TOWN OF BENNINGTON

TO: Chair, Town Planning Commissions, Towns of: Glastenbury, Pownal, Shaftsbury, Woodford and Hoosick, NY, and Villages of: Old Bennington and North Bennington, Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs, Bennington County Regional Commission

FROM: Barry Horst, Chairman, Town of Bennington Planning Commission, 205 South Street

Date: March 30, 2015

Re: Proposed revised Bennington Town Plan

Enclosed is one copy of the proposed revised Bennington Town Plan text, maps and report.

The Planning Commission has scheduled a Public Hearing to consider the adoption of the revised Town Plan on Monday, May 4, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. at the Bennington Fire Facility, 3rd Floor Assembly Room, 126 River Street, in Bennington, Vermont. The Town Plan then will be presented to the Bennington Select Board.

Per 24 VSA, Chapter 117 § 4384 (e) the Bennington Planning Commission is soliciting comments, especially from Bennington's municipal neighbors and the Bennington County Regional Commission, through this notice.

Please address any questions, comments, or concerns, to my attention at the above address at your earliest convenience. Thank you.

Enc: Proposed revised Bennington Town Plan, and Legal Notice for Planning Commission Public Hearing.

205 SOUTH STREET P.O. BOX 469 BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201
802-442-1037 FAX (802) 442-1068

PLANNING COMMISSION
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
BENNINGTON TOWN PLAN

The Bennington Planning Commission will conduct a Public Hearing on Monday, May 4, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. at the Bennington Fire Facility, 3rd Floor Assembly Room, 126 River Street in Bennington, Vermont for the purpose of adopting the revised 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 effects the entire Town of Bennington.

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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.

Barry Horst, Chairperson, Town of Bennington Planning Commission

Planning Commission Hearing Draft

Bennington Town Plan

Adopted: _____

Prepared by the
Bennington Planning Commission
Approved by the Planning Commission:

Assistance provided by the Bennington County Regional Commission
Funded in part by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development

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Bennington Planning Commission: Barry Horst, Chair, Donald Campbell, Charles Copp, Michael McDonough, Ken Swierad

Planning Director: Daniel Monks

Bennington Select Board: Greg Van Houten, Chair, Sharyn Brush, Vice-Chair, Jim Carroll, Justin Corcoran, Thomas Jacobs, Michael Keane, John McFadden

Town Manager: Stuart Hurd

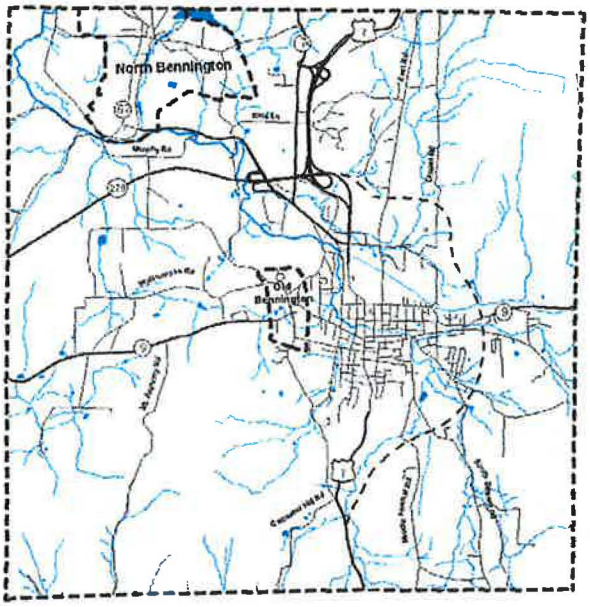
Introduction

Overview

The Town Plan provides a framework for decisions that will guide future growth and development in Bennington. Its statements, policies, and recommendations will help ensure that the town retains the attributes that residents value while promoting actions that enhance the town's character, prosperity, and overall quality of life.

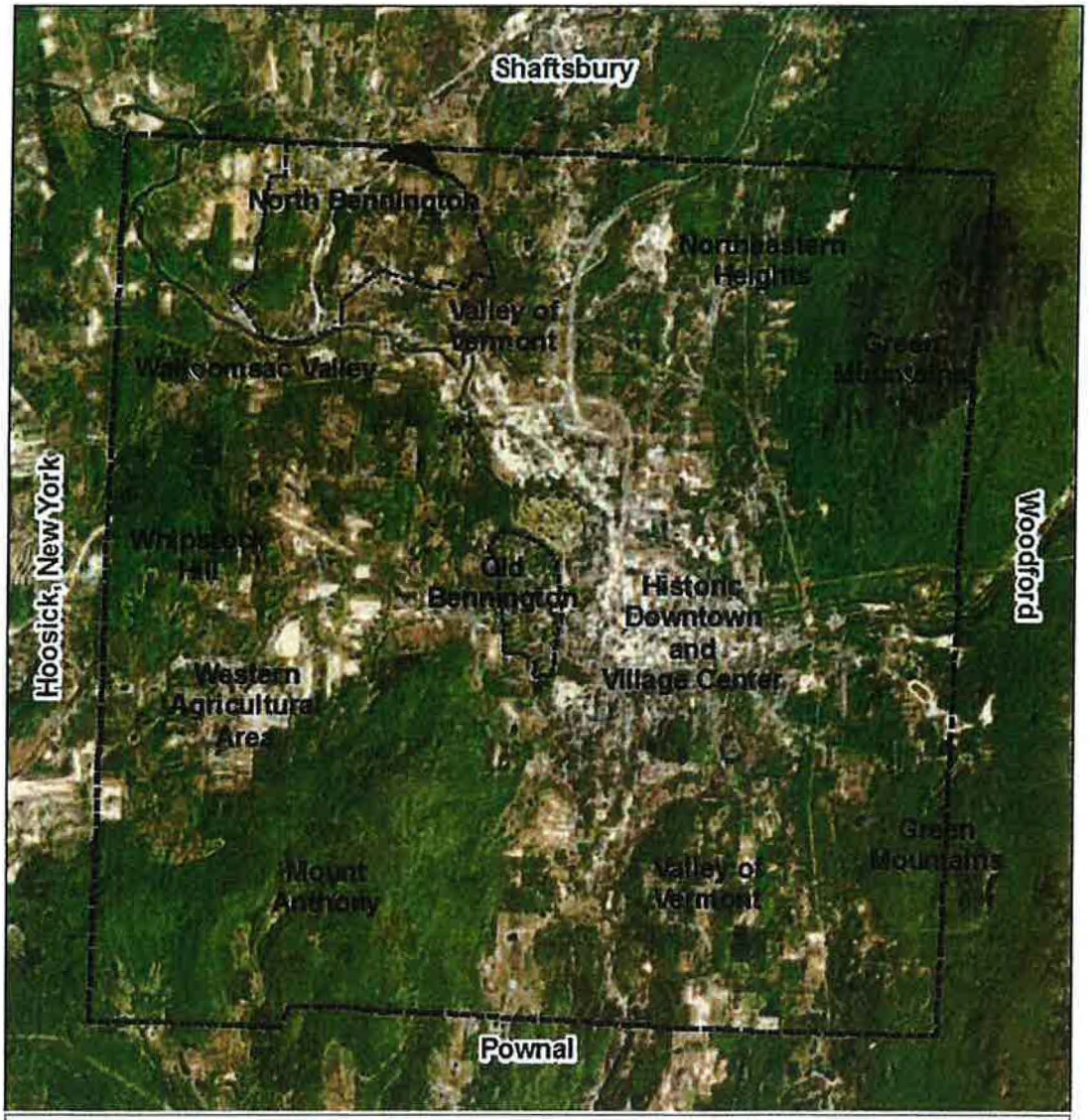
The Town Plan was prepared and adopted pursuant to Title 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117, the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act. It contains all of the required elements and is consistent with all of the goals enumerated in that statute. Moreover, while this Plan is guided by the needs 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.

Beginning in the summer of 2014, the Bennington Planning Commission gathered data, compiled background information, and held meetings to identify and analyze issues that are important to the community. The basis for this Town Plan was the plan developed and adopted by the town in 2010. An updated draft of the Town Plan was developed based on this planning process, and public hearings were held to assess the acceptance of the ideas presented in the document. After final revisions were made, the Town Plan was forwarded to the Select Board for final hearings and adoption. The Town Plan remains in effect for five years after which it will need to be updated once again.



This Plan covers the entire Town of Bennington, exclusive of the separately incorporated villages of Old Bennington and North Bennington. Issues involving facilities and services shared with one or both of the villages are addressed in the Plan.

Effective implementation of this document is, of course, critical to its success. It is therefore important that the Town Plan be referred to by local, regional, and state officials and organizations when undertaking actions that will affect the town. The Planning Commission and Select Board must consider the Plan when preparing amendments to municipal bylaws and



This aerial photo of Bennington clearly shows the forested mountains that line the town's eastern border and which cover much of the southwestern portion of the town. Agricultural areas are found in the southern and western valleys, and the most heavily developed areas lie in the center of town near the intersections of Routes 7 and 9. The US 7/VT 279 interchange is very evident toward the town's north as is the WH Morse Airport runway near Whipstock Hill.

ordinances, and when considering significant municipal expenditures and pursuing grant opportunities. Because the Plan provides the basis for many town 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. The town also should insist that plans and projects advanced by state or federal agencies that affect the community be compatible with the Town Plan.

Physical Geography

Bennington's character is shaped by its location among the mountains and valleys of southwestern Vermont. The escarpment of the Green Mountains lies near the town's eastern border, rising abruptly some 2,000 feet above the valley. Mount Anthony, a peak in the Taconic Mountain Range, dominates the landscape in the southwestern part of the town and Whipstock Hill lies near the state line at the town's western edge. These steep upland areas have supplied important natural resources to the town while remaining largely free from development due to poor access and unproductive soils.

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. Of Bennington's 26,700 acres (42 square miles) approximately 16,500 acres (61%) lie in these productive valley areas.

History

The town was chartered in 1749 by Benning Wentworth, the governor of New Hampshire. A village site was planned for its center and was eventually established where Old Bennington Village is now located. The relatively level ground and abundant water power to the north and east of Old Bennington soon attracted considerable development. The downtown and village neighborhoods that surround it remain as important commercial and residential centers today.

Bennington became an important manufacturing center in the 19th century with mills and factories constructed in the area that is now downtown and along the Walloomsac River and Paran Creek. The textile industry developed into a particularly important component of the town's economic base. In the meantime, agriculture transformed the landscape as farms spread through the valleys and hillsides were cleared for pasture.

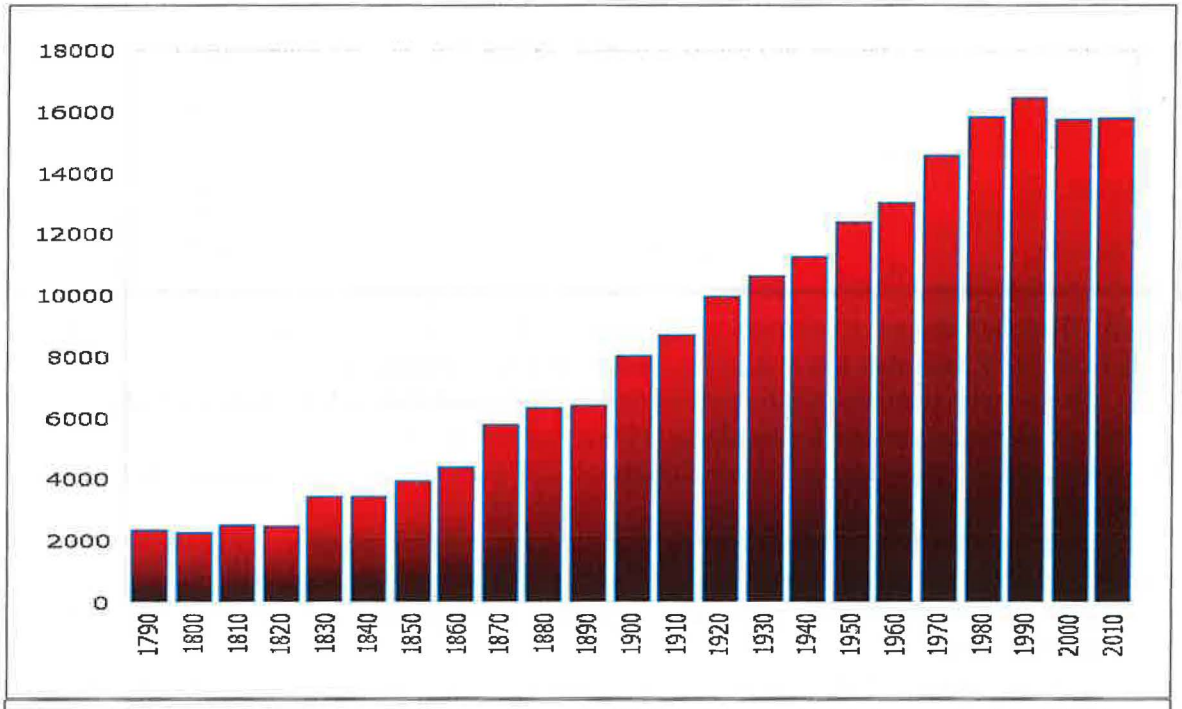
A network of roads soon connected the villages and outlying areas, and important highways leading to towns and cities to the west, north, and south were laid out and improved. Roadways also were established along different alignments up and over the mountains to the east until the current highway (VT 9), following the Roaring Branch into Woodford, became the principal route toward Brattleboro and the Connecticut River Valley.

Trains came to Bennington in the mid-1800s and significantly impacted the town's growth and economic development for many years. The main line passed through North Bennington and a spur provided access to the downtown area where an important train station and rail yard were located. Other connecting rail lines included the "Corkscrew" line that entered town from the west and a line that reached from downtown into Glastenbury in the Green Mountains.

The first decades of the 20th century saw a number of important developments. An increasing reliance on automobiles led to a need to improve roads and most of the main roads through the area were paved by 1940. The first hospital, Putnam Memorial, now known as Southwestern Vermont Medical Center, was opened in 1918. The stock market crash idled many local industries in the 1930s, but new industrial enterprises began to take their place after World War II.

Bennington also began to develop as a center for education, culture, and recreation with the opening of Bennington College, improved access for tourism, and a growing interest in the arts. In recent years, the town has made an effort to preserve important historic and natural resources while encouraging new development that takes advantage of the area's rich history and an ever-improving transportation and telecommunications infrastructure. The town is now home to approximately 16,000 residents (including North Bennington and Old Bennington), a number that has remained relatively constant since 1980.

This population has dispersed somewhat as new homes have been constructed in rural areas which are not farmed as extensively as they once were. Agricultural operations are still important in Bennington, however, especially in the rich valleys in the southern and western



Bennington's population increased steadily from the early 1800s to its current total of approximately 16,000.
Source: UVM Center for Rural Studies – U.S. Census Data.

parts of the town. The mountainsides, to the extent that they were once cleared for timber resources and pasture, have largely reverted to forest and many of these lands have been conserved to ensure that they remain undeveloped.

Bennington remains the largest and most important center of population and economic activity in southwestern Vermont. It also contains important educational, governmental, health

care, and cultural institutions that serve Bennington County and surrounding rural areas in Vermont, Massachusetts, and New York.

Economic and Demographic Profile

The 2010 US Census reported a total resident population of 15,764 for Bennington. Of that number, 1,643 were residents of North Bennington Village and 139 resided in Old Bennington Village. The population has stabilized showing a slight increase over the past few years following a slow decline in population after 1990. Bennington County includes 17 towns and has a total population of 37,125; Bennington being far and away the largest of those towns. The age-sex profile of the community is comparable to that of the county and state. Females outnumber males, 8,385 to 7,364, primarily because there are more women in the older age

Population by Age Cohort – 2010 US Census

AGE	BENNINGTON	COUNTY (%)
Under 20	3,952 (25.1%)	23.5 %
20 - 34	2,963 (18.8%)	14.8 %
35 - 49	2,877 (18.3%)	19.4 %
50 - 64	3,132 (19.9%)	23.4%
65 and over	2,840 (18.0%)	18.9%

classes. The median age of the town's population is 40.8 years, an increase of almost three years from 2000, although lower than the county and state median age.

Bennington contains 3,716 families and 6,246 households (a household includes families as well as single persons living alone) within its borders (2010 US Census). The average family size of 2.88 persons and household size of 2.29 persons are nearly identical to the county averages.

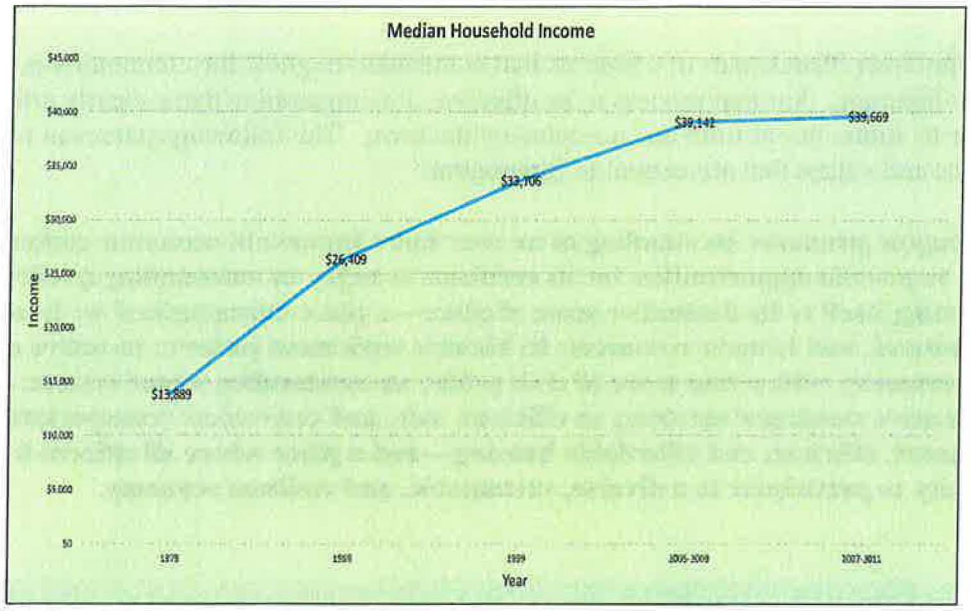
The town includes a total of 6,763 housing units. Of that number, 3,738 units are owner occupied, 2,508 are renter occupied, and 517 are vacant or used seasonally.
Bennington contains the highest percentage of renter occupied units (over 37% of the total) of any town in the area.

The percentage of Bennington residents aged 25 and over with at least a high school degree (86%) is slightly lower than the total for the county as a whole (90%), and fewer Bennington residents hold a college degree (24% versus 33% for the county).

According to 2013 data from the Vermont Department of Labor, Bennington's total resident workforce was 7,807. The total number of jobs in Bennington at that time was 9,876 indicating that Bennington is a regional employment center. Most Bennington residents work in or near town, as their average commute is just 17 minutes. The average unemployment rate in 2013 was 5.8%, slightly higher than the countywide and state unemployment rates

Service industries are the major employers of Bennington residents, with manufacturing, retail, construction, and professional jobs also important economic sectors. The average wage

earned by a worker in Bennington has increased steadily over time to its current level of $38,101, comparable to the county average, but lower than the average for the state.



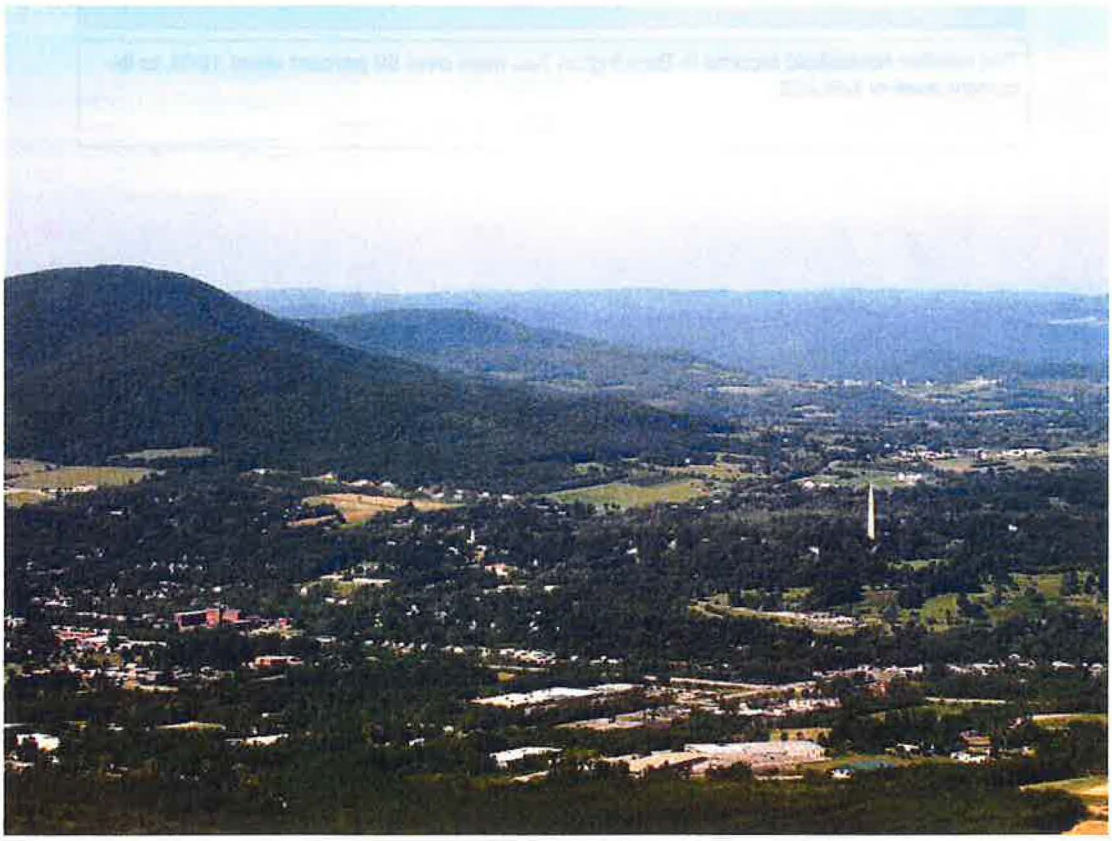
The median household income in Bennington has risen over 60 percent since 1979, to its current level of $39,669.

Chapter 1 - A Vision for Bennington's Future

1.1 VISION STATEMENT

The Town Plan is part of a process that is intended to guide the community in a particular direction. For that process to be effective, it is imperative that a clearly articulated vision for its future be set forth and accepted by the town. The following statement is based on aspirations and values that are central to Bennington.

As Bennington promotes its standing as an ever more important economic center, it will continue to provide opportunities for its residents to enjoy an outstanding quality of life by dedicating itself to its distinctive sense of place—a place characterized by its natural, scenic, cultural, and historic resources; its historic settlement pattern; its active and engaged community with a true sense of civic pride; an outstanding school system; efficient and responsive municipal services; an efficient, safe, and convenient transportation system; pleasant, efficient, and affordable housing—and a place where all citizens have the opportunity to participate in a diverse, sustainable, and resilient economy.



Bennington as seen from the White Rocks lookout on Bald Mountain east of town.

1.2 GOALS

Specific goals provide focus and direction to the policy statements and recommended actions set forth in each chapter of the Town Plan.. These goals also are consistent with the 14 specific goals of 24 V.S.A. Section 4302.

