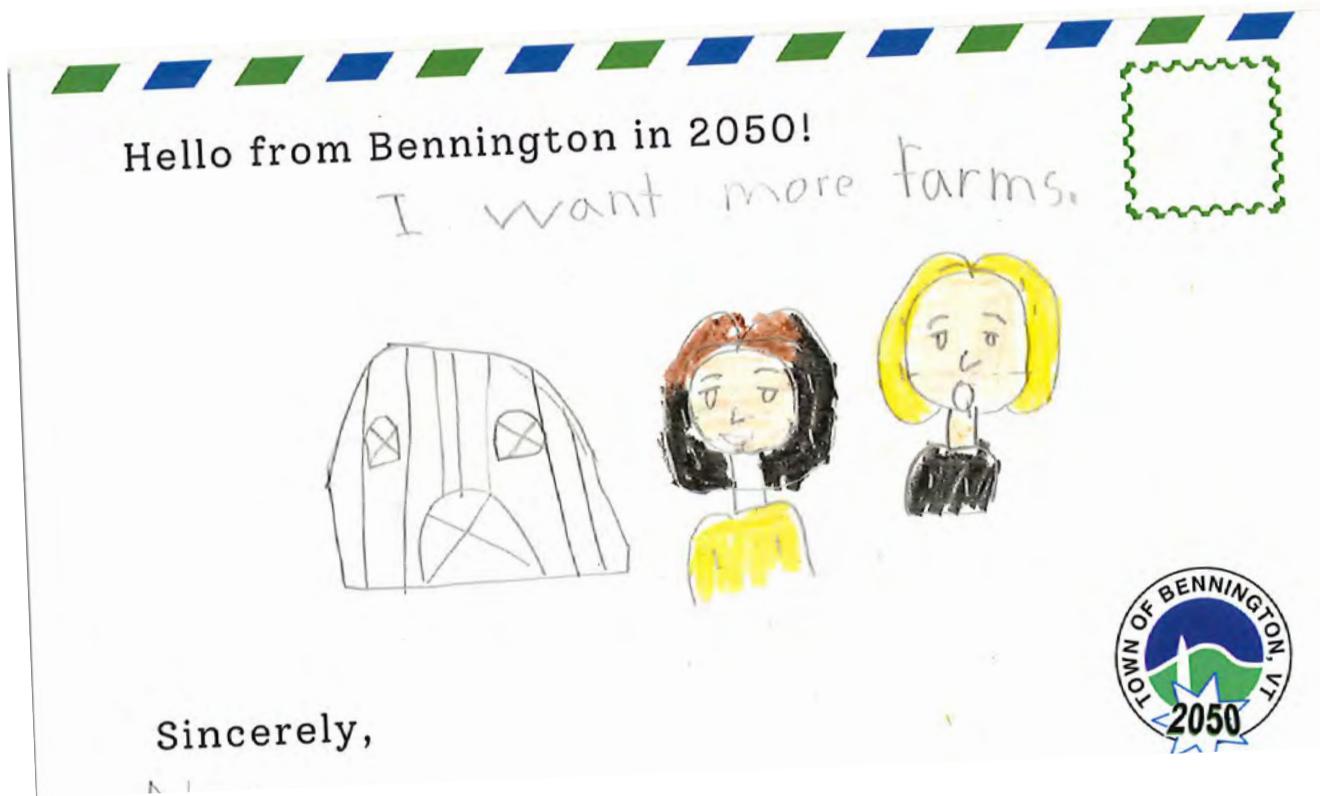
Access to fresh, healthy food that is affordable, and culturally diverse is essential for a good quality of life. Bennington is an important part of the regional food system and a hub for local food. Fresh local produce, meat, dairy, poultry, and other products such as maple syrup and yogurt are available in Bennington at locally owned food retailers. Many local restaurants also source local ingredients for their menu. The Town can help strengthen the local food system by encouraging more connections between local producers and local and regional businesses.

Not everyone can afford to participate in the local food system, and many people in Bennington experience food insecurity. There are several organizations in Bennington that offer free and emergency food to people in need, and use of their services is increasing. Greater Bennington Community Services (GBCS) operates the Kitchen Cupboard,



*The Bennington Community Garden off Bradford Street offers plots for people to grow their own plants and produce.*





which provides free food several times a week to people in need and has seen a significant increase in shoppers each year. From January through October of 2024, the Kitchen Cupboard was visited over 8,600 times, an increase of 47% over the same period in 2023. Other free food programs such as His Pantry, and Veggie VanGo distributions from the Vermont Foodbank also serve a high volume of people. These community food programs are essential for addressing the immediate needs of food insecure individuals, but systemic food insecurity will continue to exist as long as poverty exists. The Town should take steps to address food security by **continuing its support of local food distribution and meal programs in Bennington.**

The ability of people to grow their own food is an important part of the local food system and food security. The Town supports agricultural production in appropriate areas as identified by the future land use map and Bennington's land use and development regulations. On a smaller scale, local food production is encouraged through the development of community gardens and the planting of fruit trees and other edible plants in public areas. **The Town will explore the expansion of the existing community garden at the recreation center and the identification of other suitable sites for additional gardens in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. The Town will encourage gardening spaces in housing and commercial development projects where sufficient land is available.**



The Bennington Community Garden hosts a composting event in 2024





*This duplex in a downtown Bennington neighborhood is an example of "missing middle housing."*



*This small multi-unit building, and quadplex (also known as a fourplex) are other examples of existing missing middle housing in Bennington.*

## Chapter 3: Housing

A shortage of quality, appropriately sized, and reasonably priced housing options in Bennington affects the town's ability to meet other goals in this plan, including attracting and retaining a diversified workforce, providing high-quality education, and supporting a resilient local economy.

According to the **2025 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment** (which uses American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018–2022), Bennington has approximately 6,900 housing units. At the time of that count, it was estimated that 52% of those units were owner-occupied, 40% were occupied by renters, 4% occupied by seasonal residents, and 4% vacant.

In a 2021 housing needs assessment for the Town of Bennington, conducted as part of the **Energizer Reuse Study**, Camoin Associates found that much of Bennington's housing stock is in need of rehabilitation, and that the rate of new housing development has been slow, with only 1% growth between 2010 and 2019. The study also found that housing affordability is a major issue in Bennington, with many households experiencing housing cost burdens, especially renters. This is consistent with community feedback about the lack of affordability and availability of housing in Bennington. **The Town will encourage the improvement of the existing housing stock to create more rental and home-ownership opportunities for people of all income levels.**

The median price of a home in Bennington in 2023 was \$227,250 which is lower than the state median home price (\$325,000). However, Vermont Housing Finance Agency's **Home Price Affordability Calculator** suggests that to buy a home for \$227,000, the household income would need to be

*"Bennington has a serious lack of quality, affordable housing."*



### Missing Middle Housing

Missing middle homes are neighborhood-scale housing units such as duplexes, triplexes, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and small-scale multiunit buildings. Missing middle homes have existed in Vermont for decades and have recently been recognized as an affordable solution to the state's housing crisis. The Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development has developed the **Homes for All Toolkit** to encourage the development of more missing middle and small-scale housing in the state.

### Cost Burdened Households

According to the 2025 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment (HNA), a household is considered cost burdened "when housing costs consume more than 30% of household income." Renters are more likely to be cost burdened than owners, and the HNA estimates that 59% of renters in Bennington County are cost burdened. The Town of Bennington has the highest percentage of renter households in the region which makes affordability an especially important issue.

at least \$76,148, which is significantly higher than Bennington's median household income in 2023 (\$60,750). Additionally, more than half (53%) of renter households in Bennington pay more than 35% of their income on rent.

A broad mix of housing types are needed to meet the needs of current and future Bennington residents and ease housing cost burdens. These include, but are not limited to, housing options for families, seniors (both independent seniors and those who need assisted living), young professionals, low-income households, individuals with disabilities, people exiting homelessness, and empty nesters. **The Town will encourage the development of housing, especially missing middle and infill housing, in Bennington neighborhoods** through the promotion of the Vermont Homes for All Toolkit and similar tools and support the remediation and redevelopment of vacant or underused buildings and "brownfield" sites for housing in Bennington's center.

### Homelessness

The housing crisis in Bennington (and statewide), has also exacerbated the homelessness crisis, an issue that many people in Bennington are deeply concerned about. Homelessness intersects with many other social issues including poverty, mental and physical health, and substance use, which is why the Housing First model advocates for the need for stable, permanent housing first before other issues are addressed. According to the **National Alliance to End Homelessness**, "Housing First is a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness. . . . This approach is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical." This approach is used by Pathways Vermont, a nonprofit addressing homelessness and mental health issues in Vermont.

According to the 2024 **Point-in-Time (PIT) count**—an annual, single-night count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness—there were 324 people experiencing homelessness



*The Squire House in Bennington is a recovery house for women that opened in the summer of 2024 and is operated by Vermont Foundation of Recovery. The historic home, built in 1887, was redeveloped by Shires Housing (now Cornerstone Housing Partners), with support from various funders and community organizations.*

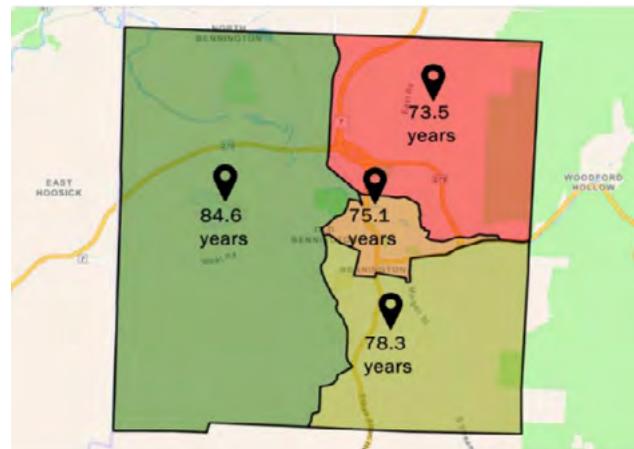
*"The public needs to discuss housing challenges to dispel information and talk about how to better support people who are homeless."*

in Bennington County, including 84 children. Locally, the Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless (BCCH) provides shelter services for unhoused individuals. BCCH operates two facilities in Bennington: a 16-bed shelter for adults, and the Norton House, which has nine apartment-style units for families. Many other social service agencies are involved in providing support to unhoused people in Bennington. **The Town will work with community stakeholders that provide services for people experiencing homelessness, and promote programs that assist people in obtaining permanent housing.**

**Table 3.1. Poverty Rate by Census Tract.**  
**Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2023**

Census Tract	Population Below Poverty Level (%)
Census Tract 9709: Northeastern Bennington	26.2
Census Tract 9710: Western Bennington	10.2
Census Tract 9711: Southeastern Bennington	4.6
Census Tract 9712: Downtown Bennington	17.7

**Figure 3.1. Life Expectancy by Census Tract.**  
**Source: U.S. Small-area Life Expectancy Estimates**



**Poverty in Bennington**

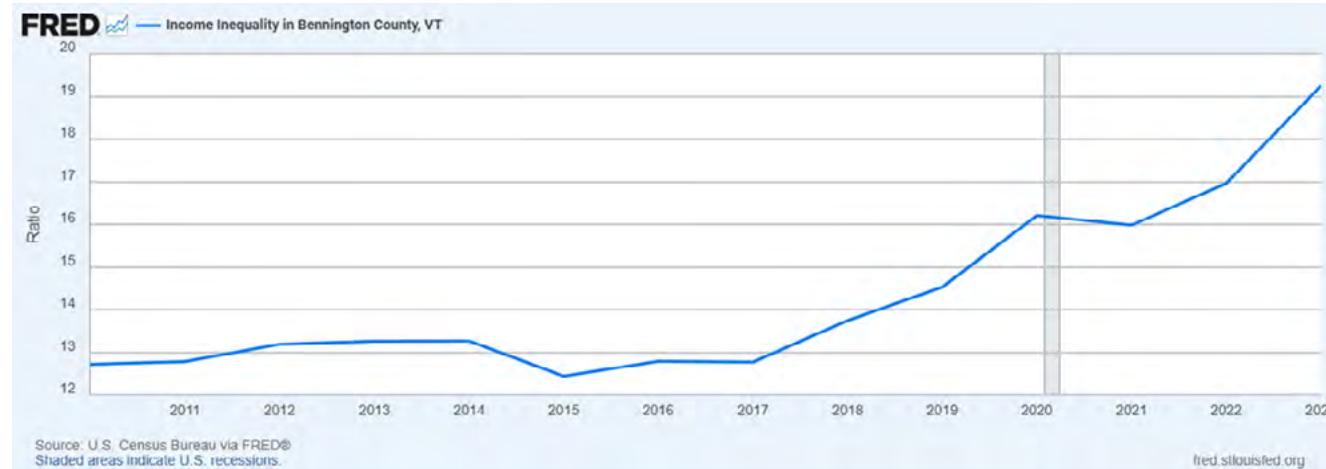
Poverty is a significant challenge in Bennington that is interconnected with many other issues raised in this plan, including housing, transportation, employment opportunities, healthcare, and community support, among others. Recognition of the systemic causes of poverty and a focus on community and economic development efforts that center on human dignity, lived expertise, and equity are essential to improving the wellbeing of the Bennington community.

According to U.S. Census data, approximately 13.5% of Bennington residents live at or below the federal poverty level—less than \$15,650 for a single person, or less than \$32,150 for a family of four in 2023—with many of them experiencing persistent, generational poverty. Three of Bennington’s four census tracts—in the west, northeast, and central parts of town—indicated persistent poverty, meaning that the poverty rate for those areas had been 20% or higher between 1989 and 2015–2019. Persistent poverty has impacts for everyone in the area, as research indicates that people living in high poverty areas face higher barriers to well-being even if they are not poor themselves, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

While poverty rates for western and central parts of Bennington have dropped below 20% in the most recent American Community Survey, rates are still elevated in some parts of town and for certain demographic groups. Table 3.1 shows significant variation among census tracts, as of 2023. The northeastern part of town has the highest rate of poverty, with more than one quarter of residents living below the federal poverty level. Furthermore, poverty rates are higher for specific populations including children and people of color. There is also a significant disparity in life expectancy between census tracts (Figure 3.1). The average life



**Figure 3.2. Income Inequality in Bennington County. Source: U.S. Census Bureau via FRED**



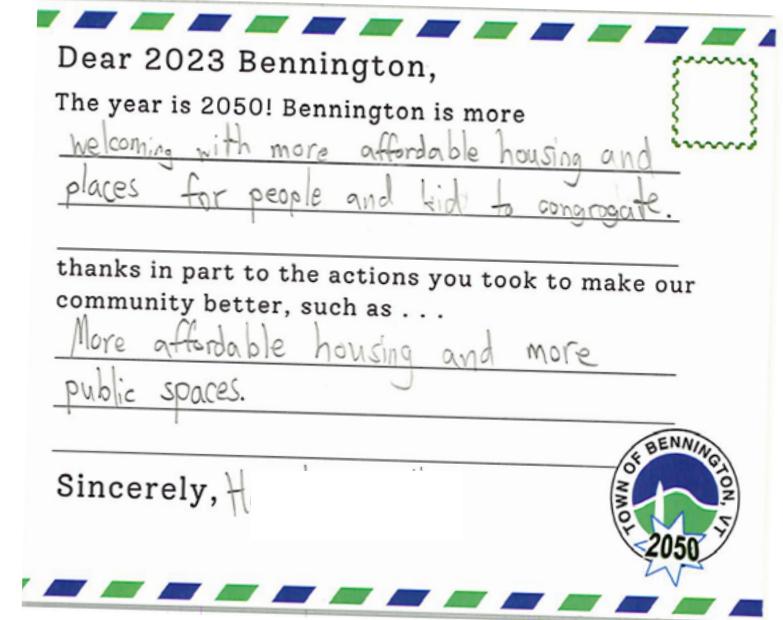
expectancy in the western part of Bennington is 84.6 years, while the average life expectancy in the northeastern part of town is 73.5 years—more than a ten-year difference

Additionally, in 2023, Bennington County had the highest rate of income inequality in Vermont (Figure 3.2). The mean income for the top 20% of earners in the county was nearly 20 times the mean income for the bottom 20% of earners. Income inequality in Bennington County has been increasing since 2017, and with a significant increase between 2021 and 2023 compared to other Vermont counties.

Outside of demographic statistics, there are many people who technically live above the federal poverty level, but who are still not financially secure. An alternative method of determining economic insecurity beyond federal poverty measures is the **ALICE measure**. People who are ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) earn more than the

federal poverty level, but not enough to make ends meet. Importantly, they may be ineligible for essential public assistance programs. **The Benn High Redevelopment Project Health Impact Assessment (HIA)** examines the socioeconomic conditions of Bennington in more detail and their intersection with health outcomes.

Poverty interacts with and exacerbates many other issues in Bennington, including housing insecurity, homelessness, food insecurity, substance use, and mental and physical health. Any solution that addresses one or more of these challenges should be mindful of the interconnected nature of these issues and prioritize equitable approaches and outcomes. **When reviewing new land use regulations, the Town should consider whether they will cause unnecessary dispersion of services for those in poverty or displacement of those living in poverty.**

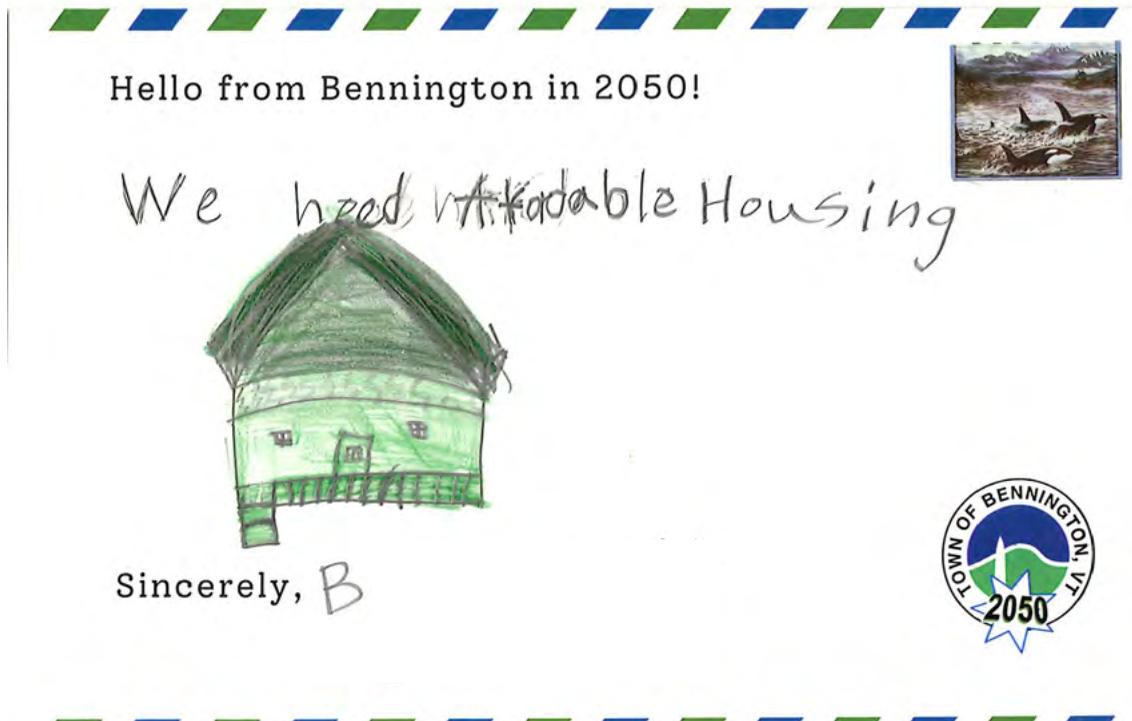


### Housing Targets

In the **Bennington Regional Plan (2024)**, the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) established housing targets for each of the municipalities in the region. To arrive at each municipal target, the BCRC disaggregated a regional housing target developed by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, using the annual average number of residential units permitted in each municipality over the past five years as a basis for projected growth, as well as factors like municipal staff capacity and public utility infrastructure. Based on this methodology, the BCRC recommended that Bennington strive to bring 500 new units of housing online between 2024 and 2029. This target is based in part on the town’s five-year annual average number of residential units permitted, which was 20.8 permits for the period between 2019 and 2023.



*A well decorated mailbox illustrates the friendliness of a Bennington neighborhood.*



### Housing and Land Use Regulation

Bennington has been involved in several projects to increase the housing supply, including the Putnam Block project and the Benn High redevelopment. As it has in the past, the Town will continue to work cooperatively with private sector and non-profit organizations, including Cornerstone Housing Partners (formerly Shires Housing), Bennington Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont Housing Finance Agency, Bennington County Regional Commission, and other entities wishing to promote or construct high quality housing that is affordable at a variety of price points. Participation in the state’s revised versions of the Act 250 exemptions and designation programs—created in Act 181

(2024)—will further reduce barriers to the creation of new housing in Bennington’s downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. **The Town will encourage housing developers to realize development opportunities for housing of all income levels, including affordable housing throughout Bennington’s downtown and neighborhood areas.**

In 2023, the HOME Act established that any area allowing residential development that was served by both municipal water and municipal wastewater must allow residential density of at least five housing units per acre. The HOME Act was intended to reduce barriers to higher density development in core parts of municipalities and encourage

development in areas where public investments in utilities have already been made. In Bennington, much of the area served by both public water and sewer already allows for densities of five units or more per acre.

In 2024, Act 181 created exemptions to Act 250 permitting requirements for qualified areas of municipalities. The new law established four tiered areas: Tiers 1A and 1B, both of which offer some form of exemption to Act 250; Tier 2, which has no exemptions; and Tier 3, which are areas of critical natural resources that trigger Act 250 jurisdiction. To establish Tier 1A jurisdiction, a municipality must apply to the State of Vermont Land Use Review Board (LURB).

**Bennington will pursue a Tier 1A or 1B designation from the Land Use Review Board to exempt developers from some or all Act 250 permitting requirements in the downtown and neighborhood areas** (see Figure 1.2). Establishing either Tier 1A or 1B jurisdiction in Bennington’s core will be a significant step toward removing obstacles to housing development in areas well-suited to further development. This approach will advance local and state planning goals and lower barriers to much-needed housing development in Bennington.

For more information about the tiers established by Act 181, see **Appendix B. Act 181 and Municipal Planning.**





*A historic Main Street house that has been renovated into a multi-unit residence.*

### Housing Standards

All new housing units, and the rehabilitation of existing units, should maximize energy efficiency, comfort, and safety. Vermont's Building Energy Codes, which include the Residential Building Energy Standards (RBES) and the Commercial Building Energy Standards (CBES) are minimum standards of energy efficiency that apply to all new construction, renovations, alterations, and repairs in Vermont. **The Town will assist homeowners and developers with understanding the CBES and RBES by posting information, including [Efficiency VT's Energy Code Support page](#), on the Town's website. Additionally, the town encourages participation in Efficiency VT's Residential and Commercial New Construction program offerings.**

For more information about energy efficiency in residential structures, see **Chapter 7: Energy**.

Navigating the landscape of housing resources can be overwhelming and confusing for many people. Working with social service partners, **the Town will assist residents with accessing clear information about finding and securing housing.** This could include making resources available on the Town's website and at key locations around Bennington, and hosting information-sharing events in partnership with local organizations.



*Multi-unit housing in downtown Bennington with a view of the Green Mountains.*

*"Housing quality is a big challenge. Many homes are in disrepair, and there are not enough contractors to do home improvement work."*



*Bennington will be well connected through a robust network of facilities and services that support a high quality of life and provide opportunities for community cohesion.*

- A transportation system that is safe, efficient, affordable, and sustainable for all users
- A public transit system that provides efficient and accessible transportation throughout Bennington and the broader region
- A vibrant, welcoming, and accessible community where residents feel a sense of belonging
- A strong educational system that supports learners of all ages, from early childhood care to vocational training and post-secondary education
- Accessible and affordable health services that support community members' long-term health and overall quality of life
- Expanded public facilities and services that support all community members, especially those struggling with housing insecurity, addiction, and other challenges

*continued . . .*





- Effective emergency services and community-oriented public safety systems
- Affordable broadband and telecommunication services throughout Bennington
- Robust and safe water and wastewater systems
- A solid waste management strategy that emphasizes reduction, reuse, and responsible disposal
- Ample and accessible opportunities for recreation that foster healthy lifestyles and social connection
- An engaged citizenry that participates in town governance on appointed citizen boards and commissions that represent a broad swath of the town citizenry, including people of all ages, abilities, and income levels
- Extensive connections with the broader region, including playing an appropriate role in regional institutions





*The Bennington Rail Trail is a shared use path that connects downtown Bennington to Northside Drive and is enjoyed by pedestrians and cyclists.*

### Active Transportation and Walk, Bike, and Roll

Active transportation is another way of describing human-powered mobility, or moving around town outside of driving, such as by bicycle, electric bike, wheelchair, scooter, skateboard, and walking. “Walk, bike, and roll” is an inclusive short-hand term to talk about active transportation. Rolling can include the use of scooters, skateboards, skates, wheelchairs, and other mobility assistance devices.

## Chapter 4. Mobility for All

A safe, convenient, and efficient transportation system is essential to Bennington’s residents, businesses, and visitors, and crucial to achieving the economic progress and quality-of-life goals identified in this plan. The transportation modes that form this system include: roadways, bridges, and vehicle parking areas; facilities for pedestrians and bicycles; railways; air transportation; and buses and other public transportation. Each individual mode is important, and it is also important to recognize that the connections between the various modes as well as the relationship between land uses and transportation facilities are critical to the effectiveness of the overall system.

### Active Transportation

Rather than design streets or sites for the convenience of car travel alone, as was done through much of the twentieth century, Bennington’s transportation system should be designed for the safety and convenience of people using all modes of traveling through town. This means requiring that transportation infrastructure be designed and constructed to accommodate the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit users.

To ensure positive, safe, and convenient experiences for community members who walk, bike, and roll to navigate Bennington, **the Town should consider creating an Active Transportation Infrastructure Plan** to articulate and strengthen **Complete Streets policies**, ensure that sidewalks and bike paths/lanes are built when regular road

maintenance and construction projects happen, incorporate ADA standards, and create a shared vision for the expansion of Bennington’s active transportation network. In recent years, Bennington has improved and expanded its sidewalk system to further enhance the pedestrian-friendly nature of the town. In partnership with the BCRC, Bennington keeps a map of the town’s sidewalk conditions, which also identifies gaps in the network. The Town should prioritize filling these gaps and addressing areas with poor conditions.

When building new or reconstructed roadways and bridges, **the Town’s policies should include provisions for safe passage by pedestrians and bicyclists, including, when possible, adding sidewalks and bike lanes or paths**, or paved shoulders or wider lanes, as appropriate with best practices



Figure 4.1. Roads, Rail, and Airport

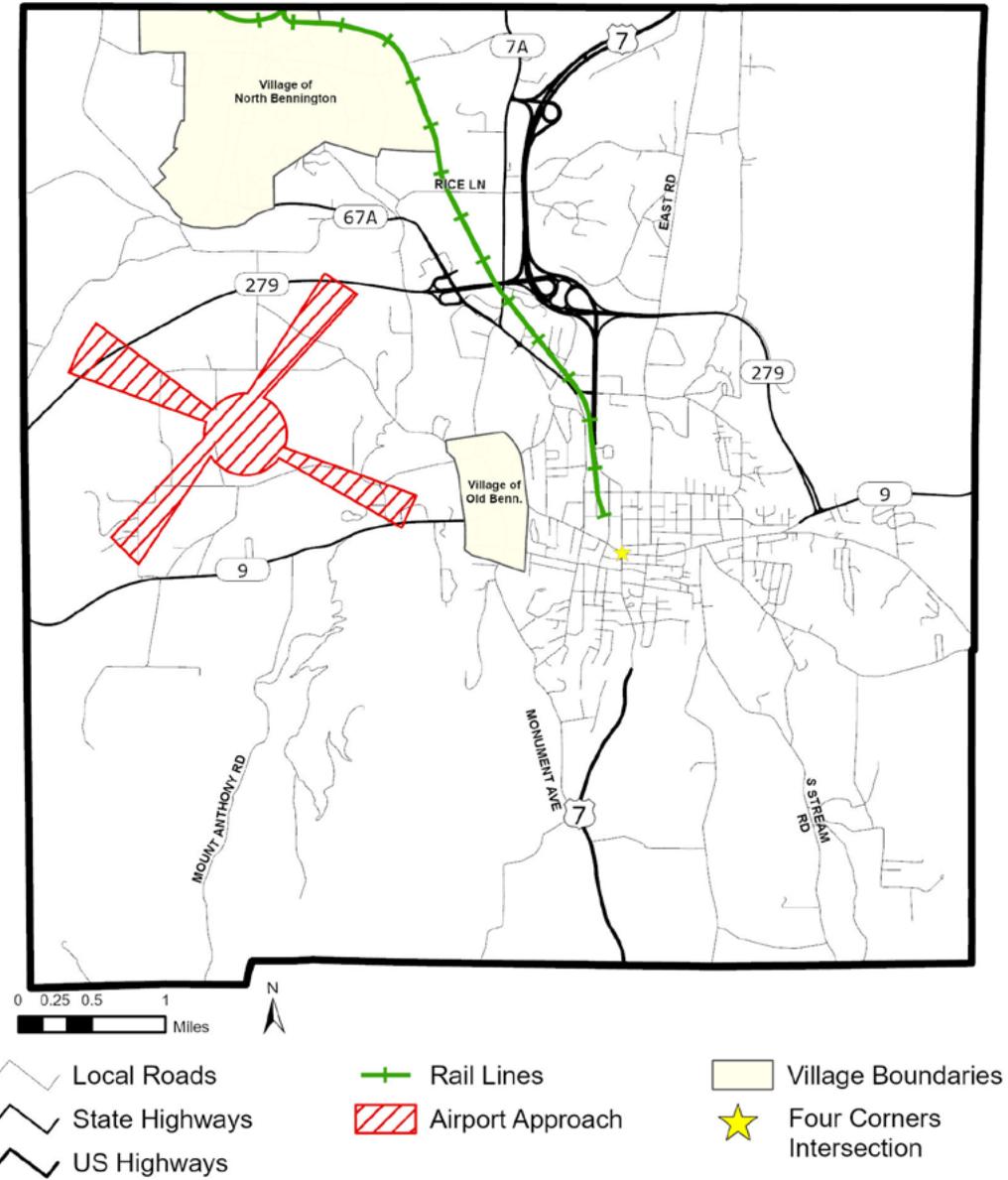
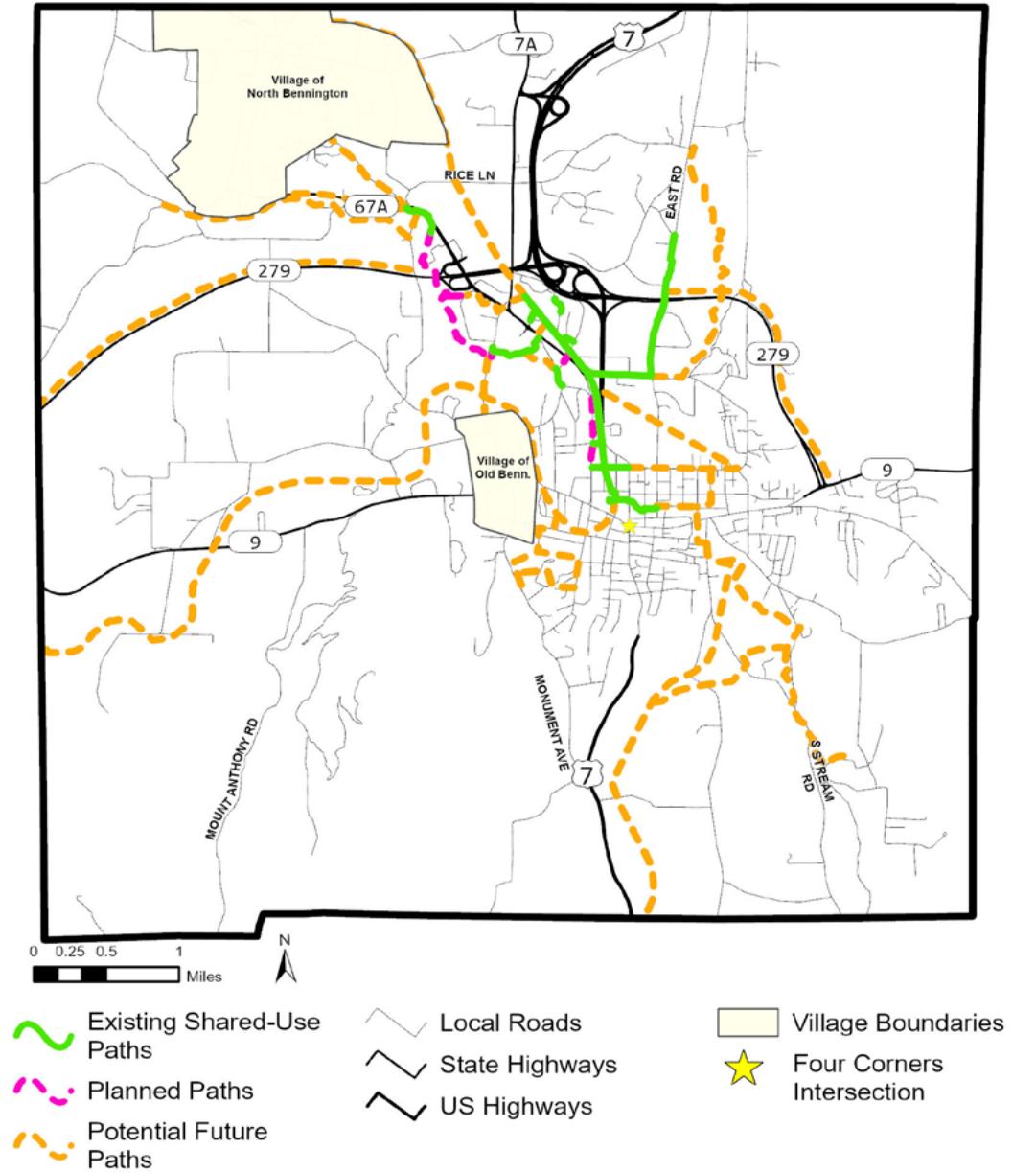