1. **Support and strengthen Bennington's role as an economic center**. Continue to develop an economy that is based on businesses that provide satisfying and rewarding employment while maintaining high social and environmental standards. Provide public investment and support as appropriate to create a competitive business environment.

   Promote the use of local products and resources in a manner that supports development of a sustainable local economy.

   Recognize the importance to the community of a variety of economic enterprises. Support emerging new technology and service oriented businesses, traditional manufacturing, agricultural, and forestry-related businesses. Provide the infrastructure necessary to support desirable new technology-driven industries.

2. **Plan development to maintain the town's historic settlement pattern** of a well-defined urban growth center surrounded by rural countryside. Provide incentives for investment in the downtown and ensure that new development is consistent with the area's historic character and form. Support efforts to strengthen and revitalize existing residential neighborhoods near the town's center.

   Development in rural areas shall respect the need to protect the town's natural resources and scenic landscapes. Sprawl–dispersed, auto-dependent development outside of compact urban and village centers, along highways, and in rural countryside–is costly, inefficient, and unattractive and will be strictly limited. The forest lands on the steep slopes of Mount Anthony, Whipstock Hill, and the Green Mountains must remain free from development and be reserved for forest and recreation related uses.

3. **Recognize the importance of significant natural, scenic, and historic resources**. Make use of public investment, regulation, and creative development techniques to protect open spaces, natural and fragile areas, scenic views, and historic sites, structures, and districts that are significant to the community.

   Support appropriate utilization of local natural resources for economic and renewable energy development while ensuring that any resource extraction is accomplished in an environmentally sensitive manner.

4. Support policies, public investments, and projects undertaken by both private and non-profit developers that help **ensure the availability of an adequate supply of housing that is affordable and desirable** for all of the town's residents. Single and multi-family opportunities all must be available in sufficient quantity in the community. Efforts should focus on increasing the percentage of owner-occupied housing. Concentra-

tions of new housing will be located near employment and community centers. Promote rehabilitation and reuse of existing sites and structures near the town's center for housing development.

Housing development in rural areas must be carefully planned to protect the town's rural character and to avoid placing excessive demands on public transportation facilities and utilities.

5. **Provide a safe, convenient, and efficient transportation system** that includes a safe and efficient system of roads and bridges and facilities and services that encourage and accommodate other modes of travel, including bicycle/pedestrian and public transit.

   Recognize the importance of convenient and well-planned parking and pedestrian facilities to the vitality of the town and provide support for their development.

   Support expansion of freight and passenger rail service and bus service for the town and region and ensure that airport facilities and services are adequate to meet the needs of businesses.

6. **Ensure that community facilities and services are sufficient to support a growing resident population and the economic needs of the community**.

   High quality educational, vocational, and child care opportunities must be available to meet the needs of all residents and businesses.

   High quality medical services must continue to be available to meet the needs of all residents.

   Municipal utilities shall be maintained in good condition and any extensions or expansions coordinated with the town's land use plan and growth objectives.

   A variety of recreational facilities and services must be available for residents and visitors. Support efforts to maintain or provide public access to outdoor recreational opportunities - such as forests, trails, streams, and safe bicycling routes - that are important to the community.

   Continue efforts to minimize solid waste generation and ensure that safe and cost-effective disposal methods are available.

7. **Promote the safe and efficient use of energy and utilization of renewable energy resources**. Support efforts to develop renewable energy facilities, a smart grid, and other technologies that will help the area meet a significant share of its energy needs. Pursue efforts to reduce overall energy use in all sectors and minimize the energy required to operate municipal buildings, vehicles, and other facilities and equipment.

Chapter 2 - Economic Development

2.1 Overview

Bennington is an important economic center serving southwestern Vermont as well as nearby communities in New York and Massachusetts and is identified as a principal regional growth center in the Bennington County Regional Plan. 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.

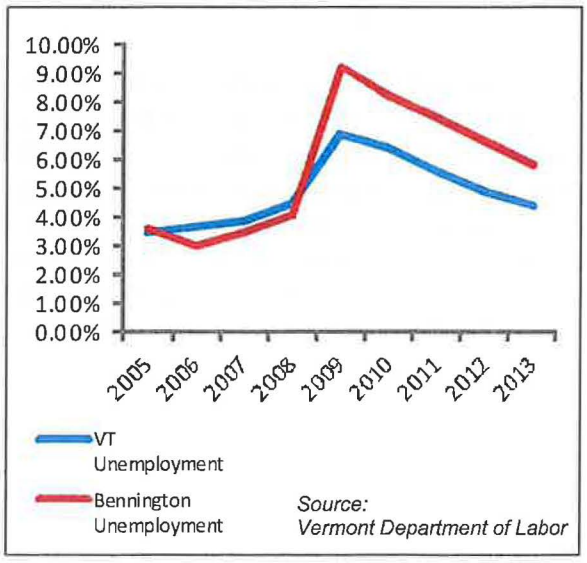
The Bennington Stategic Economic Development Plan, adopted in 2013, establishes economic development objectives and guidelines based upon the unique characteristics and assets of the Bennington region. Bennington can use that plan as a resource to promote a *diverse* and *sustainable* economy for the region that will support economic opportunity and a high quality of life for residents of the area. The plan stresses the importance of an economic development strategy that is, like Bennington's economy, diverse, with efforts focused towards three main goals:

1. Increase job opportunities and the competitiveness and quality of the workforce to meet the needs of existing and new businesses in Bennington.
2. Develop and maintain critical infrastructure necessary to promote economic vitality.
3. Increase economic activity and improve the quality of life in Bennington by focusing on local businesses and existing assets.

2.2 Current Economic Conditions and Recent Trends

Since 2010, Bennington's economy, like most of the rest of Vermont, has been slowly recovering from the preceding period of recession. In that time, as you can see in Figure 2.1, the unemployment rate has remained high relative to the state average. In September of 2014, Bennington's unemployment rate was 5.6%, compared to Vermont's 4.2%. Most economic sectors have slightly declined over the previous decade, but diversity has allowed the economy on the whole to remain relatively strong (when compared to many other communities of similar demographics). That diversity can be seen in Table 2-1, which includes data from 2003, 2008, and 2013 from the Vermont Department of Labor.

Figure 2.1 - Unemployment: 2005-2013



As seen below in table 2-1, which includes a ten year span of employment and average wage by economic sector, health and social service, manufacturing, retail, and education jobs make up the majority of Bennington's Economy. Furthermore, in the instance of health and manufacturing, these jobs offer some of the highest average wages in Bennington. In fact, health and manufacturing generate more than half of the total wage earnings in Bennington—more than all other sectors in table 2-1 combined. However, while the average wages have consistently gone up in these sectors, the number of jobs has gone down in each.

Table 2-1 - Bennington Employment and Average Wage by Sector: 2003, 2008, 2013

	2003		2008		2013	
Economic Sector	**Employment**	**Avg. Wage**	**Employment**	**Avg. Wage**	**Employment**	**Avg. Wage**
Health and Social Services	2816	$32,890	2846	$41,334	2660	$46,485
Manufacturing	1700	$36,645	1835	$42,162	1601	$45,575
Retail Trade	1550	$21,857	1561	$24,438	1521	$25,867
Government	1521	$35,614	1454	$37,218	1475	$41,510
Education	1232	$30,071	1328	$35,468	1349	$39,755
Leisure, Hospitality	805	$11,872	812	$13,601	741	$16,295
Professional Services	372	$26,317	447	$35,013	581	$31,234
Other Services	294	$17,385	230	$19,373	246	$21,825
Information	264	$30,487	261	$39,868	219	$42,271
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	266	$36,796	240	$41,842	212	$48,085
Construction	250	$27,887	283	$33,907	174	$38,335
Transportation	148	$27,519	150	$34,018	99	$29,833
Wholesale Trade	113	$39,734	113	$46,238	54	$54,746
Natural Resources	46	$17,024	15	$23,323	23	$29,089

Source:
Vermont Department of Labor

Despite a few specific notable exceptions (such as education or government), most economic sectors have followed the trend of the overall economy—with the total workforce in Bennington decreasing around 1% since the beginning of the recession in 2008. During that same period, unemployment within the workforce in Bennington reached a high of over 9%, far more extreme than Vermont's unemployment spike in 2009 of around 7%. Figure 2.1 illustrates the impacts of the recession on unemployment in Bennington. Nonetheless, throughout this time, average wages in Bennington have continued to rise at rates almost identical to the state as a whole, each increasing 22% since 2005. Total, the overall average wage in Bennington is over $38,000.

2.3 Key Economic Resources

The town recognizes the importance of maintaining a diverse and sustainable economy that provides satisfying jobs and good wages for residents. Key economic sectors that will be particularly important to the town in the future include:

- Materials-Related Light Manufacturing (examples: Abacus Automation, Plasan North America, Kaman Composites, NSK Steering Systems)
- Specialty Electronics and Metal Products Manufacturing (example: Eveready, Vishay/Tansitor)
- Natural Resource-Based Manufacturing (examples: Bennington Potters, Catamount Glass)
- Specialty Publishing and Printing (example: Hemmings Motor News)
- Education Services (examples: colleges, elementary and secondary schools – public and private)
- Health and Social Services (examples: Southwestern Vermont Health Care, United Counseling Service)
- High Value-Added Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (example: Global-Z International)
- Tourism-Related Enterprises and Recreational Manufacturing (example: Bennington Battle Monument, Bennington Museum, specialty retail stores, restaurants, and accommodations)
- Retail and Professional Services

These businesses are well-positioned to capitalize on significant economic trends that have emerged in recent years. Bennington is part of a larger economic region and can benefit from ties to areas such as New York's capital district. At the same time, markets are becoming much more global and businesses need to be able to interact in that broad marketplace. Technology is having profound effects on innovation and efficiency in business practices and products. Quality of life issues are of great importance in business location/relocation decisions. Support for the local workforce, including educational services, child care facilities, and housing availability, are more critical than ever. All of these factors must be recognized and acted upon for the local economy to thrive.

A number of resources in Bennington are available to businesses that are attempting to capitalize on these trends. The town should work to ensure that these resources are widely appreciated, utilized, and improved whenever possible:

- Availability of quality higher education in the area (there are over 35 institutions of higher education within a 50 mile radius of Bennington).
- An excellent quality of life including good health care services, and natural, cultural, and recreational resources.
- An attractive, historic, and vibrant downtown.
- Proximity to New York's Capital District and the Berkshires of Massachusetts.
- Access to major tourism markets and location at a key gateway to Vermont.
- Highway and rail transportation infrastructure.
- WH Morse State Airport.

- Strong technology infrastructure.
- An adequate supply of available industrial sites.
- An active workforce investment board and technical education center.

Areas that should receive special attention to further the town's competitive economic position include:

- Adequate education and workforce training, with focus on targeted sectors of projected growth. This should include a comprehensive internship program and efforts designed to promote exposure to local employment opportunities to students at all ages.
- A mechanism of regular communication with businesses to monitor unmet needs and opportunities.
- Affordable and high quality housing for employees in all workforce sectors.
- Adequacy of transportation and telecommunications systems to meet industrial and personal demand. Especially important will be connections to regional rail systems.

There are a number of strategies that can help further strengthen the economy of the town and region. The six principal strategies include: strengthening regional collaboration between various governmental and business organizations (including entities in western Massachusetts and eastern New York) targeting strategic job sectors (retention, expansion, and recruitment), improving education and training for the workforce, further enhancing transportation (especially rail) and telecommunications infrastructure, strengthening housing supply and choice, and facilitating access to investment capital. The town should participate in ongoing efforts to support their effective implementation.

2.4 Economic Sectors

A brief overview of the issues and opportunities facing the individual market sectors that comprise Bennington's economy will help the town identify policies and actions that will be most beneficial to the community.

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 a number of important manufacturing enterprises continue to operate successfully in the town, such as the Eveready Battery Factory and Bennington Potters.

On the whole, between 2003 and 2013, manufacturing jobs in Bennington county decreased by 6%, following a national trend of decline. However, average wages in the sector rose by about 25%, meaning that the total wages created by manufacturing in Bennington has risen significantly (17% since 2003), and continues to rise.

Newer manufacturing businesses are primarily located in industrially zoned land northeast and northwest of the town center near the US 7/VT 279 interchanges. Some of Benning-

ton's largest manufacturing employers – NSK Steering, Abacus Automation, Kaman Composites - are located in these districts and available land and infrastructure exists to accommodate additional industrial growth in these locations. 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. Such businesses produce specialized high-value products, offer good wages, and are environmentally friendly. Factors crucial to the recruitment and long-term viability of these businesses are summarized below.

NSK Steering is an important local industry and major employer.

Given the significance of the manufacturing sector within the local economy, the following needs of manufacturing businesses should be considered in all related development and planning:

- An adequate amount of industrially zoned land with good access and infrastructure. There is currently a good inventory of available industrial land and buildings in Bennington; pressure to convert these sites to other commercial (i.e., retail) uses must be resisted. The town should work with the BCRC to identify and reclaim "brownfield" sites (unused or underutilized former industrial properties that may have some level of environmental contamination) and work toward industrial reuse of those properties where appropriate.
- Transportation facilities must be available to provide ready and efficient access to suppliers and markets. Completion of planned roadway improvements along Kocher Drive and Northside Drive, maintenance and improvement of the railway corridor, and air transportation services at the WH Morse Airport are all critical.
- Because of concerns over long-term cost and availability of energy for industrial processes and transportation, efforts must be made to establish reliable local energy from renewable sources and to ensure that alternative transportation to and within the region are available.
- An educated and capable workforce, trained in the new technologies that manufacturing concerns rely on, must be maintained and developed further. Educational facilities and programs must be responsive to the needs of these industries.
- Housing, child care, and related services must be available for workers.
- Public and private business development interests must ensure that adequate financial resources can be made available to ensure that the town is competitive for businesses seeking to locate or expand in Bennington.
- Maintain and enhance the town's unique quality of life by supporting important community services and recreational and cultural resources.

Information and Technology

Businesses in this category include specialty publishing, graphic design, software engineering, internet/website design, and technology manufacturing and related services. Many of these businesses operate out of relatively small sites in and near the downtown and surrounding office, professional, and mixed use districts. Notable examples include Hemmings Motor News, a larger enterprise occupying a renovated building on West Main Street, and GlobalZ International, located in the industrial area northwest of the center of town.

Like manufacturing, information and technology businesses in Bennington have seen a decline in total employment numbers but an increase in average wages, which remain significantly higher than the overall average wage in Bennington or in the state of Vermont.

These technology-driven businesses also have specific requirements for success. Principal among those are an educated and skilled workforce, an adequate supply of conveniently located buildings to house their operations, and state of the art technology infrastructure. The town must be sure that light industrial and commercial/mixed use properties remain available for growth in this sector

It also is important that local educational and career development facilities offer courses and training in the technologies that are in demand by these businesses. Access to educational opportunities as well as internships among the local workforce will be critical to Bennington's future economic vitality in this critical sector.

Mount Anthony Union High School and the Career Development Center must provide effective training for the town's future workforce.

Because businesses of this type have a great deal of flexibility in where they can locate, quality of life issues are of extreme importance in recruitment and retention. The quality of Bennington's public schools, cultural and recreational opportunities, a vibrant downtown, and the beauty of the natural environment are key economic development factors for this reason.

Health Care, Education, Social, and Governmental Services

This service sector is the town's largest employer, providing around 5000 jobs, about half of Bennington's work force. These facilities and the 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 business to the community.

The major regional hospital, Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC) is the town's largest employer. There also is an array of related medical offices, treatment centers, and residential care facilities, many located nearby SVMC in the southwest quadrant of town. A public high school, three public elementary schools, a vocational training center, a middle school, and several private schools serve the town and employ many professionals and support staff. Bennington is a center of post-secondary education as well, with Southern Vermont College lying on the lower slopes of Mount Anthony, Bennington College in North Bennington, and the Community College of Vermont maintaining a facility in the downtown. These colleges collectively represent around 1,700 students annually. There are also two smaller higher

education institutions that have recently opened in Bennington, a satellite campus of Vermont Technical College, which focuses on healthcare education, and Northeast Baptist College .

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.

Many of these facilities and services rely directly or indirectly on the support of local, state, or federal governmental funding, programs, and initiatives. Such support must be at a level sufficient to maintain facilities and services that are as good as or better than that which can be found in other communities. Competitive wages and a high quality of life are needed to attract and retain the people that will make these enterprises successful.

These businesses and organizations also require good access to information and technology as well as a skilled workforce. Maintaining up-to-date technology infrastructure and education and training programs will support continued strength in this growing economic sector.

Other Professional Services

Bennington's historic downtown is the center of commercial activity and a key economic development asset for the town.

Many professions offer services—financial, insurance, real estate, legal, and various administrative and technical functions—that are important to the town's economy. There are numerous small professional businesses located in and near the downtown, either in the central business district or in mixed residential/office districts. These businesses not only provide valuable services, but also add a great deal of vibrancy to the town center. A sizeable workforce in and near the downtown supports commercial businesses and reinforces the importance of the area to the community.

Persons employed in these businesses must be educated, skilled, and very familiar with the technology that allows for information sharing and analysis. Existing educational opportunities must be maintained and enhanced to ensure that the needs of the workforce are met. The town also should seek to develop and maintain a high level of technology infrastructure in and around the town center where many of these businesses are located.

Retail Trade

Retail businesses—the stores where residents of Bennington and the surrounding area, as well as visitors to the town, purchase everything from food to automobiles—have always been an important part of the local economy. Historically, retail businesses were concentrated in the downtown and that area continues to support a significant number of stores today. There has been a tendency toward conversion to specialty shops, galleries, and specialized merchandise in the downtown as larger department stores and chain retail outlets have become established in the commercial districts and plazas along Northside Drive, VT 67A near the new VT 279 interchange, and Kocher Drive.

Employment within the retail sector has remained relatively consistent over the course of the previous decade. Wages have increased by almost 25% in that time, but still remain rela-

tively low compared to other employment sectors or the average wage for a retail sector job in Vermont, which in 2013 was over $27,000.

The large department, grocery, home supply, and chain outlets in the planned commercial districts provide low-cost goods to consumers and employment for many residents. At the same time, over-development of this type of commercial use would have a negative impact on the vitality of other commercial areas, especially the downtown. The town has recognized that a balance must be achieved and has implemented regulations that require careful building and site design as well as community impact studies prior to establishment of major new retail outlets. These studies should also consider the quality of jobs being provided and seek to continue to increase the wages offered in this sector. The downtown and planned commercial area developments will together support Bennington's position as the retail hub for the region.

Because Bennington is an active regional shopping destination, it is important that transportation infrastructure be maintained in good condition and improved where 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 equally important to providing a convenient and enjoyable shopping experience. With the completion of the east-west VT 279, it will be critical to promote and facilitate access to the downtown. Local business organizations and governments must continue efforts to enhance the downtown and provide amenities for residents and visitors. Ongoing streetscape improvements and new business development has led to increased investment, interest, and vitality in this important commercial center. Marketing programs and facilities, including the Molly Stark Byway, Shires Byway and tourist welcome centers will further enhance interest in the downtown.

Alternative transportation, including both walking and biking, should also be encouraged through all development and development policy. This has particular impact on retail enterprises because alternative transportation not only offers access to a greater percentage of the population, it has also been shown to increase the tendency of passersby to shop.

Careful planning and design of new or redeveloped retail properties in the planned commercial districts is needed to ensure that these areas remain attractive and successful. The Bennington Growth Center Plan demonstrated that an adequate amount of space for future retail growth exists in established commercial districts. The extension of retail development into areas not currently zoned for such uses is not appropriate.

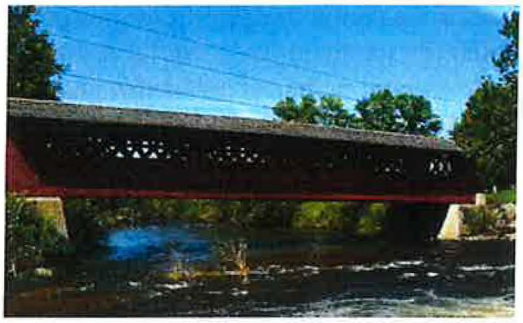
Retail businesses also require a dependable skilled workforce. Educational and training opportunities should provide workers with the skills needed to succeed and advance in this field.

Tourism and Recreation

Bennington is an important tourist destination because of its unique historic character and wealth of natural resources, and has the potential to significantly increase economic activity in businesses related to tourism and outdoor recreation. Attractions for tourists to Bennington include three historic districts, museums, covered bridges, the Bennington Battle Monument, scenery, and recreational opportunities available in town and the surrounding countryside.

In addition to the many in-town recreational facilities, Bennington lies next to the Green Mountain National Forest and close to ski areas, lakes, rivers, scenic highways, and other historic towns. Because Bennington contains the greatest concentration of lodging establishments,

restaurants, and retail stores in the area, it is a logical place for tourists to stop while visiting. Bennington should consider advocating for the conversion of a portion of the Green Mountain Forest to the Green Mountain National Park as National Parks generate a large amount of tourist activity.


Bennington's unique scenic and historic resources support tourism-related businesses.

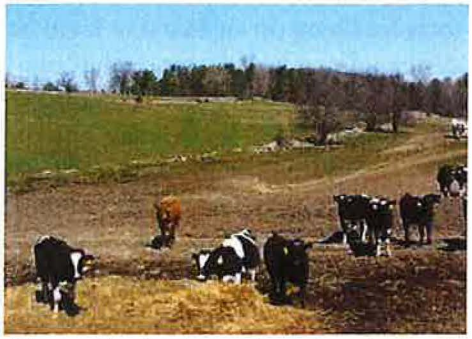
Information and facilities for visitors to the area are critical to successful tourism and recreation related economic development. Marketing campaigns through the Chamber of Commerce, Better Bennington Corporation, and other organizations need to reach a wide market through print, radio/tv, and internet-based communications. Information on area attractions also should be readily available at local businesses.

The Bennington Visitors 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. As such, it is critical that this tourism and recreation resource for our community is utilized to the greatest extent possible.

Clear directions need to be provided to attractions, and once there, tourists must be able to park and move about safely. Businesses and tourist attractions must provide desired amenities and visitor-oriented customer service. Technological resources, a skilled workforce capable of utilizing it, a well organized marketing and branding campaign, and funding for marketing programs are all necessary components in efforts to inform the public about Bennington as a tourist and recreation destination.

Natural Resources

Bennington includes a number of businesses based on agriculture, forestry, and 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 is an important part of the town's heritage and its present day economy.

The working landscape of the town once emphasized dairy and grain production; recently, considerable diversification into specialty areas such as tree farms, maple products, orchards, and wood products manufacture has taken place. These businesses occupy a large portion of the town's rural lands. The retention of the traditional landscape and the employment provided by these economic sectors is very important to the local economy.

Development in important agricultural and for-

est areas should be planned to preserve 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. It will be important that training in these fields remains available to ensure that existing businesses can continue to operate and grow in the future.

Construction and Trades

Construction and related trades and services are very important to Bennington's economy. In 2013 there were 46 business enterprises in Bennington working within the construction sector. The availability of a skilled local workforce is absolutely vital to this market sector. If workers are not available locally, work in the community will be exported to businesses from other areas.

This is especially important given the existing condition of the town's housing and built environment infrastructure, which is considerably older than state averages. Opportunities for many renovation projects will coincide with economic expansion in Bennington, and a strong local workforce within the construction sector will be vital to these efforts.

Quality programs at the Career Development Center and other training and workforce development programs are important to these businesses. Sufficient land in industrially zoned areas will ensure that large and growing construction firms are able to maintain their businesses in Bennington. Access to information and communication technology will support these businesses as well.

2.5 Sustainable Local Economy

Economic development always has relied on the availability of energy, and as pointed out in the energy chapter of this plan, the long-term cost and availability of energy is a serious issue that needs to be confronted when planning for the local economy. As abundant and relatively inexpensive nonrenewable energy sources are depleted, local, regional, and national economies will have to adjust to new models that do not rely on continued broad-based growth requiring expanded energy inputs. The reality is that within a very few years, energy constraints will require that our economies function with less energy than that which currently is being consumed. This realization has led to the formation of a number of organizations and efforts focusing on sustainable local economies. The premise of all such efforts is that economic systems must be developed that can function with less total energy. Such systems orient toward local production and markets, fueled by locally produced energy, and served by transportation modes that do not rely on gas and diesel fueled cars and trucks.

The economic sectors and needs identified earlier in this chapter will remain important to the community, but will need to be adapted over time to take advantage of opportunities offered by things such as local renewable energy resources, manufacturing of goods using locally available resources, and industries that support economic sectors that function with lower energy inputs.

Key points in the development of a sustainable local economy include:

- Conserving agricultural and forest land and supporting farm and forest product businesses. A strong emphasis on production of food for local markets significantly reduces energy use and keeps local money from being exported.
- When the community is faced with a particular need, the first methods considered for meeting that need should be those involving use of local resources.
- Develop properly scaled industries for local products that add value to those resources.
- Produce as much of the community's energy demand as possible using local resources (while working to significantly reduce total energy use through conservation measures).
- Ensure there are opportunities and incentives for money paid into the local economy to circulate within the community and decrease expenditures that lead to flows of money outside the community.
- Make sure the town invests in itself: maintaining its buildings, land, cultural, and recreational resources, as well as developing public transportation, rail infrastructure, and bicycle and pedestrian systems.
- Provide quality education for the town's children.
- Develop markets for local goods and manufactured products in nearby industrial areas.
- Retain and develop local human resources.
- Investigate possible uses of local currency, community-funded loan programs, or other systems of barter and exchange.

2.6 Economic Development Policies and Recommendations

1. Using the goals and action steps laid out in the Bennington Strategic Economic Development Plan and working through the framework of the Bennington Economic Development Partners, maintain and enhance the role of Bennington as the region's principal economic center.

2. Support economic development that provides high-quality jobs while capitalizing on the town's strengths. Economic development activities shall occur in harmony with the town's historic character, attractive physical environment, and traditional development pattern of a densely developed center surrounded by rural countryside.

3. Develop and maintain a diverse and sustainable local economy that will thrive in changing regional, national, and international economic conditions. Support and strengthen the positive balance that currently exists between various economic sectors in Bennington.

4. Emphasize re-use of existing buildings and vacant commercial and industrial sites, including any brownfield sites that are identified in town.

5. Direct new growth and development to areas identified as appropriate for such development in the Land Use section of this Plan. Ensure that an adequate supply of industrial land remains for future growth and that commercial development is focused in those areas currently planned for those uses.

6. Protect the long-term viability of natural resource industries by preserving rural open spaces and through good stewardship of the land.

7. Support programs that attract new business to the community while working to ensure existing businesses remain and expand locally.

8. Invest in programs that support workforce development outcomes that meet the needs of area employers.

9. Work to maintain and enhance natural, historic, cultural, and recreational resources that provide an outstanding quality of life to attract new businesses, employees, and tourists to Bennington.

10. Promote the creation of the Green Mountain National Park from a portion of the Green Mountain National Forest.

11. Ensure that an adequate supply of quality affordable housing is available for all people of all income levels, eliminating housing as a barrier to personal financial security or workforce expansion.

12. Maintain and improve the infrastructure that is necessary to support desirable economic development. Such facilities include municipal water and sewer, roadways, bike & pedestrian facilities, rail transportation, bus service, the WH Morse State Airport, electricity supply and transmission, and state-of-the-art telecommunication facilities.

13. Recognize the growing economic importance and potential of specialized service and manufacturing market sectors, health care and education, and of tourism and recreation, local construction and trades, and diverse retail. Actively support efforts to develop these and other emerging businesses within the town.

14. Work cooperatively with nearby towns and the broader economic region, including New York's Capital District, the Berkshires of Massachusetts, and the State of Vermont to further economic development opportunities.

15. Continue efforts to maintain and enhance downtown as the commercial, institutional, civic, cultural, and residential center of Bennington. Maintain the "Designated Downtown" status as established through the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

16. Emphasize investment in ventures and activities that support a sustainable local economy, with particular consideration given to local foods and renewable energy.

Chapter 3 - Land Use

3.1 Existing Land Use

Current development patterns in Bennington reflect the town and state goal of "maintaining the historic development pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside." The most densely developed part of town is located near its geographic center, in and around the historic downtown. Commercial, residential, cultural, and institutional uses are found in and immediately adjacent to this relatively small, but vitally important part of the community.

Additional concentrations of residential development are found along the traditional grid network of streets that surround the downtown. Newer residential development and subdivisions, at a moderately high density supported by municipal water and sewer services, lie further from the center, but within the town's Urban Growth Area (Map 3-1).

Attractive homes and trees line many of the local streets in Bennington's traditional neighborhoods.

Large scale commercial developments including department stores, grocery stores, car dealerships, and similar uses are found north of the town's center, lying along the Northside Drive / Kocher Drive corridor.

A number of important industrial buildings are located in land zoned for such uses off East Road, Bowen Road, and near the VT 67A/VT 279 interchange. Other industrial uses occupy buildings located along the streams that were once used for power generation in the town's historic industrial core.

Major public buildings and service facilities are found in and around the historic village center. The elementary schools and the high school are located just outside of the central business district. The middle school is slightly further from the town center, located on East Road adjacent to the alignment of the eastern segment of VT 279 and almost across the road from Willow Park. The Southern Vermont Health Care campus and many supporting personal service businesses are located southwest of the downtown.

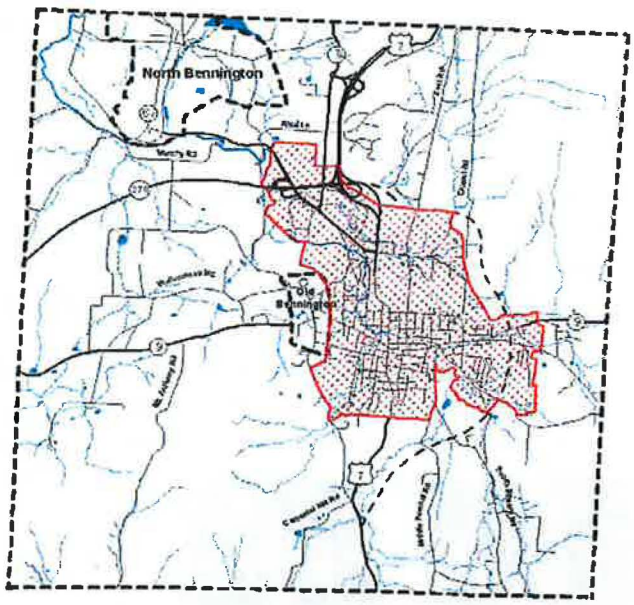
Some areas adjacent to the downtown support a mix of uses that are transitional between the historic commercial district and residential or non-traditional commercial areas. Lower Elm Street, for example, includes many older homes that have been converted to offices, and Benmont Avenue includes a mix of historic, commercial, residential, and industrial buildings and uses. Special attention is needed to ensure that these areas retain their historic integrity as well as their economic viability.

All of the concentrated development referred to above is located within the Urban Growth Area. The town's rural areas are located beyond the Urban Growth Boundary, where agricultural landscapes blend with forested mountainsides. Residential development in these areas is of a much lower density and the few pre-existing commercial uses are confined to limited sites along state highways. The Green and Taconic Mountain Ranges remain forested and free of development.

Land use policies and public investments shall be designed to promote new development, infill development, and redevelopment of existing properties within the Urban Growth Area.

Although development will occur outside of this area, it will be much less concentrated and shall not include new commercial uses because such uses are incompatible with the rural character of the area. These outlying rural areas also contribute important historic and scenic qualities to the town, and new development in these areas must be carefully planned to protect those resources.

As noted, the downtown is located in Bennington's historic business center. It is an important regional retail and service center as well as a civic center, with town, state, and federal offices. The town has made a commitment to maintaining a strong and vital downtown to preserve the community's unique character and to support economic development.



Map 3-1 The shaded area represents Bennington's Urban Growth Area. The greatest density and diversity of land uses are to be restricted to this area. A formally designated "Growth Center" has been approved and lies entirely within the Urban Growth Area.

Bennington's downtown is recognized as a designated downtown and Bennington has established a designated growth center. Downtown designation provides tax credits, grants, training and technical services to help preserve and revitalize historic downtowns and create strong communities. Growth center designation recognizes municipalities that demonstrate a capacity to plan and invest in vital, walkable, mixed-use centers. Currently, Bennington is one of six municipalities with a state designated growth center.

These state designations, offered through a program of the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, provide regulatory, financial, and other incentives to encourage compatible development within their boundaries. Bennington's designated downtown and designated growth center are shown in Map 3-2.

The historic villages of Old Bennington and North Bennington are separately incorporated municipalities, but lie within the town's boundaries. Both of these unique villages add a mix of residential, commercial, and institutional uses at a smaller scale than found in Bennington's downtown.

3.2 Land Use Plan

The town seeks to direct growth and development in a way that reinforces the existing settlement pattern of a concentration of mixed uses within the Urban Growth Area surrounded by open rural countryside. A sufficient amount of land must be available to support new growth and economic development opportunities. At the same time, policies and regulations must be implemented to ensure that new development enhances the town's unique character and furthers this Plan's Vision Statement and Goals.

The following **overall objectives** of this Land Use Plan will guide the specific policies and recommendations for each land use, or zoning, district:

- Encourage relatively dense and diverse development within the Urban Growth Area and ensure that there is a clear demarcation between urban and rural areas at the Urban Growth Boundary.
- Require new development to strengthen and support the town's existing land use pattern and historic and scenic qualities.
- Provide development opportunities that allow for continued high quality economic development that will support Bennington's position as the regional growth center.
- Support Bennington's historic downtown as the commercial, civic, and cultural heart of the community. Necessary retail services, including groceries, should be provided within this area to serve surrounding residential areas.
- Expand opportunities to create an adequate supply of a variety of housing types.
- Maintain the rural character of the outlying countryside and support agriculture, forestry, and recreational uses in these areas as well as carefully planned low-density residential uses.
- Plan development in a manner that avoids commercial or residential sprawl and which is consistent with the efficient provision of municipal services and the protection of important natural, scenic, and historic resources.
- Maintain the integrity and quality of established residential neighborhoods.

These objectives are implemented through the municipal Land Use and Development Regulations (LUDR) which divide the town into a number of zoning districts. Each district has a unique set of allowed uses and dimensional requirements, and some have special design or resource protection standards. The LUDR also includes the regulations that govern the subdivision of land.

Although the LUDR has served the town well, it is rather lengthy and complex and relies on a traditional method of segregating uses and specifying density levels to achieve the planned community character and development type. It may be possible to achieve the town's land use objectives with a simplified "form-based" land use ordinance.

A form-based ordinance such as the "Smartcode" model integrates zoning and subdivision regulations, public works standards, and architectural controls, much like the current LUDR, but with simplified land use districts. The form-based regulations focus on the physical form of buildings and areas while promoting a vibrant downtown, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods, conserved rural open lands, housing diversity and alternative transportation options. The ordinance also can be used to restrict costly and inefficient sprawl and to promote redevelopment of areas that currently diverge from the town's land use vision.

The Planning Commission should review ordinances like Smartcode, evaluate their effectiveness in communities similar to Bennington, and consider developing a comprehensive form-based ordinance to replace or complement the current LUDR.

Land Use Districts

The Municipal Land Use and Development Regulations are based on the following land use district designations and descriptions. Those Regulations identify specific use and dimensional standards for each district. The

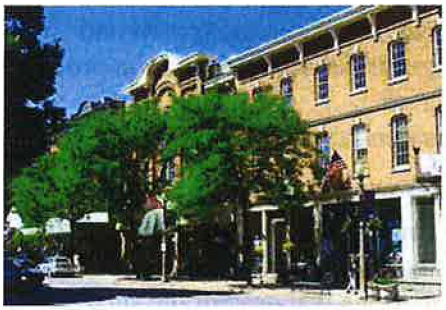
location of the districts are represented graphically in the land use maps that follow this section (Maps 3-2 and 3-3).

Downtown and the Historic Central Bennington Design Review District

Bennington's downtown is the historic heart of the community. The character and vitality of this unique area must be retained to support the social, cultural, and economic goals set forth in this Plan. "Downtown" refers to the Central Business District and the relatively densely settled areas surrounding it. Map 3-4 shows the downtown area and the specific boundaries of the regulatory design review district.

The downtown includes a wide variety of commercial, civic, institutional, cultural, and residential uses. This mixed use environment is critical to maintain the vibrancy of the area and includes several zoning districts supporting this type of mixed use environment. Special site and building standards ensure high quality development.

The town has taken a number of actions to improve the quality of the downtown. Special funding is provided through a Downtown Improvement District and an organization, the Better Bennington Corporation, has been set up specifically to focus on downtown issues related to design, economic development, and marketing and promotion. Because of these efforts and the historic significance of the area to the community, Bennington's downtown is formally recognized as a Vermont *Designated Downtown*, providing special opportunities for state-sponsored funding and redevelopment initiatives.



Historic buildings and an attractive streetscape are critical to the success of Bennington's downtown.

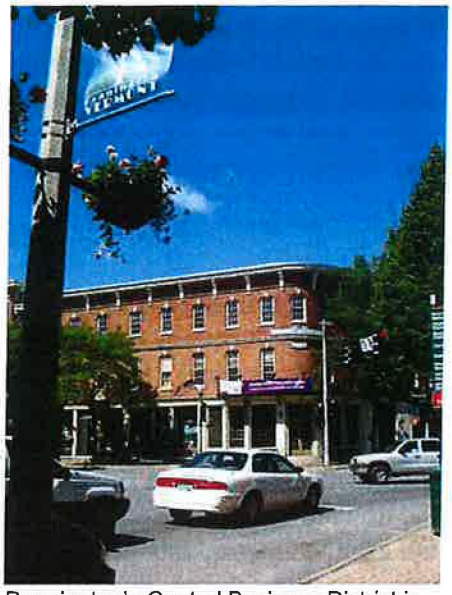
The federal "Transportation Enhancements" program provides grants to communities for projects that enhance transportation facilities. Bennington has successfully pursued several Enhancements grants specifically to implement planned streetscape improvements that include historic lighting fixtures, signs, landscaping, and pedestrian facilities. Continued efforts through this and other programs are designed to enhance and maintain the physical character of the downtown.

In addition to continuing efforts to assist existing and new commercial enterprises in the downtown, the town will support projects that provide new and improved residential units in the area. A strong residential component to the area is an efficient way to provide housing and also keeps the downtown active throughout the day and sustains commercial, cultural, and recreational activities in the area.

Renovation and occupancy of upper-floors in downtown buildings by professional and residential uses will make the area more attractive and economically viable; this initiative has been actively supported by the Better Bennington Corporation.

The Historic Central Bennington Design Review District has been established to protect historic resources in a defined area and to encourage new construction that will reinforce the best qualities of the area through both traditional and innovative design approaches. The design standards outlined in the LUDR and those referenced in the report: Time and Place in Bennington: A Handbook for the Central Bennington Historic District (as amended and updated) shall guide design in this District. It also is critical that site design (e.g., location and orientation of buildings, parking areas, drives) be sensitive to the historic character of the area and that appropriate site features and amenities (e.g., signs, landscaping, street furniture) be provided.

Central Business District (CB)



Bennington's Central Business District is the heart of the town's busy and historic downtown.

The Central Business District is located in the heart of the downtown, centered on the intersection of US 7 and VT 9. The purpose of the district is to promote sound economic growth through the preservation and continued development of Bennington's downtown as a major regional commercial, financial, service, governmental, cultural, and residential center.

A wide variety of uses are allowed in the Central Business District and dimensional standards are designed to encourage a traditional downtown streetscape of tightly clustered multi-story buildings closely fronting the sidewalks and streets. Adaptive reuse and mixed use of buildings is encouraged, and new construction or modifications to existing structures requires design review to ensure that the historic integrity of the area is preserved.

Certain uses which are incompatible with the district are specifically excluded, such as gasoline service stations and drive-through restaurants, as well as ground floor uses on Main Street and North and South Streets that do not contribute to a vibrant commercial streetscape. In addition, parking areas are not allowed between principal buildings and the street.

Public investments and initiatives should support private redevelopment efforts and reinforce the historic character of the district. Ongoing streetscape improvements—period lampposts, landscaping, benches, and pedestrian facilities—funded through Transportation Enhancements grants and fundraising efforts are an example of successful efforts to support the Central Business District.

Office and Apartment Districts (OA)

The Office and Apartment Districts are located immediately to the east, south, and west of the Central Business District. These areas are transitional between the commercial downtown core and surrounding residential neighborhoods. Land uses in the OA District are intended to be appropriate to the fabric and historic character of the village and to be complementary to, but not in competition with, downtown commercial uses.

Much of the OA District retains a residential character.

A variety of residential, professional, service, institutional, and limited commercial uses (not including retail stores) are permitted in the Office and Apartment Districts. To ensure retention of the character of these areas, certain uses are restricted to existing historic structures and/or to parcels that front on Main Street. Building scale, landscaping, parking, and pedestrian standards are designed to encourage an attractive streetscape that supports the purpose of the district. Drive-through businesses and other establishments that are incompatible with the purpose of the district are specifically prohibited.

Preservation of existing historic buildings and re-

tention of the character of mixed use residential areas is of considerable importance in the Office and Apartment District. The minimum lot size in the district is larger than adjacent commercial districts to support these objectives. Portions of the district lie within the design review district and require design plan approval. Special attention also must be given to vehicular use and access to maintain safe and efficient traffic flow in these areas.

Village Commercial Districts (VC)

The Village Commercial Districts extend north from the Central Business District along US 7 and east from the Office and Apartment District along VT 9. The purpose of the district is to provide for a mix of commercial and residential uses while maintaining the historic character that exists along these important entry roads to the town's commercial center.

A variety of residential, small-scale commercial, professional, and service uses are permitted in the Village Commercial Districts. Business development is intended to complement the downtown commercial area rather than compete with it. Drive-through restaurants, large retail establishments, and gasoline station canopies are among the uses that are not allowed in these areas to protect the character and function of these commercial gateways to the town. These objectives must be reinforced in response to expected development pressure along East Main Street associated with completion of work on the new VT 279 interchange.

Special attention must be given to front yard landscaping, street trees, pedestrian amenities, and building design. Parking and management of vehicular access to these properties must be carefully planned to ensure attractive site design and safe and efficient vehicular movements.

Mixed Residential Districts (MR)

The Mixed Residential Districts are located adjacent to Village Commercial and Office and Apartment Districts north, south, east, and west of the downtown. The Mixed Residential Districts are intended to provide for compact residential development that may include one and two family dwellings as well as apartments, row houses, and similar types of housing. Planned developments with integrated designs are encouraged to promote the most appropriate use of the land and to ensure the most efficient use of municipal services.

Residential uses are permitted together with limited public and institutional uses, and very limited commercial uses such as bed and breakfasts and neighborhood groceries. The minimum lot area in the district should be 10,000 square feet, with relatively high densities allowed for development of multi-family housing. Properties in the Mixed Residential District are to be served by municipal water and sewer service.

Historic row houses along Benmont Avenue in the MR District.

The scale, design, and orientation of new buildings in the Mixed Residential Districts shall be consistent with historic structures and development patterns in the surrounding area. Front yards are to be attractively landscaped and should include appropriate pedestrian amenities. Whenever possible, neighborhoods shall be linked by pathways and sidewalks.

Village Residential Districts (VR)

The Village Residential Districts consist of areas of existing and planned compact residential development located outside the core commercial and business zones, but within the Urban Growth Area. The purpose of this district is to provide attractive neighborhoods of relatively concentrated residential development, in one and two family dwellings—with high owner occupancy rates—supported by municipal water and sewer service. The emphasis in these areas is to maintain and enhance the appealing residential character of the neighborhoods.

Uses in the Village Residential Districts are restricted to single-family dwellings and uses accessory to them, including up to one accessory apartment per single-family dwelling. Historic structures may be converted to lodging establishments subject to specific design and use limitations.

Water and sewer service should be provided to all areas within these districts, allowing for minimum lot areas of 8,000 square feet. Front yard treatments, building dimensions and orientation, pedestrian facilities, and vehicular access shall be consistent with the compact residential character of these neighborhoods. The town should support provision of neighborhood parks and pedestrian linkages between neighborhoods to further enhance the attractiveness of these areas.

Manufacturing facility located along a primarily residential street in the VI District.

Village Industrial District (VI)

The Village Industrial District is located just north of the downtown in an area of existing industrial use that is surrounded by a predominantly residential area. The purpose of the district is to provide for existing industries in an area that historically has supported a mix of residential and industrial uses. Continued industrial use and compatible development in this district will promote sound economic development and encourage the efficient use of land in central sections of the urban core.

Because of the mixed use nature of the area, nearly all development in the Village Industrial District, including residential development, requires approval by the Development Review Board. Manufacturing, health care facilities, offices, and various institutional uses—in addition to single-family, two-family, and multi-family dwellings—are permitted in the district.

Development in the district shall conform with specific performance standards to ensure that any potential negative impacts on surrounding properties are minimized. In addition, non-residential uses are required to provide screening for adjacent residential properties.

Urban Mixed Use District (UMU)

The Urban Mixed Use District lies along Benmont Avenue north of County Street and west of North Street. The purpose of the district is to facilitate re-development of the area in a manner that is consistent with the historic character of the area recognizing, however, that retail development in the area should not rival downtown as the town's commercial core.

A variety of uses are permitted in the district, including one, two, and multi-family dwellings, manufacturing, retail establishments, professional offices, service businesses, art galleries,

and range of educational, cultural, and institutional uses. The historic Holden-Leonard Mill is a valuable community asset and presents an important redevelopment opportunity. The buildings and grounds should be retained and re-used to support a mix of uses that are permitted in the district, including manufacturing uses. Other former industrial buildings in the area may be redeveloped in similar ways.

Reuse of historic buildings is a central objective of the UMU District.

Development standards for this district are intended to promote the objective of making this a vibrant area supporting a mix of appropriate uses. Buildings must be designed and sited to be consistent with historic development patterns, and landscaping and pedestrian and vehicular access implemented to promote attractive, safe, and efficient public spaces.

Additional and/or more intensive uses are permitted in historic structures to encourage site redevelopment, although incompatible uses such as drive through restaurants are specifically prohibited.