Figure 4.2. Shared-Use Paths

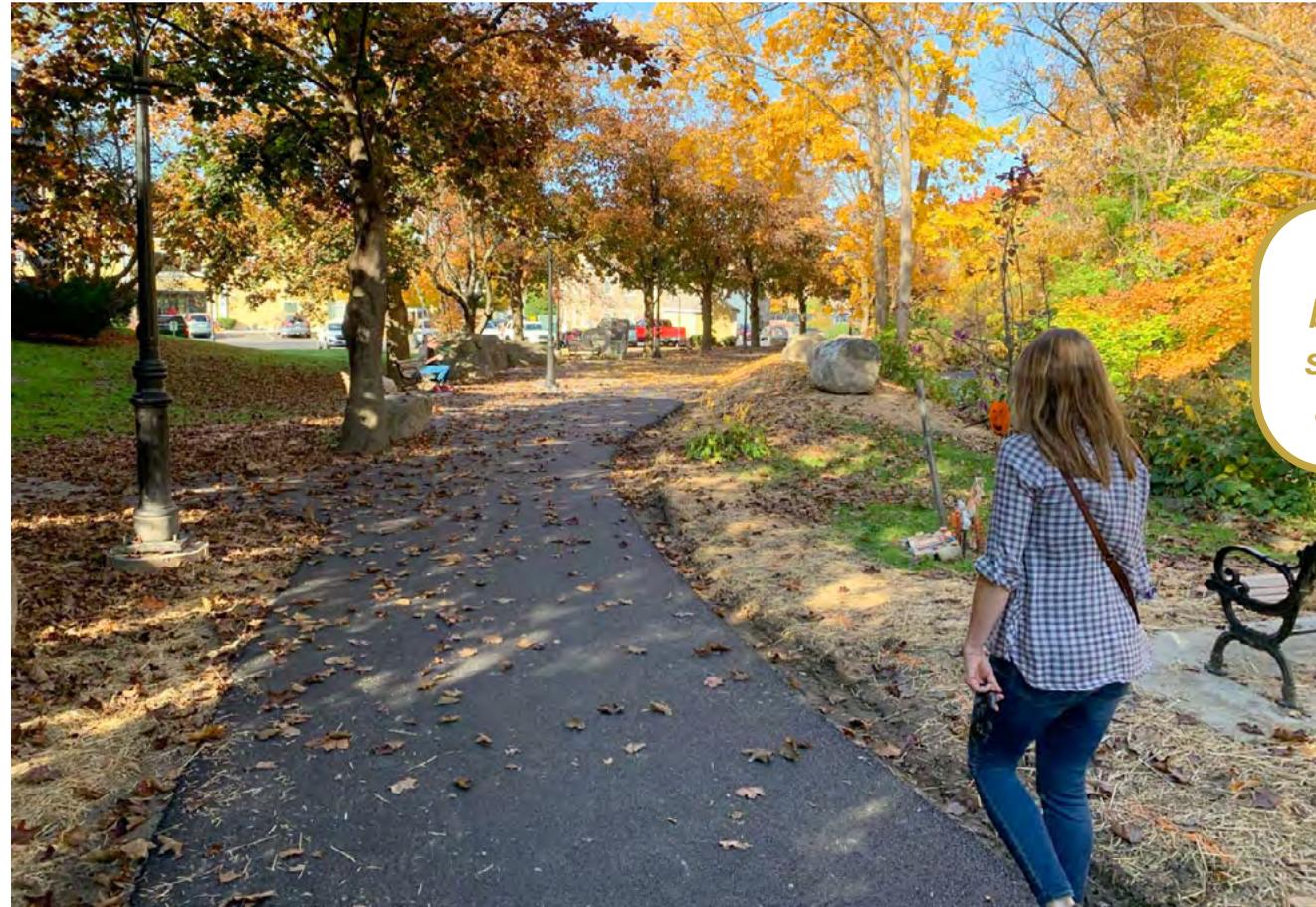


### Pedestrian Improvements

One example of an improvement for pedestrians could include “daylighting” (improving lines of sight at) particularly dangerous driveways throughout town by strategically removing one or two street parking spaces on either side of the curb cut. Another example would be adding pedestrian-activated flashing lights at crosswalks where vehicles routinely fail to stop for people crossing the street.

and Complete Streets standards. **The Town should work to enhance pedestrian protections at major crosswalk areas and add infrastructure for safe pedestrian crossings throughout Bennington.**

To further support cycling, **the Town should encourage organizations and businesses in the downtown and neighborhood areas to provide bike racks so people can safely store bicycles when visiting a public site or shopping area. The Town should also ensure that land use regulations throughout the downtown and neighborhood areas continue to include policies that require the installation of bike parking at new developments.** Other barriers to active transportation include weather-related impacts in hot and cold temperatures. To enable active transportation as a commuting strategy, **the Town should encourage organizations to provide locker rooms that would allow employees to shower and change when they arrive at work. Bennington should also update the municipal plowing policy to incorporate shared-use paths (as appropriate).**



*“We need better plowing of shared-use paths and sidewalks.”*

*Bennington’s many pathways increase community members’ mobility around town and offer enjoyable recreational opportunities for all.*

For more information on Complete Streets policies, bike infrastructure, and development, see **Chapter 1: Land Use**.

Bennington recognizes that desired transportation improvements are costly and will not be accomplished all at once. It is important to keep a long-term perspective, so that incremental improvements are achieved within the context of the big picture. Dedicated planning documents will be key to steadily making those improvements over time.

This planning work should be part of a broader cultural shift to promote active transportation. Such a shift would have multiple benefits, including reduced roadway congestion, improved air quality, reduced energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, reduced parking demand, reduced noise, improved public health for those biking or walking, and reduced commuting and travel costs. To advance this cultural shift, the Town should partner with the Bike Hub, citizen advisory groups, and Green Mountain Community Network, among others, to





*This bridge on the so-called Ninja Path was constructed in 2017 to connect the section of the path that runs behind Hannaford.*

work toward these transportation system goals. The Bike Hub's work to distribute free bicycles to community members in Bennington has already begun to initiate a change in how people approach local transportation: access to bicycles and an improved network of paths downtown has given more people the ability to get around quickly and easily without a car. **The Town should encourage cycling education programs conducted by schools and cycling advocacy groups.** The technological maturity and decreasing costs of e-bikes encourage the Town to consider the need for bike infrastructure even in outlying areas of Bennington. Other micromobility devices—scooters, skateboards, and other such vehicles—could open up more possibilities for navigating Bennington efficiently, economically, and sustainably.

### Shared-Use Pathways

In addition to the bike and pedestrian infrastructure improvements that are integrated into roadways shared with motor vehicles, **the Town should continue its work to expand the network of separated shared-use trails and pathways** by collaborating with landowners and community groups. Throughout the community outreach phase of this plan, Bennington community members expressed a strong desire to continue improving walking and cycling paths. The Bennington community broadly supports the expansion of a network of “walk, bike, and roll” paths that connect the downtown with stores along Northside Drive, public schools throughout town, and eventually the Bennington College campus in North Bennington. This network improves access for non-motorized travel within the



downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, while creating new mobility options close to town for residents and visitors alike.

These paths should be accommodated in all development proposals. To achieve this, **the Town should preserve potential shared-use routes by requiring easements and/or land dedications as part of development applications involving planned trails or pathway corridors, and by ensuring that roadway construction projects preserve the routes.** To enhance existing paths and sidewalks and create pleasant and comfortable walking and biking routes throughout town, **Bennington should continue to add street furniture and landscaping to paths and sidewalks.**





Road and sidewalk improvements on Maple Street.

### Traffic Calming

Traffic calming—the practice of using design interventions to reduce car speeds and make streets safer—is an increasingly popular concept in Bennington and throughout the region. In 2024, Bennington adopted a traffic calming policy to create a systematic method to allocate resources for traffic calming projects. **The Town should continue to maintain traffic carrying capacity and safety on local and state highways through the implementation of planned improvements and application of access management and traffic calming techniques.**

For further guidance on how to make thoughtful decisions around transportation projects, **the Town should follow the latest version of the Vermont Transportation Equity Framework to**

**help decision makers plan for and prioritize projects, ensure accurate representation in decision making, and enhance the equitable delivery of services.**

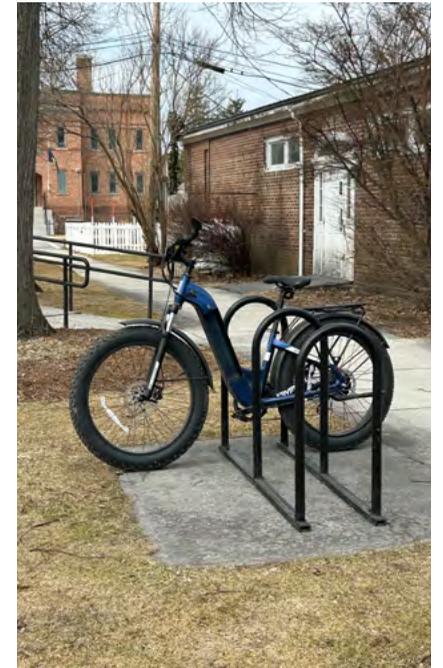
### Road Maintenance

The Town maintains and resurfaces its roads on a planned rotation cycle, so as to avoid the greater costs and problems associated with delayed maintenance and roadbed deterioration.

*“We need more crosswalks and more respect for the people using them.”*

### Development Regulations

Planning for improved active transportation infrastructure should be part of a broader cultural shift to promote active transportation and reduce car travel. Such a shift would have multiple benefits, including reduced roadway congestion, improved air quality, reduced energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, reduced parking demand, improved public health for those biking or walking, and reduced commuting and travel costs. Development regulations can play an important role in shaping this cultural shift, by requiring pedestrian- and bike-friendly infrastructure in new development projects and by creating creative collaborations with private entities to incentivize travel by walking, biking, or public transportation.



Bike parking outside of key locations, like the Town Office, makes it easier for people to move around town without a car.



*“Bennington has good alternative pathway options for transportation and recreation.”*



*A cyclist on the Bennington Rail Trail.*

*Disc golf at Willow Park.*



While development may be seen as the cause of traffic problems, development may also serve, or be used as a tool, to help solve some of those same problems. Since 2021, when Bennington adopted its downtown form-based code, the Town has worked to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment with more effective pedestrian and vehicular links between commercial projects, and more streamlined intersection design, all of which help the transportation network to function more efficiently. Maintaining this approach to development furthers town goals of meeting the needs of all users, by creating a safe and enjoyable environment for walking and biking in Bennington’s core commercial areas, and by providing adequate infrastructure for navigating town by car. **The Land Use and Development Regulations shall continue to require the implementation of access management principles for redevelopment,** to reduce the number of vehicular access points,

thereby increasing safety and efficiency for all modes of traffic in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

In the public engagement phase of this plan, community members shared their support for the town’s work to further strengthen a compact, walkable area downtown by maintaining and making improvements to the existing network of sidewalks and bike paths, and by adding more street furniture like benches and lighting to improve comfort and safety for pedestrians and cyclists. **The form-based code regulations that guide development in Bennington’s downtown shall continue to ensure that site plans include adequate bike and pedestrian infrastructure and safety measures.**

Bennington’s form-based code includes regulations to guide on-site measures for appropriate traffic mitigation for new developments, such as intersection

improvements, public sidewalks, sharing and consolidating curb cuts and parking areas, bicycle parking facilities, provisions for public transit, benches and other pedestrian amenities, easements for or construction of walkways and driveways creating off-street links between projects, street trees, and other similar design enhancements.

Continuing to strengthen those measures will advance town goals to promote a walkable center and surrounding neighborhoods. Additionally, **the Town should reduce curb cuts and increase bike and pedestrian connections and amenities, where possible, on Town-owned properties in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.**





*Adequate parking, including handicap accessible parking, is an important amenity throughout Bennington, but new parking facilities should be minimized and not impede pedestrian and cyclist access.*

### Parking

It is essential that infrastructure is designed to meet general needs throughout the year, and not be overbuilt to accommodate peak demands at limited times of year. This is especially true with parking in Bennington's downtown. Best practices in planning and managing parking suggest that good access management (i.e., fewer and smaller curb cuts), greater connectivity between sites, mixed uses, and enhanced bike and pedestrian amenities tend to alleviate traffic and parking issues.

**Bennington's land use and development regulations should continue to ensure that parking requirements advance the town's values around efficient uses of space, safety for all users, and aesthetic compatibility with the surrounding area.** Parking facilities should be designed, consolidated, and reconfigured in ways that maximize the effective use of land, while providing appropriate design, pedestrian and vehicular links, and

screening. Landscaping and screening should also be used as a buffer between parking lots and sidewalks or residential areas, and provide delineated pedestrian pathways, screen cars from the road, provide shade, and provide year-round aesthetic beauty.

Innovative approaches to parking should also be used where appropriate, including payment in lieu of parking by developers, shared parking, or other strategies. Shared parking arrangements should acknowledge actual, on the ground needs during normal business conditions, not just theoretical distinctions in time and space. Creating new parking lots should be avoided unless the need for additional parking spaces is documented. When necessary to build a new parking lot, developers should provide adequate, but not excessive, number of spaces for users of the site, include provisions for safe and efficient vehicular access and circulation, include safe and convenient facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, and ensure the lots are carefully sited and fully landscaped to avoid adverse aesthetic impacts.

To encourage bicycling for transportation, **the Town should encourage bike parking in existing developments and require bike parking in all new developments.** Bike parking should be secure, convenient, and visible from the entrance it serves. Bike parking should have two points of contact with the bicycle frame, be intuitive to use, and accommodate a variety of bicycles and attachments. "School yard" or "grid" racks which are commonly used in Bennington are not appropriate for most public uses because they do not allow locking of the frame and can cause wheel damage. Additionally, weather-protected parking makes bicycle transportation more viable for daily and year-round use.



*The Historic Paper Mill Village Bridge.*

### Scenic Roads

Many of Bennington's roads are scenic as well as functional, and they should be protected as important community assets.

Two designated scenic byways run through the Town of Bennington: the Shires of Vermont Byway and the Molly Stark Byway. These scenic byways are recognized officially, protected under state statute, and marketed by the state's tourism department. Other roads in Bennington are also prized for their scenic amenities. Public or private actions that would impact these roads must be carefully



evaluated, and development must be planned to minimize adverse impacts on their scenic qualities.

**The Town should continue to require that new public and private roads and driveways be designed according to the Town's standards and accepted access management principles.** Such construction should also include improvements for non-motor vehicle users and avoid negative impacts to natural or scenic resources. In addition to traditional engineering considerations, rural character, natural topography, and scenic corridors should be considered when designing new roads in Bennington. Roads that are wider than necessary encourage higher motor vehicle speeds and discourage active transportation. They also cause the destruction of trees, stone walls, and other features integral to the area's rural character. To protect the town in the future, the dedication of new rights-of-way and construction of new roadbeds should strictly abide by the Town's specifications. These allotments should correspond with anticipated traffic flow and mitigate any negative impacts to scenic qualities.

Additionally, **the Town should continue to participate in the Agency of Transportation's Better Roads grant program and Municipal Highway and Stormwater Mitigation Program.** These statewide programs provide technical and financial support to the municipality to maintain its roads, limit erosion, and protect water quality.

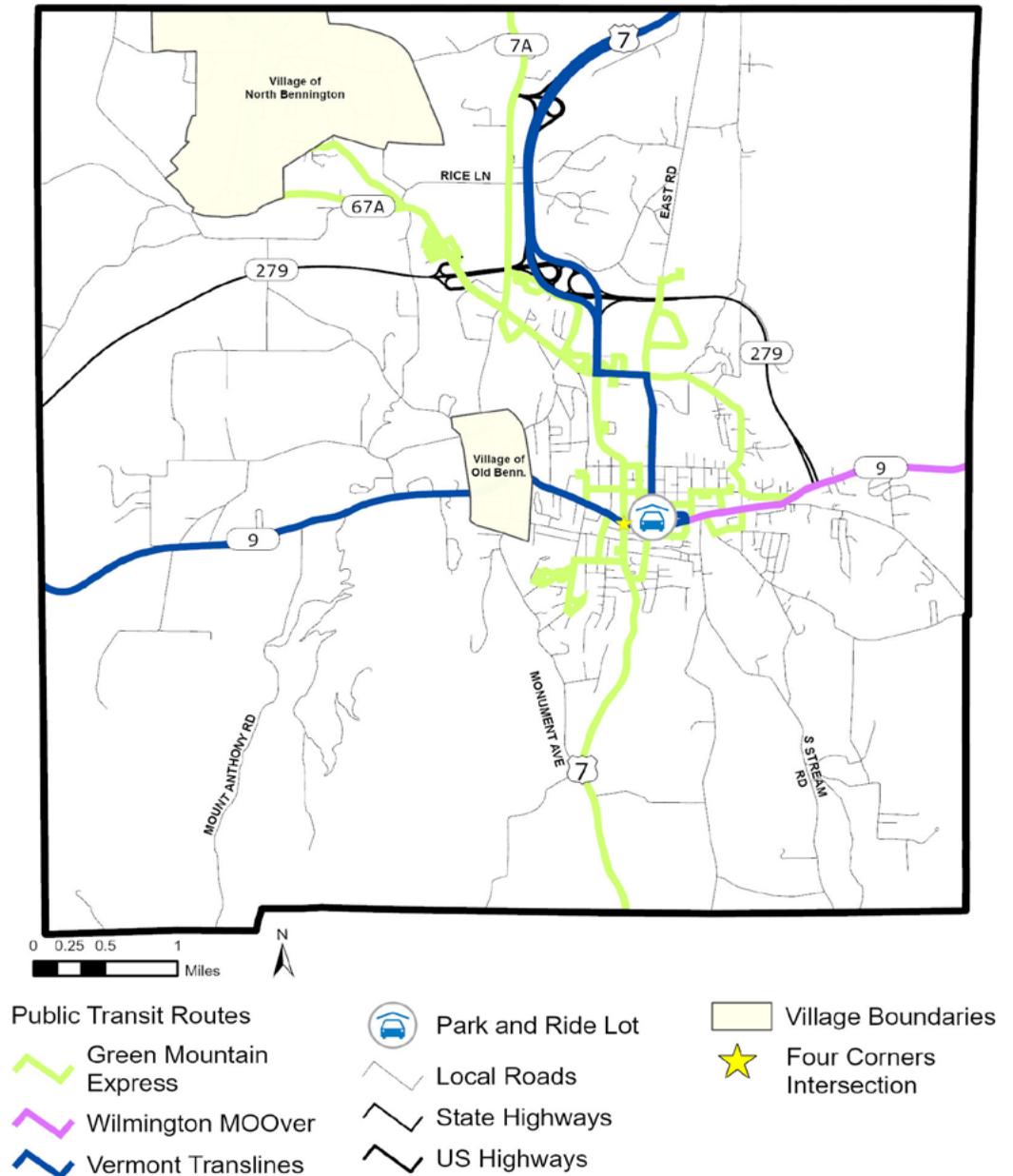


*The bus station on Pleasant Street is a transit hub for the Green Mountain Express and the Vermont TransLines service.*

### Public Transportation

Public transit service is a crucial element of a more equitable transportation network. Regular, cost-effective, energy efficient transit, whether by bus, rail, or other means, will become even more important in the future, whether within town, for daily commuting between towns, or for other long-distance travel. Bennington is served by the Green Mountain Community Network (GMCN), which aims to provide safe and efficient transportation service throughout the county. The GMCN is a private not-for-profit organization that manages the

**Figure 4.3. Public Transit**



*“Limited bus service is a major challenge. Expanded routes and hours, plus more accessible information, would improve our public transit.”*



*This bus shelter serves retail customers and workers on Northside Drive.*

Green Mountain Express, which provides transportation services in and around Bennington County. GMCN is funded in part by the State of Vermont Transportation Budget, the Federal Transit Administration, and Medicaid. As a full-service transit provider, the Green Mountain Express offers a wide range of services, including fixed bus routes, demand response, Medicaid, transportation for older adults and people with disabilities, and private pay services. Travel on fixed bus routes in and around Bennington is available free of charge.

During the community engagement phase of this plan, many people expressed their reliance on and appreciation for the current offerings of the Green Mountain Express lines; however, many riders identified room for improvement that would make the bus a more convenient and reliable option for a wider group of people. **Bennington should work with GMCN to encourage improvements to public transportation services** between key destinations so that it better supports current riders and attracts riders who choose to take public transit over driving personal vehicles. This could include expanding or modifying schedules to accommodate

more users, for example. **The Town should also work with GMCN, institutions, and businesses to support the construction of bus shelters and other amenities for transit riders.**

Recent improvements to longer distance service options—including the Vermont TransLines service connecting Bennington with the Albany to New York City train corridor, as well as the northern part of Vermont—should be promoted as valuable resources that offer regular, cost-effective, and energy-efficient transportation options. More broadly, **the Town should promote and support the Go! Vermont program** that links travelers to a variety of transportation resources and mobility options throughout the region and state. **The Town should support community-wide projects like those listed above, as well as private-public partnerships like employer programs to encourage carpooling, vanpooling, walking, and biking for employees' commutes.**

### Rail and Airport Infrastructure

Bennington's transportation infrastructure includes rail lines and the William H. Morse State Airport. A railroad line passes through the northwestern part of Bennington and the Village of North Bennington. It connects to lines in New York State and continues north to Burlington. The railway corridor is owned by the State of Vermont and is leased to Vermont Railway. A spur line that has been inactive since 1991 connects North Bennington and downtown Bennington. A portion of this spur has been converted to a rail trail.

**Bennington should support efforts to expand passenger rail to the region.** Such service would increase travel options for residents and advance economic development efforts by providing a convenient and enjoyable connection between Bennington and major metropolitan areas in New York State and along the East Coast. In 2014, a federally funded “Track 3” planning study to support reestablishing passenger train service to the Bennington region from Albany (Rensselaer), New York was completed. It recommended the initiation



*The William H. Morse State Airport is home to many businesses.*



of a new service between Rensselaer and Rutland with stops in North Bennington and Manchester. In 2022, the Vermont Agency of Transportation received a Federal Railroad Administration Corridor Identification and Development planning grant to explore the concept of a corridor connecting “New York, NY, with Burlington, VT, via Albany, NY, and Rutland, VT, dovetailing with the existing Amtrak Ethan Allen Express by providing new service to communities in southwestern Vermont (including Bennington and Manchester).” As of fall 2024, VTTrans was beginning its planning work.

The William H. Morse State Airport is a state-owned general aviation airport located north of VT Route 9 in the western part of Bennington. One asphalt runway, extended to 3,704 feet in 1980, serves all of the aircraft operations. The airport is home to the Bennington Civil Air Patrol wing, which serves the Southern Vermont region. The market area for the airport extends from Pownal in the south to the Bromley and Stratton Mountain resort areas in the north and into nearby towns in New York State. Although there is no commercial passenger or freight operator based at the airport, it is an important general aviation center and is used frequently

by business travelers. The airport is an important component of the town’s transportation infrastructure and a critical economic development resource. To this end, **the Town shall continue to protect the airport environs from incompatible development and support safety and operational improvements at the airport that will provide economic development benefits without having undue adverse impacts on residents.**



## Chapter 5. Community, Utilities, Facilities, and Services

In the Bennington region, community is formed and shaped by the people who live, work, and spend time here. These people and their connections to each other are further shaped by the infrastructure around them. This chapter will look at the people who make up Bennington’s community and the services, facilities, and networks that connect them.

In Bennington, a number of public agencies, service organizations, and community groups provide a wide range of facilities and services essential to residents’ quality of life and the economic vitality of the town. Bennington’s rich ecosystem of community groups and advocacy organizations ensure that the types of services provided continue to reflect the shifting needs of the community. The Town should continue to respond to those needs through public investment, partnership with private organizations, and leadership and collaboration among key stakeholders.

Because considerable public and private investment is required to ensure that needs are satisfied, it is important that existing conditions are well-documented and that planning for future improvements occurs on a regular basis. The Town updates its capital plan annually to guide the planning and financing of such improvements. This document is used in preparation of the annual municipal budget.

### Current Demographics and Trends

Bennington’s population has decreased over the past thirty years, while the county around it has remained steady, and the state has seen modest growth.

**Table 5.1. Population by Town, County, and State. Source: U.S. Decennial Census, 1990–2020**

	1990	Change (1990-2000)	2000	Change (2000-2010)	2010	Change (2010-2020)	2020
<b>Town of Bennington</b>	16,451	-4.34%	15,737	0.17%	15,764	-2.73%	15,333
<b>Bennington County</b>	35,845	3.21%	36,994	0.35%	37,125	0.6%	37,347
<b>Vermont</b>	562,758	8.19%	608,827	2.78%	625,741	2.77%	643,077

**Table 5.2. Trends in Age by Town, County, and State. Source: U.S. Decennial Census, 2000–2020**

	Town of Bennington			Bennington County			Vermont		
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020
<b>Under 19</b>	27%	25.1%	22.8%	26.3%	23.4%	21.6%	27.3%	24%	21.4%
<b>20-34</b>	18.8%	18.8%	18.6%	15.7%	14.9%	15.1%	18.5%	18.1%	18.5%
<b>35-44</b>	14.4%	11.3%	10.5%	15.7%	11.5%	10.4%	16.7%	12.5%	11.8%
<b>45-54</b>	13.4%	13.7%	11.2%	15.1%	16.3%	12.2%	15.4%	16.4%	12.3%
<b>55-64</b>	8.6%	13%	14.5%	10.6%	15.1%	16.5%	9.3%	14.4%	15.4%
<b>65 and older</b>	17.8%	18%	22.5%	16.7%	18.8%	24.2%	12.7%	14.6%	20.7%



Bennington's population has been steadily aging over the past twenty years, at a pace that is similar to the county and the state. In 2000, 27% of Bennington's population was under age 19 and 26.4% was 55 and older. As of 2020, only 22.8% of the town's population was under 19 and 37% was older than 55. This shift mirrors what is happening throughout Vermont and is an important indicator of some of the changing needs and challenges facing Bennington in the coming years.

Bennington's population is predominantly white, with 90% reporting their race as white in the 2020 census. This is down slightly compared to 2010, when 95.9% of respondents indicated their race was white. As of 2020, the racial and ethnic demographics in Bennington are very similar to those throughout the state.

About 23% of Bennington's population identifies as disabled, according to the 2022 American Community Survey. This is slightly higher than the share of disabled people living in the county and state. A little over 40% of those who identify as disabled are 65 or older, while more than half of the disabled community in Bennington is between 18 and 64 years old.

The share of people living in Bennington who were born outside of Vermont has grown over the last ten years. In 2012, more than 53% of Bennington's population reported that they were born in Vermont with only 2.5% indicating that they were born outside of the US. In 2022, 44% of people in Bennington said they were born in Vermont, with 3.4% of respondents indicating that they were foreign born. This mirrors trends at the state level, as well.

Bennington has become home to many newcomers in recent years. As a landing spot for people moving within the region, from out of state, or from outside

**Table 5.3. Racial and Ethnic Demographics by Town, County, and State. Source: U.S. Decennial Census, 2020**

	White	Black	American Indian	Asian	Native Hawaiian	Other	Hispanic/Latino
<b>Town of Bennington</b>	90.0%	2.9%	2.3%	1.8%	0.2%	2.8%	2.8%
<b>Bennington County</b>	91.7%	1.9%	2.0%	1.5%	0.1%	2.8%	2.5%
<b>Vermont</b>	90.0%	2.1%	2.5%	2.4%	0.1%	2.9%	2.4%

*Hispanic and Latino identity are considered an ethnicity, not a race, according to the U.S. Census. Racial and ethnic identity are asked about separately when collecting census data, and data in this table will not sum to 100%.*

**Table 5.4. Disability Status by Town, County, and State. Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2012-2022**

	2012	2017	2022			
	Total	Total	Under 18	18-64	65+	Total
<b>Town of Bennington</b>	19.1%	21.3%	3.0%	54.3%	42.7%	23.1%
<b>Bennington County</b>	15.4%	17.4%	4.4%	50.7%	44.9%	17.5%
<b>Vermont</b>	13.3%	14.2%	7.1%	51.5%	41.4%	14.5%

**Table 5.5. Place of Birth by Town, County, and State. Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2012-2022**

	2012			2017			2022		
	Born in Vermont	Born in other state	Born outside U.S.	Born in Vermont	Born in other state	Born outside U.S.	Born in Vermont	Born in other state	Born outside U.S.
<b>Town of Bennington</b>	53.5%	42.9%	2.5%	50%	46.2%	3%	44.3%	51.4%	3.4%
<b>Bennington County</b>	45.6%	50.5%	2.9%	45.8%	50.4%	2.9%	40.9%	55.3%	2.7%
<b>Vermont</b>	51.2%	43.9%	4%	50.7%	43.8%	4.5%	48.3%	46.3%	4.4%



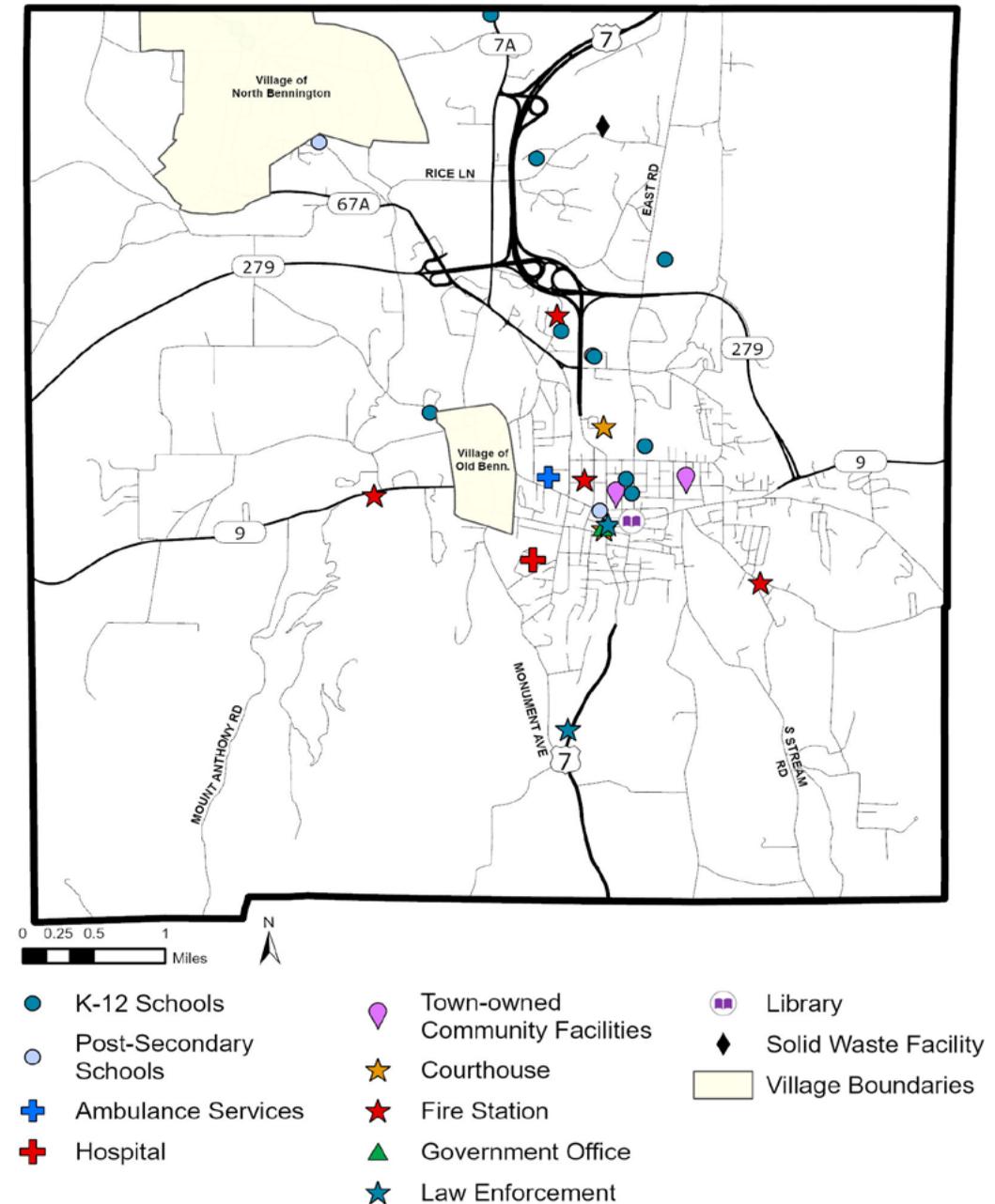
*“Bennington has a strong feeling of community. People are kind, generous, and friendly.”*

the United States, the town should strive to create a welcoming atmosphere for new community members to settle in and quickly connect with the broad number of resources available. **The Town should support efforts to connect newcomers with civic and community life and encourage consistent coordination among local groups, regional organizations, and employers. Town-supported organizations, such as fire departments, should actively seek new members from among those who have recently moved to Bennington.**

Furthermore, community connection is important for all who call Bennington home, no matter how long they have done so. When possible, **the Town should collaborate with local community organizations to host regular events at the recreation center, Willow Park, senior center, and other town facilities to support opportunities for social connection. The Town can also work with local**

**organizations and institutions to coordinate beautification and place-making, volunteerism and civic participation, and public events that will create a rich atmosphere for all community members to be a part of.** In many cases, events and opportunities like these are already underway thanks to Bennington’s rich ecosystem of community-based organizations. **The Town can further support these initiatives by strengthening the marketing of community assets and improving communications for existing resources.**

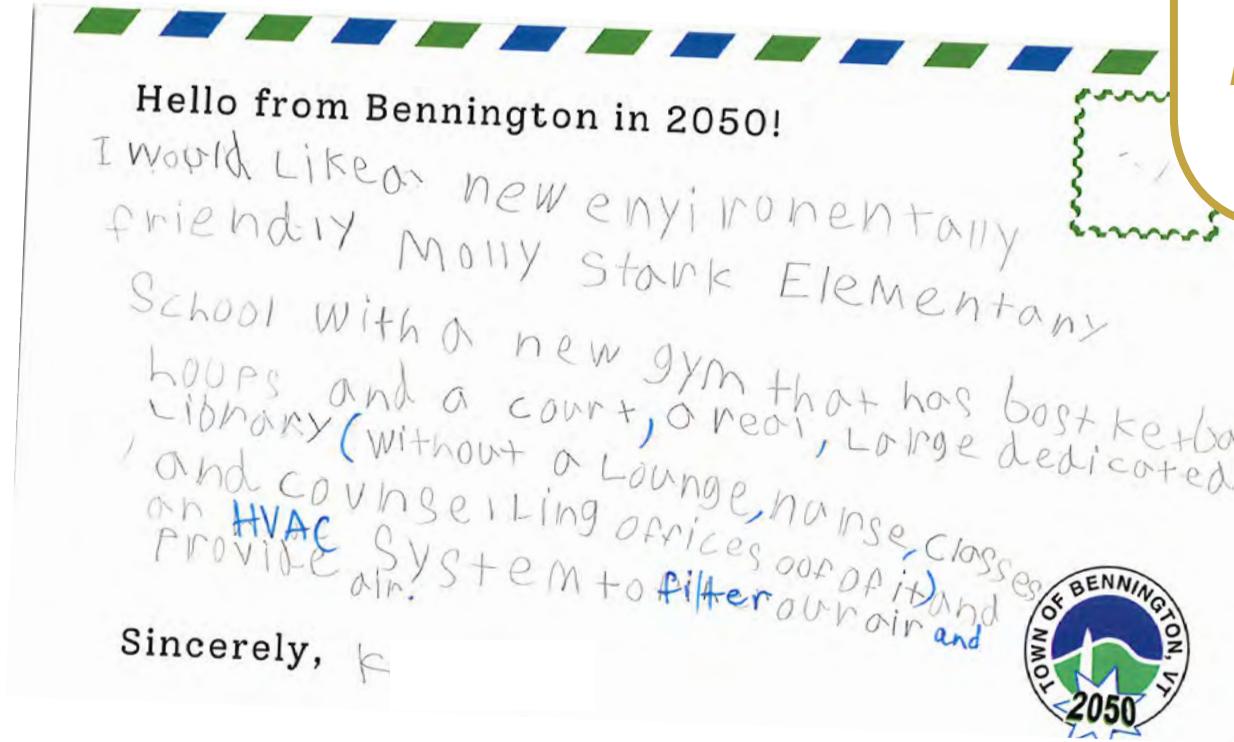
Figure 5.1. Public Facilities



**Schools in Bennington**

**Public schools:** Bennington Elementary School, Molly Stark Elementary School, and Monument Elementary School; Mount Anthony Union Middle School; Mount Anthony Union High School  
**Private schools:** Grace Christian School, Hiland Hall School, Southshire Community School, The School of Sacred Heart St. Francis de Sales, Village School of North Bennington

*“We should take advantage of existing educational resources to strengthen career development in Bennington.”*



**Education System**

Bennington’s school system—from childcare to K-12 schools to post-secondary education—provides essential educational services for the youth who may become the town’s future citizens and leaders. It is crucial that the schools produce graduates with high levels of competency in core academic disciplines as well as in specific skills that will prepare them for successful futures in rapidly changing job markets. Ongoing communication and coordination between the schools, local government, and business and industry groups, therefore, is essential.