Institutional/Professional District (IP)

Institutional/Professional Districts are located in the vicinity of the Southwestern Vermont Health Care campus southwest of the downtown and the Vermont Veteran's Home and Mount Anthony Union High School north and east of the downtown. Because Bennington is and will continue to be the regional health care and education center, existing principal health care and educational uses, as well as a range of support services, in these areas must be supported with appropriate land use policies. The Institutional/Professional Districts are intended to facilitate synergistic groupings of health care, educational, and long-term care facilities and services.

The Southwestern Vermont Health Care Center is the focal point for one of the town's IP Districts.

Health care, educational, and support uses are appropriate in this district along with residential uses and certain limited public facilities. While the minimum lot area for a principal use should be 10,000 square feet, specific density standards are established for regular dwelling units as well as for elderly housing and community care facilities.

The portion of Dewey Street that passes through the Institutional/Professional District is characterized by residential-scale buildings. To preserve the character of this streetscape, standards for building scale and design are required for structures within 150 feet of Dewey Street. Additional standards are designed to limit adverse impacts between adjacent properties, keep parking areas out of front yards, and to buffer institutional land uses from residential land uses lying across Monument Avenue.

One of the several successful businesses operating in the Shields Drive industrial park.

Industrial Districts (I)

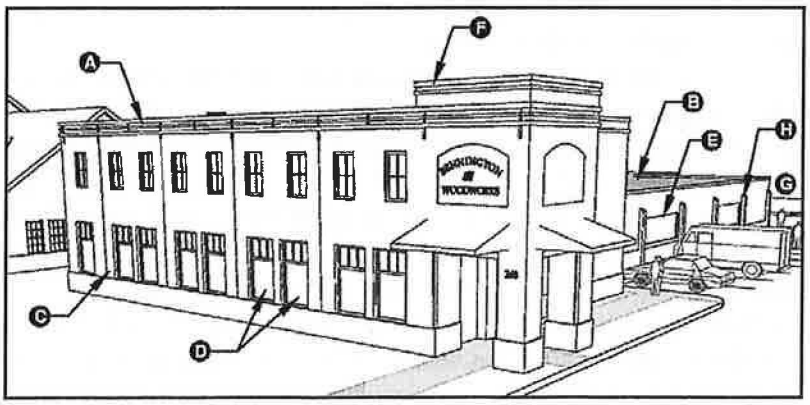
It is absolutely essential that the town maintain an adequate and diverse inventory of industrial land to support existing businesses and future economic development. Districts zoned specifically for industrial use are located in the north-central portion of the town. One area is located north and south of the VT 279 interchange on VT 67A and the other lies east of Park and East Streets and includes the Vermont Composites facility on Kocher Drive. These Industrial Districts are specifically designed to encourage the most efficient and productive use of land in locations suitable for industrial establishments.

All uses in the Industrial Districts require review and approval by the Development Review Board and uses within the Morse, Bowen, and Shields Drive industrial parks are also subject to approval as planned unit developments. A range of manufacturing, warehousing, trucking, research and development, and related uses are permitted in the Industrial Districts. Professional and business offices are allowed only within an office park as part of a planned unit development. Buildings in these districts shall not include long, blank facades, and must be designed with varying roof height and lines. Landscaping and pedestrian facilities also must be incorporated into site design to provide an attractive and safe environment. All uses also must conform to specific performance standards and provide screening to avoid adverse impacts on neighboring properties.

Because the industrial zones located north of the VT 67A/VT 7A/Kocher Drive corridor are very visible from public highways, uses in these areas should be limited to manufacturing, research and development, and office facilities. Special design standards should be prepared for development in these areas.

Planned Commercial District (PC)

The Planned Commercial District includes those lands along Kocher Drive, Northside Drive, and Route 67A that have experienced substantial commercial development. The purpose of the Planned Commercial District is to promote a mix of commercial uses in an area with convenient access to major transportation corridors. The existing and permitted uses in the Planned Commercial District are to be compatible with each



The town's Design Guidelines for Development in the Planned Commercial District contains detailed standards for the design of sites and buildings. Use of these Guidelines will greatly enhance the visual character of the District.

other while complementing the downtown's function as a regional commercial and employment center. Because sufficient land for development and redevelopment of commercial properties exists in this area to accommodate future growth, the boundaries of the district should not be expanded.

A wide range of uses are permitted in the Planned Commercial District, including retail stores, gas stations, lodging facilities, restaurants, car dealerships, hotels, multi-family dwellings, and a range of professional, service, and recreational uses. Special studies are required for any new stores larger than 50,000 square feet to ensure that any impacts on the community's infrastructure and economy are adequately considered prior to development. Because of the concentration of community interest in the area, new development must conform with the town's Planned Commercial District Design Guidelines. Special attention also must be given to access management to minimize traffic congestion and safety hazards along the busy roadways in the area.

Landscaping must conform with standards which require that special attention be given to creating attractive front yards and softening the appearance of large expanses of parking. Pedestrian access along the roadways and between the roadways and commercial businesses is critical; any new development shall include sidewalks along the full road frontage and to the building's primary entrance.

Route 7A Corridor Overlay District (CO)

The Route 7A Corridor Overlay District includes most of the Rural Residential District lying within 500 feet of Route 7A between one of the Industrial zones and the Shaftsbury town line. Although this corridor lies in a rural area, a few commercial businesses exist there, and allowance should be made for the existing commercial development subject to strict performance standards. Any form of commercial "strip" development in this area is not permitted.

Any commercial development in the Route 7A Corridor Overlay District must be compatible with the open, scenic, and agricultural character of the area while recognizing the architectural, historic, and cultural importance of this gateway to Bennington. Uses permitted in the district include those allowed in the underlying residential district plus antique sales, gift shops, restaurants, small-scale lodging establishments, and agricultural equipment sales, subject to standards that limit the density of development and which require provision of substantial green space along the highway corridor.

It is not appropriate to permit development of new types of retail stores (other than those which currently are permitted), gasoline stations, convenience stores, or similar uses in the Route 7A Corridor Overlay District. A proliferation of such uses along this rural highway corridor would be inconsistent with the town and state objectives of avoiding inefficient and unattractive commercial sprawl and strip development and would adversely impact existing commercial districts located closer to the town center. Consideration should be given to expanded design standards for this corridor, an important historic entryway to the town. Convenience services for through travelers on US 7 are not necessary at this location because they are available in the established commercial areas near the two exits just south of this corridor.

Planned Airport District (AP) and Airport Approach Overlay District (AAO)

The WH Morse State Airport is located in a rural area on the west side of Bennington.

The WH Morse State Airport is located in the western part of Bennington, north of VT 9 and east of Whipstock Hill. This airport is an important general aviation facility serving the entire region. The purpose of the Planned Airport District, and the Airport Approach Overlay District, is to enable the continued economic use and enjoyment of the airport and to prevent encroachment of uses that are incompatible with the operation of the airport.

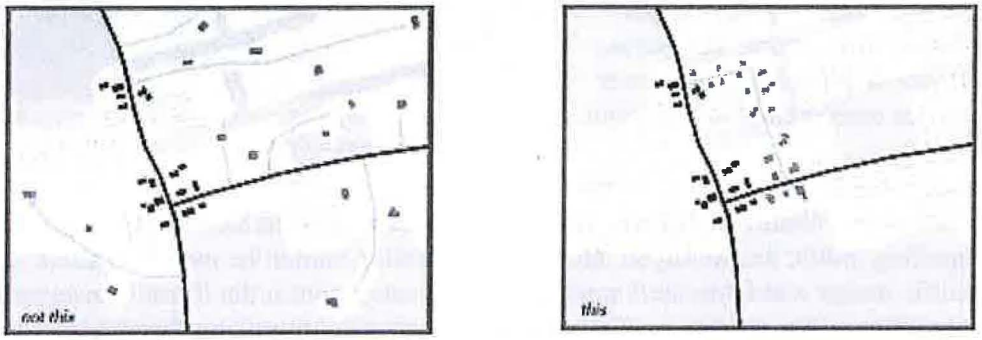
In addition to the primary airport use that is permitted within the Planned Airport District, professional, service, and warehousing uses that support or rely on proximity to the airport are allowed.

The Airport Approach Overlay District provides for the safe and convenient use of lands on the approach to the airport runways, allowing the airport to coexist with its neighbors.

Rural Residential District (RR)

The town's Rural Residential Districts are located outside the Urban Growth Area, but in areas that support existing residential development and can accommodate low density residential growth because of the availability of good roads and soil conditions. These areas are intended to support limited growth while preserving the rural landscape and scenic and natural resources.

Appropriate uses in the Rural Residential District include agriculture, forestry, low density residential uses, limited commercial uses such as veterinary clinics and neighborhood grocery stores, golf courses, earth resource extraction, and certain educational and cultural uses. Community care facilities and multi-family dwellings are permitted in the district provided they are approved subject to the town's residential Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulations.



Two views of new residential development in a rural area near an existing cluster of buildings. By using effective residential planned unit development techniques, subdivisions with the same number of units can be achieved without consuming productive farm land and open space. This can allow agricultural land to stay in production, increase infrastructure efficiency, and lead to the creation of open spaces for community use. From Growing Smarter - Best Site Planning for Residential, Commercial, and Industrial Development, produced by the Smart Growth Vermont.

The residential PUD standards require development to be consistent with Vermont's traditional rural landscape of farmsteads and small clusters of dwellings surrounded by open space. Significant open space shall be preserved in any PUD and the design must maximize preservation of important agricultural land and other natural resources. Density bonuses may be permitted to encourage open space preservation and provision of affordable housing.

The design of new subdivisions is especially important in ensuring the retention of an efficient and attractive land use pattern in these rural areas. Any new subdivision must be planned to preserve important agricultural land and natural and scenic resources, and all major subdivisions must meet standards for Planned Unit Developments.

Rural Conservation District (RC)

Rural Conservation Districts are located in valley areas outside the Urban Growth Area which have retained their rural and open space character. Considerable acreages of agricultural land exist in these areas, along with extensive woodlands and low density residential development. The purpose of the Rural Conservation Districts is to preserve this distinctive rural character and working landscape while accommodating very low density residential development in a manner that avoids the need for public water supply and public sewer systems.

Agriculture, forestry, very low density single-family residential development, and certain limited uses that are suitable in rural areas are permitted in the district. Zoning regulations shall maintain large blocks of working agriculture land and productive forest lands. Additional standards apply to college buildings, cultural institutions, and the adaptive reuse of historic structures as bed and breakfasts. Subdivisions must protect important agricultural land, natural, and scenic resources; major subdivisions must meet the standards for residential Planned Unit Development.

A typical scene in one of Bennington's RC Districts; this view looks across Pleasant Valley.

Connections of any building to the municipal wastewater treatment system may only be approved if the Development Review Board finds a compelling public health threat, and such connection cannot be used to expand the use.

Specific design standards shall apply to new development in the Rural Conservation Districts in recognition of the existence of a concentration of agricultural and forest lands and to protect the extraordinary scenic resources such lands and uses provide. Any use in the Rural Conservation District, including single-family dwellings, shall require approval under those regulatory guidelines. Development in this area cannot be sited in prominently visible locations on hillsides or ridgelines, shall utilize earth tone colors and non-reflective materials on exterior surfaces of all structures, and must minimize clearing of natural vegetation.

Valley farmland in the Agriculture District along Skiparee Road.

Agriculture District (A)

One Agriculture District has been established in the southwestern corner of town, along Mount Anthony and Skiparee Roads. This area is very remote from the town center and municipal utilities and includes extensive agricultural uses lying in steep-sided narrow valleys. The purpose of the district is to provide for all types of agricultural use while limiting nonagricultural uses. Agriculture, forestry, very low density (25 acre minimum lot size) single-family residential development, and a limited number of accessory uses are permitted in the district.

Forest District (F)

The Forest Districts encompass Mount Anthony, Whipstock Hill, and the forested western flanks of the Green Mountains in the northeastern and southeastern parts of town. The land in these areas is characterized by steep slopes and the absence of development or improved roads. These forested mountains also provide an important scenic backdrop that is an integral part of the town's rural character. The purpose of the district is to provide for commercial forestry uses and the protection of timber and wildlife resources.

Permitted uses are restricted to forestry, small seasonal camps, appropriate open space based public recreational uses, and telecommunication antennas. Any building development must meet additional standards that are designed to limit their size, environmental, and aesthetic impacts.

Any development of telecommunications facilities must conform to standards which are designed to accommodate the communication needs of residents and businesses while protecting the public health, safety, general welfare, and scenic character of the town.

Willow Park and the Bradford-Putnam Wetlands are two important public open space areas that offer diverse recreational opportunities for residents.

Public Open Space Districts (POS)

The Public Open Space Districts include the newly-created Walloomsac Headwaters Park as well as several existing public open spaces: Willow Park, Memorial Park, Beech Street Park, Stark Street Park, the "Y Woods," the Leonard J. Black property, and the Bradford-Putnam Wetlands. The purpose of the district is to recognize the existence of the major community open spaces and to provide for their continuation. Permitted uses are restricted to public park, recreation, conservation facilities, and associated public utilities.

The town must maintain these properties and ensure their continued availability to the public, and should consider acquisition of additional lands for public open space as appropriate.

3.3 Land Use Policies and Recommendations

1. The overall land use policy of the Town Plan is to reinforce the existing pattern of compact development within the Urban Growth Area surrounded by rural countryside. Moreover, the historic character and central importance of the downtown must be preserved. The Municipal Land Use Regulations shall reflect the purposes of the individual land use districts as stated in this Plan and all development activity shall conform to the requirements and restrictions on uses, densities, and dimensional, design, and special standards as indicated in those Regulations.

2. The town shall ensure that municipal regulations and public investments support the land use policies of this Plan. Consideration should be given to developing a form-based land use ordinance to simplify implementation and further these policies.

3. **Downtown** will remain the commercial, civic, cultural, and residential heart of the community. The town must continue to pursue public investments and actions that will provide needed facilities and amenities to allow this area to prosper. Historic resources shall be protected and new building and site development shall be compatible with the historic character of the area.

4. The **Central Business District** shall provide a variety of appropriate businesses and

services in a concentrated area at the core of the downtown area. Residential uses are beneficial to the district and shall be encouraged in the upper stories of buildings. Public and private planning and development shall provide attractive landscaping, pedestrian facilities, street lighting, signs, and similar amenities.

5. Existing small scale buildings in the **Office and Apartment Districts** shall be retained and used as offices, single-family residences, apartments, and other compatible uses. New development shall be compatible with the residential character of these areas.

6. The **Village Commercial Districts** shall include a range of commercial and residential uses that reinforce the vitality of the nearby Central Business District. The scale of existing buildings shall be retained and new development shall be compatible with the residential origins of these areas and with adjacent residential neighborhoods. Site development shall maintain attractive entrances to the downtown and shall be planned for efficient and safe vehicular access. Development that would compete with the downtown, or extend the downtown along entrance corridors, shall not be allowed in the VC Districts.

7. A full range of residential uses, at relatively high densities served by public water and sewer, shall be provided in the **Mixed Residential Districts**. Neighborhoods shall be linked to each other and to nearby commercial areas by sidewalks or pathways.

8. **Village Residential Districts** shall provide for moderately high densities of residential development, and other compatible uses, served by public water and sewer. Efforts should be made to enhance the desirability of these residential areas by providing amenities such as parks, pathways, and well-maintained sidewalk systems.

9. The **Village Industrial District** will provide for industrial uses in a central location near the downtown. Industrial uses in the district shall be planned and operated in a manner that does not adversely impact nearby residential neighborhoods.

10. Creative redevelopment shall occur in the **Urban Mixed Use District**. A mix of industrial, professional, retail, and residential uses shall be encouraged in this district. Building and site design shall preserve the historic character of the area. Public and private development shall provide an attractive streetscape, pedestrian amenities, and safe and efficient management of vehicular movements. This area should develop as a mixed use district, and not become dominated by retail uses, so that the downtown remains as the town's retail center.

11. Bennington's **Institutional and Professional Districts** shall continue to support regionally important health care and educational facilities. Expansions to major institutional uses shall be based on approved master plans and shall not adversely impact the character of adjacent residential or mixed use neighborhoods.

12. The town will work with the Bennington County Industrial Corporation and other organizations to ensure that uses in **Industrial Districts** shall have the infrastructure and resources they need to be successful. Industrial uses shall not have an adverse impact on the environment or residential properties.

13. The **Planned Commercial District** provides for a wide range of businesses such as retail stores, restaurants, lodging establishments, and automotive uses. Commercial uses shall be planned to be compatible with adjacent uses and shall share parking, access, and pedestrian facilities whenever possible. Building and site design shall be consistent with the Planned Commercial District Design Standards.

14. New development in the **Route 7A Corridor Overlay** shall retain the rural character of the area and not adversely impact traffic flow or safety on this historic approach to Bennington. Strictly limited commercial uses are permitted in accordance with design and dimensional standards that preserve open space, scenic resources, and the rural character of the area. Uses that would contribute to sprawl or commercial strip development shall be prohibited.

15. The **Planned Airport District and Airport Approach Overlay District** provides the land that is necessary for continued effective operation of the WH Morse State Airport and incidental commercial and professional uses. Development in the area shall not lead to unsafe conditions or inhibit effective use of the airport.

16. The **Rural Residential Districts** shall provide for relatively low density residential development just outside the area of more compact development. New residential development in the area shall be carefully planned to protect important agricultural land and other natural and scenic resources. Major subdivisions shall meet the standards of a residential Planned Unit Development (PUD) to protect Bennington's traditional rural and agrarian landscape.

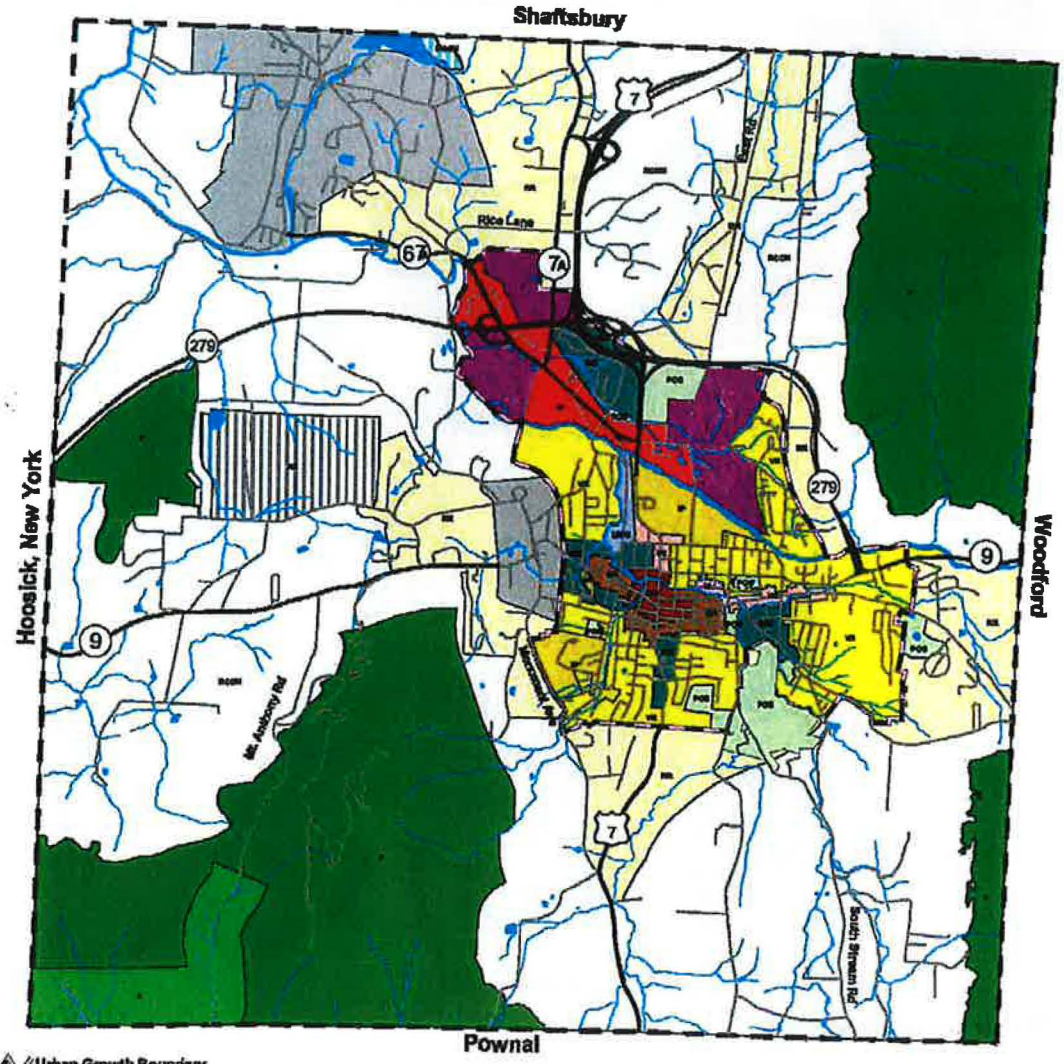
17. **Rural Conservation Districts** shall continue to support traditional low density rural and agricultural uses. Extension of municipal water supply and wastewater disposal lines to these areas shall be prohibited. New residential development in the area shall be carefully planned to protect agricultural land, forest land and other natural and scenic resources. Subdivisions shall meet the standards of a Residential Planned Unit Development (PUD) to protect Bennington's traditional rural and agrarian landscape.

18. The rural character of the **Agriculture District** shall be maintained. Maintenance of agricultural uses in the area shall be supported and any residential development shall be of a very low density and carefully planed to avoid adverse impacts on agricultural potential.

19. The **Forest Districts** shall remain free of development. Forestry and recreational uses are appropriate in this area. Seasonal camps and telecommunication facilities are permitted provided adverse impacts on the environment and scenic resources are avoided. Conservation initiatives involving property tax relief for private owners or acquisition of important resource lands by the United States Forest Service shall be supported by the town.

20. The parks and open spaces of the **Public Open Space Districts** shall remain available for the enjoyment of the public in perpetuity. The town shall provide adequate maintenance of these properties and consider acquisition of new park and recreation lands if deemed appropriate.