**The Town should support the development of a variety of childcare services that meet the needs of residents and employers.** The availability of safe and affordable childcare services is important both to residents and to the town’s economy. While there are numerous registered home day care providers and licensed early education programs offered in Bennington, there is a serious shortage of availability, which impacts parents, employers, and the wider community. According to the 2022 report

*Stalled at the Start: Vermont’s Child Care Challenge*, the Bennington County region’s childcare sector would need to add 338 infant slots, 91 toddler slots, and 177 preschool slots to meet the existing demand for services.

In accordance with Vermont state law, child day care facilities serving a limited number of full and part-time children are allowed in all districts in a town where single family homes are permitted. Facilities serving a larger number of children are

allowed with development review board approval in most of those districts. Additional information on childcare facilities as well as information on services for families, providers, employers, and people interested in opening a new facility can be found through the Child Development Division of the Vermont Department for Children and Families (Agency of Human Services). Large employers with workforces highly exposed to the childcare market should be encouraged to consider investing in in-house or collaborative childcare centers.





The playground at Bennington Elementary is a school facility that can serve as a public amenity outside of school hours.

**The Town should continue to ensure zoning allows childcare centers alongside medical, educational, and industrial areas, not just residential areas as required by state law.**

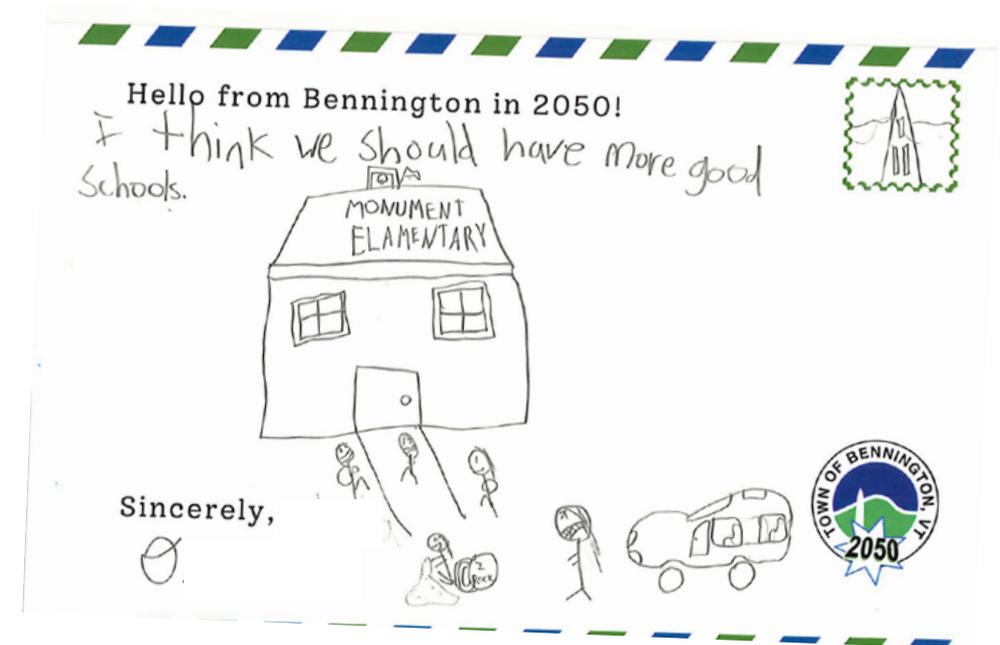
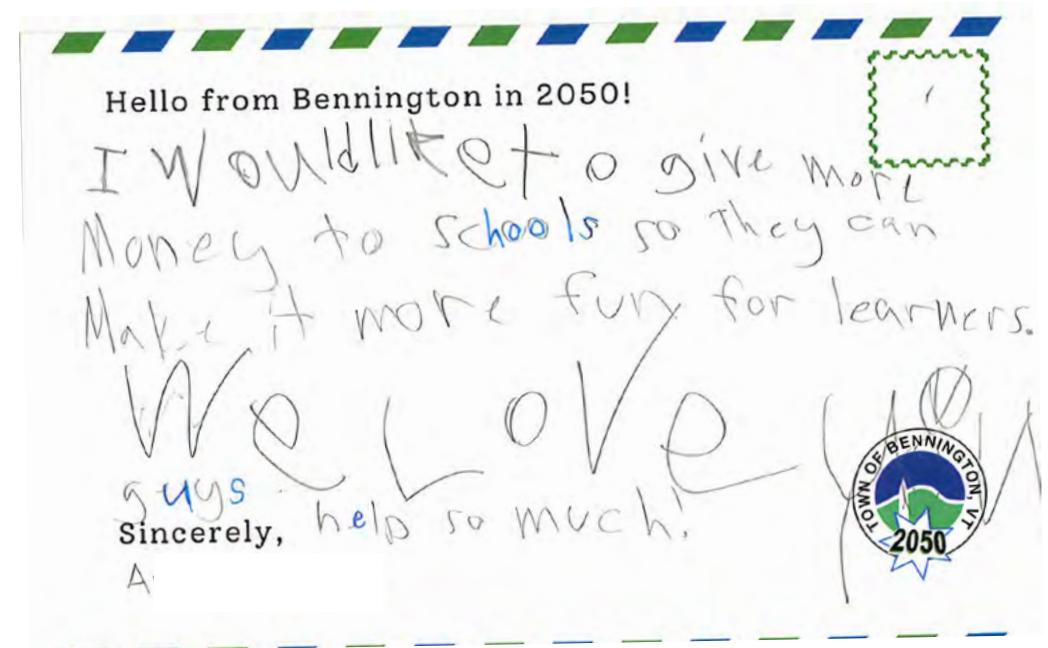
The Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union, with offices located on North Street, provides administrative, curricular, and personnel support for a number of school districts, including the three districts serving Bennington. While the management of public schools is outside the Town's purview, a collaborative relationship between the Town, the school districts, and the supervisory union could be beneficial for all parties. **The Town should support efforts by the supervisory union and school districts that will improve efficiency and educational outcomes for students in Bennington. Additionally, the Town and the supervisory union should engage in cooperative financial planning to minimize year-to-year fluctuations in property taxes.**



The CCV academic center in downtown Bennington serves over 450 students.

In 2024–2025 biennium, the state legislature actively considered a complete restructuring of the educational system throughout Vermont. While the impacts of such a statewide restructuring are uncertain, preparing for potential changes in student population and available facilities will benefit Bennington and the broader region. **The Town should work with the supervisory union to plan for shifting uses of school properties,** if the facilities are closed or if alternative uses of those buildings are available.

Bennington is home to three public elementary schools, a public middle school and a public high school, and five private schools that offer a mix of elementary and secondary education. Between 2013 and 2023, total enrollment at the public schools in Bennington remained fairly steady, with about 2,480 students enrolled in all Bennington public schools in 2013 and 2023. The Mount Anthony Union Middle



*“Increase collaboration with Bennington College students, through partnerships with restaurants, local non-profits, and K-12 schools, for example.”*

and High Schools serve Bennington as well as the neighboring municipalities of North Bennington, Old Bennington, Pownal, Shaftsbury, and Woodford.

The public high school provides a full range of educational and interscholastic athletic programs and shares its site with the Southwest Vermont Regional Technical School District (Southwest Tech). Southwest Tech works with local businesses to provide youth and adults with the skills required to meet the needs of the local employment market. In addition, Southwest Tech offers specialized training and retraining courses to groups of employees. This resource is a valuable community asset, and further opportunities for connecting students with real-world work and training opportunities should be encouraged. **Town officials and committees should encourage and facilitate workforce development initiatives** that emphasize increasing awareness of career opportunities within the region, and that match education and training with



*Bennington College has an idyllic campus, and efforts like the Ninja Path have worked to better connect it with Bennington's downtown.*

the needs of area employers. The Town’s community development office, the chamber of commerce, the Bennington County Regional Commission, and other relevant groups should work to connect workforce development opportunities between schools and growing industries, such as green jobs.

For more information about fostering a diverse workforce, see **Chapter 2: Economic Development**.

Bennington’s post-secondary schools provide unique educational, economic, and cultural benefits

to the town, and efforts to integrate their programs with community needs and interests should be pursued. Partnerships with the Community College of Vermont, Bennington College, Northeast Baptist College, and Vermont State University should be pursued to foster greater connections between students and the community, and to support a strong career pipeline with local employers. In the community engagement phase of this plan, local college students expressed interest in visiting Bennington’s downtown and participating more actively in civic life, but they cited challenges in getting into town





The Southern Vermont Health Care campus hosts many centers, medical offices, and even a childcare facility.

*“There is a shortage of primary care providers (and other professionals) in part because of lack of appropriate and affordable housing.”*

without personal vehicles and a lack of information about local events as major barriers. **Bennington should collaborate with institutions of higher education to expand the integration of local colleges into the community** through student internships, development of student-oriented local businesses, improved transportation, and communication links.

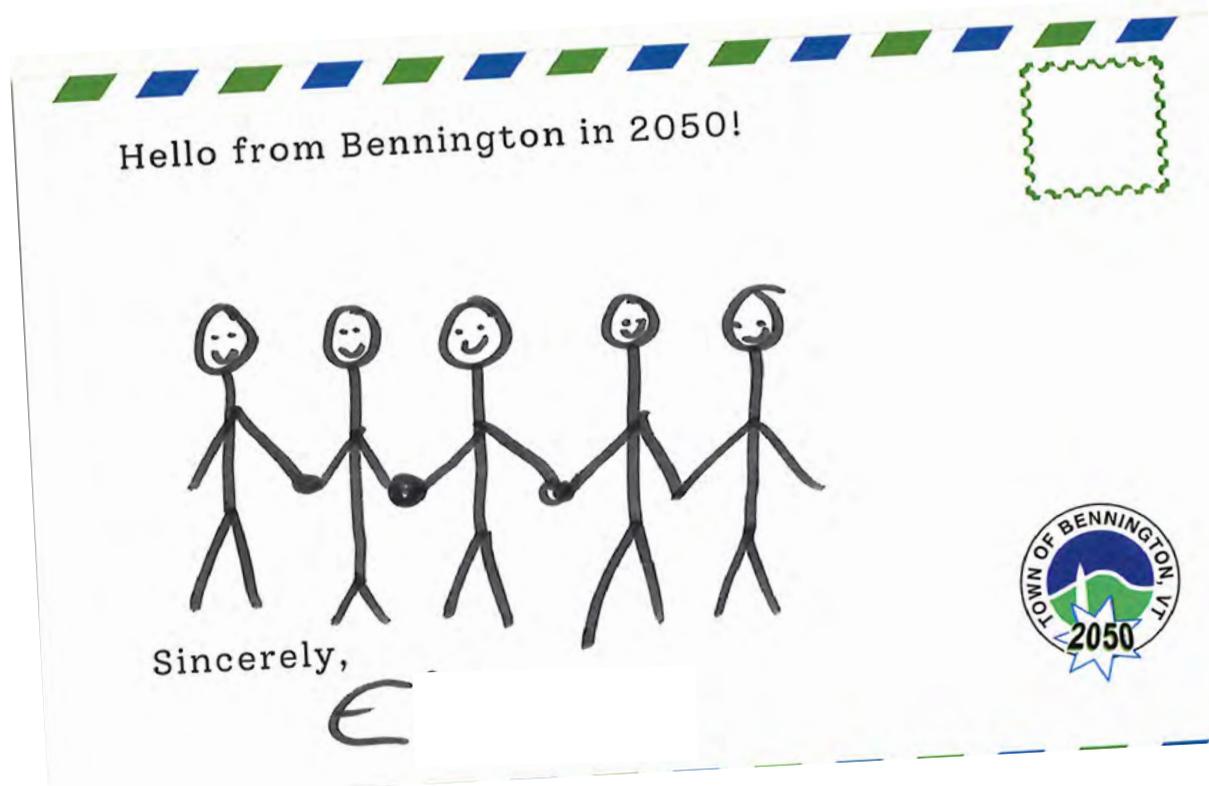
Additionally, **the Town should support adult learning and vocational training opportunities** when offered. Opportunities for adult education are important for advancing the community’s economic development goals and improving quality of life, as they assist people in advancing their careers, enable socioeconomic mobility, and support lifelong learning.

### Healthcare Facilities and Services

Bennington is a regional center for health services. Southwestern Vermont Health Care (SVHC) operates a hospital in Bennington (Southwestern Vermont Medical Center) that offers a full range of inpatient and outpatient services, including the Dartmouth Cancer Center at Southwestern Vermont Medical Center. SVMC also shares a campus with a 100-plus-bed, long-term care facility (the Centers for Living and Rehabilitation). Bennington also has a home health nursing organization (VNA and Hospice) and the VA clinic. Several nursing homes, assisted living, and independent senior housing facilities also are available in the community, including the Vermont Veterans’ Home, which serves veterans and their spouses at its facility on North Street. The facility includes 130 nursing home beds and 8 residential care beds, and offers outpatient rehab services to veterans, their spouses, and gold star parents.

Bennington has worked closely with SVHC in efforts to achieve shared health care goals and support the broader community. There are numerous medical professional and technical offices located near the hospital that also offer a wide range of specialized medical services to residents. Additionally, in 2023 and 2024 the Greater Bennington Community Services (GBCS) collaborated with Remote Area Medical (RAM) to host a 2-day clinic at MAUMS to provide free medical, dental, and vision care to anyone in need. Mental health, substance abuse, and services for people with cognitive disabilities are provided through the United Counseling Service of Bennington County, which also oversees the Head Start and Big Brothers-Big Sisters of Bennington programs. **The Town should continue its collaborative relationships with local health care providers to ensure that high levels of care are available and to address critical care needs and improve the quality of life for residents through implementation of public health care initiatives.**





Despite this hub of medical providers in Bennington, many community members struggle to access adequate or affordable medical care. Workforce shortages have hampered the healthcare industry in Bennington, creating a ripple effect that leaves many in the community seeking out medical care far from home. The Town’s work to improve housing availability, transit options, and general economic development all play a part in improving medical care in Bennington by attracting more staff and lowering barriers for patients. Furthermore, because of the growing importance of healthcare to the local economy, adequate educational training must be available locally and municipal and technological infrastructure must be available to support expansion of facilities and services within the areas where these facilities are located.

### Support for Vulnerable Community Members

Everyone in Bennington should have access to public facilities and support services, and some community members may need to rely on those public amenities more. People who are struggling with housing insecurity, food insecurity, addiction, and other challenges often become connected with one of the many social service or non-profit organizations that serve the Bennington region. These include the Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless, Greater Bennington Community Services, SaVida Health, Turning Point Recovery Center, United Counseling Service, Sunrise Family Resource Center, Center for Restorative Justice, Project Against Violent Encounters (PAVE), and

more. There are also several charitable religious organizations in Bennington that provide community services. **The Town should collaborate with local and regional organizations to support their community-minded work and identify ways to connect community members in need with key public resources.** Project Alliance is one example of such community-wide collaboration. Formed in 2023, the consortium of local and state service providers brings together community leaders in law enforcement, education, social work, mental health, medicine, and other key areas to address health and safety issues in Bennington.

Another way the Town can support vulnerable community members is with clear information channels. Maintaining an up-to-date website with





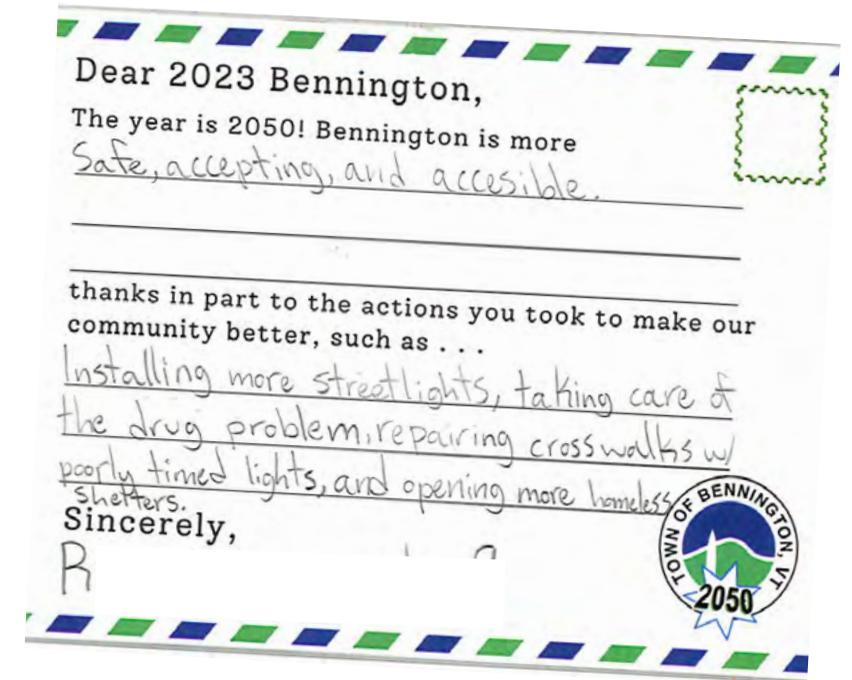
The Bennington Senior Center is an important town-operated public facility that facilitates social connections throughout the community. The center's building on Pleasant Street also houses Meals on Wheels.

resources about social services, housing programs, and opportunities to connect with local providers will advance transparency and accessibility of information and strengthen the network of supportive services in Bennington. Likewise, the town should embrace the work of local, state, and federal programs that seek to prevent issues like substance abuse, mental illness, housing insecurity, and food insecurity. Community members in Bennington—including students participating in the Postcards for the Future activity—repeatedly mentioned concerns about these issues, and the Town should support the organizations in Bennington and the broader region that are working to expand the social safety net and address issues at their root cause.

Youth wellness and prevention programs are also essential for creating a healthy community. Youth support programs such as those offered by the Center for Restorative Justice (CRJ)—which offers intervention programs, mentoring, and drop-in hours to help young people succeed—and Alliance for Community Transformations (ACT)—which leads substance use prevention education, leadership development, and health equity initiatives for youth—are important community resources that the town should continue to support. Likewise, there is a whole ecosystem of senior services in Bennington, including Meals on Wheels, Council on Aging, and the Town's Senior Center, to support older residents.

Emergency shelters are an important part of the continuum of care that supports people through the difficulty of being unhoused. Emergency shelters are the most immediate response to homelessness and offer basic protection from exposure. The Town's work to lower barriers to affordable housing production will also be crucial in supporting vulnerable community members, as homelessness is a housing problem. **The Town should work with service providers to ensure access to quality facilities to accommodate the needs of unhoused people on a short-term or emergency basis.**

For more strategies to address housing, see **Chapter 3: Housing.**





A Bennington Fire Department training.

### Emergency Services and Public Safety

Bennington has a network of emergency services providers that strive to ensure the safety and well-being of all community members.

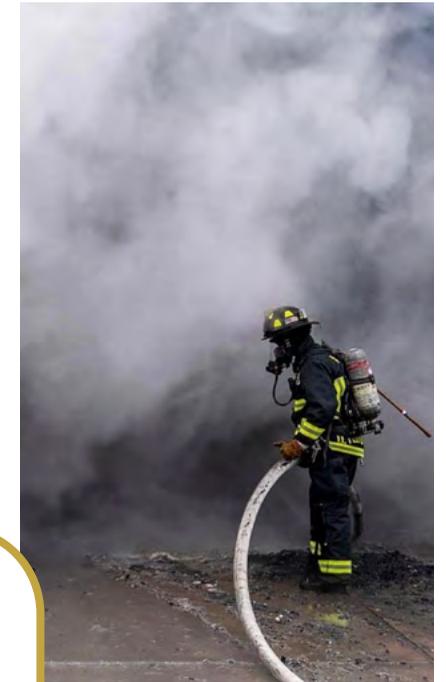
**Bennington has a Local Emergency Management Plan, which should be updated annually by the Emergency Management Director (EMD) and adopted by the Select Board.** Bennington’s EMD and a second representative are members of the Bennington County Regional Emergency Management Committee, which coordinates

planning and response activities on a region-wide scale. In 2025, Bennington completed a new Hazard Mitigation Plan, formulated by a committee of community members who worked with the Bennington County Regional Commission, emergency responders, and town staff. To facilitate a cohesive and collaborative local emergency response, all Town officials and staff with a role in these activities should continue to attend meetings of the local emergency planning committee.

#### Hazard Mitigation Plan versus Local Emergency Management Plan

A hazard mitigation plan establishes proactive steps that the municipality can take to help reduce or eliminate possible damages from hazards. A Local Emergency Management Plan is established to guide the municipality’s response to emergencies within the town.

*“Emergency services providers are understaffed and overworked.”*



A Bennington Fire Department training.

**The Town should maintain close communication with emergency providers to ensure that their staffing and equipment needs are met through careful and coordinated planning.** It is necessary to ensure that funding levels support continued full staffing and periodic replacement and upgrades of equipment for all the emergency service providers. **The Town should meet with representatives from each emergency services provider on an annual basis to understand their fiscal needs and plan for short- and long-term expenses.**





The Bennington Rescue Squad station on McKinley Street.



A Bennington Fire Department Training.

**Public Safety, Fire, and Emergency Medical Services**

**Bennington Police Department**  
Station on South Street

**Bennington Fire Department**  
Station on River Street

**Bennington Rural Fire Department**  
Stations on Beech Street, Orchard Road, West Road

**Bennington Rescue Squad**  
Station on McKinley Street  
*As of June 2025*

In 2023, the Bennington Select Board established the Community Policing Advisory Review Board (CPARB) to facilitate meaningful input on safety and equity in community policing efforts. **The Town should continue to liaise with the broader community on public safety issues.** Through this community collaboration, **the Town should continue to strengthen its community-oriented public safety efforts to creatively and compassionately address some of Bennington’s most pressing challenges,** including substance abuse and local crime.

**Electrical and Telecommunications Services**

Electrical service is provided through Green Mountain Power (GMP), the state’s largest electric utility company. Existing electric service to the community is adequate, and GMP offers an Economic Development Incentive Program to support new and expanding industries. For new developments, Bennington’s land use regulations require new utilities be installed underground—an important step toward preserving aesthetic values and advancing resilience in the face of increasingly frequent climate hazards. **Siting of new overhead power lines, locating switching boxes, and maintaining existing power lines should recognize the scenic and historic values of the community, and new service connections should continue to be routed underground.** To further improve





Bennington Fire Department Training

community resilience, **Bennington should coordinate with GMP on the siting of new distribution and transmission infrastructure and encourage the implementation of grid resiliency measures.** The Town should also encourage property owners to install battery storage, which allows excess energy to be stored and then released when power is in high demand or not available. Battery storage systems have the dual benefits of providing backup power during an outage and increasing electric grid reliability during periods of peak energy demand, which can provide backup power to the homeowner during an outage.

For more information about hazard mitigations and resilience, see **Chapter 6: Climate Hazards.**

High-speed internet is an essential utility for all households. The Southern Vermont Communications Union District (SoVT CUD) is a multi-municipality organization that has worked to bring high-speed internet to all households in the region. This project has aimed to eliminate

the digital divide and associated socioeconomic impacts that can result from uneven access to effective internet service. As of October 2023, all Bennington households have been eligible for high-speed fiber internet. **The Town should advocate for the availability of fast, reliable, and affordable internet access throughout Bennington by continuing participation in the SoVT CUD.**

Although the availability of high-speed internet has largely been addressed, reliable cell phone service is a persistent challenge in Bennington. **The Town should work with wireless companies to maintain and enhance wireless services, provide new facilities as necessary, and do so with respect and sensitivity to environmental, scenic, and neighborhood concerns.** A visual proliferation of highly visible towers and antennas can be avoided through careful siting and co-location on single, low-visibility tower structures.

### Water-Related Utilities

The Bennington water supply system serves a residential population of approximately 13,000 people and some commercial and industrial development, primarily within the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. The Town has a Source Protection Plan it follows to ensure the protection of the public water supply. Public wastewater services are also located primarily within Bennington's downtown and neighborhood areas, with some service to North Bennington, Old Bennington, and a small area in Shaftsbury. To preserve the capacity of both systems and reinforce the Town's land use plan, except in the event of a severe public health emergency, **the Town should limit new connections to the public water system and sewer line expansions to the downtown and neighborhood areas.**

The water line extensions to areas of the town that were affected by PFOAs are a prime example of extending public utilities in response to a public health emergency. From 2015 to 2021, a PFOA

Bennington Police engaging in community and trust building.





*The town's lead service line replacement program is a successful example of making infrastructure upgrades to benefit public health.*

extension project brought public water lines to Bennington's west end and north along East Road. The Public Works Department anticipates another extension of water mains in response to PFOAs in the coming years, primarily toward the south along Monument Avenue and Route 7.

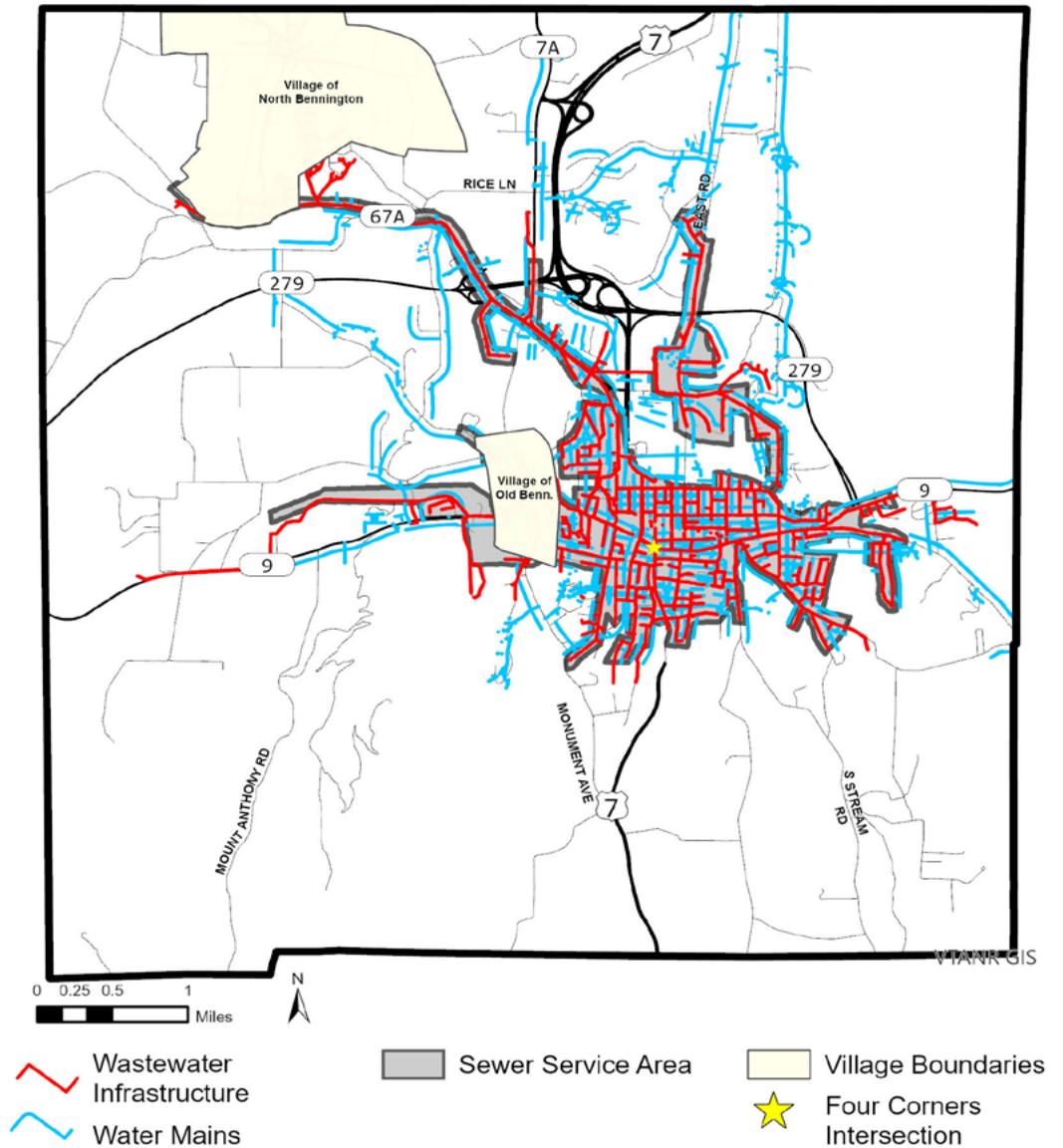
Bennington's lead service line replacement project is a successful instance of the Town securing outside funds from the Vermont Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund to make important infrastructure improvements for the public's health. **The Town should continue to promote homeowner participation in the lead service line replacement program and consider adopting an ordinance to mandate participation in this critical public health initiative.**

Another infrastructure improvement the town may consider is requiring metering for all users of the water system. Tying cost directly to water usage would ensure that all users pay their fair share and would encourage conservation.

The town's annual daily average wastewater volume is about 4.3 million gallons per day (MGD) out of a total capacity of 5.1 MGD for the public wastewater system. The demand on the public water system is 1.4 MGD out of 3 MGD available for the water system. To ensure that adequate capacity continues to be available, **the Town should continue to review and update water and sewer capacity allocation policies regularly.**

One of the primary issues affecting the town's wastewater capacity is inflow and infiltration of stormwater into the sewer system. A study was conducted in 2011, and the Town has worked to address issues identified in that assessment by implementing slip lining projects annually (upgrading clay pipes with fiberglass liners to reduce inflow) and other measures, but challenges persist. One of the

**Figure 5.2. Water-Related Utilites**





*The Bennington water supply relies on two sources; Bolles Brook in Woodford, and Morgan Spring in downtown Bennington.*

biggest challenges involves the large number of homes and businesses that discharge sump pumps and surface stormwater drains into the sanitary sewage system.

**The Town must continue efforts to reduce sewer line infiltration with appropriate technological fixes and separate sources of stormwater discharge from the system to maintain and improve its capacity. Bennington's Public Works Department should continue to implement and regularly update its stormwater master plan,** which should include recommendations for financing and phasing construction. Additionally, **the Town must require new development projects to plan for adequate and environmentally sound stormwater discharges** and may also require such projects to participate in necessary upgrades of subsurface drainage facilities.

Because considerable public and private investment is needed to ensure that maintenance and large-scale improvements are achieved, it is important that existing conditions are well-documented and that planning for future improvements occurs on a regular basis. **The Public Works Department should continue to be closely involved in the annual maintenance of the Town's capital plan.**

## Solid Waste Management

The Town owns a solid waste transfer station at a former landfill site on Houghton Lane. It is operated by Casella Waste Management, and it receives waste from Casella's own hauling operation, private haulers, and residents' drop-offs.

Bennington has two policies that help to regulate waste disposal: a hauler registration requirement and a pay-as-you-throw ordinance. The registration requirement charges a nominal fee for haulers to register as trash collectors in Bennington. The pay-as-you-throw ordinance requires that haulers set pricing that is differentiated based on the volume of waste received. By connecting higher pricing to greater volumes of waste, this ordinance incentivizes reductions in household waste. Composting and recycling processes in Bennington are generally governed by state statutes. **Bennington should continue to support efforts to reduce the generation of solid waste through recycling programs, composting programs, and initiatives to reduce the use of wasteful packaging.**

Household hazardous materials and waste are disposed of through use of a special collection facility at the transfer station, which opened in 2023 and is run May through October by the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance. Bennington is a member of the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance, which has a solid waste implementation plan (SWIP) that meets the requirements of the Agency of Natural Resources.

Bennington is home to the Long Trail Composting Facility which is co-located at the Bennington Transfer station on Houghton Lane. The facility is also operated by Casella, and it is the largest Vermont Certified Food Scrap Management Facility in the region. All town residents can drop off food scraps at the Bennington transfer station free of

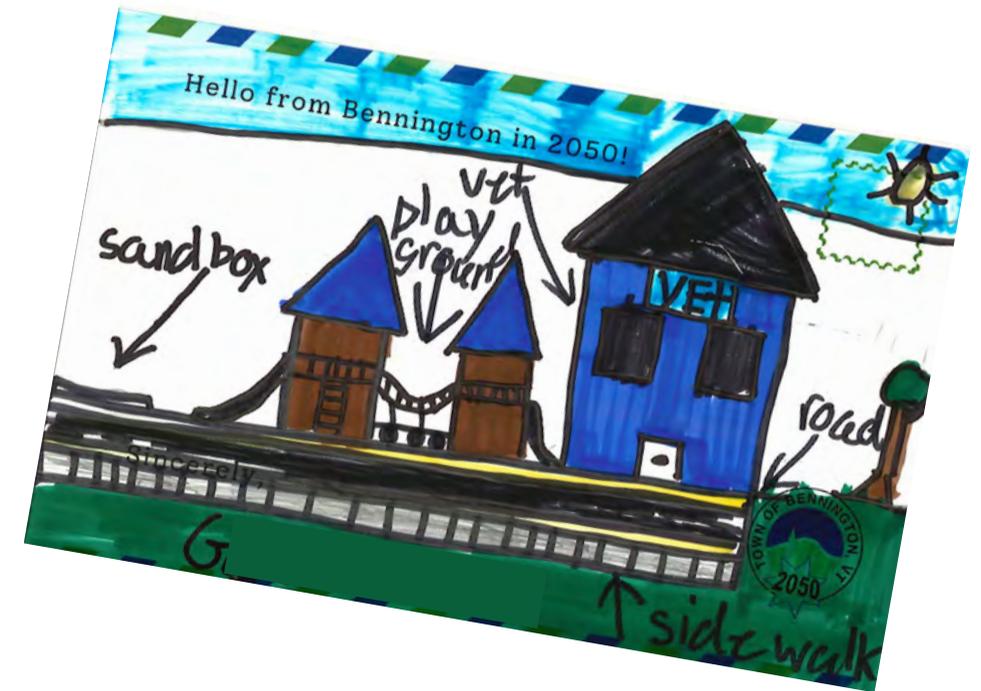




Merchant's Park on the corner of North Street and Pleasant Street is home to the splash pad and the Thomson Family Stage and hosts several public events throughout the year.



Wayfinding signage on the Bennington Rail Trail.



charge, and anyone can purchase soil from Long Trail. This gives community members an opportunity to compost their own food scraps and be part of broader sustainability efforts.

**The Town should encourage public events to be more proactive about separating trash, recycling, and food scraps, and ultimately aim to be zero waste events.** By highlighting such initiatives or otherwise encouraging or incentivizing zero waste events, the town could make a large impact on systemic solid waste disposal practices. **Bennington should also support comprehensive education programs on waste minimization, reuse, recycling, and resource recovery through collaboration with local media, schools, industry, and community organizations.**

### Recreational and Community Facilities

Bennington's community facilities play an important role in supporting community members of all ages—from kids who learn to swim at the Recreation Center to older adults who gather for trivia at the Senior Center. In the community engagement phase of this plan, members of the public expressed their appreciation for Bennington's many public parks, including Willow Park, the Norman and Selma Greenberg Headwaters Park, and the splash pad. The public greatly values and utilizes these facilities, and has shared a desire for more public spaces that provide all generations with easy access to recreational spaces. Some of the desires for larger spaces, newer amenities, and more cross-over between different constituencies will be met by the Benn High Redevelopment project, which





At over 100 acres, Willow Park offers several public amenities including two playgrounds with accessible play structures, a walking path, a dog park, pavilions, and a variety of playing fields.

will create a new home for the Senior Center and expanded recreational opportunities for people of all ages, in addition to new housing.

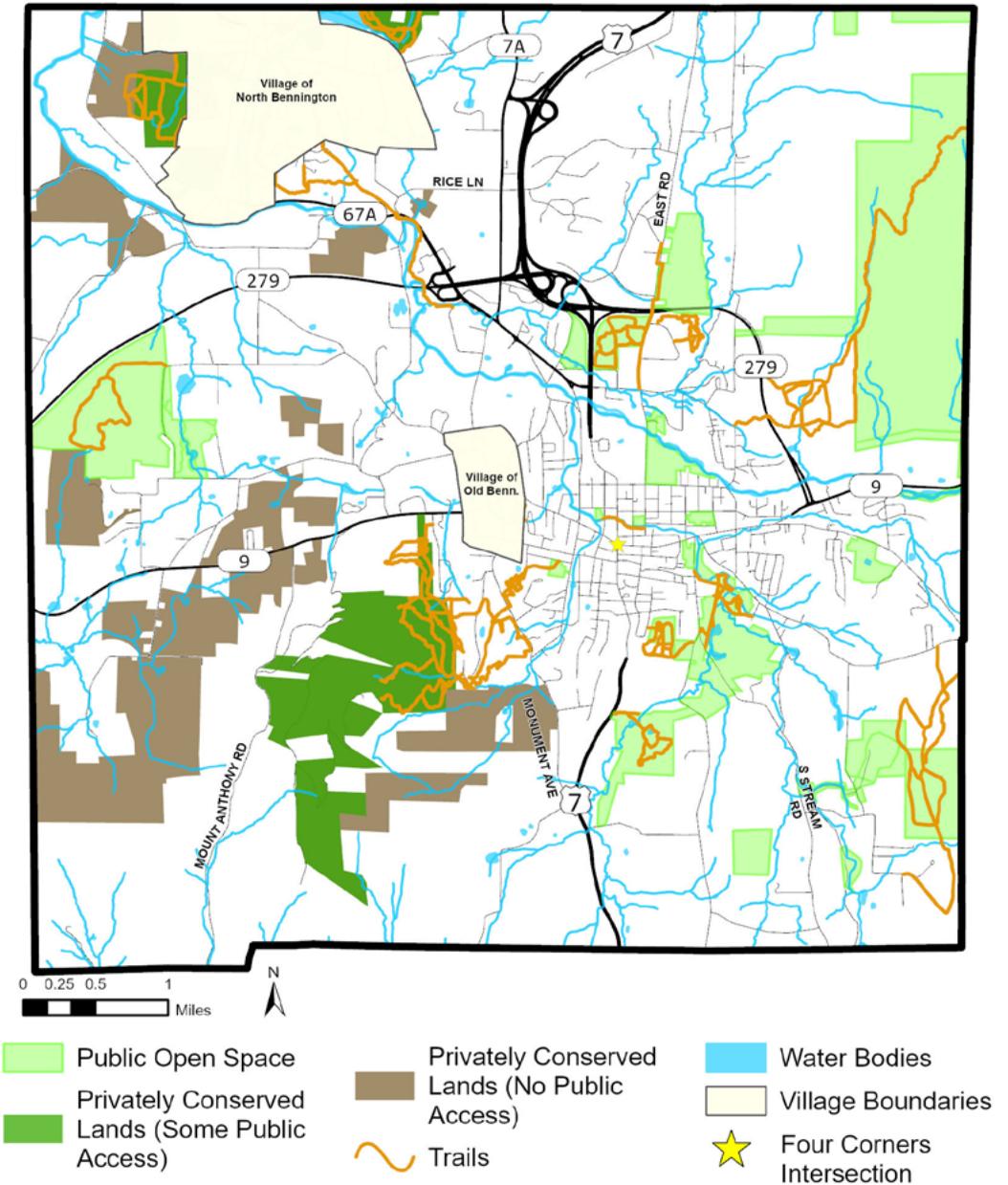
Bennington’s undeveloped open space—forests, fields, and parkland—are important natural and scenic assets that support a wide range of recreational activities, such as hiking, running, and time in nature. Developed parks and other facilities add to the recreational opportunities available to residents and visitors. Willow Park, for example, offers a mix of courts for various sports, playgrounds, playing fields, and gathering areas for community members to enjoy together. **It is important that the Town continue to maintain these open lands and facilities, and expand on them where appropriate. Bennington should actively support**

**the acquisition of important recreational lands (or acquisition of easements to those lands) by conservation organizations that will allow public access.**

For more information about incorporating open space into new developments, see **Chapter 1: Land Use**.

With trails on Mount Anthony, in Green Mountain National Forest, Greenberg Reserve, and other public and privately conserved lands, Bennington offers a number of excellent opportunities for residents and visitors alike to explore natural areas. Bennington’s trails, and its designation as an Appalachian Trail Community, are a point of great pride for members of Bennington’s community, as

Figure 5.3. Open Spaces and Trails





Norman and Selma Greenberg Headwaters Park is located off of Morgan Street. The 165-acre parks includes several trails for walking, cross country skiing, and mountain biking, as well as a boardwalk to a kayak/canoe launch.



In 2021, Bennington became a designated Appalachian Trail Community. This title recognizes the town's commitment to protect and promote the Appalachian Trail.



The Greenberg Headwaters Park highlight the many scenic views and natural features that visitors can enjoy.

many people shared during the public engagement phase of this plan. As the town's network of open space continues to grow, Bennington should be strategic about creating connections between parks, facilities, and other key amenities. **The Town should look for opportunities to expand the network of trails and shared-use paths to continue connecting open space and key destinations throughout Bennington.**

When creating those connections or envisioning new open space amenities, **the Town should ensure that those high-quality recreation opportunities are available for all residents, including those with special needs, and for visitors to the area.** The splash pad on North Street illustrates a great success story. This public amenity offers a fun

destination for local children and visitors alike, in an accessible and central location. The Town is working to expand other multigenerational recreational offerings with the skate park project in downtown Bennington. Widespread community support initiated the development of a skate park at Rotary Park, adjacent to the Walloomsac River, and further fundraising and grant funding enabled construction to begin in 2024.

Bennington also contains a wealth of privately owned and operated recreational facilities. One of the region's premier golf courses lies near the base of the Battle Monument; fitness centers are easily accessible in the center of town; and the Bennington Sports Center located between North and School Streets is a comprehensive soccer





*The Bennington Free Library offers countless materials, programs, and services that support the community.*

center with an indoor soccer facility and dormitory. Public feedback indicated a strong desire for more facilities for indoor recreation and socialization, especially for young people. Parents of young children and teenagers alike are looking for places to expend energy indoors during Bennington’s winter months that are family-friendly, accessible, and available to the general public. **The Town should support the creation of additional indoor recreational spaces for all ages.**

Bennington also has the opportunity to facilitate more social connection through its community spaces; in particular, many community members expressed a desire for more intergenerational engagement in Bennington. Another opportunity for

greater community connection is through beautification and placemaking efforts. Community members shared an interest in working to make Bennington look and feel as special to others as it is to them, through mural painting, gardening, clean-ups, and more.

Arts and cultural opportunities are another way to foster social connection. Bennington is fortunate to have many cultural assets including a first-rate art and history museum, a local performing arts theatre downtown, and a rich ecosystem of artists and makers. There are a variety of cultural activities in Bennington for all ages to enjoy, including free public concerts, art exhibitions, lectures, festivals, classes and workshops.



*Volunteers restore headstones at the Bennington Village Cemetery to keep a cherished community asset in good condition.*



*The Bennington Recreation Center includes a pool, fitness room, locker rooms, outdoor sport courts, and playground.*

*“We need more indoor recreation facilities, like sport courts, ice skating and roller skating rinks, bowling alleys, etc.”*





The Bennington Battle Day Parade is one of many moments for the broader community to come together and celebrate.

For more information about arts and culture in Bennington, see **Chapter 2: Economic Development**.

Other privately-operated community amenities, like the Bennington Free Library and Meals on Wheels, offer great value to Bennington but may be underutilized. Strengthened marketing and strategic partnerships with other public facilities could spread the word about the resources available to the public throughout Bennington.

### Civic Participation

A vibrant future in Bennington will be actively shaped by its community members. Attracting and supporting a diverse group of residents to participate in town governance, as members on town governance bodies, regular attendees at meetings and forums, and in other capacities, is an important step to widening the base of engaged community members who will help to create the Bennington they wish to see. **The Town should actively recruit citizens, including those relatively new to the area, to serve on the Town’s appointed boards and commissions.**

*“We could strengthen our community ties through more volunteering and civic participation.”*



Student artwork frequently adorns the street lights in downtown, thanks to a program in collaboration with the BBC.

In this work to expand the variety of participants, the Town should look to existing organizations and institutions as partners in recruiting new board and committee members and seek to understand what has limited many people from participating up to now. Issues like inaccessibility, lack of child-care, and language barriers, among other things, may be keeping interested community members from feeling fully able to participate in civic life. **The Town should work to eliminate barriers and ensure accommodations for all members of the community when structuring meeting schedules and formats to ensure a truly representative town**





*Public meetings, like this presentation about Y Woods, are often held at the Firehouse on River Street.*

**governance.** Offering multiple ways for community members to share their ideas and feedback on town initiatives can also create opportunities for broader participation.

Continued connections with students will also be an important element of a more engaged citizenry in Bennington's future. Students' participation in the public engagement phase of this town plan, through the Postcards from the Future activity, demonstrated the value of involving students in public outreach processes. Creating collaborations between local schools and town initiatives opens the opportunity for new ideas to shape the town, while also inspiring future generations of leaders. **The Town should collaborate with the SVSU to connect students with Bennington's Town Government.** Such

initiatives could include a classroom visit from town staff, students attending town meetings as part of a class assignment, allowing students of voting age to leave school to vote, and mock Select Board meetings.

### The Villages of North Bennington and Old Bennington

Bennington has a particularly close historical, geographic, and economic relationship to the villages of Old Bennington and North Bennington. The residents of the villages are also served by many of Bennington's municipal services. Both villages contain important historical districts that contribute to the overall character of the community, and efforts to preserve and promote those resources are common to all three municipalities. North Bennington is a significant village center in its own right, and the Town should work with both villages to improve transportation connections, by road, trail, and shared use paths, between the town and village centers.

### Regional Connections

Facilitating strong connections throughout the region—across municipal, county, and state borders—relates to all elements of this plan, be it transportation, housing, economic development, natural resources, emergency management, or land use. **Bennington should take a leading role on matters requiring regional coordination and/or of regional significance where smaller towns do not have the administrative capacity to lead.** Specific policies on these topic areas and their relationships to the broader Bennington region can be found in their respective sections of this plan.

More broadly, Bennington has been a member of the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) since its creation in 1967 and has developed





A scenic view of Mount Anthony.

a working relationship with the BCRC that has assured that local and regional planning efforts are compatible. The *Bennington Regional Plan* recognizes Bennington as a regional center for commerce, industry, institutional uses, and public services. The regional Future Land Use Map (Figure 1.1) includes a combination of growth-oriented and rural land use classifications that are consistent in geographical extent and purpose with Bennington's land use map. The regional plan encourages public and private investment to support growth and economic development activity in the town's center, while emphasizing the need to protect natural, scenic, and historic resources in very much the same way as the town plan. Infrastructure improvements that are advanced in the town plan are supported by the regional plan as well. Economic development planning efforts at the regional level have involved community development officials in Bennington and focus specifically on the types of business development and workforce issues that the town has identified as critical to success.

Other nearby towns in the region include Pownal, Stamford, Woodford, Glastenbury, and Shaftsbury, as well as White Creek and Hoosick in New York State, and Williamstown and greater Berkshire County in Massachusetts. The Bennington County towns have developed land use and development plans that are structured around the general guidelines of the regional plan and consequently are also consistent with the Bennington Town Plan. These towns are much more rural than Bennington, and most lack the infrastructure needed for more intensive growth. Although some growth will, and should, occur in those communities, it is recognized that Bennington will remain the regional service center for the southern part of the county. Adjacent land use districts in those towns provide principally for low-density and natural resource-based land uses that are compatible with the rural land use districts in Bennington.

The area of New York State immediately to the west of Bennington is rural and agricultural in character

and is likely to remain that way. Residents of the area rely on Bennington as an employment and service center. As of 2022, approximately 200 people who lived in Bennington were working in the greater Albany region, while around 1000 people working in Bennington were commuting from the Albany region (U.S. Census Bureau). Additionally, Hoosick's technical education students attend Southwest Tech rather than technical schools in New York. Bennington supports the Town of Hoosick's efforts to curtail the proliferation of billboards and commercial sprawl along NY Route 7, an important approach to Vermont and a critical arterial highway connection to the Albany area and the interstate highway system. **The Town should continue to coordinate with regional partners to establish connections with targeted areas, including New York's Capital District, to sustain in-migration to meet workforce demands.**





***Bennington will be proactive, forward-thinking, and inclusive in addressing the hazards of a changing climate.***

- Up-to-date emergency management policies and procedures that address the needs of all community members, especially vulnerable residents
- Infrastructure, buildings, and critical assets that are resilient to extreme weather events, especially flooding
- Healthy rivers, streams, wetlands, and upland forests that mitigate flooding
- Climate-resilient neighborhoods
- Informed residents who are prepared for emergency situations
- Energy-efficient residential, municipal, commercial, and industrial buildings
- Reduced energy consumption in municipal operations
- An energy-efficient transportation system with a diversity of options
- Local, renewable sources of energy that strengthen the local economy and are accessible to all residents
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions that align with Vermont's Global Warming Solutions Act





In 2011, Bennington experienced major flooding during Hurricane Irene.

## Chapter 6: Climate Hazards

Posing a significant threat to human health, life, property, and infrastructure, extreme weather events and hazards exacerbated by climate change are expected to continue for the foreseeable future. In a public survey conducted in 2024 as part of Bennington’s Local Hazard Mitigation Plan update, the following hazards were identified as top concerns by residents:

- high wind events
- flooding and fluvial erosion
- public water supply contamination
- winter storms

The impacts of these events will not be felt equally among Bennington residents, nor are these the only types of events that will impact Bennington. To help assess Bennington’s physical and social climate vulnerabilities and help the town prioritize mitigation and resilience actions, tools like the Municipal Climate Change Vulnerability Indicator (MVI),

developed by the Vermont Climate Action Office, can be used.

Once hazards have been identified and prioritized, **the Town will engage in the following preventative planning processes:**

- **Maintain a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan**
- **Maintain a Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) and update it on an annual basis; create annexes to the LEMP to address specific hazard responses; submit a copy of each to the Vermont Department of Emergency Management.**
- **Actively engage with the Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC) and the regional coordinator at Vermont Emergency Management (VEM).**

In local hazard mitigation plans, the Town can identify local hazards while prioritizing the steps needed to mitigate risk and provide access to a funding source through the Federal Emergency

### Annexes

In the context of a hazard mitigation plan, an annex typically provides detailed information or procedures related to a specific hazard and expands upon the main plan’s core elements. Annexes often address unique needs or procedures related to a specific hazard or support area, like hazardous materials response or evacuation procedures.

Inundation flooding on South Street in July 2022.

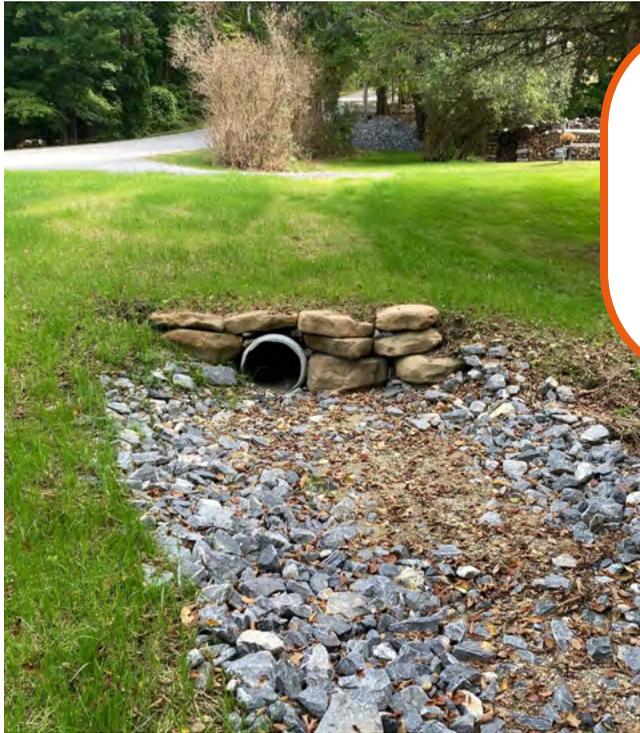


Management Agency’s (FEMA) Flood Mitigation Assistance Program, for example.

This section on climate hazards will focus primarily on risks around flooding and how the town can prepare for and mitigate damages to property and people. It will also include mention of extreme heat—an issue of elevated concern in Bennington’s urban area—and social vulnerabilities.

For a discussion of storm drains and public water supply safety, see **Chapter 5. Community, Utilities, Facilities, and Services.**





A culvert in a residential part of town helps divert water from the roadway.

*“We should do more to engage with, and build awareness of the environment—especially across generations.”*

**Hazard Mitigation**

The town plan is required by the state to include a flood resiliency section. Other types of hazards are addressed in the Town of Bennington Hazard Mitigation Plan.

**Flooding**

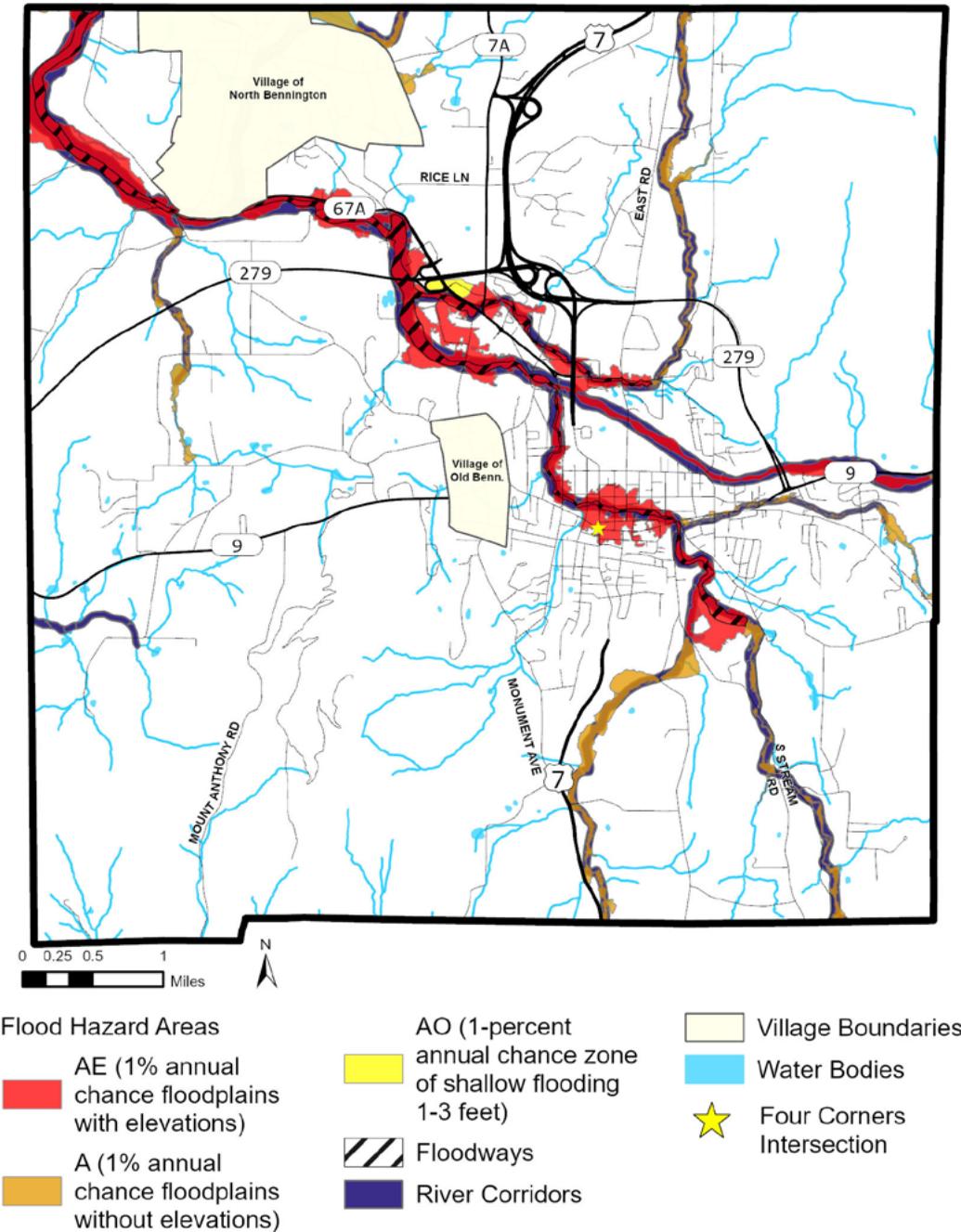
The State of Vermont maintains a [Flood Ready Website](#) that provides comprehensive information for municipalities. Effective flood resilience requires several steps, including: assessing hazards, avoiding and reducing risks, preparing for an emergency, and insuring residual risk.

Once damage from a flood has occurred, it is important that communities have the capacity to rebuild and recover effectively. Following through on risk reduction strategies is critical, as is the ability to access support (financial and otherwise) from government agencies.

A floodway is defined as the channel of a river or

other watercourse and the land immediately adjacent to it. Surrounding the floodway are the defined areas that are at risk from high water events. Flood hazard areas (often described as the “100-year flood zone”) include areas that have been determined to have a one percent or greater chance of inundation from flooding in any given year. These are the areas referenced in FEMA’s flood insurance program and shown on FEMA’s flood insurance rate maps. As a participating municipality in the FEMA flood insurance program, Bennington maintains land use regulations that control the type of development that occurs in these flood-prone areas. However, a large number of existing structures are already located in these areas, due to historical settlement patterns and because the town is located on a level

Figure 6.1. Flood Hazard Areas and River Corridors



**Table 6.1. Structures by Type in River Corridors and Special Flood Hazard Areas.**  
 Source: Vermont Open Geodata Portal (2024)

	Number in Special Flood Hazard Area	Number in River Corridor
<b>Residential</b>	267	295
<b>Commercial</b>	203	73
<b>Industrial</b>	2	2
<b>Seasonal Home</b>	0	1
<b>Mobile Home</b>	7	14
<b>Farm</b>	0	0
<b>Utilities</b>	3	5
<b>Woodland</b>	0	23
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	13	1
<b>Total</b>	504	414

*Special flood hazard areas (SFHA) include zones A, AE, and AO as shown in Figure 6.1.*



*The Greenberg Headwaters Park is a 165-acre park that protects important natural habitats including streams, wetlands, and wooded areas, and offers a variety of recreational activities.*

plain where several streams merge from various directions (Table 6.1).

The Town’s flood hazard regulations control development in areas prone to flood inundation and enable Bennington to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Through that program, property owners have access to flood insurance. The regulations required by NFIP set development standards that minimize adverse impacts on structures that would be caused by high water. **Bennington should maintain up-to-date regulations to limit and control development in flood and river corridor areas.** Any public infrastructure that must be located in these areas should be carefully planned and constructed to minimize the potential for loss and damage. **The**

**Town should work cooperatively with the BCRC and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources to maintain accurate flood hazard area maps and to identify specific areas of concern that should be targeted for mitigation actions.**

When applicable, **the Town should support efforts to provide education and outreach to property owners within flood zones to encourage flood-proofing or buy-outs of structures subject to repeated flooding that are eligible for funding under the FEMA hazard mitigation grant program. Owners of property in flood hazard zones should be encouraged to secure propane tanks, firewood, boats and other items that could float away in a flood. The Town should also maintain participation in FEMA’s Community Rating**





*The Morgan Street Bridge project increased flood resiliency.*

**System**, which enables homeowners to get a discount on flood insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program.

River corridors also require special attention because of the potential for flood-related damage to buildings and critical infrastructure resulting from the erosive force of floodwaters. River corridors include the areas adjacent to rivers that accommodate changes in course that are needed for a river to maintain dynamic equilibrium over time. The Town has adopted regulations to protect mapped fluvial erosion hazard areas, a precursor to what we now call river corridors. **These regulations should be updated to align with new guidance from the Agency of Natural Resources.** For further explanation of river corridors and other flood terminology, see the Bennington Hazard Mitigation Plan.

For more information about flood hazard and river corridor regulations, see **Chapter 1: Land Use**.

Elements of the natural environment play an important role in minimizing the extent of the risk from flooding. Upland forests help to retain water during storms and minimize the erosive forces that would add sediment and debris to river channels. Wetlands, particularly those in floodplain areas, retain stormwater and protect water quality during and after heavy rains. The town has taken steps to preserve these important areas by supporting public land ownership and restricting permanent development on Mount Anthony and in the Green Mountains and by acting to preserve key wetland complexes such as the Walloomsac Headwaters Park. To continue these efforts, an undisturbed buffer of natural vegetation should be established and maintained between rivers, streams, and other

waterbodies to maintain water quality and to attenuate overland flow. **The Town should continue to work with state and federal agencies, conservation and watershed organizations, and landowners to maintain and enhance the ecological integrity of rivers, streams, wetlands, and upland forests.**

Roads and stream crossing structures (culverts and bridges) are particularly vulnerable to damage from flooding. Many existing culverts are too small to carry flood waters and too narrow to accommodate the stream channel, causing a back-up of sediments and erosion that damage roads and threaten nearby properties. The Town is engaged in an ongoing assessment of the physical conditions of its culverts and bridges and is developing a plan for needed upgrades. To stay ahead of significant damages, **Bennington's roadway design standards should remain consistent with the most current "VTrans Orange Book" standards to size replacement structures correctly. The Town should also work with BCRC and VTrans to repair or replace vulnerable bridges and culverts.**

Once a flood or other emergency situation occurs, it is imperative that municipalities have a consistent and reliable system for coordinating a response. A Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) is an effective way to coordinate a local response and facilitate contact with other towns and agencies. The LEMP provides a list of local names, numbers and assigned roles, resources available in nearby communities and contact information, and provides a framework for coordination with support services available at the state and federal level.

*"We should take action to make the town more climate- and flood-resilient."*





*Kids cool off in the town's splash pad on a hot summer day.*

### Extreme Heat

As climate change intensifies, extreme heat events are projected to increase in Bennington and throughout Vermont. Currently Vermont has an average of seven hot days per year (87°F or hotter), but climate modeling conducted by the University of Vermont projects that Vermont will experience 15–20 hot days per year by mid-century, and 20–34 hot days annually by the end of the century.

Children, seniors, and people with disabilities are especially vulnerable to extreme heat. Outdoor workers, the unhoused, and people without access to air conditioning are also disproportionately impacted by extreme heat events. Extreme heat not only affects public health, but it can also stress critical infrastructure, including the electrical grid. **The Town should coordinate with Green Mountain Power and Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO) to identify vulnerabilities in local transmission and distribution infrastructure and**

**ensure that power outages are addressed swiftly.**

Bennington's percentages of young, elderly, and disabled residents are all above the state of average, and there is a general lack of residential air conditioning in Vermont. For these reasons, Bennington could be especially vulnerable to extreme heat events. Recognizing this vulnerability, the Town of Bennington has developed a heat annex to supplement their Local Emergency Management Plan. The Vermont Department of Health also maintains a [hot weather page](#) on their website with information about heat-related illnesses and how to stay safe in hot weather. **The Town communications coordinator will promote these resources to residents through social media, updates to the Town's Emergency and Disaster Planning webpage, and other methods, such as direct mailings.**

The "urban heat island effect" is a phenomenon of having higher temperatures in more urbanized areas

### Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure encompasses a range of natural and human-made systems that use plants, soil, and other natural elements to provide various benefits. Examples include rain gardens, planter boxes, green roofs, and permeable pavements to improve air quality, treat stormwater, and enhance biodiversity.