Map 3-2
LAND USE PLAN
Bennington, Vermont



Urban Growth Boundary
Shoreland Protection Overlay
Land Use Districts
- Rural Conservation
- Rural Residential
- Village Residential
- Mixed Residential
- Office and Apartment
- Institutional and Professional
- Village Commercial
- Planned Commercial
- Central Business
- Industrial
- Village Industrial
- Urban Mixed Use
- Agricultural
- Forest
- Public Open Space
- Planned Airport
- North Bennington and Old Bennington

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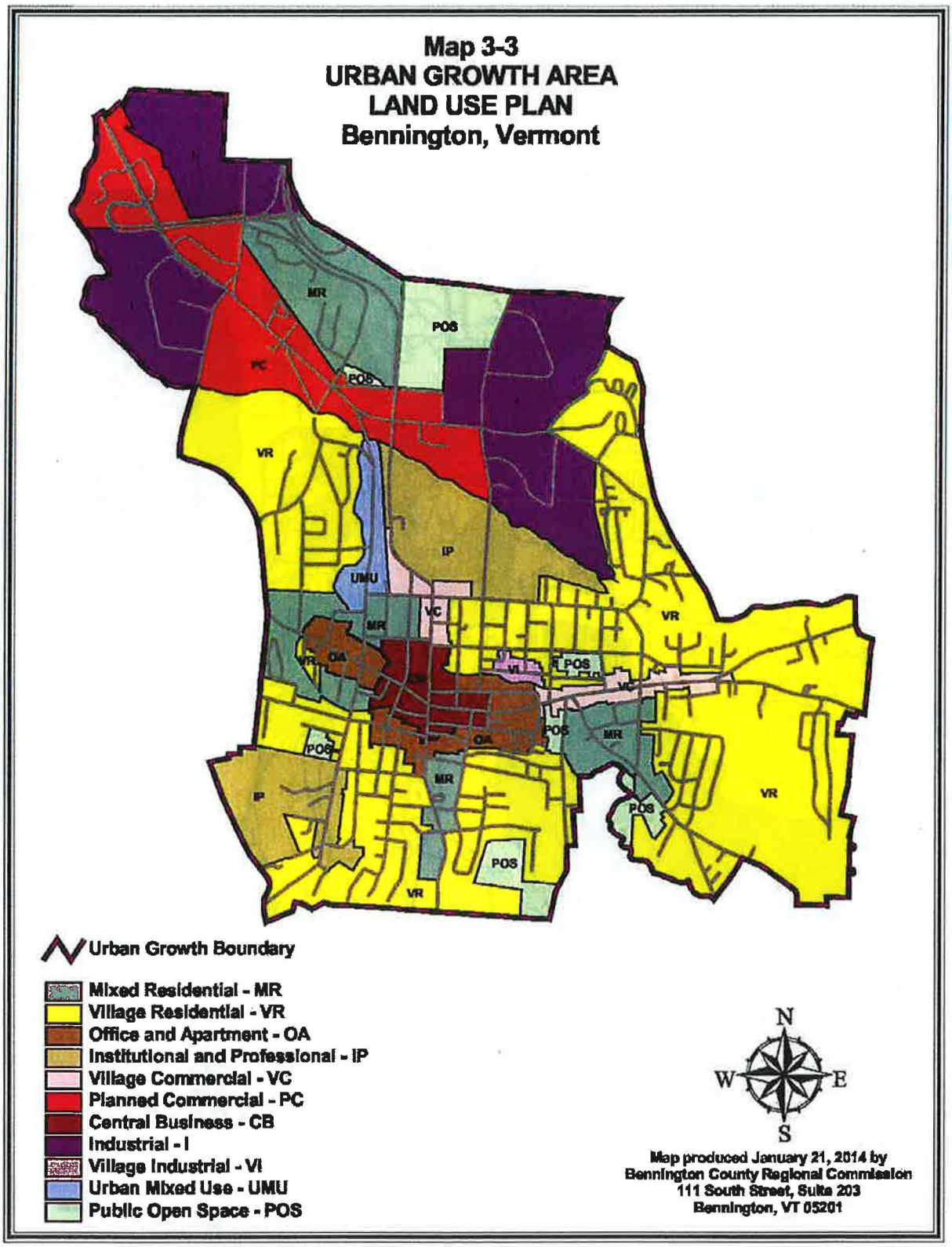
Map 3-3
URBAN GROWTH AREA
LAND USE PLAN
Bennington, Vermont
MR
POS
PC
VR
IP
UMU
VC
OA
VI
I
Urban Growth Boundary
Mixed Residential - MR
Village Residential - VR
Office and Apartment - OA
Institutional and Professional - IP
Village Commercial - VC
Planned Commercial - PC
Central Business - CB
Industrial - I
Village Industrial - VI
Urban Mixed Use - UMU
Public Open Space - POS
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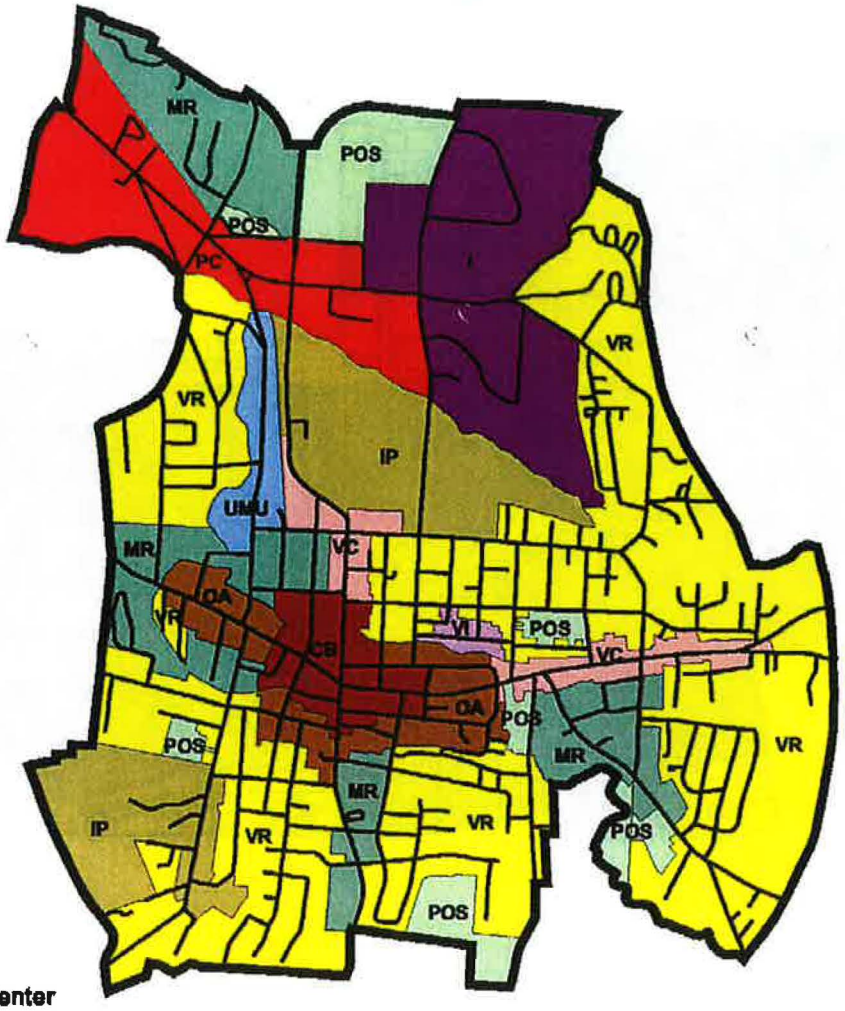
Map 3-3A
GROWTH CENTER
LAND USE PLAN
Bennington, Vermont



Growth Center

Mixed Residential - MR
Village Residential - VR
Office and Apartment - OA
Institutional and Professional - IP
Village Commercial - VC
Planned Commercial - PC
Central Business - CB
Industrial - I
Village Industrial - VI
Urban Mixed Use - UMU
Public Open Space - POS

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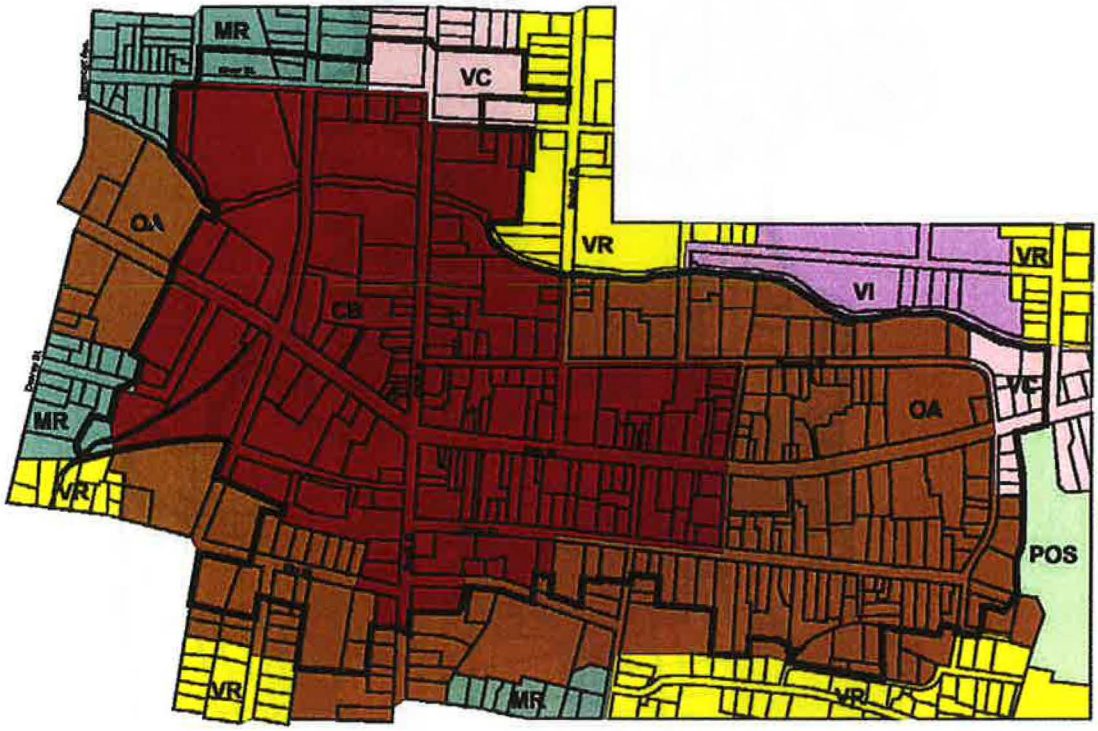
Map 3 - 4
DOWNTOWN LAND USE
AND
HISTORIC DESIGN REVIEW DISTRICT
Bennington, Vermont



Design Review District
Land Use Districts
Village Residential - VR
Mixed Residential - MR
Office and Apartment - OA
Central Business - CB
Village Commercial - VC
Village Industrial - VI
Public Open Space - POS

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Chapter 4 - Natural, Scenic, and Historical Resources

4.1 Overview

Bennington's location and history have combined to create a community that is rich in a variety of resources. The town's natural resources are important to the area's economic vitality and have played an important role in shaping the character of the community. Many of those resources also now provide for exceptional outdoor recreational opportunities.

The scenic quality of the landscape, including both its natural and man-made features, is another important community resource. Views of rural fields and farmsteads, waterways, mountains, and historical structures enhance the quality of life for residents and are important for tourism and future economic development.

Settlement of Bennington began in the mid-1700s and the early pattern of relatively densely developed village centers surrounded by rural countryside is still evident today. The town's historic districts and their distinctive architecture represent irreplaceable resources that further define the community's character and support economic development.

This section of the Plan will identify and discuss the preservation and wise use of important natural, scenic, and historical resources.

4.2 Natural Resources

Bennington's natural resources always have played an important part in the life of the community. Early settlers in the area farmed the lowland agricultural soils and harvested trees from the mountainsides. Streams provided power for early industry, sand and gravel deposits were mined for roadway and building construction, and abundant wildlife roamed throughout the hills and valleys.

Those same natural resources continue to provide economic benefits to the community while also supporting important recreational activities for residents and tourists. Wise use and conservation of these resources will ensure that future generations will benefit from them as well. The objectives and specific policies set forth in this section should be read in conjunction with those of the corresponding land use districts.

Agricultural Land

Bennington contains some of the most extensive valley lands in southern Vermont and many of the soils lying in these lowland areas are very productive for agricultural use (Map 4-1). Because prime agricultural soils are often the same soils that are best suited for development, the potential for loss of much of this resource is considerable. Conserving agricultural land benefits the community in a number of ways, including:

Bennington's agricultural and forest lands provide numerous benefits to townspeople.

- Support for a diverse economic base while ensuring the future viability of local agricultural production;
- Maintenance of the town's rural character and agricultural heritage;
- Preservation of open space, scenic vistas, and ecological resources.

Although the number of active farms in Bennington has declined, there are still 30 farming operations in the community. Recent trends (county data, 2007 US Census of Agriculture) indicates a continuing reduction in the number and size of farms, although the value of products sold has increased substantially. There has been some diversification from traditional dairy and crop farming, as apple orchards, Christmas tree farms, and other specialty producers also are now found in rural areas. Public policies and private development shall seek to conserve prime agricultural soils and the potential for agricultural production in the town's rural areas. Because the town seeks to direct growth to the Urban Growth Area while protecting rural open space in outlying areas, loss of agricultural soils to alternative uses in the center of town is expected and appropriate.

Map 4-1. The shaded areas represent prime agricultural soils, as mapped by the Natural Resource Conservation Service. These areas cover much of the valley land in the town. With the exception of the Urban Growth Area, most of these areas retain the potential for supporting a variety of agricultural uses.

Local agriculture will become increasingly important as energy constraints affect the supply and transport of food. A strong emphasis must be placed on preservation of productive soils and support for local farms. Initiatives such as the Bennington County "Farm to Plate" program and the Bennington Farmer's Market should be supported by the town.

Agricultural land conservation will be encouraged by requiring that development remain at a relatively low density in rural areas and by requiring that new subdivisions be planned to preserve open space and the use potential of agricultural soils. When development is planned adjacent to an existing agricultural operation, the project shall be designed to minimize conflicts between the different uses.

Owners of agricultural land are encouraged to consider use of programs that reduce the property tax burden on open lands. Acquisition of agricultural land or the development rights to such land by organizations such as the Vermont Land Trust is an effective way to preserve these resources, often while providing considerable benefits to the landowners and enabling continued viability of the farming operation.

Forest Land

Much of Bennington is covered in forests, particularly on the slopes of the Green Mountains and Mount Anthony. Numerous smaller woodlots are found throughout the valley areas. All of these woodlands help to prevent soil erosion and flooding, contribute to air and water quality, and support valuable timber, wildlife habitat, recreational, and aesthetic resources. Protection of forest resources is an important objective of this Plan.

The extensive forests covering the mountain slopes have not been developed because

of their remoteness and limited access. With the withdrawal of agricultural uses from marginal hillsides and reduced demand for local timber in the 20th century, the amount of forest land in Bennington actually increased. However, experiences such as the unsuccessful effort to create residential lots over much of Mount Anthony serve as a reminder that active efforts to conserve these resources are necessary.

Most of Bennington's high elevation forest land is zoned to permit only forestry, recreation, and other uses that will protect the value of the resource. Property tax reduction programs, appropriate land use planning, and acquisition of land or development rights by a land trust or other conservation organization are appropriate techniques for preserving forest land.

The Green Mountain National Forest covers a large amount of land on the town's eastern side and in the nearby mountain towns. Its recreational resource base offers tremendous potential for attracting tourists from around the country and the world. Better information, directions, and facilities at trailheads and other access points would be helpful. A compelling suggestion was made recently that the establishment of a Green Mountain National Park, perhaps carved out of a portion of the national forest near a particularly scenic natural area, would be a sure way to promote interest in the area's natural beauty and recreational opportunities.

Lands acquired by the Forest Service remain accessible to the public; all of these properties should be actively managed for multiple uses including recreation, timber production, and wildlife. The town should participate in National Forest planning activities and should coordinate forest planning with other nearby towns, especially with Woodford. Particular attention should be given to planning for the wise and environmentally sound use of forest trails and roads. Unrestricted access by all-terrain vehicles, trucks, and other motorized vehicles can result in severe damage to these travelways and cause erosion and water quality degradation; consequently, use of these vehicles should be allowed only on public lands and trails when proper environmental safeguards are in place.

Water Resources

Bennington contains a wide variety of water resources, including ponds, wetlands, rivers and streams, floodplains, and groundwater (Map 4-2). The quality of these resources is essential to the health of residents and to the local economy. Effective planning for water resource protection requires consideration of activities that occur throughout a watershed. Construction, stormwater runoff, road building and maintenance, and agricultural and logging activities all can increase the flow of sediments, nutrients, or other pollutants into waterways. Appropriate land use and environmental regulations (including Vermont state stormwater regulations), adherence to accepted best management practices and erosion control procedures, and public education contribute to protection of these vital resources. In addition, the Town should develop effective stormwater regulations to ensure the protection of water resources.

Lake Paran is an important water resource in the northwestern part of town.

Lake Paran

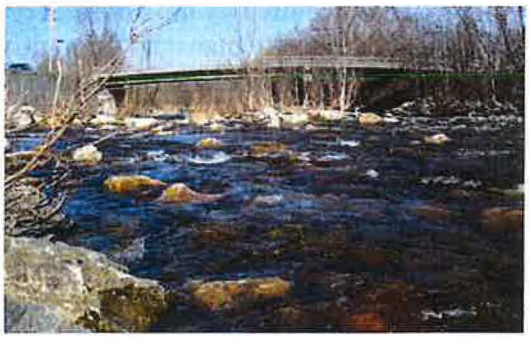
Lake Paran covers approximately 40 acres with a shoreline shared by Bennington, North Bennington, and Shaftsbury. The lake is an important recreational resource that is used for swimming, boating, and fishing. Because

maintaining water quality in the lake is of such great importance, development within 200 feet of the shoreline shall be restricted to prevent sediments or nutrients from entering the water. Much of the northern shoreline of the lake has been protected through a cooperative venture with the Vermont Land Trust.

Rivers and Streams

Streams flow into Bennington's valleys from mountains lying to the north, east, and south. A sizeable river, the Walloomsac, is formed from the convergence of these streams and flows westward from the center of town. These waterways always have been important to the community, first serving as a focus for settlement and development in both urban and rural areas and now providing important recreational and aesthetic benefits to residents and visitors. The Bennington municipal sewage treatment plant also discharges treated effluent into the river near the town's western boundary.

The Walloomsac and its tributaries tie together a diverse landscape in Bennington as they flow from forested mountains and rural fields through residential neighborhoods, the historical downtown, and past mills and factories. Efforts to protect water quality and direct interest and attention toward the river and streams have been effective and should be continued.



Restoration work along the Roaring Branch on the east side of town will improve water quality and floodplain management.

Environmental regulations that control discharges to these waterways are necessary to maintain the quality, function, and value of the resources. In addition to state and federal regulations, local zoning standards regulate development and vegetation clearing within buffer zones along all stream banks.

Preservation and rehabilitation of historical structures along the river and construction of pedestrian and bicycle pathways adjacent to the stream banks will promote appreciation of the waterways and enhance economic development opportunities. Special attention should be paid to preservation of the three covered bridges over the Walloomsac and development of adequate, safe, and attractive parking, public access, and pathways at these locations.

Wetlands

Part of a large wetland complex located in the northwestern part of Bennington.

Wetlands are areas transitional between aquatic and terrestrial systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface or the land is covered by shallow water. Benefits provided by wetlands include: flood and storm water control, maintenance of surface and ground water quality, open space and aesthetic appreciation, fish and wildlife habitat, ecological research and educational opportunities, and sources of nutrients for freshwater food chains.

Concentrations of wetlands in Bennington are found south of the town's center along Jewett Brook and South

Stream, in the relatively flat areas to the west bounded by Whipstock Hill and Routes 9 and 279, and in the low lying areas south and east of Lake Paran.

The Vermont Wetlands Rules and federal regulations administered by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers provide protection for wetland resources. Town regulations also prohibit incompatible development within 50 feet of Class 1 or 2 wetlands.

Floodplains and Fluvial Erosion Hazard Areas

Floodplains are areas that are inundated during high water flows and are important for floodwater storage as well as for the role they play in supporting significant riparian wetlands and wildlife habitats. Substantial floodplain areas in Bennington are located along the Roaring Branch, the Walloomsac River, Furnace Brook, Jewett Brook, and South Stream. Development in floodplain areas is inherently dangerous and is subject to strict regulation under the town's Flood Hazard Area zoning regulations. No development other than agriculture and forestry is allowed in these areas without approval by the Development Review Board after showing that specific engineering and construction standards have been satisfied.

The town has mapped fluvial erosion hazard (FEH) areas and has implemented special regulations for those areas (Map 4-2(A)). These FEH zones recognize the fact that rivers' locations are not static, but change over time as a result of erosive forces.

Development in these areas is restricted to prevent damage from erosion in much the same way that development in flood hazard areas is restricted to prevent damage from inundation.

Groundwater

A large amount of the water consumed by domestic, commercial, and industrial users in Bennington is derived from groundwater; of course, surface waters are fed from groundwater as well. A sufficient supply of clean groundwater is therefore crucial to residents and businesses and to future development. The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation and the Vermont Department of Health have identified public water source protection areas covering areas that supply groundwater to municipal and private water systems of a certain size. These source protection areas are illustrated on Map 4-2 and include recharge areas for sources like the Morgan Spring and watersheds of surface water sources such as Bolles Brook.

State and federal environmental regulations provide standards for the collection and distribution of these water resources. Land use regulations shall limit the type and intensity of development in upland areas where important groundwater recharge occurs. In addition, because many residences and businesses rely on individual on-site wells to serve their water needs, strict adherence to local and state regulations is critically important.

Earth Resources

Mineral, sand, gravel, rock, and other earth resources in Bennington have been utilized since colonial times. Iron ore was mined at one time and stone furnaces from this early industry are still visible near the Bennington-Woodford town line. Talc, limestone, and dolomite were extracted from small quarries from time to time in the past, and clay deposits were used in the

production of local pottery, brick, and in papermaking. At the present time, the only significant earth resource extraction operations involve sand and gravel deposits that are used for roadway construction and concrete aggregate.

Important earth resources should be identified and land development planned so that these deposits remain available for future use. In addition, because extraction operations potentially can have adverse impacts on the environment and nearby properties, any new or expanded quarrying and extraction is subject to special review by the Development Review Board. Any new extraction operation must demonstrate that it will not unduly impact the environment or the value of neighboring properties, and must include a plan for rehabilitation of the site once the operation is complete.

Earth resource extraction operations in adjacent towns also can affect Bennington, as is the case with the gravel pit off Burgess Road in Woodford. The town should participate in any appropriate environmental reviews of such projects to ensure proper resource management and site reclamation.

Air Quality

The quality of the air in Bennington is generally excellent and efforts should be made to ensure that it remains clear and clean. Threats to air quality may come at a number of levels. A serious local environmental health issue involves the illegal burning of domestic refuse, so-called "backyard burning." Such activities discharge dangerous amounts of airborne particulate and toxic and carcinogenic products of combustion. Local and state regulations that prohibit such practices must be strictly enforced.

Economic development in Bennington has emphasized "clean industries" that do not emit dangerous amounts of air pollution and this approach should be continued. Of course, airborne pollutants often originate from well beyond a municipality's borders so the town must remain aware of potential pollution sites, especially to the west in New York State, and work with the state to make sure that local air quality is not degraded.

Emissions from motor vehicles can have significant local and regional impacts on air quality. Efforts to reduce vehicle miles traveled through efficient land use planning should be continued and opportunities for alternative transportation enhanced to reduce congestion and emissions. The town can also promote clean air by requiring planning for energy efficiency in new developments and by promoting the use of fuel-efficient vehicles.

Fish and Wildlife

As noted in the earlier sections of this chapter, the diverse natural environments of the town provide habitat for a wide range of fish and wildlife species. Streams, ponds, and wetlands support popular sport fish such as rainbow and brook trout, as well as the invertebrate species they rely on for food. These water bodies also serve as critical habitat elements for waterfowl, amphibians, and many mammals (e.g., otter, beaver, bear, moose, and deer) that feed and travel along the shorelines. It is important to maintain natural vegetative covers along streambanks and to prevent the introduction into water bodies of sediments and harmful nutrients that encourage algal growth.

The black bear is one of several large mammals that live in and around Bennington.