*Blooming trees provide shade along Bennington's scenic River Walk.*



*Street trees along Main Street also benefit businesses with outdoor dining options.*

because of a greater concentration of heat-absorbing impervious surfaces (such as sidewalks, roads, parking lots, and buildings), lack of tree coverage, and lack of open water. This phenomenon contributes to the inequitable impacts of climate change, as larger areas of impervious surfaces and greater concentrations of low-income community members tend to coincide. **To reduce the urban heat island effect in Bennington, the town should increase the planting of trees and vegetation throughout more urbanized areas to mitigate the effects of the higher coverage of impervious surfaces. Additionally, the Town should incorporate green infrastructure into regular street upgrades and public space improvement projects.**





*The Bennington Senior Center is an important resource for Bennington's older population, providing community space and senior-focused programming.*

### Social and Community Resilience

Bennington's physical infrastructure must be resilient to climate hazards, but it is equally important to build resilience at the social and community level. A robust network of educational, recreational, and cultural resources, a strong local food system, and a diversified economy all contribute to Bennington's resilience. Strong social connections and civic participation can also contribute to the response and recovery process as demonstrated by several studies. **The Town should work with social service providers, mobile home park owners, and landlords to share information about emergency procedures with their clients and residents.**

For more information about community facilities and social resilience, see **Chapter 5. Community, Utilities, Facilities, and Services.**

In the aftermath of an emergency, recovery should be approached holistically and prioritize equity. Recovery efforts should also acknowledge the immediate and lasting mental health impacts of disasters, and recovery resources should include information about mental health support.

There are four steps in the emergency management cycle: preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.

Preparedness is the planning process that occurs prior to a disaster that includes the local emergency management plan (LEMP) and annexes such as heat, cold weather, and sheltering. Bennington's LEMP is reviewed and updated annually. As part of the LEMP, annexes should also be reviewed and updated annually.

### Municipal Vulnerability Indicator

Climate change and related hazards do not impact everyone equally. Some people are more vulnerable to climate hazards due to factors such as age, disability, and socioeconomic status. The Municipal Vulnerability Indicator (MVI) developed by the Vermont Climate Action Office identifies several demographic factors that may make Bennington more vulnerable to climate change, such as the high percentage of elderly, disabled, and low-income residents.



*The Bennington Recreation Center is an important intergenerational community space that offers fitness classes, childcare, and meeting spaces, and hosts the Bennington Community Garden.*

Response is focused on short-term measures taken in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Life and safety and the prevention of further damage are the focus of most response actions.

The recovery step is long-term and occurs as a community works to rebuild after a disaster and seeks to return to normal or find a new normal.

The mitigation step is when a community focuses on building or rebuilding to reduce risk of harm permanently. Mitigation can occur as part of the planning phase or during the recovery phase while a community strives to build back stronger and decrease the amount of future harm.



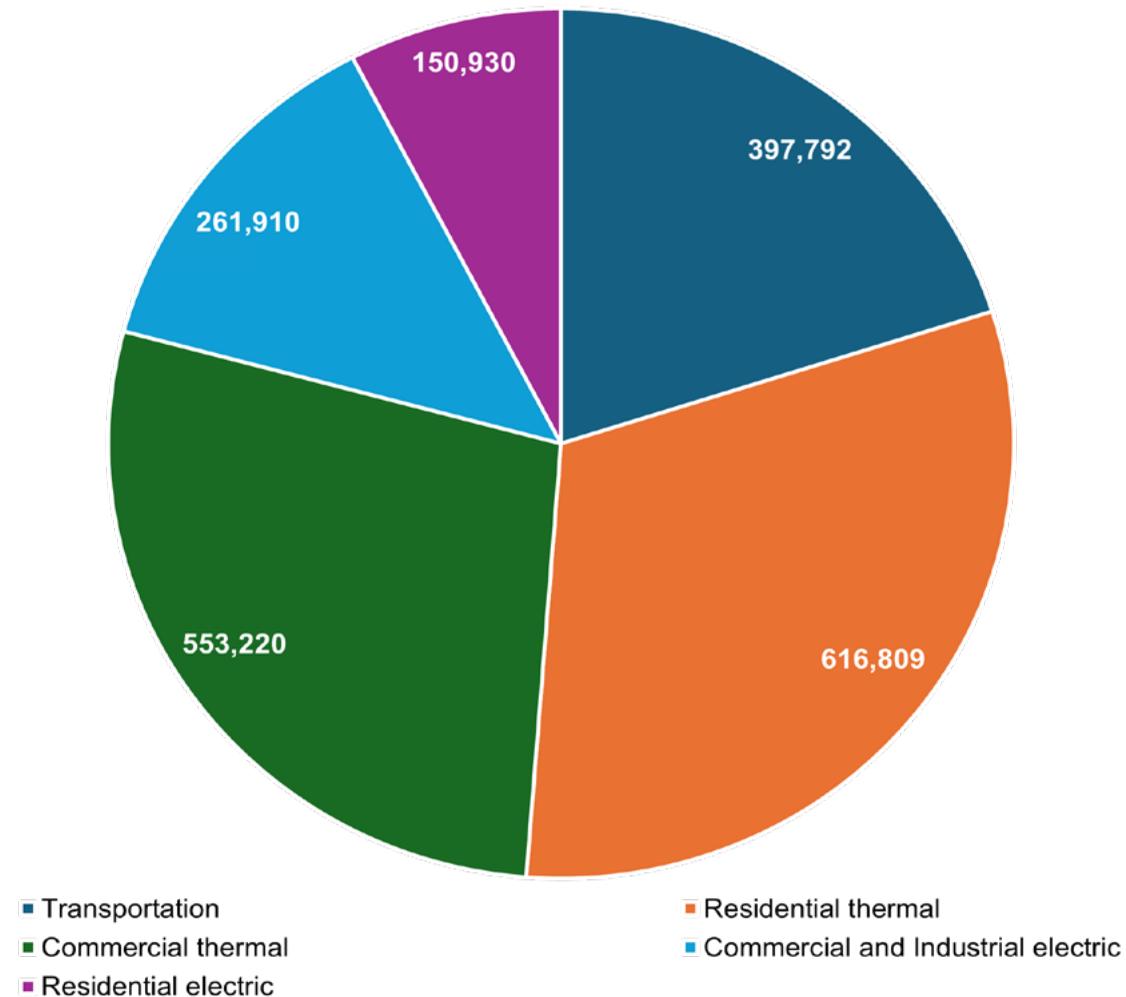
## Chapter 7: Energy

The Town of Bennington recognizes that it is necessary to work toward a sustainable energy future in a manner that minimizes environmental impacts and bolsters the local economy. The purpose of this energy section is to further those goals and recommended actions by increasing public awareness of energy issues, assessing local energy use and conservation opportunities, reducing the number of energy-related dollars exported from the town, and evaluating the potential for utilization of various renewable energy resources.

To maintain a high quality of life and a strong economy, and to protect important natural resources, the town must develop conservation strategies, improve energy efficiency, and transition to the widespread use of renewable energy. The following sections will provide estimates of current energy use by sector as well as projections illustrating the magnitude of conservation, efficiency, and transition to alternative fuels needed to meet state and local energy goals.

**The Bennington Energy Committee shall pursue implementation of this plan with the support of other Town boards and staff, advocate for energy conservation and renewable energy projects, and report on a regular basis to the Select Board.**

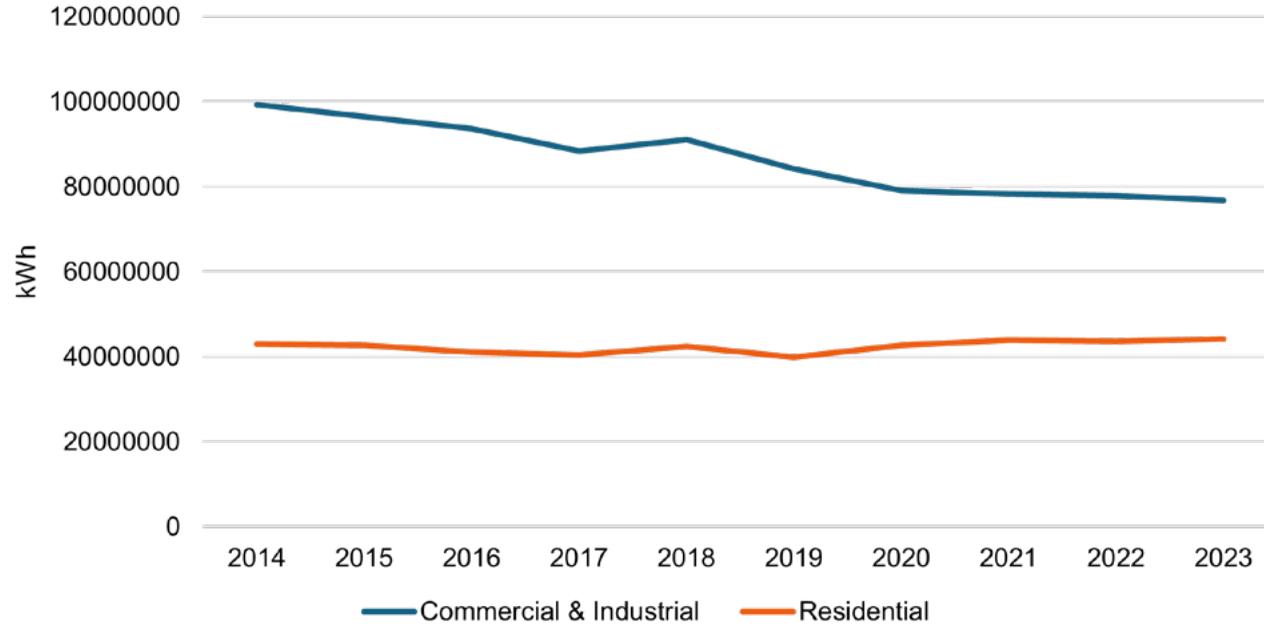
Figure 7.1. Town Energy Use by Sector (in mmBTUs)



*According to Energy Action Network's 2024 Annual Progress Report, total energy consumption in Vermont topped 119 trillion BTUs in 2022, with the largest share being used for heating and cooling (52.1 trillion BTUs). Additionally, fossil fuels make up the largest share of Vermont's energy expenditures, and most of that money leaves the area to pay for imported fuels. Thermal energy makes up the largest share of energy usage at the regional and local level. Sources: Vermont Public Service Department, Municipal Consumption Tool (2021–2022 ACS 5-year estimates) and Efficiency Vermont (2023 data). Electricity used for heating, cooling, and transportation is included in the residential electric sector.*



**Figure 7.2. Electricity Usage in Bennington. Annual electricity usage in Bennington 2014–2023**



Source: Efficiency Vermont

**Methodology**

Much of the data presented in this energy section comes from Low Emissions Analysis Platform (LEAP) model. The LEAP model is a tool used by the State of Vermont to analyze energy consumption and develop energy demand targets for the years 2015–2050. The targets are designed to meet the greenhouse gas reduction requirements set forth in the 2020 Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA). The LEAP targets for each sector include two scenarios: baseline energy demand and a “Climate Action Plan (CAP) Mitigation” energy demand. The baseline scenario, or business-as-usual scenario, was developed to estimate regional energy demand under current conditions. The CAP Mitigation scenario was developed to estimate energy demand

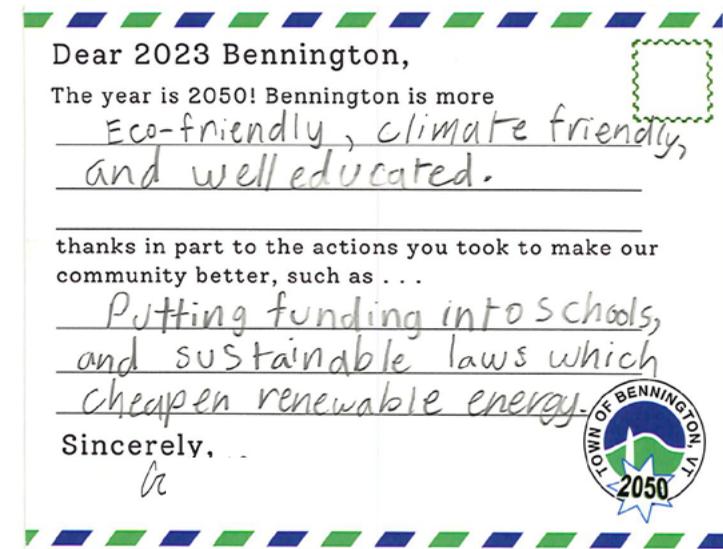
needed to meet the state’s greenhouse gas reduction requirements. The CAP Mitigation scenario is consistently used throughout this plan.

The regional LEAP targets were broken out into municipal targets by the BCRC using each municipality’s share of regional energy use. The overall trend presented in these targets is that Bennington must decrease its overall energy use through a combination of conservation and efficiency methods, which will involve increasing electrification of the thermal and transportation sectors and decreasing the use of fossil fuels. More information on the LEAP targets can be found in the appendix of the *Bennington Regional Plan*.

**Equity and Energy Planning**

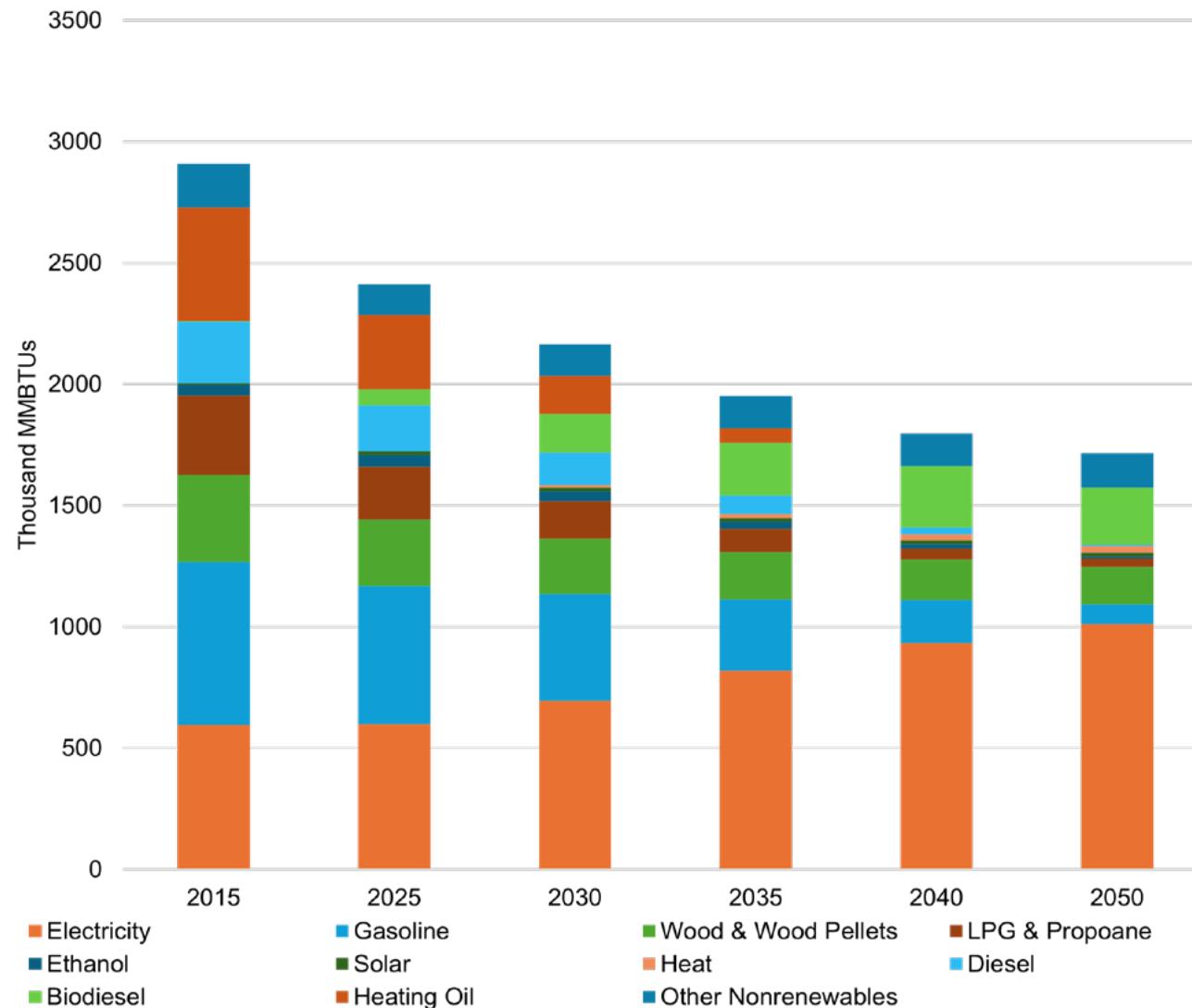
Equity and justice must be integrated into all aspects of the energy planning and policy process; and as goals, objectives, and actions are considered and implemented, the decision-making process will be guided in part by the following questions:

- Who is helped by the policy or objective?
- Who is harmed by the policy or objective?
- Who is missing from the conversation on the policy or objective, and how can we make sure they are included in the process?



Although technically a conductor of energy and not a source, electricity is referenced here as an energy source since widespread adoption of appliances, vehicles, and thermal technologies powered by electricity are critical to achieving Vermont’s energy goals. An increased reliance on electricity will be necessary to transition away from fossil fuels. Although electricity use will initially increase (and has already begun to increase) with the electrification of the heating and transportation sectors, electricity is expected to become more efficient as electric technologies continue to improve. Because electrification trends are expected to outpace demand-side management efforts (i.e. efficiency and conservation programs), electricity demand is expected to increase. However, efforts to reduce and manage electricity demand will be important to mitigate the impact increased electrification. Current trends suggest that total electric use is gradually decreasing in Bennington’s commercial sector and gradually increasing in the residential sector (Figure 7.2). The trend for the residential sector shows a gradual decrease in electricity usage until 2020, when electricity usage began to gradually increase. This uptick in electricity usage is expected as the electrification of heating and transportation accelerates. The uptick in residential electricity usage is also due in part to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic which has made hybrid and remote work more common.

Figure 7.3. Energy Demand Targets by Fuel Type



According to the LEAP model, in 2015 Bennington used nearly 3,000 thousand million British Thermal Units (MMBTU) of energy, with a significant portion derived from fossil fuels. This figure also projects incremental targets to guide the town in decreasing overall energy use and increasing electrification. Heat refers to waste heat recovery and solar refers to solar hot water heating in the commercial sector. Source: CAP Mitigation LEAP projections

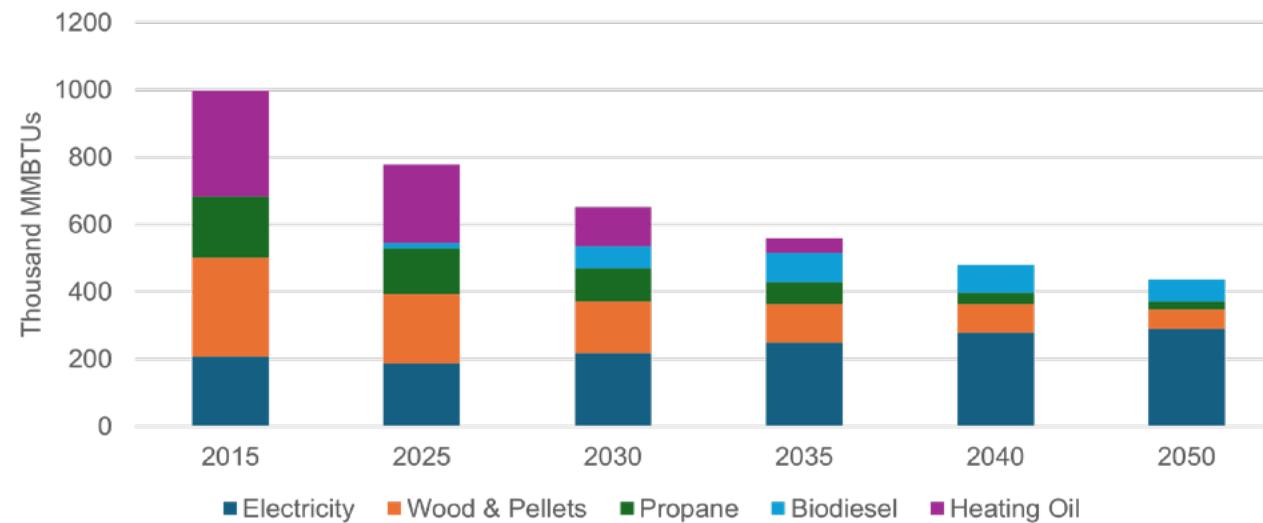


### Residential Energy Demand

Bennington has more than 15,000 residents and over 6,000 housing units, all of which consume energy for transportation, space and water heating, and powering lights and appliances. By identifying technologies and practices capable of catalyzing the transformation of each energy sector, this energy section provides the town with the tools necessary to realize the state’s energy goals. **For example, the Energy Committee shall promote energy education programs sponsored by Efficiency Vermont, the Bennington County Regional Commission, and other organizations—particularly those that focus on weatherization improvements and energy savings.**

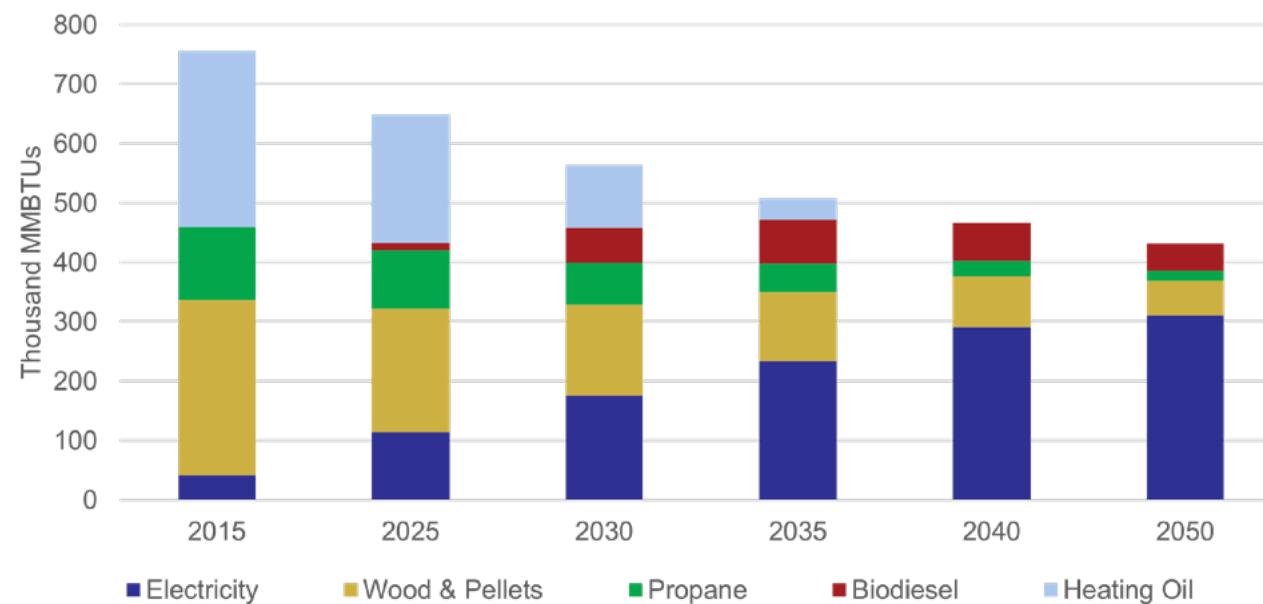
The transition to electrification may result in significant cost savings for Bennington residents. Energy Action Network (EAN) estimates that a typical single-family household in Vermont could expect to save approximately \$2,000 a year by electrifying their home and switching from a gasoline-powered vehicle to an electric vehicle (EV). However, the upfront cost of electrification is still out of reach for some Bennington residents, and most renters have a limited ability to make efficiency improvements to their homes. **In accordance with state law the Town shall continue to provide information on the Residential Building Energy Standards to building permit applicants and take steps to verify that all new residential buildings meet those standards.**

Figure 7.4. Residential Energy Demand Targets.



*Overall residential energy use (including thermal use) is projected to change over the next several decades to meet state energy and emissions goals. Under this scenario, residential energy use would decrease by more than 50% with increased efficiency, growing electricity and biodiesel use, and a phasing out of fossil fuels. Source: CAP Mitigation LEAP projections*

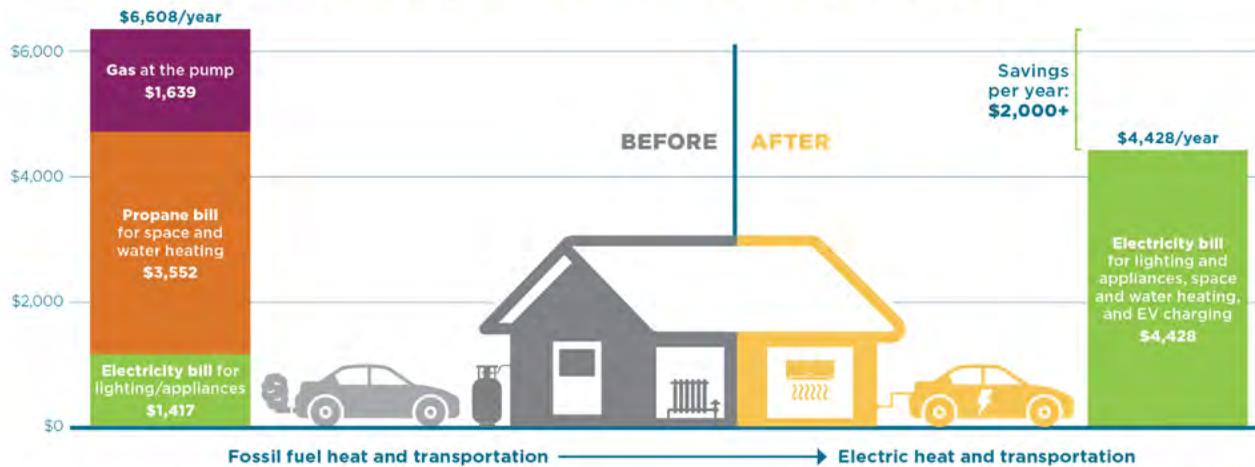
Figure 7.5. Residential Thermal Energy Demand Targets.



*Residential thermal energy use comprises a significant portion of Bennington’s total energy use. Therefore, to reduce overall residential energy demand in Bennington, implementing thermal energy conservation and efficiency measures will be especially important. This figure shows recommended targets for Bennington to reduce its residential thermal energy demand, which could be achieved by increasing the electrification of space heating and cooling and reducing the use of fossil fuels. Source: CAP Mitigation LEAP projections*



### Estimated annual energy bill costs for a sample Vermont single-family household, before and after electrification



**Sources:** Energy bill savings calculated based on the average monthly prices for propane, gasoline, and electricity in 2023, from the Vermont Department of Public Service and EIA. Electricity bill costs for lighting and appliances reflect statewide average annual household electricity expenditures (Efficiency Vermont, "Vermont Energy Burden Report," 2023). Annual transportation fuel costs calculated using average fuel efficiency of 23.4 MPG for vehicles registered in VT from the 2021 Vermont Transportation Energy Profile and VT average annual vehicle miles traveled (VMT) of 11,084 miles/year from the Federal Highway Administration. **Note:** Actual energy bill savings will depend on a number of factors, including a household's electricity rate. Several Vermont utilities offer lower electric rates for managed EV charging, providing additional savings to households with access to those rates. Upfront equipment/vehicle costs vary based on model and incentive eligibility; because of this variance, upfront costs are not quantified here. Savings estimates are for a one car household. Savings will be higher for households replacing multiple gas vehicles with electric vehicles.

Source: Energy Action Network

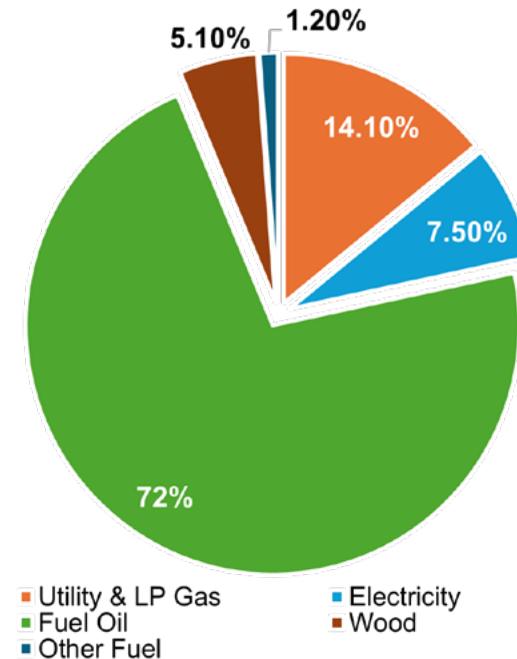
### Energy Burden

Many Bennington residents experience a high energy burden, which is defined as the proportion of household income spent on energy costs (2023 Vermont Energy Burden Report | Efficiency Vermont). Bennington's average energy burden is 10.8%, which is similar to the state average energy burden. Nationally, an energy burden greater than 6% is considered high and is correlated with a poor health and poverty according to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, Efficiency Vermont's calculation of energy burden includes transportation energy cost, which is not included in many national measures of energy burden. When transportation energy costs are excluded from the calculation Bennington's energy burden is still considered high at 7%.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Vermont's average energy costs are higher than the U.S. average, and a significant proportion of Vermont households heat with oil, making them more vulnerable to shortages and price increases. Vermont's rural nature also contributes to higher transportation costs, as people often need to drive longer distances to reach jobs, amenities, and services. All of these factors may contribute to Bennington's energy burden, with low-income residents being the most severely impacted.

According to a University of Vermont study, energy expenses disproportionately hurt Vermonters who are rural, lower-income, non-white, and non-home-owners. It is also important to note how energy spending often competes with other basic needs

Figure 7.6. Household Heating Fuel Sources



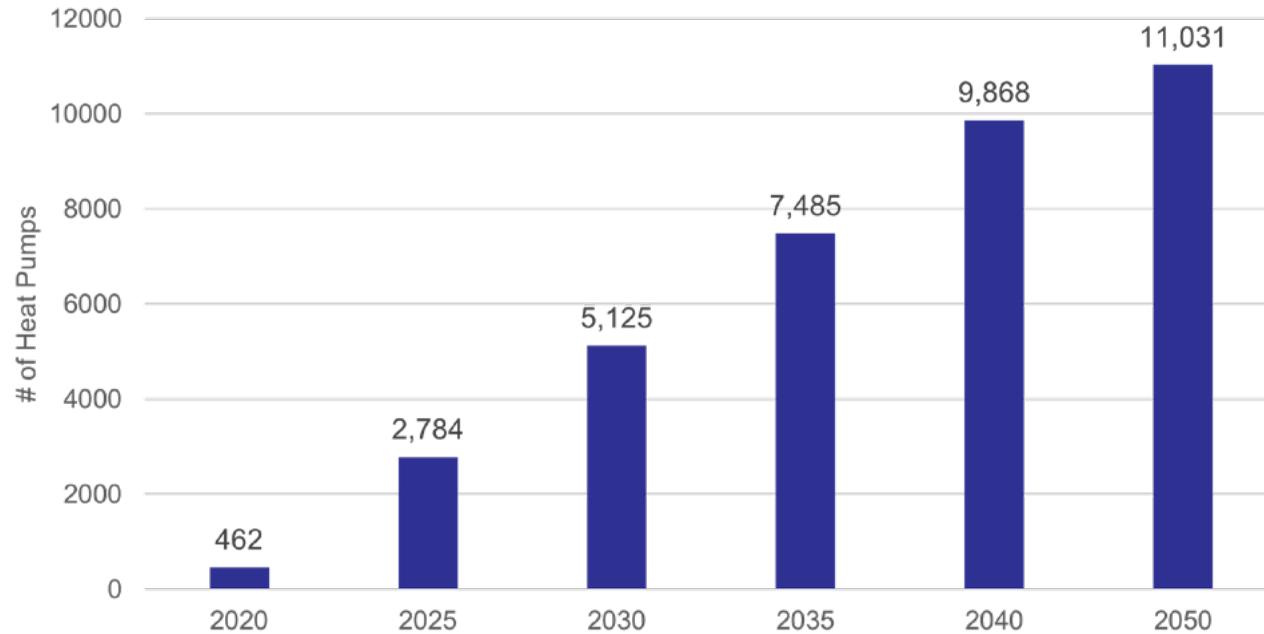
Currently, over 70% of Bennington's homes are heated with oil. Although this fuel source has been inexpensive and widely accessible in the past, recent projected shortages and price volatility of fossil fuels suggest that residents should mitigate reliance on fossil fuel sources by switching to more efficient systems that can be powered by local resources. Switching away from fossil fuels will also be important for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating the effects of climate change. Source: 2022 ACS 5-year estimates

such as housing, healthcare, and food. According to EAN's 2024 Progress Report, "Vermont households with the lowest incomes—those earning less than 60% of area median income (AMI)—spend an average of 19% of their income on heating fuel and electricity. Households at or above 100% AMI—typically spend 4% or less of their income on heating fuel and electricity costs."