The whitetail deer is an important part of the local ecosystem and is a popular game animal for resident and visiting sportsmen. While deer are found throughout rural areas of the town, certain wintering yards are particularly important to the health of the herd. These habitat areas are often associated with a high degree of softwood cover having a southerly or westerly aspect, and are free from human disturbance. Important deer yards have been identified on Mount Anthony and Whipstock Hill (Map 4-3) and shall be protected from development activities that would degrade them. The population of the deer herd does need to be carefully managed because an overabundance of deer can result in damage to natural vegetation and crops.

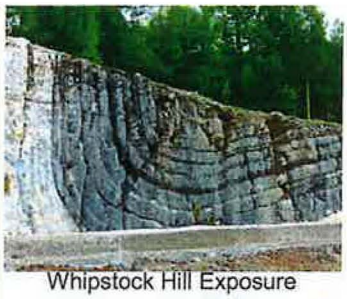
The black bear is another distinctive animal that requires specific habitat elements to thrive. Large tracts of undeveloped forest land, including the high elevation forests in the Green and Taconic Mountains in Bennington, are critical to the survival of a viable population of black bears. Large expanses of forest, and bear travel corridors that connect such forested areas, must be maintained. The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife has identified areas that are likely to support black bear populations (Map 4-3) and within these larger areas are "critical habitats" that must be preserved, including beech and oak stands, wetlands, and the aforementioned travel corridors.

Unique Natural Areas

There are several unique natural areas in Bennington that deserve special mention and

Table 4-1 Unique Natural Features in Bennington

1. **Whipstock Hill**: Exposure of the rock type Wildflysch Conglomerate, illustrating the development of the Taconic Mountains.
2. **Everett Cave:** Solution cave with dripstone formations in Mt. Anthony.
3. **Jewett Brook Marsh:** Scenic pen water marsh providing important habitat for many plants and animal species.
4. **Tuliptrees**: Large two-stemmed tuliptree and several smaller ones on Mt. Anthony.
5. **Mount Anthony**: Scenic landmark whose synclinal nature is well-exposed around its northern end.
6. **Silk Road Alluvial Forest**: Canopy of elm, sycamore, and eastern cottonwood, also containing a shrub swamp.
7. **Silk Road Woods**: Wooded area containing uncommon species.
8. **Pit of Misery**: Open pit on the lower slopes of Mt. Anthony
9. **Stratton Brook Falls**: Scenic falls along Stratton Brook descending from Bald Mountain.
10. **Wetland Plant Community**: A rare sedge, Carex schweinitzii, growing in this wetland is found in fewer than 10 sites statewide.
11. **Serendipity Fen**: Rich fen within a 100+ acre wetland.
12. **McCullough Woods**: Mixed northern hardwoods forest of old growth white pine, sugar maple, beech, elm, and red oak.
13. **Bald Mountain:** Boreal outcrop community with areas of talus.
14. **Cemetery Meadows**: Meadow containing the rare plant, arrow-leaved aster (Aster sagittifolius).


Whipstock Hill Exposure

Jewett Brook Marsh

Talus slope on Bald Mountain

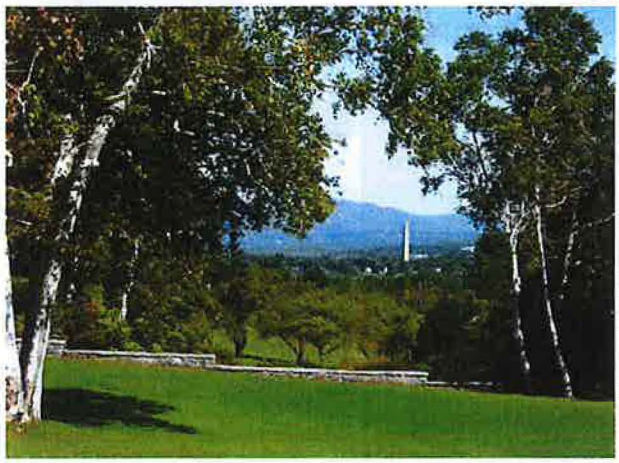
protection. The Vermont Natural Heritage Program has identified rare plant and animal species and unique natural communities in the area. Information on other significant natural areas, including geologic features such as caves, waterfalls, and rock outcroppings has been separately complied by the Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Bennington Country Regional Commission. These areas and the lands immediately around them must be protected from incompatible development. The locations of the resources identified in Table 4-1 are displayed on Map 4-3.

In addition to these natural areas, a number of important individual tree specimens are found in Bennington. The Department of Natural Sciences at Castleton State College compiled a registry of Vermont's largest trees and five of those state champion trees are in Bennington. All of these trees are in residential areas and the owners have been made aware of their presence. Special efforts should be made to protect these trees and other attractive mature trees in the community. Site plans for new developments shall identify and preserve these important trees.

4.3 Scenic Resources

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

Bennington is characterized by its expansive valley that has been able to support a rich variety of rural and urban development. That development has occurred in close proximity to distinctive upland features which have themselves limited and channeled the direction of such growth. The varied nature of the valley landforms and built environment juxtaposed with wild and abrupt mountainsides gives Bennington its unique sense of place.



Bennington's natural and built environment combine to create a truly unique sense of place with outstanding scenic qualities.

Many individual factors come together to create Bennington's special visual landscapes. These "scenic elements" reflect both characteristics that are unique to Bennington and certain features that are widely recognized as adding visual interest to a landscape. The town's Scenic Resource Inventory (December 2004) 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. The "visual qualities" of landscape contrast, order and harmony, focal points, spatial quality, and intactness that make a particular view special and unique to the community must be protected to retain the integrity of the resource.

The scenic quality of a landscape can be affected, positively or negatively, by change. A number of landscape features are particularly sensitive to change, among them: views across open fields, prominent ridgelines or hillsides, historical buildings and districts and gateways to those districts, and scenes that include important contrasting elements such as water.

The town's land use plan and regulations are designed to reinforce the scenic quality of the landscape by focusing development in historical village centers and preserving the rural character of the outlying countryside. Special regulations also have been adopted that preserve scenic resources by requiring aesthetically sensitive design of subdivisions and commercial buildings. In addition, zoning regulations establish very specific standards and review procedures for new and altered buildings in the town's designated historic design review district.

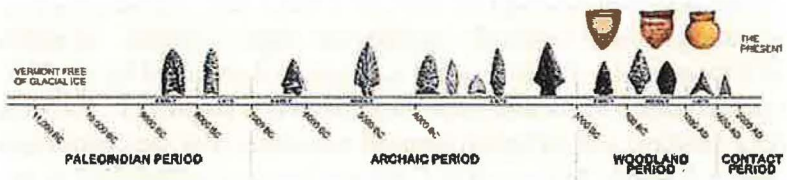
Nonregulatory tools also can be used to protect identified scenic resources. The town should work with conservation organizations such as the Vermont Land Trust to acquire properties, or conservation or scenic easements to properties, that have particular scenic significance to the community. Local and state designated scenic roads, such as Route 9, the "Molly Stark Byway" can help provide funding and impetus for preserving and promoting scenic roadway corridors.

Special attention should be given to visual gateways: points of transition along a public highway where it is evident that the traveler is arriving at a unique place. Gateways are located at entry points to the historical downtown and at places along rural highways where significant visual elements of the town's landscape first appear. These features can be improved through effective planning of adjacent land uses and integration of site features such as landscaping and careful placement of historic district signs.

Recent interest in development of renewable energy resources raises a number of important issues. Commercial-scale wind turbines will be highly visible and should be located only in locations approved by the community. Biomass (wood) heating and electric generation will involve significant tree harvesting and may include plants with smokestacks and visible plumes of steam; the environmental and scenic impacts of those operations must be considered. Small-scale hydroelectric generation can impact stream water quality, fish habitat, and aesthetics; restricting development to existing dam sites (Paper Mill Village) will greatly minimize any such concerns. Finally, the scenic impacts of commercial scale solar energy generation facilities must be considered.

4.4 Historical Resources

Bennington's historical structures, districts, and archaeological sites are important resources that provide residents with a sense of their heritage and a link with the past, promoting a sense of community identity and pride. Those same resources add to the aesthetic qualities of the town and provide an interesting context that makes the community attractive to tourists



Native American artifacts uncovered in Bennington reveal a long history of settlement and activity in the Walloomsac Valley—U. Maine at Farmington Archaeology Research Center.

and to people and businesses seeking to relocate.

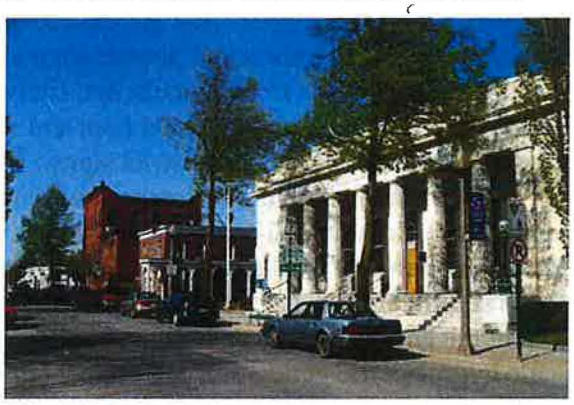
Details of some of the earliest human history of the Bennington area have been gleaned from archaeological sites excavated along the Walloomsac River. Careful inventories of prehistoric Native American sites adjacent to the river have revealed artifacts and evidence of 6000

years of human occupation and use of the area. These sites and others which are likely to contain materials from Native American and early colonial settlements should be protected from development that would destroy the artifacts. If development is to occur in these areas, professional archaeological investigations should be undertaken and any artifacts and findings should be documented and displayed in the area.

Bennington was chartered as a town in 1749 and evidence of its long history since that time exists in the layout of local roads, architectural styles of buildings identified with specific periods, and groups of buildings and structures in commercial, industrial, and residential districts. A comprehensive inventory is a necessary first step in understanding and protecting historical resources. Fortunately, several inventories and assessments of local historical resources have been completed. The most comprehensive is the Vermont Historic Sites and Structures Survey for the Town of Bennington which contains information on more than 3,000 properties in Bennington, Old Bennington, and North Bennington. Several historic districts and individual structures also have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places (Table 4-2).

Table 4-2. Sites in Bennington Included in the National Register of Historic Places

Downtown Bennington Historic District
Old Bennington Historic District
North Bennington Historic District
Furnace Grove Historic District
Carrigan Lane District
Ritchie Block
Silk Road Covered Bridge
Paper Mill Covered Bridge
Henry Covered Bridge
Bennington Railroad Station
William Henry House
Holden-Leonard Mill Complex
Frederick Squire House
U.S. Federal Building (current Bennington Police Station)
Everett Mansion
Park-McCullough House
Cora B. Whitney School (converted to affordable housing)
Shires properties on South Street and Benmont Avenue



There is a concentration of important historic structures in the Downtown Historic District; the former Federal Building is in the foreground of this photograph looking up South Street.

Of particular interest and concern to the town is the Downtown Bennington Historic District. This area includes a concentration of historical commercial, civic, and residential structures at the center of the community that, more than any other area, gives the town its unique sense of place. A design review district (Map 3-4) has been established to ensure that the historical integrity of this important area remains intact.

Inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places may enable property owners to receive federal tax advantages for historically appropriate improvements. In addition, Bennington is a Certified Local Government (CLG) - under a program developed by the National Park Service to encourage preservation of locally important historical resources. As a CLG the town is able to access certain funding and technical support resources that facilitate stated preservation goals. The Bennington Historic Preservation Commission was established in response to requirements of the CLG program and this Commission now oversees many historic preservation activities and programs in the community.

The Historic Preservation Commission has developed preservation guidelines to protect the character of historic districts that it has identified. 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. This document is available, with its comprehensive set

of design guidelines, on the town's website.

No single tool can ensure a successful historic preservation program. A combination of regulatory design controls, public funding for site and building improvements, and incentives for adaptive re-use of historical structures is necessary, and the town supports each of these techniques to achieve its historic preservation objectives, which can be summarized as follows:

Many of Bennington's historic structures are located along its waterways, such as the three covered bridges over the Walloomsac River.

- Maintain the community's special historical and cultural heritage and preserve a sense of place and pride for the town's residents;
- Maintain those historical and aesthetic qualities that are economic assets to the community and promote the economically viable reuse of historical structures;
- Require that the renovation and alteration of existing structures, and the construction of new structures, is done in a manner consistent with the character of the historic district in which they are located;
- Achieve overall visual compatibility within each district through careful attention to architectural, landscape, and site structure details;
- Save historical structures whenever possible.

The town will continue to pursue funding opportunities that support these objectives. Ongoing historically appropriate streetscape improvements in the downtown funded through the Transportation Enhancements Program have been particularly effective in this regard. Development of historical properties in Bennington, or of any property in designated historic districts, shall comply with the town's preservation guidelines and the applicable regulatory design standards. Consideration should be given to "landmark status" for especially significant historic buildings and sites and to preservation of unique and historically important interior spaces.

4.5 Policies and Recommendations for Natural, Scenic, and Historical Resources

1. The town should continue to work with conservation organizations and the Vermont Land Trust to preserve lands that contain productive agricultural soils and to support economically viable farming operations.

2. Land development in rural areas shall be designed to preserve as much prime agricultural soil as possible. Within the Urban Growth Area, preservation of agricultural soils is not required.

3. High elevation forest lands shall remain free from development and shall support appropriate uses as defined in the municipal zoning regulations. Conservation of important tracts of forest land through tax incentives or acquisition by conservation organizations or the Green Mountain National Forest is encouraged. The Town should promote the creation of the Green Mountain National Park from a portion of the Green Mountain National Forest.

4. Surface water resources shall be protected through comprehensive watershed planning that includes erosion and storm water control and by maintaining undisturbed buffers between development and stream banks and shorelines.

5. The town should seek opportunities to focus community interest toward and along waterways through development of linear parks, pathways, and safe and adequate public access and parking locations.

6. Development in regulatory floodplains and fluvial erosion hazard zones shall be strictly regulated according to the municipal flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard regulations.

7. The quality and quantity of groundwater resources used for residential, commercial, and industrial consumption shall be protected through strict adherence to state and local environmental and health regulations.

8. Development planning shall consider the need for future extraction of important deposits of earth resources. Earth resource extraction operations shall be conducted in a manner that does not harm the environment, the value of nearby properties, or future development of the site.

9. Air quality must be maintained by prohibiting discharges of unhealthy pollutants from industrial, commercial, or residential sources.

10. Critical fish and wildlife habitat areas and unique natural areas shall not be damaged by incompatible development. The town should work with conservation organizations when opportunities arise to acquire such areas.

11. Development of renewable energy resources should consider both the need for locally produced energy and the need to protect natural and scenic resources.

12. New development shall be sensitive to scenic resources and shall be planned in a manner that preserves the visual integrity of critical scenic elements and visual qualities.

13. The town should work with conservation organizations to permanently protect important viewsheds through purchase of properties or scenic easements. The town should continue to participate in and support local and state scenic roads programs.

14. Protect and enhance existing visual gateways to the community and downtown, and seek opportunities to establish new gateways at appropriate locations.

15. Strict adherence to design guidelines and standards for additions or alterations to historical properties and for any construction or building alterations within the Historic Bennington Design Review District is required.

16. The adaptive reuse of historical buildings, rather than their demolition and replacement, is required whenever such reuse is practical and appropriate. Historical struc-

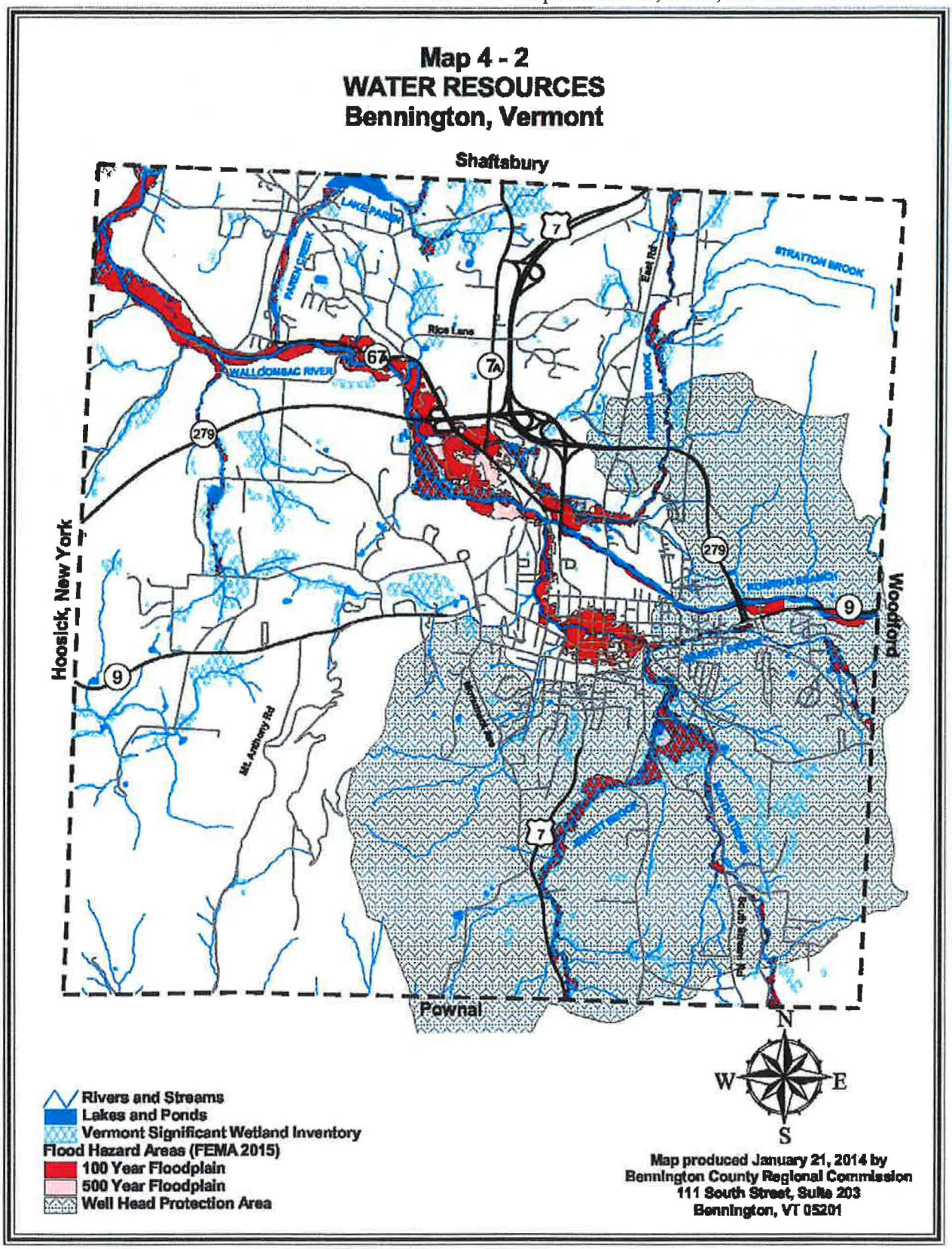
tures shall be incorporated into site plans for new developments.

17. The Historic Preservation Commission shall continue to serve in an advisory role to the Planning Commission and the Development Review Board when regulations and development proposals affecting historical sites or districts are being considered.

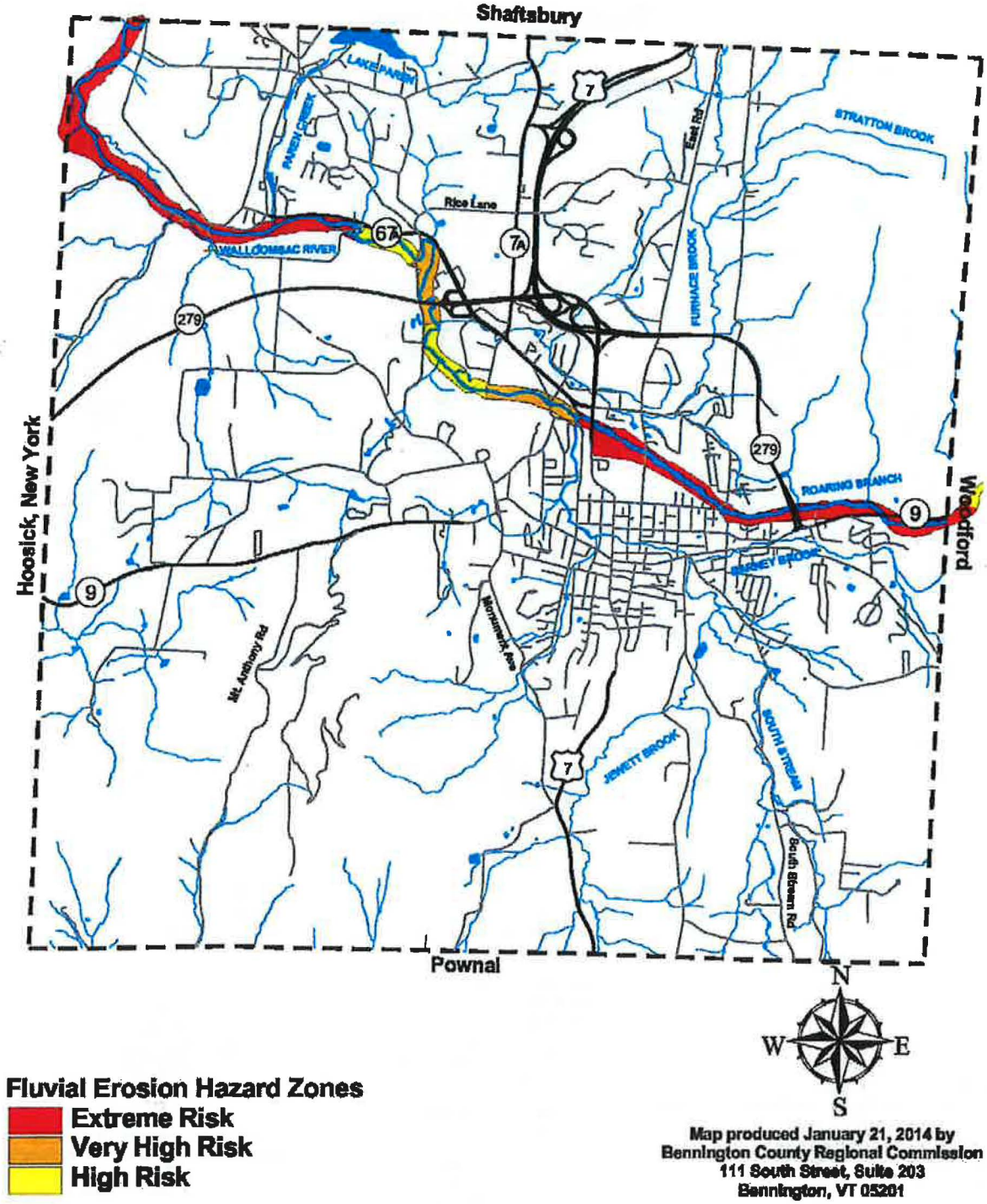
18. Explore and pursue opportunities for funding and financial incentives (Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credits, CLG, National Trust, etc.) that will support historic preservation efforts by the town and private property owners.

19. Support efforts by the Historic Preservation Commission, the Chamber of Commerce, the Better Bennington Corporation, and other organizations to increase awareness of historical resources through displays, walking tours, and other means.

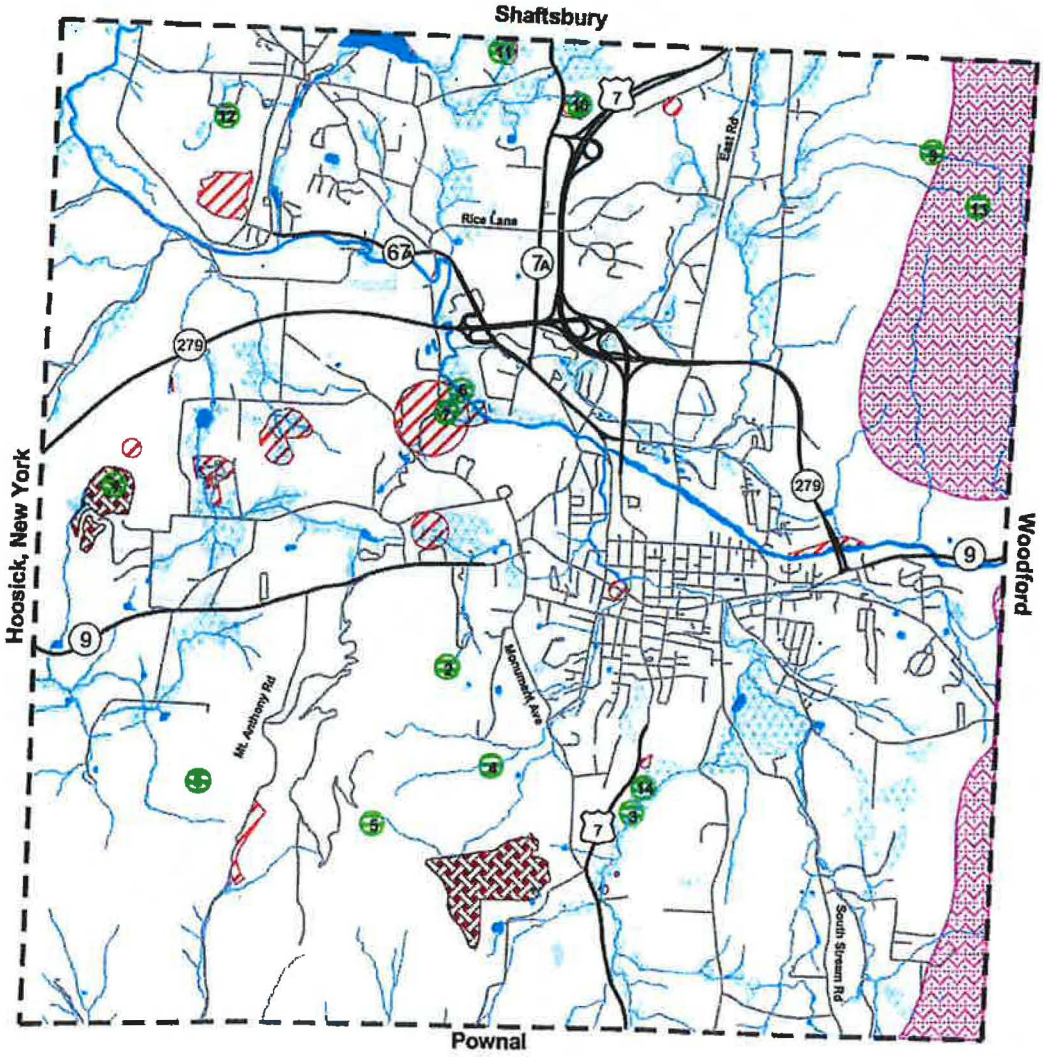
20. The town should develop an inventory of irreplaceable natural, scenic, and historical resources - "Landmarks" - that must be protected. These landmarks include, but are not limited to, features such as the Bennington Battle Monument, the covered bridges, the Hotel Putnam, Mount Anthony, and similar features that are of fundamental importance in establishing Bennington's unique character.


Map 4 - 2
WATER RESOURCES
Bennington, Vermont
Shaftsbury
Hoosick, New York
Woodford
Pownal
LAKE PARAN
PARAN CREEK
WALLOOMSAC RIVER
Rice Lane
STRATTON BROOK
East Rd
Mt Anthony Rd
7
7A
9
279
N
W
E
S
Rivers and Streams
Lakes and Ponds
Vermont Significant Wetland Inventory
Flood Hazard Areas (FEMA 2015)
100 Year Floodplain
500 Year Floodplain
Well Head Protection Area
Map produced January 21, 2014 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
111 South Street, Suite 203
Bennington, VT 05201

Map 4 - 2 (A)
FLUVIAL EROSION HAZARD ZONES
Bennington, Vermont



Map 4-3
FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITATS AND UNIQUE NATURAL AREAS
Bennington, Vermont



1. Whipstock hill
2. Everett Cave
3. Jewett Brook Marsh
4. Tulip Trees
5. Mount Anthony
6. Silk Rd. Alluvial Forest
7. Silk Rd. Woods
8. Pit of Misery
9. Stratton Brook Falls
10. Wetland Community
11. Serendipity Fen
12. McCullough Woods
13. Bald Mountain
14. Cemetery Meadows

- Rivers and Streams
- Lakes and Ponds
- Vermont Significant Wetland Inventory
- Unique Natural Areas
- Deer Wintering Areas
- Important Bear Habitat
- Rare and Endangered Species

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Map produced January 21, 2014 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
111 South Street, Suite 203
Bennington, VT 05201

Chapter 5 - Housing

5.1 Overview

Bennington contains a variety of housing types in both urban and rural areas. The quantity, quality, and diversity of housing in the community must be maintained and improved to support current residents as well as future population and economic growth.

A majority of the town's existing housing stock is located in residentially zoned areas within the Urban Growth Area. Future residential growth should occur predominantly in this area, although some additional housing in rural areas is expected and appropriate. Both owned and rented housing are available in significant quantities in Bennington, and both fill important needs. It is very important that a supply of quality housing be available that is affordable for residents and prospective residents at a variety of income levels.

The State of Vermont has identified the need for "affordable housing" as a central goal for local, regional, and state planning efforts. Housing affordability is determined by two factors: the cost of a home or apartment and the ability of a household to pay that cost. A standard measure assumes that housing is affordable when a household pays no more than 30 percent of its income for rent and utilities or for mortgage, taxes, and insurance.

The Cora B. Whitney elderly housing project is a good example of rehabilitation of a historic property to meet the needs of a particular segment of the local population.

Many housing programs already exist that are targeted specifically for families and individuals with incomes at or below the poverty level and for individuals with special needs that are not adequately served by the private housing market. There also is a need for a greater supply of quality local housing for people in moderate to higher income categories.

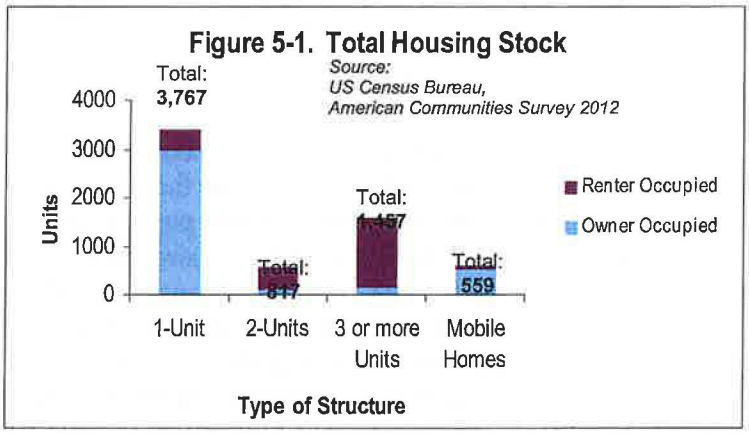
Bennington is an employment center for the region and people who work in town should be able to find housing in town. If an adequate supply of houses and apartments at a range of price levels is not present locally, people looking for housing will be forced to move to outlying areas and towns, resulting in inefficient residential sprawl. A shortage of a diverse stock of quality local housing also discourages economic development because employers consider the availability of a local workforce—and housing for that workforce—to be a critical factor in selecting locations for establishing or expanding a business.

Planning for housing should consider the design of residential buildings and neighborhoods as well as the location and cost of that housing. It is important to ensure that existing and new residential areas provide pleasant places for people to live that are both efficient and compatible with the character of the town and adjacent land uses.

5.2 Housing Statistics and Identified Needs

Bennington contains approximately 6,763 housing units of which 55 percent are owner–occupied units, 37 percent are renter-occupied units, and eight percent are listed as seasonal/ vacant (2012 U.S. Census Bureau, American Communities Survey). This proportion of rentals is significantly greater than the countywide rate and statewide rates (26 and 23 percent, respectively). Most single-family dwelling units (including mobile homes) are owner-occupied while

two-family and multi-family dwellings are more often occupied by renters (Figure 5-1). Of the vacant units in Bennington, 247 were listed as being for sale or rent (less than 2 percent of the "owned" and about 7 percent of the "rented" units).



Residential property sales data from 2008 indicate that median home prices in Bennington are lower than in the county or state (Table 5-1). Renters pay a higher percentage of their income in monthly housing costs than homeowners, and that amount in Bennington is, for many renters, more than what is considered affordable. Three in five renters in Bennington pay over 30% of their income in housing costs and over a quarter of renters pay more than 50% of their income for housing, statistics that are particularly significant given the large percentage of renters in the town.

A further analysis of income and housing costs provided by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency reveals more about housing needs in Bennington. The median value of owner-occupied housing unit in Bennington is $162,000, which would be considered affordable for a household with an income of $54,000, but the median household income in Bennington is less than $42,000. A family with an annual income of $42,000 can afford to own a home costing $140,000. This might explain why the average sale price of primary residences in Bennington between January 2013 and April 2014 was significantly lower than county and state averages (22% and 25% less, respectively.)

Table 5-1. Median Price of Primary Residences Sold in 2013	Bennington	Bennington County	Vermont
Single Family Houses	$142,500	$175,000	$200,000
Condominiums	$110,500	$180,000	$187,000
Mobile Homes (w/ land)	$37,910	$32,000	$76,500

Several specific areas of housing concern and need have been identified, based on demographic data and input from human service and housing organizations:

- Housing that meets the needs of the town's growing population of elderly residents. Additional housing is needed in and near the center of town because of the limited mobility of much of this population; in addition, housing options with few or no stairs to negotiate are needed, which should include considerations of ramps and other accessible entrances. Assisted living housing is another area with a growing demand that will need to be addressed, as is the need for housing for elderly residents on a limited income.

- Low and very low income residents currently have very few housing choices available to them in Bennington. Both the Bennington Housing Authority and Shires Housing, formerly the Regional Affordable Housing Corporation, attempt to find housing for low-income residents, but also must ensure that prospective tenants can afford the minimum rents needed to keep the units open and available. There also is a need for some type of transition program to help people move from subsidized to non-subsidized housing. In the same vein, expanded job opportunities are needed to provide the income that will allow people to progress in the housing market.
- Sufficient quality rental housing in Bennington is needed, particularly in and around the downtown. This was cited as the chief housing-related concern by area employers in a local survey conducted as part of the Bennington Housing Report in 2014.
- Housing options are needed to provide an entry into the home ownership market for people and families making 100% to 150% of median income. This income group comprises an important segment of the working population of the town and must be served to support the town's future economic progress. One model that should be explored is development of new or rehabilitated houses as duplex units, with one-half occupied by the owner of the building and the other half rented, with the rental income used to help pay the costs of ownership.

5.3 Location and Design of Residential Development

Bennington's housing stock, is significantly older than the state average. The median year built for a housing unit in Bennington is 1956, compared with a county and state median of 1970 and 1972, respectively. Therefore, efforts to renovate older structures in Bennington will be critical. Where new development occurs, it should be concentrated in the Urban Growth Area where the town has specifically planned for a compact settlement pattern with a mix of land uses supported by public water and sewer facilities.

In addition to the vacant land available in the Urban Growth Area, there are opportunities for "infill" development on underutilized sites, rehabilitation of substandard housing stock, and redevelopment of nonresidential structures no longer utilized for their original purpose. Any such development that conforms to zoning regulations will be consistent with the Town Plan and meet significant market demands. Because of the higher densities permitted in these areas, proximity to the town center, and grant funds available to address identified regional housing needs, it is appropriate to locate housing for elderly or other less mobile persons in these areas.

A variety of housing types also is encouraged in and around the downtown. Maintaining a residential population in this area provides convenient and efficient housing for employees, helps support local businesses, and ensures a vibrant and active downtown throughout the day and week.

Certain characteristics should be common to all new residential development in Bennington. These features represent the best of the town's traditional development pattern. All new residential or mixed-use planned-unit developments should include as many of the following elements as possible:

- Low density in rural areas, planned to protect open spaces and important natural resources; higher densities within the Urban Growth Area.
- Architecture that is compatible with the historic character of the town and surrounding neighborhoods, but that provides some variety in design among and between structures.
- Housing in walkable and accessible areas that have connections to public space and all basic amenities.
- Relatively narrow streets that slow traffic and form a connected network with existing streets, and with multiple neighborhood access points, to disperse traffic.
- Parking areas for cars and garages that are not prominent in building or site design.
- Buildings sited relatively close to the public street that include front porches with walkways connecting to the public sidewalks.
- Sidewalks and pathways that traverse the development and connect to public open spaces, adjacent neighborhoods, and any concentrations of public activity such as commercial areas or schools.
- Streets and sidewalks that are treated as public spaces and integrated with existing parks and new "pocket" parks to foster a sense of neighborhood and community.
- Landscaping that is carefully planned with appropriate trees and grass strips along streets and sidewalks.
- Whenever possible, a range of housing types (ownership, rental, one, two, or multi–family—as permitted in the zoning bylaws for the district) at a range of price levels are provided.

Any new or rehabilitated housing also should be made as energy efficient as possible. Adequate insulation, minimizing air infiltration, proper ventilation, efficient furnaces, appliances, and other structural features should be incorporated in residential developments. The town should require conformance to the Vermont Residential Building Energy Standards. State-level legislative initiatives should be pursued so that investments in energy conservation and renewable energy systems are affordable and do not result in increased tax burdens. Any measures of affordability must consider ongoing energy costs—poorly designed and insulated buildings and mobile homes may be inexpensive initially, but prove to be a poor investment and costly to maintain over the long-term.

5.4 Housing Programs

The town's land use plan (as implemented through the zoning and subdivision regulations) provides for the development of an adequate supply of housing for the community. Relatively high residential densities and mixed uses are planned for the center of town. A large amount of rural land is available to support carefully planned low density residential development. In addition, the land use plan allows for multifamily housing in several districts as well as residential care homes for special needs populations and accessory dwelling units as required

by state law.

Shires Housing is a local nonprofit organization that develops and maintains affordable housing throughout Bennington County. Shires has completed a number of projects in Bennington ranging from rehabilitation of single family homes to construction of new multifamily housing projects and adaptive reuse of historic structures for residential use. The town should continue to work cooperatively with Shires, other organizations, and private developers and landowners to encourage development of affordable housing in the area with an emphasis on renovation of existing housing stock and creation of home ownership opportunities.

The Applegate Apartments on Orchard Road provide 104 units of affordable family housing.

The Bennington Housing Authority manages up to 207 Section 8 vouchers for rental subsidies in the community. The Bennington Housing Authority also owns and manages 195 public housing units in four different properties, serving both families and elderly tenants. The town should place representatives on the Authority's board of directors who take an active interest in furthering the town's housing goals. Efforts should be made to ensure that people who become financially able to relocate to non-subsidized housing are able to, so those subsidized units can then be made available to those most in need.

Two housing revolving loan funds are administered by the town's Community Development Department: the Housing Rehabilitation Loan Program and the Home Retention Loan Program. The Department also works closely with developers, industry, and local groups to foster economic development and related housing initiatives.

A considerable amount of Bennington's affordable housing is in the form of rental units in privately owned homes, many of which are located within the town's vibrant urban neighborhoods. The town should support landlords who provide quality rentals that meet demonstrated housing needs and support livable neighborhoods.

Statewide organizations that are involved in the development and maintenance of affordable housing include the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, which provides funding for both housing development and land conservation efforts and Housing Vermont, a nonprofit organization that creates permanently affordable rental housing by working with local organizations and the private sector. The Vermont State Housing Authority provides rental subsidies and financing for the development of affordable housing projects. The town should continue to work cooperatively with all of these organizations to pursue opportunities that will expand the supply of quality affordable housing for existing and new residents with an emphasis on renovation of existing housing stock and creation of home ownership opportunities.

5.5 Housing Policies and Recommendations

1. Improve the existing housing stock to provide a variety of opportunities for rental and home ownership for people of all income levels.

2. Create infill housing opportunities, which like all residential development shall: inte-

grate into existing street networks; be compatible with the character of the town; provide safe, comfortable, and attractive neighborhoods for residents; and shall include amenities such as sidewalks, landscaping, and public open space.

3. Create financial incentives to encourage adaptive re-use of existing structures; actively encourage new housing development in and around the downtown, including residential use of the upper stories of commercial buildings.

4. Maintain an adequate supply of quality rental housing at a variety of income levels. This will be a critical step in generating the economic development necessary to support long-term home ownership.

5. Work with businesses to monitor employee housing needs and barriers, considering both rental and ownership.

6. Recognize and address the housing needs of professionals relocating to the area by supporting the renovation of existing dwellings and construction of new dwellings to serve this population.

7. Recognize and address the housing needs of elderly and disabled persons with limited mobility by working with local and state housing agencies and private developers. Support renovation of existing housing and development of new housing that meets the needs of these groups in and near the center of town.

8. Promote programs and development that provide needed amenities , such as community facilities and stores (especially food stores) for neighborhoods that currently lack access to such amenities.

9. Work with Shires Housing, other housing agencies, and private developers to develop an adequate supply of affordable housing and develop programs that encourage home ownership for people and families with incomes at or near the town median. Focus efforts on opportunities to increase owner-occupancy rates in and near the downtown area.

10. Energy conservation and efficiency shall be an important consideration in all housing. Incentives for investment in conservation and renewable energy systems should be supported.

11. Residential development shall be designed to be compatible with the character of the town, provide safe, comfortable, and attractive neighborhoods for residents, and shall include amenities such as sidewalks, landscaping, and public open space.

Chapter 6 - Transportation

6.1 Overview

A safe, convenient, and efficient transportation system is essential to Bennington's residents, visitors, and businesses, and to achieve 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 providers. Each individual mode is important and it also is important to recognize that the connections between the modes and the relationship between land uses and transportation facilities are critical to the effectiveness of the overall system.

6.2 Roadways, Bridges, and Parking Facilities

The first settlers to the area constructed roads that served as a framework for the town's future development. Ever since that time, roads, whether traveled by horse and wagon, trolley, bicycle, bus, car, or truck have been the most important element of Bennington's transportation system. The town's system of roadways provide access to homes, workplaces, schools, stores, parks, and virtually every other local destination while the state highways that traverse the town are the principal means of travel to and from locations outside of Bennington. Because of their role in addressing transportation needs, the public investment in the construction and maintenance of our highways is among the largest of any governmental program. It also is important to remember that these same roads are the most visited public places in Bennington, by residents and visitors alike, and as such their design and relationship with surrounding land uses contributes greatly to the town's sense of place.

It is important to recognize that cars, trucks, buses, bicycles, and pedestrians all must be accommodated on the Town's roadways and bridges. The Complete Streets policy was implemented by Act 34 of the 2011 Legislature. Complete Streets is an approach to planning, design, construction and maintenance of roadways to consider all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders. Moreover, within the next few decades, gasoline and diesel powered vehicles may no longer be the most common users of the highway system, and consideration must be given to the eventual increased use by public transit vehicles, bicycles, and vehicles powered by alternative fuels such as electricity. Roadway design and infrastructure development must begin to consider this inevitable transformation in the use of our roads.

Bennington contains over 120 miles of public roadways (Table 6-1). Each of these roads

Table 6-1. Miles of town and state Maintained Highways in Bennington. Class 1 town highways are state system highways maintained by the town. Class 2 town highways support relatively high traffic volumes and serve as important collectors and/or connections between communities.

Highways	Mileage
Town Highways	**99.40**
Class 1	3.62
US 7	1.65
VT 9	1.97
Class 2	11.49
Class 3	84.26
State Highways	**27.93**
US 7	6.33
VT 279	6.05
VT 9	4.32
VT 67A	1.94
VT 7A	3.02

can be described according to a particular "functional class." **Arterial highways** are State roads that are intended to focus on vehicle mobility, and limited access arterials such as US 7 (north of Bennington) and VT 279 allow access only at interchanges. **Collector highways** may be either state or town highways that move traffic between local roads and destinations, serving both vehicle mobility and access to adjacent land uses. **Local roads** are town highways that provide for relatively low speed traffic flow with an emphasis on provision of access.

The entire highway system is depicted on Map 6-1. There are many issues and needed improvements associated with each State highway and with the network of town highways. Those issues are presented below, arranged according to the functional classification of the roadways.

State Highways

A principal arterial, **US 7**, connects Bennington with communities along the entire western side of Vermont and south into Berkshire County, Massachusetts. The limited access portion of the highway begins north of the downtown and passes through a set of traffic lights at the intersection of Northside and Kocher Drives. The highway is an obstacle to pedestrian movements between residential, commercial, educational, and recreational facilities. A bicycle/pedestrian path across US 7 is planned as part of an ambitious and important project to improve pedestrian mobility and safety in this area. The highway quickly gains elevation north of this intersection and functions effectively as part of the national highway system (NHS). The views to the south from US 7 as travelers enter Bennington form an important gateway to the town, with striking views of Mount Anthony and the Battle Monument.

Entering Bennington from the North on US 7.

US 7 continues as an important rural arterial south of the downtown area. It provides connections to Pownal and on to Massachusetts. As such it is an important entryway to Southern Vermont and Bennington.

VT 279 diverts through east-west traffic around Bennington's downtown, removing a considerable number of vehicles from VT 9 within the town's center. Unlike the east-west VT 279 corridor (intended primarily to divert through truck traffic around downtown Bennington), the proposed north-south VT 279 corridor will have little impact on through truck traffic, but will divert passenger vehicles around the downtown. It's important to ensure that the new intersections of VT 279 create gateways to the town and allow for easy access to the downtown to avoid adverse impacts on businesses in Bennington.

As it passes through the center of town, US 7 functions as an urban arterial with slower traffic movements and a greater emphasis on providing access to adjacent land uses. The design of US 7 as well as streetscape features along the highway are especially important as it passes through Bennington's historic downtown area; all such features should be visually appealing and consistent with the historic scale and character of the town.

All sections of VT 279 are limited access arterials. Development in the areas of the interchanges between VT 279 and US 7 and VT 9 must be consistent with the land use plan to ensure that congestion does not compromise the function of the new highway or reduce safety in those

areas. These intersections, and the approaches to the town from them, should appear attractive and convenient to travelers because they will function as the principal gateways to the community.

Route 279 will provides a useful east-west truck route around Bennington, improving traffic flow and enhancing the downtown.

The other NHS principal arterial that traverses Bennington is **VT 9**, a highway that includes both the downtown Main Street and scenic rural segments. Its historic and scenic values have led to designation of VT 9 as an official "Vermont Byway" through the National Scenic Byway Program. VT 9 is an important gateway to town as it passes through a scenic rural valley and historic Old Bennington Village. It is important to maintain and improve the condition of VT 9 and to continue to emphasize attractive highway and streetscape design, particularly in the historic downtown area. Informational and directional signs identifying VT 9 as the "Molly Stark Byway" have been installed in locations that direct travelers along this route. Additional byway signs are needed along NY Route 7 near the Route 279 intersection to direct travelers onto VT 9.