**The Energy Committee shall support programs that provide funding for weatherization of the homes of lower-income residents, including the Weatherization Assistance Program offered through the Bennington Rutland Opportunity Council (BROC).**

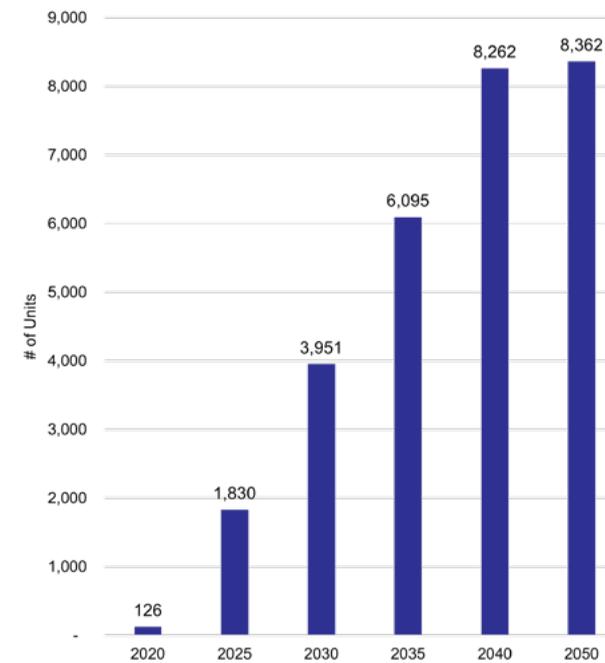


**Figure 7.7. Residential Cold Climate Heat Pump Targets**



Source: CAP Mitigation LEAP projections

**Figure 7.8. Residential Heat Pump Water Heater Targets**



Source: CAP Mitigation LEAP projections

In Bennington, over 40% of households rent their homes (2022 ACS 5-year estimate). Renters are often subject to what is known as the “split incentive,” where landlords are responsible for the heating system and weatherization of the building, but the tenant is responsible for the utility bill. This may disincentivize the landlord to make efficiency improvements to the building that would lead to greater comfort and reduced heating costs for the tenant. As Vermont continues the energy transition to meet its renewable energy goals and the requirements of the Global Warming Solutions Act, it is important to remember that the transition will not

affect all Vermonters equally. Despite various state incentives, many clean energy technologies are out of reach for Vermonters with low incomes or who rent their homes.

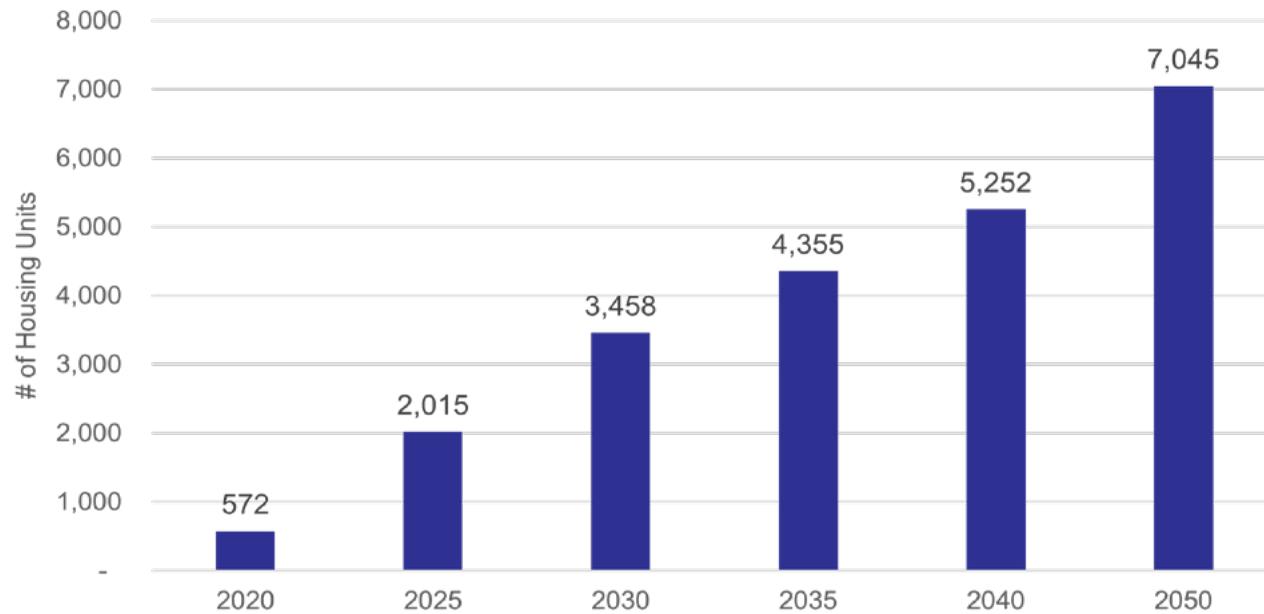
**Additionally, the Energy Committee will work with NeighborWorks of Western Vermont (now part of Cornerstone Housing Partners) to widely publicize their “Heat Squad” home energy improvement programs, including low-cost audits and assistance with construction and financing. The Energy Committee will promote efforts to assist homeowners and businesses with**

**switching to alternative space heating systems, including stoves and systems that burn wood and wood pellets, as well as air source and ground source heat pumps and innovative thermal heating options such as district heating and co-generation. The Energy Committee shall promote use of the “Energy Star” building performance rating system and related building practices that limit energy consumption in new and remodeled homes, businesses, and industrial facilities.**

As of 2023, 716 heat pumps and 540 heat pump water heaters have been installed in Bennington

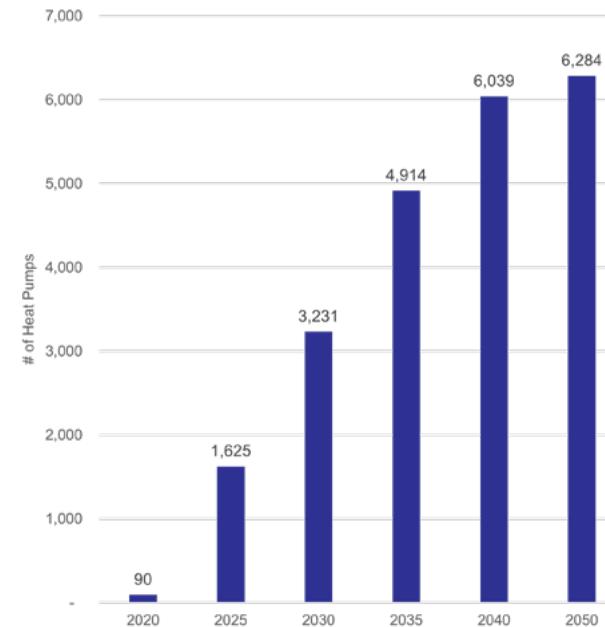


**Figure 7.9. Residential Weatherization Targets**



Source: CAP Mitigation LEAP projections

**Figure 7.10. Commercial Heat Pump Targets**



Source: CAP Mitigation LEAP projections

(Vermont Energy Dashboard, EAN and Efficiency VT data), which indicates that a significant increase in adoption is needed to meet the first incremental targets in 2025 (Figures 7.7 and 7.8).

Cold-climate electric heat pumps and heat pump water heaters are highly efficient technologies that will play a major role in lowering overall energy consumption. In addition to being more energy efficient than other heating technologies, heat pumps can also cool homes during the warmer months. Heat pump water heaters are an efficient way to heat water, typically one of the highest home energy

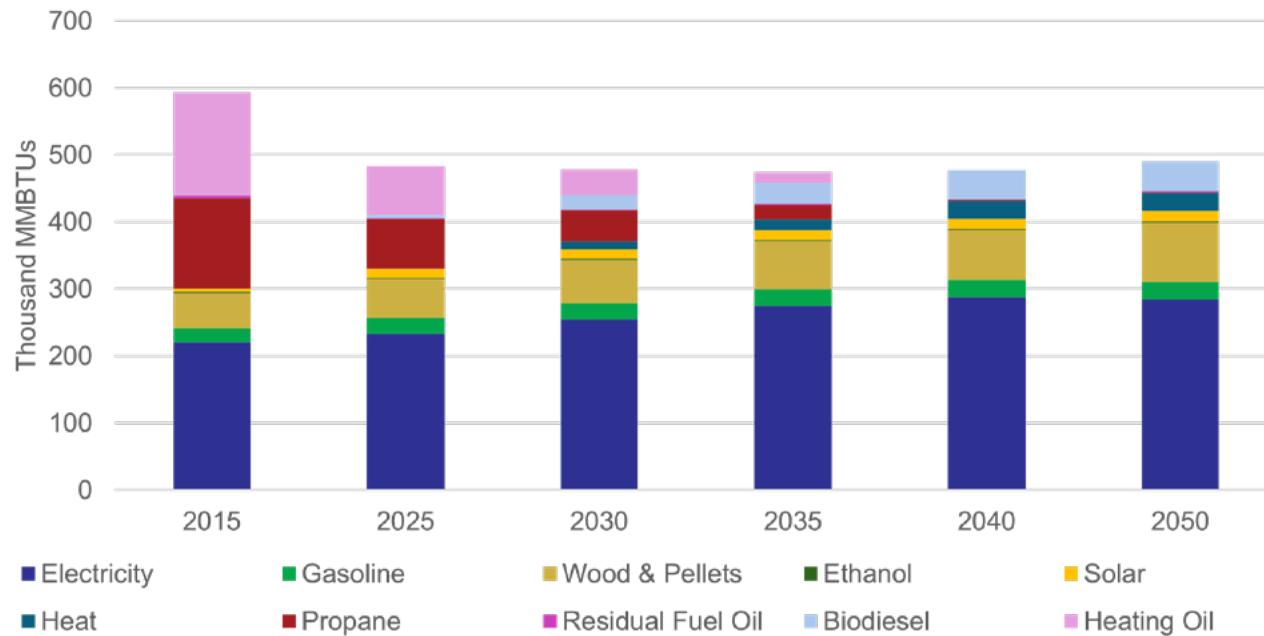
costs, by using electricity to pull heat from the air. They offer a cleaner alternative to fossil fuel-based water heaters. Efficiency VT has a [guide to heating and cooling with heat pumps](#), as well as [more information on heat pump water heaters and rebates available on their website](#).

Gradually switching thermal systems to more efficient electric options will improve energy efficiency, but the conservation of thermal energy will also rely on extensive weatherization of existing homes and adherence to building energy codes for new construction. The following household weatherization

targets should guide efforts in Bennington: 2,015 households weatherized by 2025; 3,458 by 2030; 4,355 households by 2035; 5,252 households by 2040; and 7,045 households by 2050 (Figure 7.9). As of 2023, there have been 1,055 weatherization projects in Bennington (Vermont Energy Dashboard and Efficiency VT), which means that, as with the adoption of heat pump technologies, a significant ramp up of these projects will be needed to meet the first 2025 benchmark goal.



**Figure 7.11. Commercial Energy Demand Targets**



*There are approximately 600 commercial buildings in Bennington. The CAP Mitigation LEAP scenario projects that through conservation and adoption of more efficient technologies, commercial energy use will slightly decrease and remain below 2015 levels. However, the decrease will not be as substantial as in the residential sector (see Figure 7.4). Source: CAP Mitigation LEAP projections*

**Commercial Energy Demand**

In both the residential and commercial sectors, cold-climate electric heat pumps will play a major role in lowering overall energy consumption as well as weatherization. Energy conservation goals will also be realized by extensive weatherization of commercial buildings. The following commercial building weatherization targets should guide efforts in Bennington (derived from the regional LEAP targets): 115 buildings by 2025; 261 buildings by 2035; 590 buildings by 2050.

**All new commercial and industrial buildings must also meet the state-mandated Commercial Building Energy Standards. The Town should**

**encourage commercial property owners to adopt “Stretch Codes.” Business owners should be encouraged to have energy audits to assist in identifying measures to adjust operations to minimize energy use.**



*Heat pumps at the Historic Blacksmith Building.*

**Stretch Codes**

A “stretch code” refers to a set of standards that are more stringent than the base energy code, aiming for higher energy efficiency and potentially other sustainability goals.



**Table 7.1. Municipal Building Energy Use (July 2022–June 2023)**

Building	Fuel Oil		Electric	
	Cost	Quantity (gallons)	Cost	KWH
Town Office	\$7,243	1,965	\$11,527	77,176
Police Station	\$7,727	4,842	\$19,937	179,658
Fire Station	\$19,967	5,621	\$12,652	97,124
Recreation Center	\$36,725	22,315	\$44,427	380,310
Blacksmith Shop	\$24,833	1,109	\$1,183	4,686
Bowen Road DPW	\$24,833	15,081	\$28,871	153,716

Source: Town of Bennington Facilities staff

**Municipal Energy Use**

As the largest municipality in the region, with several municipal buildings, Bennington’s municipal energy use and associated costs are high. The Town, however, has made significant strides towards improving its energy efficiency and conservation. It has installed heat pumps and EV charging stations at several of its buildings, and in 2024, Bennington received a \$75,000 Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) to complete heat pump installations at the town office and blacksmith shop, which serves as the downtown visitor center and office of the Better Bennington Corporation.

In 2023, Bennington received energy audits on six municipal buildings as part of the Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP), including the town office, police station, fire station, recreation center,

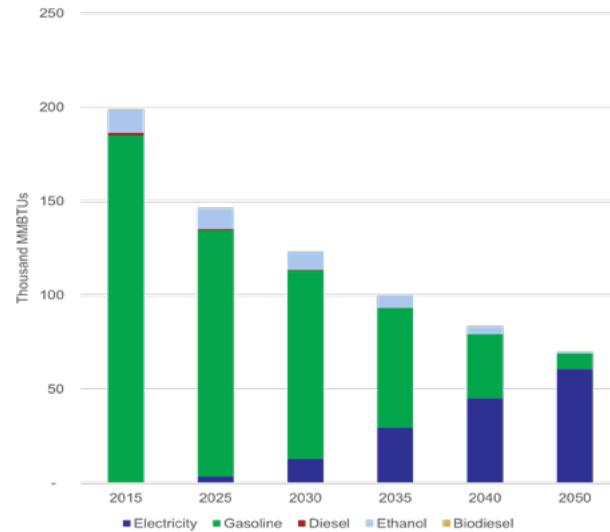
the blacksmith shop, and the public works facility on Bowen Road. The reports identified energy and cost saving opportunities and assessed the feasibility of installing solar, battery storage, and EV charging at each of the sites. **Town facilities staff will complete the planned heat pump installations in municipal buildings and identify additional energy conservation strategies for large facilities including the Department of Public Works facility and the recreation center.**



Energy audits of the fire house and police station in 2023.



**Figure 7.12. Passenger Car Energy Demand Targets**



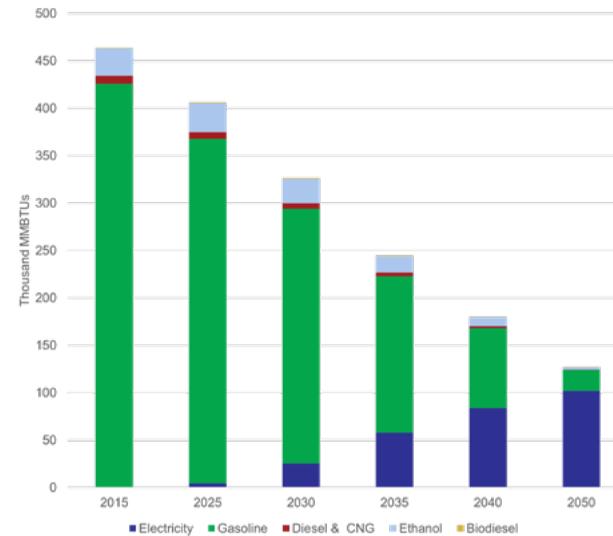
Over the next three decades, total energy demand for transportation would fall gradually to just over one third of 2015 levels, and gasoline use would decrease dramatically. The widespread adoption of electric vehicles would account for much of this reduction in energy use. Source: CAP Mitigation LEAP projections

### Transportation

Due to Vermont’s rural nature, people and goods constantly travel long distances between communities. The light duty vehicle has made this independent mobility and the freedom and access that come with it possible, yet most vehicles rely on fossil fuels to function. Given the dependence most households have on vehicles, transportation represents one of the greatest opportunities to reduce overall energy use.

Electric vehicle (EV) and plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) technologies have advanced significantly in recent years, and these systems are projected to dominate the car industry in coming decades. By electrifying the light duty vehicle fleet,

**Figure 7.13. Light Truck Energy Demand Targets**



Source: CAP Mitigation LEAP projections

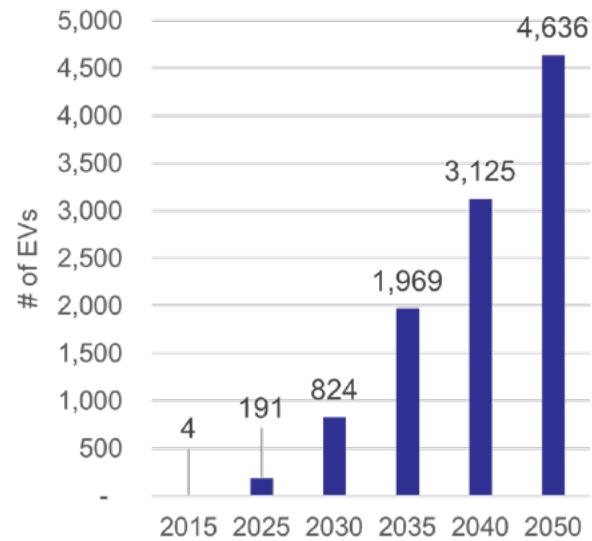
which includes passenger cars and light trucks, Bennington residents can improve transportation efficiency and divert money currently spent on fossil fuels. **The Town will promote electric vehicle use through cooperation with Drive Electric Vermont and other organizations.** The Town could also encourage local auto dealers to participate in the EV dealer program offered by Efficiency VT. **The Energy Committee will provide information to businesses about electric vehicle charging stations and encourage businesses to install such facilities to support employees who would like to use electric vehicles for commuting. For its own fleet, the Town will pursue the purchase of more fuel-efficient vehicles, including electric vehicles where practical, and vehicles with anti-idling technologies.**

Bennington has a robust EV charging network, with three EV charging stations by the town office (including a fast charger) and two charging stations by the Green Mountain Express station on Pleasant Street—all of which see frequent use. Additional charging is available at several other locations throughout town, and Bennington is actively seeking to expand its EV charging infrastructure. **The Town will pursue further installation of EV charging stations in public parking lots and encourage businesses to install charging stations for their employees and customers. The Energy Committee will work with the Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce and other organizations to highlight the availability and location of EV infrastructure in the community. The Town will pursue amending the land use regulations to incorporate additional electric vehicle supply equipment development provisions.**

Access to reliable and affordable transportation is important for people’s ability to access jobs, services, and be part of their communities. The transition to more efficient forms of transportation will not only involve widespread EV adoption, but also improvements to other methods of transportation. Improving transportation alternatives to single-passenger vehicles, such as public transit and shared-use paths, helps to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions and improves equity for those who do not have access to a vehicle (as well as those who cannot or would prefer not to drive). **The Town should work with local business groups to promote Go!Vermont commuting resources, encourage employers to provide facilities to encourage bicycling, walking, and carpooling, and motivate employees to consider alternative ways of commuting to work.**

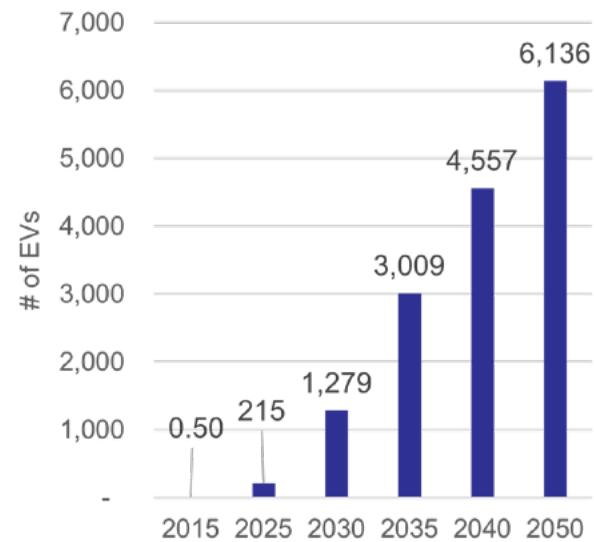


**Figure 7.14. Bennington EV Adoption Targets**



*The widespread adoption of electric vehicles will help reduce energy demand and fossil fuel use in the transportation sector. Source: Efficiency VT*

**Figure 7.15. Bennington Light Truck EV Adoption Targets**



*Rapid electrification of the light duty truck fleet will also need to occur to reduce transportation energy use. State programs and incentives can help reduce the cost of an EV, but the high upfront cost and an inadequate EV charging infrastructure are still barriers to widespread adoption, especially for low-income people and renters. Source: CAP Mitigation LEAP projections*



*An electric vehicle charges at one of the stations behind the town office.*

Improving public transit and walking, biking, and rolling infrastructure is especially important, because not everyone can afford to take part in the transition to EVs due to the upfront cost and lack of sufficient charging infrastructure. **The Energy Committee will work with the Green Mountain Community Network (GMCN) to support wider utilization of the local public transportation system.** Employers, shopping centers, and service centers should be contacted and asked to provide information about GMCN routes and services to employees, customers, and clients. **The Town will actively support the expansion of intercity bus travel. The Energy Committee will work with the Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to ensure that the services**

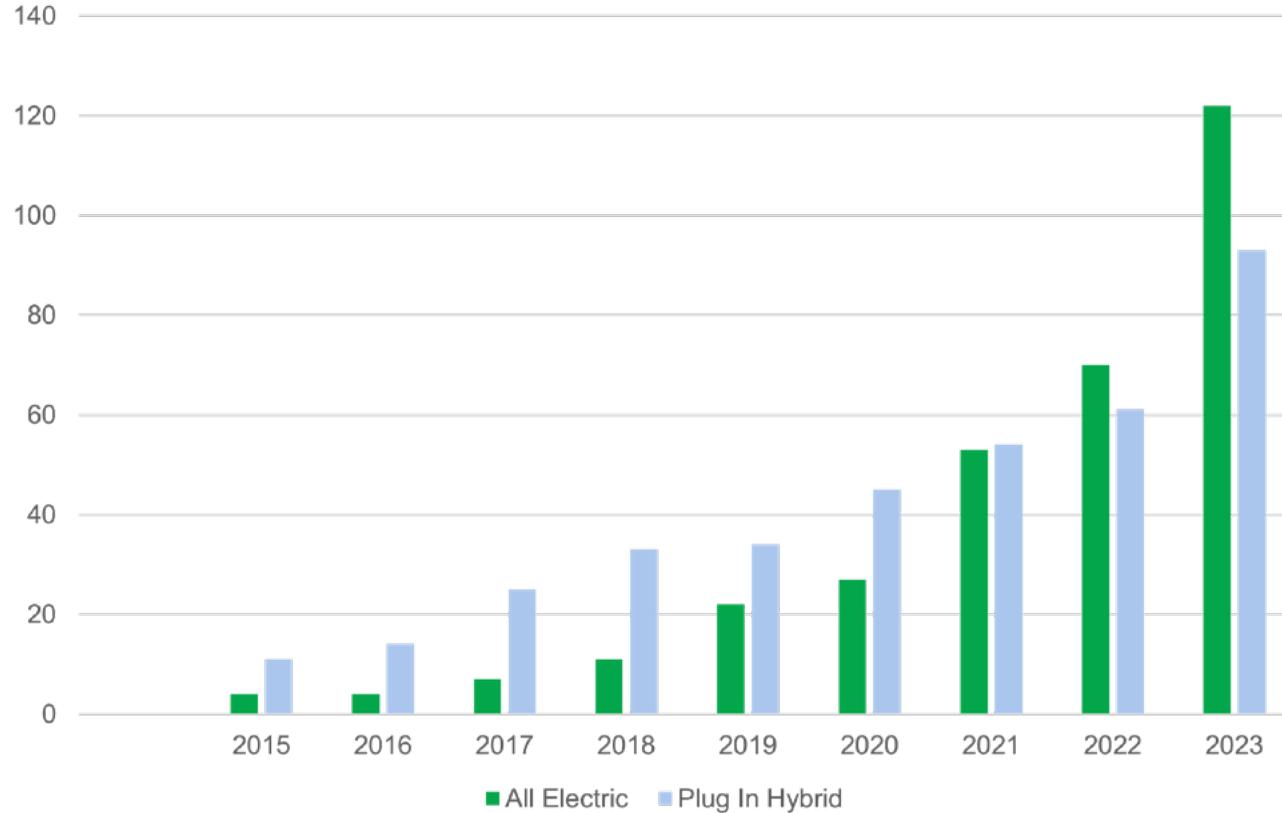
**are well publicized and that stop and transfer locations are convenient, comfortable, and attractive. The Energy Committee will also conduct outreach to the Southwestern Vermont Supervisory Union to encourage walking, biking, and taking the bus to school.**

Bennington has made several recent improvements to its active mobility infrastructure, including the completion of the Bennington Rail Trail, which connects Downtown Bennington to Northside Drive. **The Town will continue to improve, expand, and maintain the network of shared-use bicycle and pedestrian facilities and identify safety improvement needs, gaps between important destinations, and other needs.** The Town

will continue to seek funding through the VTrans Bicycle-Pedestrian and Transportation Alternatives programs, as well as from local funds and other sources to plan and implement these projects. **The Town shall ensure that local and state roadway construction and maintenance projects include accommodations for pedestrian and bicycle travel, incorporating “Complete Streets” principles whenever possible. The Town will continue to work with the BCRC to plan and implement modifications to local streets to make them more bicycle and pedestrian friendly and to present more attractive streetscapes for all residents and users of the transportation system.**



**Figure 7.16. Bennington EV Registrations**



*“We should have more fast chargers in the downtown.”*

rural areas, consistent with the land use plan and policies set forth in this town plan. Town leadership will actively support investments in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, especially projects that bring new housing and essential businesses such as food stores and hardware stores, as well as employment opportunities, into the walkable center of the community.

The development of rail infrastructure and train service can help reduce transportation energy use by reducing reliance on single passenger vehicles and heavy duty trucks. **The Town will continue to participate in rail planning projects to promote rail for freight shipments and passenger travel. The Town should also support the expenditure of transportation funds on projects to maintain and upgrade rail lines, bridges, crossings, and other critical infrastructure.**

For more information about land use policies, see **Chapter 1: Land Use.**

*As of 2023, Bennington had 122 registered EVs, and 93 PHEVs. The number of EVs in town has been increasing rapidly since 2015, indicating that Bennington is likely to meet its 2025 EV adoption goal. Source: Efficiency VT*

For more information about transportation goals, see **Chapter 4. Mobility for All.**

Land use regulations that encourage clustered development in walkable town and village centers can also help reduce the need for single-passenger vehicle trips as well as make goods and services more accessible to people without the ability or desire to drive. A 2024 study prepared for the Vermont Agency of Transportation found that concentrated development that co-locates housing,

jobs, and services could reduce transportation greenhouse gas emissions by 13,000 metric tons annually by 2050.

**The Bennington Planning Commission and town planning staff will continue implementing land use planning policies that encourage efficient development with high-density mixed-used development in the designated growth center and low-density development that does not require extensive infrastructure or services in**





The Riverwalk intersection with North Street.

### Local Renewable Energy Generation

According to data from the Department of Public Service compiled in 2024 (Table 7.2), there is about 7.6 MW of distributed renewable energy generation in Bennington, which represents approximately one-third of renewable energy generation in the region. The vast majority of this installed capacity comes from solar sites. The remaining capacity comes from a 375kW hydroelectric facility on the Walloomsac River.

This energy section establishes ambitious renewable energy generation targets for the years 2025, 2035, and 2050 (Table 7.3). The targets were developed using the Department of Public Service’s Generation Scenarios Tool, with an assumption that 20% of Vermont’s energy needs would come from in-state generation. The Generation Scenarios Tool

calculates renewable energy generation targets at the municipal and regional level based on population, land availability, and existing generation (see the appendix of the *Bennington Regional Plan* for more information). A significant acceleration of renewable energy development in the region will be needed to meet these targets.

Many of the over 200 solar sites in the Bennington region are small rooftop or ground-mounted solar

arrays at private residences and businesses. Larger solar sites in the region include the 2.2 MW Battle Creek Solar array off of Route 67A (Figure 7.17). **The Town encourages solar energy development, of any scale, on building rooftops.**

**The Town shall continue to support the development of small-scale (150 KW capacity or less) electricity generation from solar energy at homes, businesses, schools, and other**



**Table 7.2. Summary of Distributed Generation**

	Sites	Installed Capacity (MW)	Annual Production (MWh)
Solar	222	7.2	9,513.4
Wind	0	0	0
Hydropower	1	0.375	1,642.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>11,155.9</b>

*This table reflects active, permitted sites as of April 2024. More information about the calculation of annual production can be found in the appendix of the Bennington Regional Plan. Source: Department of Public Service, April 2024*

**Table 7.3. Incremental Energy Generation Targets (MW)**

Year	Solar	Rooftop Solar	Wind	Hydro	Total
2025	4.7	3.5	0.3	0.1	8.6
2035	9.9	7.9	0.6	0.2	18.6
2050	14.6	11.4	0.9	0.3	27.2

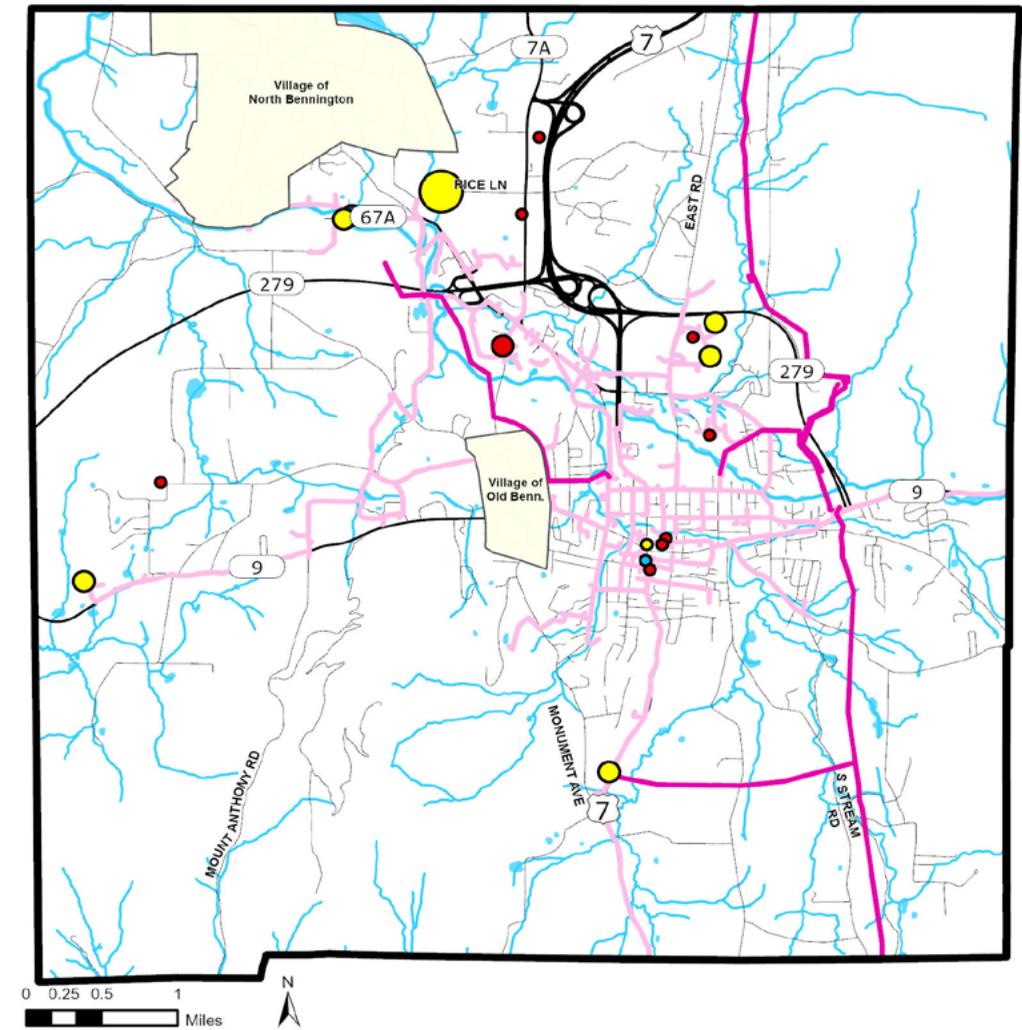
*The incremental energy generation targets for Bennington were developed using the Excel-based Generation Scenarios Tool developed by the Vermont Department of Public Service.*

**institutions. Community solar projects, which allow people to buy into a project and receive credits on their electric bill, are encouraged and may be located anywhere in Bennington not specifically identified as a “Prohibited (Exclusion) Area” in the Solar Facility Siting Criteria. Moreover, any community solar project located on a site that is not a prohibited/exclusion area shall be considered as being located on a preferred site.** Projects that benefit residents of affordable housing and people who have historically faced barriers to accessing renewable energy are especially encouraged. Developments should be

planned to take advantage of opportunities for the utilization of solar energy.

Based on a mapping analysis using data provided by the Vermont Center for Geographic Information, the slopes of Mount Anthony were identified as a potential site for utility-scale wind energy generation in Bennington. However, Mount Anthony has been specifically identified as a critical scenic resource for the town in its Scenic Resource Inventory. Development in that area would have a profoundly negative impact on critical viewsheds throughout the community, as the natural profile

**Figure 7.17. Existing Generation Resources**



Existing Generation Sources

- Roof-mounted Solar
- Ground-mounted Solar
- Large Hydro
- Micro Hydro

- 15-138 kW
- 138-500 kW
- 500-2200 kW

Green Mountain Power Line Data

- Three-Phase Power
- Transmission Lines
- Water Bodies
- Village Boundaries



Figure 7.18. Potential Solar Generation

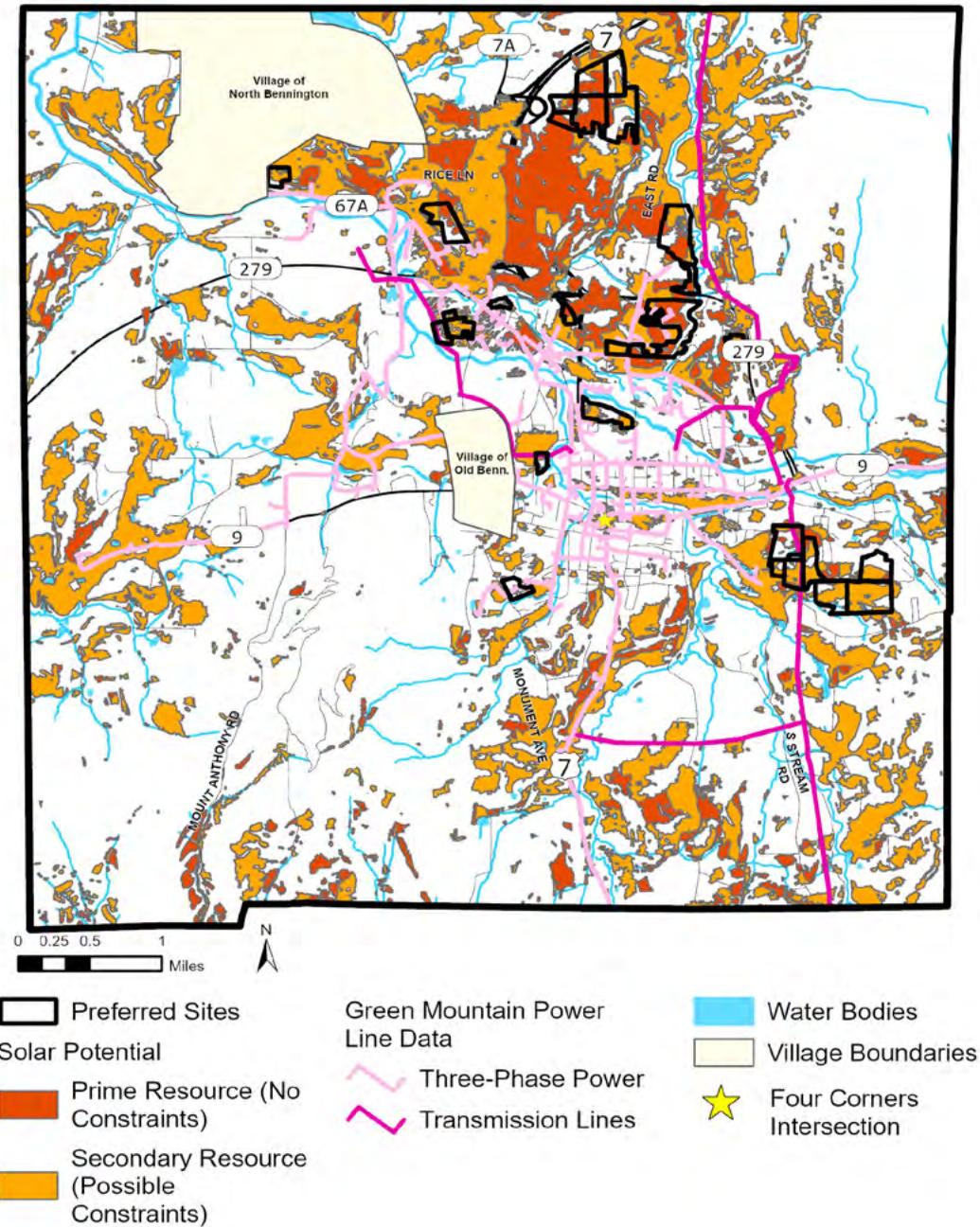
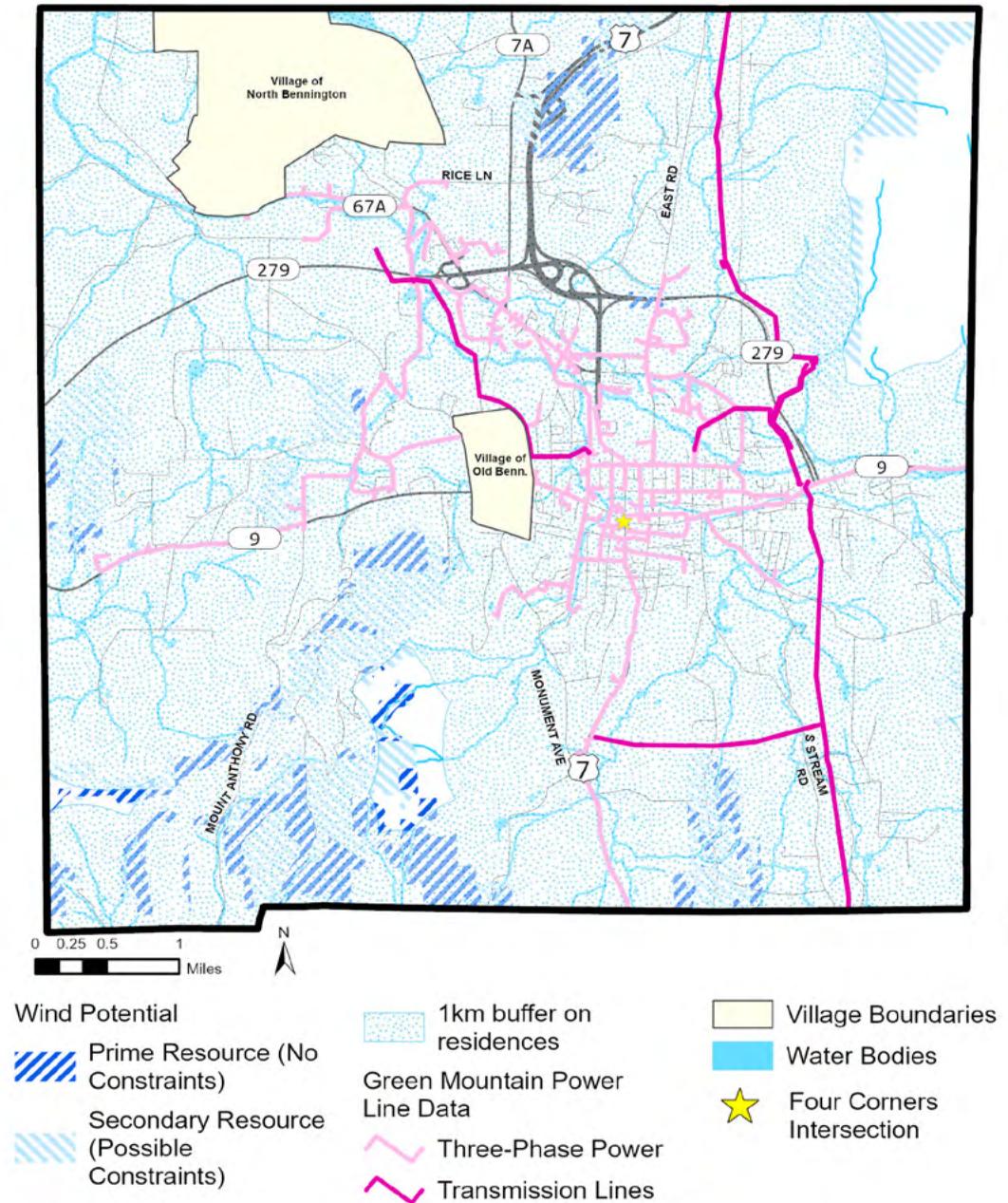


Figure 7.19. Potential Wind Generation





150kW community solar array by the Bennington County Sheriff's Department, off Route 7.

of the mountain forms an iconic backdrop from both in-town and rural valley locations. Because no other locations in Bennington have suitable wind resources, infrastructure availability, or are free from significant environmental constraints (Figure 7.19), no utility-scale (100 KW capacity or greater) wind energy facilities should be located in Bennington.

Smaller-scale wind projects, including residential-scale turbines (generally less than 10 KW) and turbines (up to 100 KW) that may be installed at farms, institutions (such as college campuses), and small businesses may be appropriate as long as noise from the turbines does not adversely affect neighboring residential properties and as long as they are not prominently visible from any town-identified historic district.

**The Town also supports efforts to develop small hydro projects at existing dam sites, such as the series of small dams on Paran Creek, and the development of local, cost-effective biomass energy resources for heating.**

The installation of battery storage can improve the effectiveness of renewable energy resources by storing excess generated energy and releasing it to the grid when more energy demand is needed.

**The Town encourages the installation of battery energy storage, especially when integrated with renewable energy generation facilities.**

### Solar Energy Facility Siting Policy and Map

**Any larger scale solar development (greater than 150 kW capacity) shall be subject to the following Solar Energy Facility Siting Policy and Map, Solar Electric Facility Siting Guidelines, and the Town's solar facility screening ordinance.**

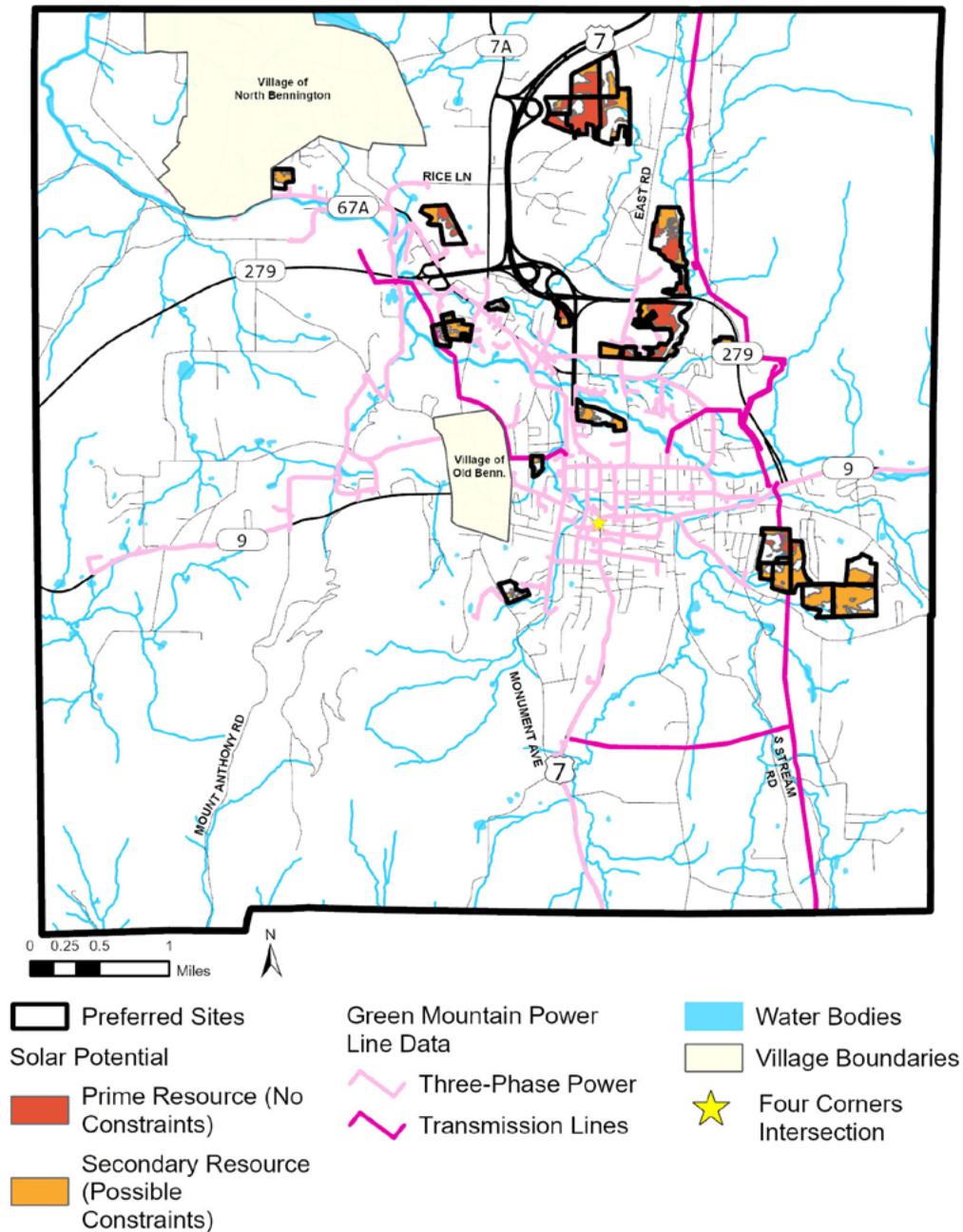
The Preferred Solar Sites Map (Figure 7.20) shall serve as a guide for developers wishing to identify land suitable for solar energy generation facilities within the Town of Bennington. This map identifies sites that have been determined by the Town of Bennington, through official action of the Select Board, to be suitable for solar facilities and sites which are preferred sites for solar energy generating facilities. Only sites identified as preferred sites on this map or located in a preferred area as defined in the Solar Facility Siting Criteria, below, may be developed with solar generating facilities in excess 150 KW of rated capacity.

The Potential Solar Generation Map shall be used in concert with the Town's Screening of Solar Facilities Ordinance and the Solar Facility Siting Guidelines (incorporating the Community Standards and Siting Criteria) included in this section of the town plan to direct the development and design of solar facilities. Although solar energy development at these preferred sites and locations is an appropriate land use, all such development shall be carefully planned to limit adverse impacts to neighboring properties and to public viewsheds, giving consideration to The Town's Screening of Solar Facilities Ordinance and Solar Facility Siting Guidelines.

The sites indicated on this map as suitable for solar energy development were selected after a thorough analysis of available geographic data, including an assessment of access to solar energy as well as environmental, aesthetic, cultural, and related regulatory constraints. State identified environmental



Figure 7.20. Preferred Solar Sites



constraints are discussed in more detail in the *Bennington Regional Plan*, and include the following resource areas:

- Class 1 and 2 wetlands, vernal pools, and hydric soils;
- Mapped river corridors and FEMA-defined floodways;
- Natural communities and rare, threatened, and endangered species;
- Federal wilderness areas;
- “Primary” and “Statewide” significant agricultural soils;
- FEMA-defined special flood hazard areas;
- Lands protected for conservation purposes;
- Deer wintering areas; and
- State-identified high priority “Conservation Design Forest Blocks.”

Lands with one or more of the above constraints were excluded from consideration as preferred sites, while areas that did not have any state-identified constraints were carefully analyzed by the Town. Sites most likely to comply with the town plan’s Community Standards and Siting Standards for Solar Facilities were identified as potentially suitable. Specifically excluded from consideration as sites suitable for development were land located in the Forest or Agriculture land use districts, privately owned land in the Rural Conservation land use district, land within 100 feet of public roads, land within 0.25 miles of any of the three covered bridges, Willow Park, and land within scenic viewsheds identified in the Scenic Resource Inventory of Bennington . Potentially suitable sites were determined to be appropriate for development only if they were likely to be developed with solar generating facilities based on property size, landowner interest, proximity to infrastructure, and community benefit.

Approximately 370 acres of land are shown on the Solar Energy Resource Map as being suitable and



preferred sites for development of these facilities. Of the land within those parcels, over 150 acres do not have any known constraints that would prevent development. The 370 acres of preferred sites, together with projected future development on rooftops and other preferred locations, exceed the acreage needed to meet the town's solar energy generation target of 26 MW of capacity by the year 2050, identified in the energy element of the *Bennington Regional Plan*. That targeted level of generation includes rooftop generation that is expected to account for up to 11.4 MW of capacity by 2050, and ground-mounted generation that is expected to account for up to 14.6 MW. Therefore, all locations other than these mapped areas and land specifically identified as preferred areas are considered unsuitable for solar generating facilities in excess of 150 kW of rated capacity.

### Solar Electricity Facility Siting Guidelines

The term "solar facility" shall have the following meaning: a solar electricity generation and transmission facility with a 150kW (AC) or greater capacity, including all on-site and offsite improvements necessary for the development and operation, and on-going maintenance of the facility.

The Town of Bennington has developed community standards and siting standards for the development of solar facilities for reference and use by facility developers and local property owners and for consideration in Section 248 proceedings (30 V.S.A. Sec. 248). In addition, the Bennington Planning Commission, in consultation with the Bennington County Regional Commission, has identified and mapped (Figure 7.20) those areas of Bennington that are most suitable for solar facility development based on facility siting requirements and municipal energy, conservation, and development policies and objectives set forth in the Bennington Town Plan, the Bennington Land Use and Development

Regulations, and Bennington's solar screening ordinance (Article 29: Screening of Solar Facilities).

Pursuant to 30 V.S.A. Sec. 248, prior to the construction of a solar facility, the VT Public Utility Commission (PUC) must issue a Certificate of Public Good. A Section 248 review addresses environmental, economic, and social impacts associated with a particular project, similar to Act 250. In making its determination, the PUC must give substantial deference to the recommendations of municipal plans that meet the requirements of enhanced energy planning set forth in Act 174.

The Town of Bennington may participate in the Public Utility Commission's review of new and expanded generation facilities to ensure that local energy, resource conservation, and development objectives are identified and considered in proposed utility development. This may include joint participation and collaboration with other affected municipalities and the Bennington County Regional Commission for projects that may have significant regional impact.

### Community Standards

***The following Community Standards and Solar Facility Siting Criteria apply to all solar generation projects exceeding 15 kW capacity in Bennington.***

The following community standards are to be considered in undertaking municipal solar electricity projects and programs, in updating Bennington's Land Use and Development Regulations to address solar facilities subject to local regulation, and in the review of any new or upgraded solar facilities in excess of 15 kW capacity, by the Town of Bennington and the Public Utility Commission (Section 248 review).

- Plan Conformance: New solar facilities and proposed system upgrades should be consistent with the Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan, the Vermont Long-Range Transmission Plan, and utilities Integrated Resource Planning (IRP).
- Benefits: A demonstrated statewide public need that outweighs adverse impacts to local residents and resources must be documented for municipal support of new solar facilities located within or which may otherwise affect Bennington. Facility development must benefit the Town of Bennington and State residents, businesses, and property owners in direct proportion to the impacts of the proposed development.
- Impacts: New solar facilities must be evaluated for consistency with community and regional development objectives and shall avoid undue adverse impacts to significant cultural, natural, and scenic resources and aesthetic values identified by the community in the Bennington Town Plan and the Scenic Resources Inventory. When evaluating impacts of a proposed solar facility under the criteria set forth in this town plan, the cumulative impact of existing solar facilities, approved pending solar facilities and the proposed solar facility shall be considered. It is explicitly understood that a proposed solar facility which by itself may not have an adverse impact may be deemed to have an adverse impact when considered in light of the cumulative impacts of the proposed solar facility and existing solar facilities and pending already approved solar facilities.
- Decommissioning: All facility certificates shall specify conditions for system decommissioning, including required sureties (bonds) for facility removal and site restoration to a safe, useful, and environmentally stable condition. All hazardous materials and structures, including foundations, pads and accessory structures, must be removed from the site and safely disposed of in



*Holiday lights decorate an 1874 fountain originally located at the Bennington Graded School.*

accordance with regulations and best practices current at the time of decommissioning.

### Solar Facility Siting Criteria

Bennington supports development of solar energy generation facilities consistent with the policies and guidelines set forth in this plan. It recognizes that financial considerations require projects to be located in close proximity to electric power lines capable of distributing the load proposed to be generated and to have convenient access from major transportation networks for construction. However, the town desires to maintain the open landscape and scenic views important to Bennington's sense of place, tourism economy, and rural cultural aesthetic. Not all solar facilities proposed can meet this standard. Projects must meet the following criteria in order to be supported by this town plan:

- Siting Requirements: New solar facilities shall be sited in locations that do not adversely impact the community's traditional and planned patterns of growth, of compact (downtown/village) centers surrounded by a rural countryside, including working farms and forest land. Solar facilities shall, therefore, not be sited in locations that adversely impact scenic views, roads, or other areas identified in the Scenic Resources Inventory, nor shall solar facilities be sited in locations that adversely impact any of the following scenic attributes identified in the Scenic Resource Inventory: views across open fields, especially when those fields form an important foreground; prominent ridgelines or hillsides that can be seen from many public vantage points and thus form a natural backdrop for many landscapes; historic buildings and districts and gateways to historic districts; and, scenes that include important contrasting elements such as water. The impact on prime and statewide agricultural soils currently in production shall be minimized during project design.
- Preferred Areas: The following areas are specifically identified as preferred areas for solar facilities, as they are most likely to meet the siting requirements:
  - Roof-mounted systems;
  - Systems located in proximity to existing large scale, commercial or industrial buildings;
  - Proximity to existing hedgerows or other topographical features that naturally screen the entire proposed array;
  - Reuse of former brownfields;
  - Facilities that are sited in disturbed areas, such as gravel pits, closed landfills, or former quarries;
  - Areas specifically identified as suitable for solar facilities on the Preferred Solar Sites Map (Figure 7.20).
- Prohibited (Exclusion) Areas: In addition to those areas that do not meet the siting requirements set forth above, development of solar generating facilities shall be excluded from (prohibited within), and shall not be supported by the Town, in the following locations:
  - Floodways shown on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs);
  - River corridors as shown in the Town of Bennington Land Use and Development Regulations;
  - Class I or II wetlands;
  - A location that would significantly diminish the economic viability or potential economic viability of the town's working landscape, including productive forest land and primary agricultural soils (as defined in Act 250 and as mapped by the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service);
  - Rare, threatened, or endangered species habitat or communities as mapped or identified through site investigation, and core habitat areas, migratory routes and travel corridors;
- Ridgelines: Mount Anthony, Whipstock Hill, Bald Mountain (Green Mountains); Steep slopes (>25%)
- Surface waters and riparian buffer areas (except for stream crossings);
- Topography that causes a facility to be prominently visible against the skyline from public and private vantage points such as roads, homes, and neighborhoods;
- A site in proximity to and interfering with a significant viewshed identified in the Scenic Resource Inventory;
- A site on which a solar facility project cannot comply with Bennington's prescribed siting and screening standards, including the screening requirements set forth in Bennington's Screening of Solar Facilities Ordinance;
- A site that causes adverse impacts to historical or cultural resources, including state or federal designated historic districts, sites and structures, and locally significant cultural resources identified in the municipal plan. Prohibited impacts to historical and cultural resources include:
  - removal or demolition;
  - physical or structural damage, significant visual intrusion, or threat to the use;
  - significant intrusion in a rural historic district or historic landscape with a high degree of integrity;
  - significant visual intrusion into a hillside that serves as a backdrop to a historic site or structure;
  - creating a focal point that would disrupt or distract from elements of a historic landscape;
  - a significant intrusion in a rural historic district or historic landscape that has a high degree of integrity;
  - impairing a vista or viewshed from a historic resource that is a significant



- component of its historic character and history of use;
- visually overwhelming a historic setting, such as by being dramatically out of scale;
- isolating a historic resource from its historic setting, or introducing incongruous or incompatible uses, or new visual, audible or atmospheric elements.
- Mass and Scale: Except for projects located on preferred sites, solar facilities larger than 10 acres, individually or cumulatively, cannot be adequately screened or mitigated to blend into the municipality's landscape and are, therefore, explicitly prohibited.



*View of Lincoln Street from the Bennington Fire House.*





## *Contents*

- Appendix A. Community Engagement for the Bennington Town Plan
- Appendix B. Act 181 and Municipal Planning
- Appendix C. Implementation Matrix



## Appendix A. Community Engagement for the Bennington Town Plan

The Bennington Planning Commission used a variety of methods to engage with community members about the town plan between December 2023 and March 2024. The primary engagement methods are listed below and examined in more detail in the following sections.

- Community meetings
- Focus group discussions
- Tabling
- Postcard activity
- Survey

### Community Conversations, Focus Groups, and Tabling

Working with the BCRC, the Town hosted five community roundtable conversations between January and March, at several different locations and times. These meetings were open to the public and featured fast-paced, small-group conversations on six topics areas:

- Housing
- Community
- Public facilities and programs
- Economy and jobs
- Energy and the environment
- Transportation and mobility

The Town also held four focus groups, each in partnership with a different local organization that helped coordinate logistics and invite participants. Participants were asked to share their experiences living in Bennington and any challenges or barriers they've experienced.

### Focus groups

- Individuals with disabilities
  - Partner: Vermont Center for Independent Living, Bennington Office
- Parents/caregivers
  - Partner: Sunrise Family Resource Center
- LGBTQ+ people
  - Partner: Queer Connect
- Seniors
  - Partner: Bennington Senior Center

In addition to meetings, BCRC staff set up a table on behalf of the Town at several locations and engaged people in brief, casual conversations about Bennington. Tabling locations included:

- Bennington Community Market
- Community College of Vermont, Bennington campus
- The Coffee Bar
- Mount Anthony Union High School girls and boys basketball games

### Postcard Activity

The Town engaged local youth through a postcard activity in partnership with the Southwestern Vermont Supervisory Union (SVSU). Staff from the Town and BCRC filmed two different versions of a video at the Old First Church explaining the project: a version for younger kids, and a version for older kids and teens. These videos, along with blank postcards, were sent to Bennington's three public elementary schools and the middle and high school. Staff from Alliance for Community Transformations (ACT) helped with distributing and collecting completed postcards at the middle school. Students were asked to envision Bennington in 2050 and actions they could take to make the town a better place.

Over 900 postcards were collected and then organized by theme. The most common visions



*Town Planning Community Roundtable at the Recreation Center, January 2024.*

expressed for Bennington were:

- More places to go and things to do
- Cleaner, greener, and prettier
- Peaceful, safe
- Addiction and drug free
- Fun and entertaining
- More and better housing
- Walking and biking friendly
- Inclusive

### Survey

An online survey was available throughout the entire outreach period, with paper copies available in select locations and upon request. The survey received 190 responses, which were generally consistent with feedback received through the other engagement methods.



**Results**

The input received at the community meetings, focus groups, and tabling was analyzed and grouped into topics. Within the topic, the input was broken down into values, challenges, and opportunities. These results tables were presented at a Planning Commission meeting in May 2024.

**Housing**

Values	Challenges	Opportunities
Adaptive reuse	Low housing stock	Redevelopment of vacant buildings
Affordability	Not easy to “age in place”	Build more accessible and small-scale homes
Architecturally beautiful	Homelessness	Encourage density in and around downtown
Walkable downtown	Impacts of housing shortage on key industries	Provide services to people experiencing homelessness
Compact neighborhoods	Maintenance and quality concerns	Regulatory reforms
Balance between downtown and rural	Disempowerment by political process and landlords	Public discussion of housing challenges

**Economy and Jobs**

Values	Challenges	Opportunities
Lots of small businesses	Vacancies and underutilized spaces downtown	Invest in career development pipeline with schools
Sense of entrepreneurship	Wages/salaries too low to support good quality of life	Create an incubator for start-ups, small businesses, BIPOC-owned businesses
Many entry-level job openings	Inconsistent quality of school system	Stronger marketing of the town
Strong community institutions	Shortage of doctors, limited medical services provided	Activate vacant / underutilized storefronts
Affordable internet	Limited retail	Address housing challenges to attract workers
New and incoming stores and restaurants	Healthy food desert	Entice more private sector, tech- or science-based jobs
Events activate Main Street	Lack of trade workers	Attract more retail and restaurants



**Transportation and Mobility**

Values	Challenges	Opportunities
Pathways for recreation and transportation	Irregular, inconsistent, insufficient bus service	Better walking and biking trails
Walkable downtown	Lack of information on public transit	More pedestrian protections at major crosswalk areas
Bus system is free, offers direct transport for medical appointments (Medicaid)	Inaccessible sidewalks and pathways	More bike parking
The Bike Hub's equitable service approach	Lack of crosswalks, lack of respect for pedestrians	Deemphasize automobiles
Ample parking	Opportunities limited by vehicle access	Expanded bus services, improved intercity transit
Bike infrastructure that links to grocery stores	Few ridesharing options	Connect businesses with transit and bike incentives
Flashing crosswalks	Traffic noise downtown	Concern about LPG train cars by North Bennington

**Public Facilities and Programs**

Values	Challenges	Opportunities
Splash pad	Barriers to civic participation	Easy access to all town communications
Lots of good parks, paths, and trails	Need more indoor and outdoor recreational spaces	Strengthen marketing of town assets
Recreation Center	Path safety improvements	More public spaces and public events
Senior Center has great classes, Meals on Wheels	Short-staffed at key municipal services	Community beautification
Appalachian Trail Community designation	Inaccessibility for children in public parks	Bathroom and shower facilities for people experiencing homelessness
Water and sewer services	Concerns about school system	Increase crime prevention measures
Social worker on staff at Police Department	Lack of trust in town government	Combat drug problem



**Community**

Values	Challenges	Opportunities
Connection with neighbors	Low self-esteem about the community	More placemaking
Strong arts community	Resources are not well known enough	Collaborations with Bennington College students
Vibrant events bring everyone together	Lack of accessible, family-friendly activities	Community spaces for people of all ages
Strong non-profit community	Need more spaces and programming for BIPOC community	Invite volunteerism and civic participation
Deeply rooted	Substance misuse and addiction challenges	More programs for youth
Appreciation for rich history	Disconnect between Bennington College	Intergenerational engagement

**Energy and the Environment**

Values	Challenges	Opportunities
Good mix of energy sources, not too reliant on coal	Need more EV charging stations	Strategic renewables development
Beautiful natural areas	Efficiency improvements are prohibitively expensive	Explore geothermal
Active Energy Committee	Too much pushback around renewables development	Add more fast chargers
Lead line replacement project	Energy conservation programs are complicated	Ensure all municipal buildings are at max efficiency
Good programs for weatherization and efficiency improvements	Utilities are expensive	Expand educational resources for homeowners, landlords, and business owners
Significant progress in recent years	Renters feel disempowered	Community clean-up events



## Appendix B. Act 181 and Municipal Planning

### Act 250

In 2024, Act 181 created exemptions to Act 250 permitting requirements for qualified areas of municipalities. The new law established four tiered areas: Tiers 1A and 1B, both of which offer some form of exemption to Act 250; Tier 2, which has no exemptions; and Tier 3, which are areas of critical natural resources that trigger Act 250 jurisdiction.

### Tier 1B

Municipalities with downtowns and village centers, planned growth areas, and village areas mapped in the regional planning commission's future land use map will be eligible for recognition as Tier 1B jurisdiction, which exempts housing projects of 50 or fewer units on ten acres or less.

To have area(s) mapped as 1B, the municipality must opt-in (request area to be mapped), and meet the following requirements:

- An approved municipal plan
- Boundaries consistent with the regional plan's downtown and village centers and planned growth areas
- Permanent municipal zoning and subdivision bylaws
- Water and wastewater systems or soils that can accommodate a community system for compact housing
- Excluded flood hazard or river corridors, unless regulated throughout the municipality
- Adequate staff to support coordinated development review and zoning administration

Tier 1B areas are established upon approval of the regional planning commission's future land use map from the State of Vermont Land Use Review Board (LURB).

### Tier 1A

Tier 1A jurisdiction exempts all subdivisions, developments, or changes to existing permitted projects from Act 250 permitting in applicable areas. Instead, municipalities with Tier 1A jurisdiction will assume the responsibility of adding existing Act 250 permit conditions to municipal land use permits. To establish Tier 1A jurisdiction, a municipality must apply to the LURB.

Requirements for Tier 1A jurisdiction include:

- An approved municipal plan
- Boundaries consistent with the regional plan's downtown and village centers and planned growth areas
- Flood hazard and river corridor bylaws that apply to entire municipality and are consistent with or stronger than 10 V.S.A. 755(b) and 1428(b), or entirely excludes those areas
- Permanent municipal zoning and subdivision bylaws
- Permanent municipal land development regulations featuring smart growth principles (including allowing up to four stories in all areas with water and sewer utilities)
- Compatibility with historic preservation standards
- Wildlife habitat plans that protect or exclude from Tier 1A significant natural communities, and rare, threatened and endangered species,
- Water and wastewater systems or planned improvements with capacity to support development
- Adequate staff to support coordinated capital planning, development review, and zoning administration

### Designation Program

Act 181 also changed the State's designation programs, which are now simplified into two categories: centers and neighborhoods. Within the designated centers, there will be three steps. As

Bennington already has a downtown designation under the previous downtown designation program, the town will automatically be considered for a Step 3 designation.

To meet the Step 3 requirements a municipality must have:

- An existing (old) designated downtown center, or meet Step 2 requirements
- An area listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places
- A downtown improvement plan
- A downtown investment agreement
- A capital plan adopted under 24 V.S.A 4430 that implements these requirements
- A local downtown organization
- Available public water/wastewater
- Permanent zoning and subdivision
- Historic preservation regulations
- Adopted downtown design or form-based regulations

A Step 3 Designated Center confers the following benefits:

- Site-based funding and technical assistance
- Eligibility for downtown tax credits (32 V.S.A. 5930aa)
- Eligibility for Better Places Grants (24 V.S.A. 5801)
- Funding priority for municipal plans, special-purpose plans, capital plans, and area improvement reinvestment plans
- Better Connections Program eligibility and funding priority
- Funding priority for infrastructure scoping, design, engineering, and construction by State Board
- Authority to create special taxing district (24 V.S.A. Chapter 87)
- Priority consideration for state affordable housing funding
- Authority to lower speed limits to less than 25

*Turkey vultures sunning themselves on the spires of Saint Francis de Sales Church*



- mph (23 V.S.A. 1007(g))
- Capped residential sewer permit fees (3 V.S.A. 2822)
- Exemption from the land gains tax (23 V.S.A. 10002(p))
- Guidance for establishing historic preservation regulations
- Vermont Downtown Program funding
- Eligibility for sales tax reallocation (32 V.S.A. 9819)
- Eligibility for Main Street America Accreditation
- Off-site signage exemptions
- Housing appeal limitations
- State office building priority
- Eligibility for Downtown Transportation Improvement Funding (24 V.S.A. 5808)

A Designated Neighborhood confers the following benefits:

- Funding priority for special-purpose plans, capital plans, area improvement reinvestment plans, the Better Connections Program, and infrastructure scoping, design, engineering, and construction
- Eligibility for downtown and village tax credits (32 V.S.A. 5930aa)
- Priority consideration for state and federal affordable housing funding
- Authority to lower speed limits to less than 25 mph (23 V.S.A. 1007(g))
- Housing appeal limitations
- State wastewater permit fees capped at \$50 for residential development (3 V.S.A. 2822)
- Exemption from the land gains tax (32 V.S.A. 10002(p))



*Attendees at Mayfest 2025 celebrate Bennington's history.*

## Appendix C. Implementation Matrix

	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
<b>THE PLACE TO BE</b>				
<i>VISION: Bennington will be home to a vibrant downtown surrounded by welcoming neighborhoods, a thriving agricultural community, and well-protected scenic and natural resources.</i>				
<i>GOAL: A lively downtown with commercial, institutional, governmental, residential, tourist, and community activity</i>				
The Town shall secure an expanded downtown center to broaden eligibility for tax and permit incentives for mixed-use and housing projects.	High	Within 2 years	Planning staff, Planning Commission	BCRC
Within the downtown center, the town should continue to provide incentives for investment in the downtown.	High	Ongoing	Community development staff	
The town should strengthen marketing of downtown assets through continued partnership with the BBC.	Low	Ongoing	Community development staff	BBC
The town should encourage and support non-profit and private local housing developers to realize development opportunities for all types of housing (market rate, workforce, and affordable) in downtown Bennington.	High	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	Housing developers
To further support creative redevelopment in the downtown, the town should encourage adaptive reuse of existing structures and incentivize adaptive reuse of historical buildings.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	HPC
Bennington should promote the use of the Brownfields Program to incentivize the redevelopment of underutilized formerly productive properties throughout the downtown.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	BCRC
The Town should review local ordinances and tracking mechanisms to discourage long-term vacancies of properties and recommend revisions to activate currently vacant and underutilized properties in the downtown.	Medium	Within 2 years	Planning Commission	
The town, BCRC, and the BBC should work collaboratively to maintain an up-to-date inventory of downtown property available for commercial and residential infill and redevelopment and work with partners to promote their purchase or lease.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	BCRC, BBC
The town should devise and adopt a streetscape improvement plan to expand accessibility and pedestrian-oriented amenities within the public rights-of-way.	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning Commission	BCRC
The land use regulations should be reviewed and updated, if necessary, to ensure new downtown development meets "Complete Streets" and transit-oriented design standards.	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning Commission	BCRC
The town should pursue opportunities for coordinating placemaking projects that incorporate public art, community gathering, public space improvements, and relationship-building.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	BCRC, BBC, community organizations
The Planning Commission should review and evaluate the design standards of the Land Use and Development Regulations for effectiveness at shaping a downtown that is lively, affordable, accessible, and resilient	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning Commission	
<i>GOAL: Cherished, preserved, and actively occupied historic architecture and landmarks throughout town</i>				
The Select Board shall ensure that the Historic Preservation Commission is composed of individuals that have background and interest in historic preservation, architecture, or design.	Medium	Ongoing	Select Board	
The HPC, DRB, and Planning Commission should meet jointly and evaluate the design standards of the Land Use and Development Regulations for effectiveness at protecting historic resources throughout Bennington.	Medium	Within 5 years	HPC, DRB, Planning Commission	



	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
The Town should explore and pursue opportunities for funding and financial incentives to support historic preservation efforts.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff, HPC	BCRC
The Historic Preservation Commission should serve an educational role for the town, to increase awareness and appreciation of Bennington's historic resources.	Low	Ongoing	HPC	Bennington Historical Society
The HPC should continue its efforts to maintain a comprehensive inventory of recognized archaeological resources, historical districts, sites, and structures to be appreciated and protected.	Medium	Ongoing	HPC	
The Town should revise the street naming ordinance to require new road names reflect local natural, cultural, or historical subject matter.	Low	Within 5 years	Select Board	ad hoc road naming committee
<b>GOAL: Welcoming residential neighborhoods served by nearby community institutions and businesses</b>				
The Town of Bennington shall secure a neighborhood designation to expand eligibility for tax and permit incentives for housing projects throughout the town's compact settlement area.	High	Within 2 years	Planning staff, Planning Commission	BCRC
The town should continue to improve bicycle and pedestrian access through the expansion of the Walloomsac Valley Path (part of the Bennington Community Pathways network), while also reviewing land use and development regulations to ensure that future developments include non-motorized transportation modes in site access.	High	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	BCRC, community groups
The Planning Commission shall review and update the Land Use and Development Regulations to be consistent with the land use categories mapped and described here.	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning Commission	
The Planning Commission should expand the use of form-based design districts to align with the broader view of the neighborhood area and its corresponding development.	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning Commission	
The Planning Commission should revise zoning district boundaries to reflect the requirements of the HOME Act, and/or create an overlay district that maps where both public water and sewer are available in Bennington.	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning Commission	
<b>GOAL: Working landscapes of local farms and forestry operations throughout Bennington's rural areas</b>				
The Town should aid efforts to preserve productive agricultural lands, support economically viable farming operations, and support economically and environmentally viable forestry operations.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	
To aid local farmers, the Town should support efforts to promote production, assist local producers in applying for funding opportunities from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets, and foster connections between local farmers and local and regional businesses (especially restaurants and stores) to bolster financial viability of farming operations.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	
The Planning Commission should review the Land Use and Development Regulations requirements to determine if requirements for clustering and strategic siting of developed features in applicable areas should be strengthened.	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning Commission	
The Town should encourage owners of valuable agricultural and forest lands to participate in the Vermont Use Value Appraisal Program.	Low	Ongoing	Planning Commission, Town Communications Coordinator	
<b>GOAL: Healthy forests, scenic ridgelines, clean waters, and protected wildlife connections</b>				
The Planning Commission should create an overlay district to provide supplementary provisions for areas with highest priority forest blocks, highest priority habitat connectors, prime agricultural lands, and other significant natural resources.	Low	Within 5 years	Planning Commission	BCRC
The Town should continue to protect groundwater resources by strict adherence to state health and environmental regulations. Locally, Bennington should continue to pursue watershed management.	High	Ongoing	Department of Public Works (DPW)	
Bennington shall also continue to strictly regulate development in floodplains and river corridors according to the standards established in the Land Use and Development Regulations, and work to keep those regulations up to date with state guidelines.	High	Ongoing	Planning Commission	
The Planning Commission should work with the Bennington County Regional Commission and the Regional Floodplain Manager to update bylaws in line with current best practices.	High	Within 2 years	Planning Commission	BCRC, RFM



	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
Bennington should update its Scenic Resource Inventory to ensure it accurately reflects current resources and best practices for their protection.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission	
The Historic Preservation Commission and Planning Commission should review and update the Land Use and Development Regulations to prohibit the installation of developed features that would significantly detract from scenic views.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission, HPC	
The Town should support the efforts of conservation organizations to preserve lands containing critical or vulnerable natural resources.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning staff, Planning Commission	Bennington County Conservation District (BCCD), Vermont Land Trust (VLT)
All development (including all buildings and structures) located within the Rural Residential, Rural Agriculture and Forestry, and Natural Resources areas shown on the plan's Future Land Use Map (Figure 1.1) shall be sited below ridgelines (and not on highly visible slopes or hillsides), shall minimize clearing of natural vegetation, and shall utilize earth tone colors and non-reflective materials on exterior surfaces. In addition, the Town's Land Use and Development Regulations should be reviewed by the Planning Commission to ensure that the regulations effectively implement this requirement.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission	
<b>GOAL: Active, maintained, and well-marked recreational areas</b>				
<i>See Connected Community: Chapter 5. Community, Utilities, Facilities, and Services</i>				
<b>BENNINGTON FOR ALL</b>				
<i>VISION: Bennington will have a thriving, diversified economy that is deeply local and acts as a regional hub, as well as an ample supply of housing that is affordable and desirable for all of the town's residents.</i>				
<i>GOAL: A diverse, sustainable, and resilient economy that provides a variety of job opportunities while maintaining environmental standards</i>				
The Town will support programs to welcome newcomers and provide education and training opportunities to those making up a diverse workforce.	Medium	Ongoing	Community development staff	Southwestern VT Chamber of Commerce (SWVTCC), Southwest Tech, Shires Young Professionals (SYP)
The Town will promote Bennington as a regional economic hub.	Low	Ongoing	Community development staff	SWVTCC, BBC
The Town will work to ensure that an adequate supply of industrial land remains for future growth.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning staff, Planning Commission	
Bennington will work cooperatively with nearby towns, the broader economic region, and the State of Vermont to further regional economic development opportunities.	Low	Ongoing	Community development staff	Adjacent towns, BCRC, Agency of Commerce & Community Development (ACCD)
The Town will protect the long-term viability of natural resource industries by preserving rural open spaces and through good stewardship of the land.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission	
The Town will continue to support the reuse and redevelopment of existing physical and structural assets wherever possible, including improvements to accessibility.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff, Planning Commission	
The Town is committed to continuing the Bennington Revolving Loan Fund program and will engage with existing employers to support their expansion as well as entrepreneurs who wish to enter the market.	High	Ongoing	Community development staff	



	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
The Town will ensure the ongoing provision of community and economic development programs.	Medium	Ongoing	Community development staff	
The Town will encourage programs that support workforce development outcomes that meet the needs of area employers.	Medium	Ongoing	Community development staff	BCRC
Community development staff will work with employers and social service agencies to incentivize an increase in the number of available childcare spaces and facilities throughout Bennington.	Medium	Ongoing	Community development staff	
<b>GOAL: A robust local food production and distribution system, affordable and available to all residents, students, workers, and visitors to Bennington</b>				
The Town should take steps to address food security by continuing its support of local food distribution and meal programs in Bennington.	Low	Ongoing	Community development staff	
The Town will explore the expansion of the existing community garden at the recreation center and the identification of other suitable sites for additional gardens in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.	Low	Within 5 years	Community development staff, Parks & Recreation Dept	BCCD
The Town will encourage gardening spaces in housing and commercial development projects where sufficient land is available.	Low	Ongoing	Community development staff, Parks & Recreation Dept	BCCD
<b>GOAL: A healthy housing ecosystem that offers an ample and varied supply of housing for all income levels that is of good quality, and energy efficient</b>				
The Town will encourage the improvement of the existing housing stock to create more rental and homeownership opportunities for people of all income levels.	High	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff, Planning Commission	
The Town will encourage the development of housing, especially missing middle and infill housing, in Bennington neighborhoods.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff, Planning Commission	
The Town will work with community stakeholders that provide services for people experiencing homelessness, and promote programs that assist people in obtaining permanent housing.	High	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff, Town Communications Coordinator	
When reviewing new land use regulations, the Town should consider whether they will cause unnecessary dispersion of services for those in poverty or displacement of those living in poverty.	High	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	Social services providers
The Town will encourage housing developers to realize development opportunities for housing of all income levels, including affordable housing throughout Bennington's downtown and neighborhood areas.	High	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff, Planning Commission	
Bennington will pursue a Tier 1A or 1B designation from the Land Use Review Board to exempt developers from some or all Act 250 permitting requirements in the downtown and neighborhood areas.	High	Within 2 years	Planning staff, Planning Commission	BCRC
<b>GOAL: Accessible resources for finding and securing housing</b>				
The Town will assist homeowners and developers with understanding the CBES and RBES by posting information on the town's website.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning staff, Town Communications Coordinator	
The Town encourages participation in Efficiency VT's Residential and Commercial New Construction program offerings.	Low	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff, Town Communications Coordinator	Efficiency VT



	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
The Town will assist residents with accessing clear information about finding and securing housing.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff, Town Communications Coordinator	Social services providers
<b>CONNECTED COMMUNITY</b>				
<i>VISION: Bennington will be well connected through a robust network of facilities and services that support a high quality of life and provide opportunities for community cohesion.</i>				
<i>GOAL: A transportation system that is safe, efficient, affordable, and sustainable for all users</i>				
The Town should consider creating an Active Transportation Infrastructure Plan.	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning staff, Planning Commission	BCRC
The Town's policies should include provisions for safe passage by pedestrians and bicyclists, including, when possible, adding sidewalks and bike lanes or paths.	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning staff, Planning Commission	
The Town should work to enhance pedestrian protections at major crosswalk areas and add infrastructure for safe pedestrian crossings throughout Bennington.	High	Within 5 years	Planning staff, Planning Commission, DPW	BCRC, Agency of Transportation (AOT)
The Town should encourage organizations and businesses in Bennington's downtown and neighborhood areas to provide bike racks so people can safely store bicycles when visiting a public site or shopping area.	Low	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	
The Town should ensure that land use regulations throughout the downtown and neighborhood areas include policies that require the installation of bike parking at new developments.	Low	Within 5 years	Planning staff, Planning Commission	
The Town should encourage organizations to provide locker rooms that would allow employees to shower and change when they arrive at work.	Low	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	
Bennington should update the municipal plowing policy to incorporate shared-use paths (as appropriate).	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning staff, DPW	
The Town should encourage cycling education programs conducted by schools and cycling advocacy groups.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff, Planning Commission, Town Communications Coordinator	Schools, Bike Hub
The Town should continue its work to expand the network of separated shared-use trails and pathways.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff, Planning Commission, Select Board	
The Town should preserve potential shared-use routes by requiring easements and/or land dedications as part of development applications involving planned trails or pathway corridors, and by ensuring that roadway construction projects preserve the routes.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning staff, Planning Commission, DPW	
Bennington should continue to add street furniture and landscaping to paths and sidewalks.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning staff, Facilities staff	
The Town should continue to maintain traffic carrying capacity and safety on local and state highways through the implementation of planned improvements and application of access management and traffic calming techniques.	High	Ongoing	DPW	BCRC, AOT
The Town should follow the latest version of the Vermont Transportation Equity Framework to help decision makers plan for and prioritize projects, ensure accurate representation in decision making, and enhance the equitable delivery of services.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning staff, Planning Commission	
The Land Use and Development Regulations shall continue to require the implementation of access management principles for redevelopment.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission	
The form-based code regulations that guide development in Bennington's downtown shall continue to ensure that site plans include adequate bike and pedestrian infrastructure and safety measures.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission	



	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
The Town should reduce curb cuts and increase bike and pedestrian connections and amenities, where possible, on Town-owned properties in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning and Facilities staff, DPW	
Bennington's land use and development regulations should continue to ensure that parking requirements advance the town's values around efficient uses of space, safety for all users, and aesthetic compatibility with the surrounding area.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission	
The Town should encourage bike parking in existing developments and require bike parking in all new developments.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission	
The Town should continue to require that new public and private roads and driveways be designed according to the Town's standards and accepted access management principles.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission, DPW	
The Town should continue to participate in the Agency of Transportation's Better Roads grant program and Municipal Highway and Stormwater Mitigation Program.	High	Ongoing	DPW	AOT
<b>GOAL: A public transit system that provides efficient and accessible transportation throughout Bennington and the broader region</b>				
Bennington should work with Green Mountain Community Network (GMCN) to encourage improvements to public transportation services.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's Office	GMCN
The Town should work with GMCN, institutions, and businesses to support the construction of bus shelters and other amenities for transit riders.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's Office	GMCN
The Town should promote and support the Go! Vermont program.	Low	Ongoing	Town Communications Coordinator, Energy Committee	
The Town should support community-wide projects, as well as private-public partnerships like employer programs to encourage car-pooling, vanpooling, walking, and biking for employees' commutes.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	
Bennington should support efforts to expand passenger rail to the region.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's Office	BCRC, AOT
The Town shall continue to protect the airport environs from incompatible development and support safety and operational improvements at the airport that will provide economic development benefits without having undue adverse impacts on residents.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission, Town Manager's Office	AOT
<b>GOAL: A vibrant, welcoming, and accessible community where residents feel a sense of belonging</b>				
The Town should support efforts to connect newcomers with civic and community life, and encourage consistent coordination among local groups, regional organizations, and employers. Town-supported organizations, such as fire departments, should actively seek new members from among those who have recently moved to the town.	Medium	Ongoing	Community development staff, Town Communications Coordinator	SWVTCC, Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), SYP, various community organizations
The Town should collaborate with local community organizations to host regular events at the firehouse, recreation center, Willow Park, senior center, and other Town facilities to support opportunities for social connection.	Low	Ongoing	Community development staff, Town Communications Coordinator	Various community organizations
The Town can work with local organizations and institutions to coordinate beautification and place-making, volunteerism and civic participation, and public events that will create a rich atmosphere for all community members to be a part of.	Medium	Ongoing	Community development staff, Town Communications Coordinator	Various community organizations
The Town can further support these initiatives by strengthening the marketing of community assets and improving communications for existing resources.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Communications Coordinator	BBC, SWVTCC



	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
<b>GOAL: A strong educational system that supports learners of all ages, from early childhood care to vocational training and post-secondary education</b>				
The Town should support the development of a variety of childcare services that meet the needs of residents and employers.	High	Ongoing	Community development staff	
The Town should continue to ensure zoning allows childcare centers alongside medical, educational, and industrial areas, not just residential areas as required in state law.	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning Commission	
The Town should support efforts by the supervisory union and school districts that will improve efficiency and educational outcomes for students in Bennington.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's Office	SVSU, school districts
The Town and the supervisory union should engage in cooperative financial planning.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's Office	SVSU
The Town should also work with the supervisory union to plan for shifting uses of school properties.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's Office	SVSU
Town officials and committees should encourage and facilitate workforce development initiatives.	Medium	Ongoing	Community development staff	BCRC, schools
Bennington should collaborate with institutions of higher education to expand the integration of local colleges into the community.	Medium	Ongoing	Community development staff	
The town should support adult learning and vocational training opportunities.	Low	Ongoing	Community development staff	Southwest Tech
<b>GOAL: Accessible and affordable health services that support community members' long-term health and overall quality of life</b>				
The Town should continue its collaborative relationships with local health care providers to ensure that high levels of care are available and to address critical care needs and improve the quality of life for residents through implementation of public health care initiatives.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's Office, community development staff	SVMC, United Counseling Service (UCS), VT Veteran's Home
<b>GOAL: Expanded public facilities and services that support all community members, especially those struggling with housing insecurity, addiction, and other challenges</b>				
The Town should collaborate with local and regional organizations to support their community-minded work and identify ways to connect community members in need with key public resources.	Medium	Ongoing	Community development staff, Town Communications Coordinator	Project Alliance
The Town should work with service providers to ensure access to quality facilities to accommodate the needs of unhoused people on a short-term or emergency basis.	High	Ongoing	Town Manager's office, Community development staff, Town Communications Coordinator	Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless (BCCH), Pathways VT, Project Alliance
<b>GOAL: Effective emergency services and community-oriented public safety systems</b>				
Bennington has a Local Emergency Management Plan, which should be updated annually by the Emergency Management Director (EMD) and adopted by the Select Board.	High	Annually	EMD, Select Board	BCRC
The Town should maintain close communication with emergency providers to ensure that their staffing and equipment needs are met through careful and coordinated planning.	High	Ongoing	Emergency Management Director (EMD)	Bennington Police Dept, Bennington Rescue Squad, fire departments



	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
The Town should meet with representatives from each emergency services provider on an annual basis to understand their fiscal needs and plan for short- and long-term expenses.	High	Annually	EMD	
The Town should continue to liaise with the broader community on public safety issues.	Medium	Ongoing	Select Board, CPARB	
The Town should continue to strengthen its community-oriented public safety efforts to creatively and compassionately address some of Bennington's most pressing challenges.	Medium	Ongoing	CPARB, Town Manager's Office, BPD	Project Alliance
<b>GOAL: Affordable broadband and telecommunication services throughout Bennington</b>				
Siting of new overhead power lines, locating switching boxes, and maintaining existing power lines should recognize the scenic and historic values of the community, and new service connections should continue to be routed underground.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission	GMP
Bennington should coordinate with GMP on the siting of new distribution and transmission infrastructure and encourage the implementation of grid resiliency measures.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission, EMD	GMP
The Town should advocate for fast, reliable, and affordable internet access to be available throughout Bennington by continuing participation in the Southern Vermont Communications Union District (SoVT CUD).	Medium	Ongoing	Bennington CUD representative	BCRC
The Town should work with wireless companies to maintain and enhance wireless services, provide new facilities as necessary, and do so with respect and sensitivity to environmental, scenic, and neighborhood concerns.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission	
<b>GOAL: Robust and safe water and wastewater systems</b>				
The Town should limit new connections to the public water system and sewer line expansions to the downtown and neighborhood areas.	Medium	Ongoing	Select Board, DPW	
The Town should continue to promote homeowner participation in the lead service line replacement program and consider adopting an ordinance to mandate participation in this critical public health initiative.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Communications Coordinator	
Bennington should review and update water and sewer capacity allocation policies regularly.	High	Annually	DPW	
The Town must continue efforts to reduce sewer line infiltration with appropriate technological fixes, and separate sources of stormwater discharge from the system to maintain and improve its capacity.	High	Ongoing	DPW	
Bennington's Public Works Department should implement and regularly update its stormwater master plan.	Medium	Ongoing	DPW	
New development projects must be required to plan for adequate and environmentally sound stormwater discharges.	Medium	Ongoing	DRB	
The Public Works Department should continue to be closely involved in the annual maintenance of the Town's capital plan.	High	Annually	DPW	
<b>GOAL: A solid waste management strategy that emphasizes reduction, reuse, and responsible disposal</b>				
Bennington should continue to support efforts to reduce the generation of solid waste through recycling programs, composting programs, and initiatives to reduce the use of wasteful packaging.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's office, Town Communications Coordinator	Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance (BCSWA)
The town should encourage public events to be more proactive about separating trash, recycling, and food scraps, and ultimately aim to be zero waste events.	Low	Ongoing	Town Communications Coordinator	BCSWA
Bennington should also support comprehensive education programs on waste minimization, reuse, recycling, and resource recovery through collaboration with local media, schools, industry, and community organizations.	Low	Ongoing	Town Communications Coordinator	BCSWA
<b>GOAL: Ample and accessible opportunities for recreation that foster healthy lifestyles and social connection</b>				
It is important that the Town continue to maintain open lands and facilities, and expand on them where appropriate. Bennington should actively support the acquisition of important recreational lands (or acquisition of easements to those lands) by conservation organizations that will allow public access.	Medium	Ongoing	Buildings & Grounds, community development staff	VLT



	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
The Town should look for opportunities to expand the network of trails and shared-use paths to continue connecting open space and key destinations throughout Bennington.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning and community development staff	BCRC
The Town should ensure that those high-quality recreation opportunities are available for all residents, including those with special needs, and for visitors to the area.	Medium	Ongoing	Buildings & Grounds	
The Town should support the creation of additional indoor recreational spaces for all ages.	Medium	Ongoing	Community development staff	
<b>GOAL: An engaged citizenry that participates in town governance on appointed citizen boards and commissions that represent a broad swath of the town citizenry, including people of all ages, abilities, and income levels</b>				
The Town should actively recruit citizens, including those relatively new to the area, to serve on the Town's appointed boards and commissions.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Communications Coordinator	
The Town should work to eliminate barriers and ensure accommodations for all members of the community when structuring meeting schedules and formats to ensure a truly representative town governance.	High	Ongoing	All towns boards and commissions	
The Town should collaborate with the SVSU to connect students with Bennington's Town Government.	Low	Within 5 years	Town Communications Coordinator	SVSU
<b>GOAL: Extensive connections with the broader region, including playing an appropriate role in regional institutions</b>				
Bennington should take a leading role on matters requiring regional coordination and/or of regional significance where smaller towns do not have the administrative capacity to lead.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's office	BCRC
Bennington should continue to coordinate with regional partners to establish connections with targeted areas, including New York's Capital District, to sustain in-migration to meet workforce demands.	Medium	Ongoing	Community development staff	BCRC
<b>RESILIENT COMMUNITY</b>				
<b>VISION: Bennington will be proactive, forward-thinking, and inclusive in addressing the hazards of a changing climate.</b>				
<b>GOAL: Up-to-date emergency management policies and procedures that address the needs of all community members, especially vulnerable residents</b>				
The Town will maintain a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.	High	Ongoing	Planning Commission	BCRC
The Town will maintain a Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) and update it on an annual basis; create annexes to the LEMP to address specific hazard responses; submit a copy to the Vermont Department of Emergency Management.	High	Annually	EMD	VEM
The Town will actively engage with the Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC) and the regional coordinator at Vermont Emergency Management (VEM).	Medium	Ongoing	EMD	BCRC, VEM
<b>GOAL: Infrastructure, buildings, and critical assets that are resilient to extreme weather events, especially flooding</b>				
Bennington should maintain up-to-date regulations to limit and control development in flood and river corridor areas.	High	Ongoing	Planning Commission	
The Town should work cooperatively with the BCRC and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources to maintain accurate flood hazard area maps and to identify specific areas of concern that should be targeted for mitigation actions.	High	Ongoing	Planning Commission	BCRC, ANR
The Town should support efforts to provide education and outreach to property owners within flood zones to encourage flood-proofing or buy-outs of structures subject to repeated flooding that are eligible for funding under the FEMA hazard mitigation grant program.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission, Town Communications Coordinator	BCRC
Owners of property in flood hazard zones should be encouraged to secure propane tanks, firewood, boats, and other items that could float away in a flood.	Low	Ongoing	Town Communication Coordinator	
The Town should maintain participation in FEMA's Community Rating System.	High	Ongoing	Town Manager's office	



	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
Bennington's river corridor regulations should be updated to align with new guidance from the Agency of Natural Resources.	Medium	Within 4 years	Planning Commission	BCRC, RFM, ANR
Bennington's roadway design standards should remain consistent with the most current "VTrans Orange Book" standards to size replacement structures correctly.	Medium	Ongoing	DPW	BCRC, AOT
The Town should work with BCRC and VTrans to repair or replace vulnerable bridges and culverts.	High	Ongoing	DPW	BCRC, AOT
The town should coordinate with Green Mountain Power and Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO) to identify vulnerabilities in local transmission and distribution infrastructure and ensure that power outages are addressed swiftly.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's office, Public Safety	GMP, VELCO
<b>GOAL: Healthy rivers, streams, wetlands, and upland forests that mitigate flooding</b>				
The Town should continue to work with state and federal agencies, conservation and watershed organizations, and landowners to maintain and enhance the ecological integrity of rivers, streams, wetlands, and upland forests.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's office, Planning Commission	
<b>GOAL: Climate-resilient neighborhoods</b>				
To reduce the urban heat island effect in Bennington, the town should increase the planting of trees and vegetation throughout more urbanized areas to mitigate the effects of the higher coverage of impervious surfaces.	Medium	Within 5 years	Planning staff, Buildings & Grounds, DPW	
The Town should incorporate green infrastructure into regular street upgrades and public space improvement projects.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning staff, Buildings & Grounds, DPW	
<b>GOAL: Informed residents who are prepared for emergency situations</b>				
The Town communications coordinator will promote important resources to residents, through social media, updates to the town's Emergency and Disaster Planning webpage, and other methods, such as direct mailings.	High	Ongoing	Town Communications Coordinator	
The town should work with social service providers, mobile home park owners, and landlords to share information about emergency procedures with their clients and residents.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Communications Coordinator, EMD	
<b>GOAL: Energy-efficient residential, municipal, commercial, and industrial buildings</b>				
The Bennington Energy Committee shall promote energy education programs sponsored by Efficiency Vermont, the Bennington County Regional Commission, and other organizations—particularly those that focus on weatherization improvements and energy savings.	Medium	Ongoing	Energy Committee	BCRC, Efficiency Vermont
In accordance with state law the Town shall continue to provide information on the Residential Building Energy Standards to building permit applicants and take steps to verify that all new residential buildings meet those standards.	High	Ongoing	Permitting staff	
The Energy Committee shall support programs that provide funding for weatherization of the homes of lower-income residents, including the Weatherization Assistance Program offered through the Bennington Rutland Opportunity Council (BROC).	Medium	Ongoing	Energy Committee	BROC
The Energy Committee will work with NeighborWorks of Western Vermont (now part of Cornerstone Housing Partners) to widely publicize their "Heat Squad" home energy improvement programs.	Medium	Ongoing	Energy Committee	NeighborWorks
The Energy Committee will promote efforts to assist homeowners and businesses with switching to alternative space heating systems.	Medium	Ongoing	Energy Committee	
The Energy Committee shall promote use of the "Energy Star" building performance rating system and related building practices that limit energy consumption in new and remodeled homes, businesses, and industrial facilities.	Low	Ongoing	Energy Committee	
All new commercial and industrial buildings must also meet the state-mandated Commercial Building Energy Standards.	Low	Ongoing	Permitting staff	
The Town should encourage commercial property owners to adopt "Stretch Codes"	Low	Ongoing	Energy Committee	
Business owners should be encouraged to have energy audits to assist in identifying measures to adjust operations to minimize energy use.	Low	Ongoing	Energy Committee	



	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
<b>GOAL: Reduced energy consumption in municipal operations</b>				
The Bennington Energy Committee shall pursue implementation of this plan with the support of other Town boards and staff, advocate for energy conservation and renewable energy projects, and report on a regular basis to the Select Board.	High	Ongoing	Energy Committee, Select Board	
Town facilities staff will complete the planned heat pump installations in municipal buildings, and identify additional energy conservation strategies for large facilities including the Department of Public Works facility and the recreation center.	High	Within 5 years	Facilities/Buildings & Grounds	
For its own fleet, the Town will pursue the purchase of more fuel-efficient vehicles, including electric vehicles where practical, and vehicles with anti-idling technologies.	Medium	Within 10 years	Town Manager's office	
<b>GOAL: An energy-efficient transportation system with a diversity of options</b>				
The Town will promote electric vehicle use through cooperation with Drive Electric Vermont and other organizations.	Medium	Ongoing	Energy Committee	BCRC, Drive Electric Vermont
The Energy Committee will provide information to businesses about electric vehicle charging stations and encourage businesses to install such facilities to support employees who would like to use electric vehicles for commuting.	Low	Ongoing	Energy Committee	
The Town will pursue further installation of EV charging stations in public parking lots and encourage businesses to install charging stations for their employees and customers.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's Office	
The energy Committee will work with the Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce and other organizations to highlight the availability and location of EV infrastructure in the community.	Low	Ongoing	Energy Committee	
The Town will pursue amending the land use regulations to incorporate additional electric vehicle supply equipment development provisions.	Low	Within 5 years	Planning Commission	
The Town should work with local business groups to promote Go!Vermont commuting resources, encourage employers to provide facilities to encourage bicycling, walking, and carpooling, and motivate employees to consider alternative ways of commuting to work.	Low	Ongoing	Energy Committee	AOT, BCRC
The Energy Committee will work with the Green Mountain Community Network (GMCN) to support wider utilization of the local public transportation system.	Medium	Ongoing	Energy Committee	GMCN
The Town will actively support the expansion of intercity bus travel.	Low	Ongoing	Town Manager's office	GMCN, BCRC
The Energy Committee will work with the Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to ensure that the services are well publicized and that stop and transfer locations are convenient, comfortable, and attractive.	Low	Ongoing	Energy Committee	Chamber of Commerce, GMCN
The Energy Committee will also conduct outreach to the Southwestern Vermont Supervisory Union to encourage walking, biking, and taking the bus to school.	Low	Ongoing	Energy Committee	SVSU
The Town will continue to improve, expand, and maintain the network of shared-use bicycle and pedestrian facilities and identify safety improvement needs, gaps between important destinations, and other needs.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's office, DPW, Planning staff	BCRC
The town shall ensure that local and state roadway construction and maintenance projects include accommodations for pedestrian and bicycle travel, incorporating "Complete Streets" principles whenever possible.	High	Ongoing	DPW	
The Town will continue to work with the BCRC to plan and implement modifications to local streets to make them more bicycle and pedestrian friendly and to present more attractive streetscapes for all residents and users of the transportation system.	Medium	Ongoing	Town Manager's office, DPW	BCRC
The Town will continue to participate in rail planning projects to promote rail for freight shipments and passenger travel. The Town should also support the expenditure of transportation funds on projects to maintain and upgrade rail lines, bridges, crossings, and other critical infrastructure.	Low	Ongoing	Planning staff	
<b>GOAL: Local, renewable sources of energy that strengthen the local economy and are accessible to all residents</b>				
The Town encourages solar energy development, of any scale, on building rooftops.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission, Energy Committee	



	Level of Priority	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Partners
The Town shall continue to support the development of small-scale (150 KW capacity or less) electricity generation from solar energy at homes, businesses, schools, and other institutions.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission, Energy Committee	
Community solar projects are encouraged and may be located anywhere in Bennington not specifically identified as a "Prohibited (Exclusion) Area" in the Solar Facility Siting Criteria. Moreover, any community solar project located on a site that is not a prohibited/exclusion area shall be considered as being located on a preferred site.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission, Energy Committee	
The Town supports efforts to develop small hydro projects at existing dam sites.	Low	Ongoing	Planning staff, Energy Committee	
The Town supports the development of local, cost-effective biomass energy resources for heating.	Low	Ongoing	Energy Committee	
The Town encourages the installation of battery energy storage, especially when integrated with renewable energy generation facilities.	Medium	Ongoing	Energy Committee	
<b>GOAL: Reduced greenhouse gas emissions that align with Vermont's Global Warming Solutions Act</b>				
The Bennington Planning Commission and town planning staff will continue implementing land use planning policies that encourage efficient development with high-density mixed-used development in the designated growth center and low-density development that does not require extensive infrastructure or services in rural areas, consistent with the land use plan and policies set forth in this town plan.	Medium	Ongoing	Planning Commission, Planning staff	
Town leadership will actively support investments in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.	High	Ongoing	Town Manager's office, community development staff	BBC, BCRC



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