The **VT 67A** corridor provides an important arterial connection from Bennington's Northside Drive commercial area to North Bennington Village and then to New York State. Large commercial, industrial, and institutional uses, as well as a linear residential area, access directly to VT 67A. This highway also includes a major interchange with VT 279. With its important arterial function, serving as a principal connection between communities, as well as its role in providing access to a variety of substantial land uses and connecting highways, careful highway design and control of driveway and roadway connections are necessary. The "Bennington VT 67A/7A Access Management Study" describes the existing condition of the highway and the challenges associated with accommodating new development and traffic growth along the corridor. That report should be reviewed by the town when considering improvements to existing intersections or roadway segments and when evaluating the appropriateness of new access drives along the highway.

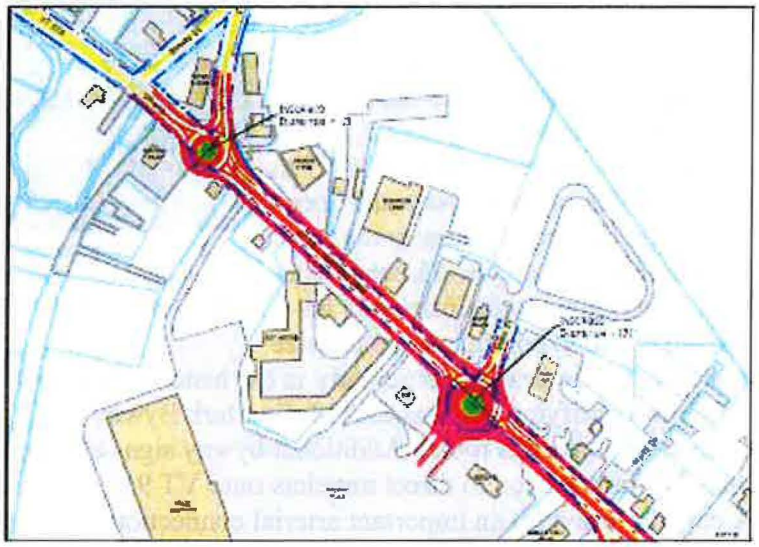
Once the principal regional highway approach to Bennington from the north, **VT 7A** is now considered a collector highway because of the presence of US 7. It collects traffic from adjacent local roads, connects Bennington and Shaftsbury, and provides access to residential and commercial uses. The commercial uses are highly concentrated in the Northside Drive area and are interspersed among residential uses and open spaces in the Harwood Hill area.

Traffic volumes are very high along Northside Drive and congestion and safety have been serious concerns in this area. Several studies have focused specifically on Northside Drive:

- Bennington Access Management Guidebook (1997)
- Northside Drive Transportation Study and Plan (2003)
- Bennington VT 67A/7A Access Management Study (2004)
- Northside Drive Roundabout Conceptual Analysis and Design (2006).

Those studies contain recommendations for short and long term solutions to the traffic concerns and should be consulted when evaluating new roadway construction projects and proposals to develop or redevelop properties along Northside Drive. Possible improvements include such things as intersection improvements (roundabouts), consolidation and improved definition of driveways, interior connections between parking lots, and methods to restrict conflicting turn-

ing movements. Stormwater drainage along this section of roadway is deficient and must be improved.



Suggested intersection improvements along the congested Route 7A/67A corridor include roundabouts at the intersection of those two highways and at the Monument Plaza intersection. (Northside Drive Roundabout Conceptual Design, 2006, by Resource Systems Group.) The proposed roundabout at the Monument Plaza intersection will be constructed as part of the Wal-Mart expansion.

Traffic volumes on VT 7A drop off considerably north of the VT 67A intersection. Additional commercial development in this area would lead to sprawl and an extension of the traffic problems currently seen along Northside Drive. Future development in this area should be restricted as described in the Land Use Plan so that necessary roadway improvements will be limited to pavement maintenance, shoulder widening, and eventual replacement of the railway bridge and the highway bridge that crosses a small stream, both at the base of Harwood Hill.

Town Highways

The town's network of local roads provides access to adjacent land uses and to collector and arterial highways. The grid of local roads in the center of town provides numerous alternative routes for local traffic to move to destinations within and outside the area. Some town highways function as collector highways and some also provide connections to adjacent towns. Examples of town collector highways are: South Stream Road, East Road, Monument Avenue, Silk Road, and North Branch Street.

The main elements of Bennington's system of town-owned roads have been in place for a very long time. Early settlers and residents laid out the roads which formed the framework for subsequent development of the community. In recent years, decisions regarding the location of roads (and thus establishing a direction for new growth) have been undertaken principally by private developers. While many such private development roads have been well sited, there may be opportunities for the town to determine where new roads are located and, consequently, to encourage development in appropriate areas and ensure efficient movement throughout town.

The town can develop and adopt an "Official Map" (24 V.S.A. Section 4421) as a means of planning for new public facilities such as roads. By carefully considering where new local roads should be located, the town can preserve the opportunity to acquire the land necessary for construction of the road. Examples of situations where such an effort might prove effective include the need for an improved roadway connection between rural neighborhoods in the southeastern part of Bennington and US 7 as well as connections that would create small grid networks to improve local traffic flow through and between neighborhoods.

Whenever a new local road is constructed or the town acquires an existing right-of-way for use as a public road, the road must be named for addressing and public safety purposes. Any new road names should reflect the historic character of the town or the particular area where the road is located rather than a reference to a commercial entity that may be served by the road.

All new private or public road construction shall be accomplished in accordance with town regulatory standards. Proper roadway construction will enhance safety and convenience for users of the roads, including pedestrians and cyclists, reduce the cost of maintenance, and ensure that the town is not faced with excessive costs if a private road becomes public or if additional growth leads to a significant increase in the volume of traffic on a road.

Bridges

Town and state bridges are critical links in the highway system. The Vermont Agency of Transportation conducts regular safety inspections of bridges and establishes priorities for funding and necessary improvements. Special financial assistance is available to towns for required repairs to town bridges and culverts.

Whenever a new bridge is constructed or an existing bridge is repaired or reconstructed, every effort should be made to maximize safety while providing an attractive design and accommodating pedestrians and bicycles by providing sufficient lane width and/or sidewalks.

The Henry Covered Bridge is one of three historic bridges spanning the Walloomsac River.

Three historic covered bridges are located in Bennington, all spanning the Walloomsac River in the northwestern part of town: the Silk Road Covered Bridge, The Paper Mill Covered Bridge, and the Henry Covered Bridge. The town must maintain these important historic and scenic resources and utilize resources provided by the Vermont Historic Bridges Program. Adequate, safe, and attractive parking areas should be maintained near the bridges to allow people to visit and photograph the structures, but those parking areas, and any roadway signs near the bridges, must be carefully located so that they do not detract from scenic values.

Access Management

Access management deals with the relationship between the roadway network and adjacent land uses. The highway system needs to provide for safe and efficient through traffic movement as well as access to residences, businesses, and other uses located along the roadways.

Those two functions often come into conflict and access management is a set of principles and tools that can be used to minimize those conflicts. Specific benefits of access management planning include:

- Improved traffic flow by decreasing delays and occurrences of vehicle blockages;
- Improved vehicular and pedestrian safety by eliminating conflict points;
- Support for economic development through improved access;
- Support for local land use plans; and
- Improved aesthetics and community character by incorporating landscaping, sidewalks, and lighting into the design of intersections and driveways.

Appropriate access management elements shall be included in any roadway construction or reconstruction project. Specific recommendations are included in the "Bennington Access Management Guidebook" and the "Bennington VT 67A/7A Access Management Study." In addition, the town shall require applicants for land use permits to include access management principles in their development site planning.

A wide range of regulatory options can be used by the town to maintain or improve access management conditions. The most basic methods involve zoning controls over the location, type, and intensity of development. Site plans for new developments or redevelopment or existing properties shall include appropriate site-specific access management options, which may include:

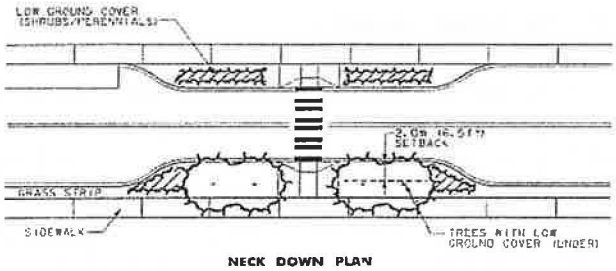
- Limiting the number, width, spacing, and alignment of curb cuts (which may involve closing or relocating existing curb cuts);
- Requiring connections between adjacent lots for both vehicles and pedestrians;
- Restricting parking to the side or rear of buildings;
- Constructing sidewalks from the public right-of-way to the storefronts;
- Providing safe access routes for bicycles and racks for bicycle storage;
- Allowing for planned unit developments and requiring submission of master plans to account for future parking and access needs;
- Requiring access drives to intersect existing side roads or new subdivision or service roads;
- Planning for roadway connections between adjacent developments and discouraging dead-end roads;
- Requiring traffic impact studies, paid for by the developer, for large-scale new projects as well as construction of necessary improvements identified in those studies.

Traffic Calming

Traffic calming involves the use of physical changes in the roadway and enforcement to reduce vehicle speeds. In urban and village areas, these techniques can safely balance the needs of motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Traffic-calming promotes safety while creating opportunities to enhance the aesthetic elements of a roadway by reducing pavement width and increasing landscaping.

A wide range of traffic calming techniques are available. Some of the most common techniques are:

- Installation of roundabouts at intersections, particularly at "gateways" to downtown or village center areas;
- Reduction of the motor vehicle travel lane width in village areas;
- Center islands and pedestrian refuges at crossing locations in roadways and raised and/or textured crosswalks;
- Bulb-outs at crosswalks;
- On-street parking;
- Pavement markings;
- Enforcement, especially a visible enforcement presence.



Detail of a "neck down" from the Agency of Transportation's traffic calming manual.

The Vermont Agency of Transportation has developed a series of standard drawings for traffic calming devices. The town should consider utilization of one or more of these techniques wherever vehicle speeds might compromise safety and especially at approaches to the town center.

Parking

Safe, convenient, and attractive vehicle parking areas are a necessary component of the transportation system. In most parts of the town, adequate parking can be provided through on-site facilities. The location of these parking lots on a site and the layout and design of the lots are important to their proper functioning and to the aesthetic values of the community.

Parking areas shall be well-landscaped and placed at the side or rear of lots to ensure that a sea of asphalt and vehicles are not prominently visible from public roads. Parking lots must include landscaped islands and sidewalk linkages that provide for safe pedestrian movements to and through these areas. It is important that parking lots provide adequate space for the number of vehicles that typically use the site, but lots with excessive parking spaces are not appropriate.

In the downtown area, due to space limitations and because of the town's objective of maintaining a very compact development pattern, on-site parking is generally not available or appropriate. On-street parking provides for a significant amount of vehicle storage in the downtown and also contributes to traffic calming, as noted above. Public parking lots and parking garages should be located behind, but convenient to, the main business streets in the downtown. Those public parking facilities should include the same design elements as on-site private lots as well as clear and attractive sidewalk or pathway connections to commercial destinations. If sufficient public parking is developed behind Main Street, it will be possible to eliminate some on-

street parking and expand sidewalks and adjacent areas for additional public spaces that could be available for enhanced landscaping, outdoor dining, art displays, sitting areas, and similar uses.

Necessary Road, Bridge, Sidewalk, and Intersection Improvements

The town has developed a list of intersection, roadway, sidewalk, and bridge needs that are included in the municipal capital plan and budget, and sidewalk infrastructure plan. These projects have been identified through the experience of municipal public works employees, town and regional planning studies, and VTrans scoping reports (the first step in the VTrans project development process). The list (Table 6-2, following page), excerpted from the capital plan, should provide a basis for identifying priorities for town and state funds.

6.3 Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation

Everyone spends at least part of their day as a pedestrian, even if that involves simply walking from a car to a residence, workplace, or store. Many people walk much further, of course, relying on the town's sidewalks, pathways, and roads to provide safe, convenient, and enjoyable travel routes. Bicycling is an extremely efficient transportation option that also is a popular recreational activity for residents and tourists to the area. Any type of human-powered transportation has the added benefits of promoting good health and reducing vehicle congestion and emissions. Bennington provides a beautiful natural and historic environment for walking and bicycling and the town should actively work to ensure that adequate facilities are available to encourage these activities.

The town maintains approximately 40 miles of sidewalks in the urban center. These sidewalks provide critical links between neighborhoods and to and throughout the central business district. A Sidewalk Infrastructure Plan was recently completed, including a detailed map/ inventory of all sidewalks and their condition, to improve planning for this infrastructure (see map 6-2).

A sidewalk reaches Mount Anthony Union High School and has been extended as a multi-use path north along Park Street and East Road to the new Middle School. There is a need for new sidewalks along the Kocher Drive and Northside Drive commercial corridors as well as a connection to those areas along North Street. A sidewalk connection between Northside Drive and the Hannaford and Home Depot shopping plazas also should be established.

Sidewalks in the downtown area should be wide and include attractive design elements such as brick borders along the curb line. Amenities such as park benches, shade trees, and informational signs directed to pedestrians also should be available. In areas characterized by higher speed traffic and a lack of on-street parking, and in residential areas, the sidewalks do not need to be as wide, but should be separated from the street edge wherever possible by a vertical curb and landscaped strip.

Crosswalks should be provided at appropriate locations to facilitate pedestrian movements at street crossings. Most pedestrian crossings should occur at traffic signals or at locations where traffic speeds and sight distances will promote safe crossings. At traffic signals in areas of high vehicle traffic volume or where vehicle turning movements could endanger pedestrian safety, dedicated pedestrian signal phases should be employed.

A particularly difficult obstacle to pedestrians exists at the US 7-Northside/Kocher intersection. A conceptual design for a bicycle/pedestrian facility connecting the East Road pathway

Table 6-2. Identified Intersection, Road, Sidewalk, and Bridge Project Needs.
(Refer to Bennington Capital Plan and Budget, Sidewalk Infrastructure Plan and Active Transportation Guide for additional details)

Bridges	
VT 7A	Widening at RR underpass and bridge at base of Harwood Hill (with road widening)
Benmont Avenue Bridge	Reconstruct
Depot Street Bridge	Possible reconstruction
Sidewalks	
Townwide	Rehabilitate sections each year per sidewalk infrastructure plan and capital plan
North Street, County to Depot	Extend sidewalks to Kocher Drive
Kocher Drive	Construct sidewalks and crosswalks
VT 67A	Sidewalks from VT 7A to shopping plazas
Benmont Avenue	Add sidewalks and curbing, upgrade existing sidewalks, complete sidewalk connections, add crosswalks
Willow Road or railroad ROW	Sidewalk or pathway from Applegate Apartments to Molly Stark School
Pleasant Street	Sidewalk improvements per capital plan
Northside Drive/North Bennington Road	Fill in gaps in sidewalks between Kocher Drive and Bennington College entrance.
Franklin Lane	Pedestrian improvements
Pathways	
Bennington Pathway Extension	Extend pathway northward, possible connections to North Bennington
Bald Mountain Trail	Trailhead/parking improvements at North Branch Street access
Applegate to Willowbrook	Connect housing developments, provide access to Molly Stark School (BCRC Feasibility Study)
Ninja Trail	Connect downtown to Bennington College via on-road/off-road bicycle/pedestrian friendly route
Intersections	
Benmont Avenue/Hunt Street	Realignment
Benmont Avenue/Northside Drive	Various improvements (*Scoping Report STPG TSIG(4)SC*)
Branch Street/East Main Street	Improve turning radius *(Bennington Local Roadway Network Analysis (BLRNA—2003)).*
Park Street/Kocher Drive/East Road/N. Branch St	Turning lane and other improvements *Scoping STPG TSIG(4)SC and BLRNA-2003*
Union Street/East Main Street	Possible signals
Rice Lane/College Drive/Silk Road/VT 67A	Possible roundabout
East Main Street/Burgess Road	Integrate with VT 279
Kocher Drive/US 7	Lane, signal, and pedestrian crossing improvements *2014 Scoping Study*
Dewey Street/Monument Avenue	Safety improvements
County Street/Park Street	Left-turn lane
Safford Street/East Main Street	Signal upgrade and lane realignment (*BLRNA-2003)*
East Road/Houghton Lane	Realign intersection, reduce turning radius
Northside Drive/North Bennington Road Corridor	Possible Roundabouts (Northside Drive Roundaboud Conceptual Plan)
Roads	
Walloomsac Road	Straighten and remove vertical curve at Pippin Knoll
Northside Drive	Curbs, drainage, sidewalks, lighting, paving, crosswalks, signals, landscaping, access management, possible intersection (roundabout) improvements
Benmont Avenue	Access management improvements, speed limit, signs, pedestrian improvements
Route 7A	Correct severe safety problem of longitudinal cracks in pavement

Downtown sidewalks should be wide and include attractive landscaping and streetscape features. It may be possible to expand these public spaces if some on-street parking is replaced with convenient off-street spaces behind Main Street.

to the sidewalks on Northside Drive was recently completed. It will be constructed after the final design is approved. Commercial stores and shopping plazas often have large parking lots—and no safe and comfortable way for pedestrians to move through the maze of vehicles from the street or their cars to the storefronts. Site planning for new or redeveloped commercial properties shall include convenient and safe pedestrian facilities connecting the storefronts to the street while providing opportunities for people to safely move through parking lots on foot. Developments also shall include sidewalk improvements along the street and between adjacent commercial sites.

Bennington Pathway System

Bennington's River Walkway is an attractive and popular pedestrian facility that follows the banks of the Walloomsac River through the town center. State funding has been obtained to extend the Walkway by constructing a "multi-use pathway" (designed for pedestrians, bicycles, and other non-motorized use) from its western end north along the idle railway spur to Orchard Road and the Molly Stark School (Map 6-1). This new "Bennington Pathway" should be designed to offer convenient access from either end, street crossings, and at appropriate locations along both North Street and Benmont Avenue. Attractive and informative signs should be erected at pathway access points and at roadway intersections.

Such multi-use pathways improve mobility options for residents and can serve as tourism resources as well. They also contribute to the quality of life appeal for a community and as such can be one important factor that attracts new businesses to the area. The town has explored options for several other multi-use paths (Map 6-1). Two possible routes would extend from the Bennington Pathway: one following the Walloomsac River all the way to the Henry Covered Bridge and the other following the rail spur into North Bennington Village. Another route, known as the Ninja Trail, is the subject of a feasibility study and portions are already being constructed. The path will connect the pathway along the river to North Bennington by employing on-road and off-road infrastructure and by passing through the Bennington College campus. A scenic and interesting pathway could be established along the old "Corkscrew" rail line from the Bennington Museum past the Battle Monument to the Bennington Center for the Arts, but that corridor is no longer in public ownership. The town should continue to explore each of these options and pursue development of those which are most feasible and for which funding can be obtained.

Bennington's River Walkway is an attractive and popular pathway that should be extended.

Numerous footpaths or woodland trails exist in Bennington, providing outstanding opportunities for recreation. Foremost among these is the Bald Mountain Trail, which extends from North Branch Street to the scenic White Rocks area in the Green Mountains. The parking area at

this trailhead should be expanded and improved. The town should inventory other important trails in the community, including the network on Mount Anthony and work to preserve public access to them. A cooperative effort between Southern Vermont College, the town, and the Vermont Land Trust has preserved several outstanding trails on Mount Anthony. A network of public-use trails, maintained by the Fund for North Bennington, has been developed in and around that village.

View from a trail on Mount Anthony on the grounds of Southern Vermont College.

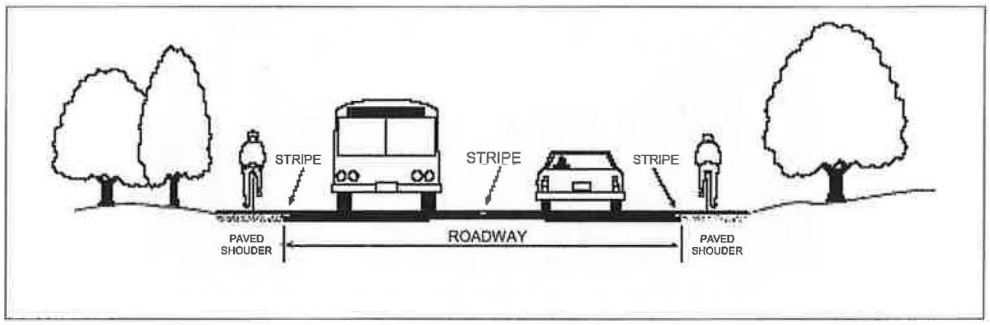
Bicycle Transportation

Some bicycle travel will occur on the multi-use pathways that exist or will be developed in Bennington, but most bicyclists—other than young children—will rely on the same network of local and state highways used by motor vehicles. The extensive use of roads (and road shoulders, where present) by bicyclists is not surprising because these highways generally provide the most direct, and often the only, route to the greatest number of destinations. Unfortunately, many roads were not designed with bicycles and pedestrians in mind, and this fact has resulted in a number of functional and safety issues that need to be addressed.

Local roads with low volumes of vehicular traffic are natural bikeways. Because these roads are often winding, narrow, and tree-lined, they are suitable for only low-speed local vehicular traffic, making them ideal for bicycling. In general, these roads require little improvement to accommodate bicycle travel. If traffic volumes and speeds increase significantly, increased lane width and/or striping of shoulders may be necessary to assure safety.

A significant amount of bicycling occurs on state highways and Class I and Class II town highways (principal and minor arterials and major collectors) that often provide the most direct, and often the only, passable route for bicyclists traveling between Bennington and adjacent towns and other important destinations. Many of these roads are characterized by high vehicle volumes and speeds, as well as considerable truck traffic. Paved shoulders (in rural locations) or wider travel lanes (in more urban locations) should be provided along all such roads. The minimum width of the shoulders and lanes can be established by consulting the Vermont State Roadway Design Standards together with local and regional input concerning the importance of

the route for bicycling. Whenever a State road paving or reconstruction project is proposed, the town must aggressively advocate for inclusion of adequate paved shoulders or lane width. In general, shoulder width should increase with increasing traffic volumes and speeds. In addition, designation of bicycle lanes and reallocation of pavement width (narrower vehicle lanes and wider shoulders) should be considered on some roads. To be in accordance with Complete Streets legislature, all transportation projects and project phases managed by a municipality, including planning, development, construction, or maintenance, should consider Complete Streets principles. These are principles of safety and accommodation of all transportation system users, regardless of age, ability, or modal preference. Furthermore, it is important that pavement be maintained in good condition and that there be a smooth transition from the pavement edge onto the shoulder. In general, widened travel lanes are preferred in downtown areas because of slow traffic speeds and the presence of on-street parking.



Paved shoulders of adequate width will increase mobility and safety for bicyclists.

Roadway hazards, such as diagonal railroad crossings, poorly designed drainage grates, narrow bridges, and cracked or broken pavement should be corrected. When increased traffic compromises safety, it may be necessary to alter the travel lanes, reallocate pavement width, widen bridges, or construct a paved shoulder or a sidewalk.

To further promote bicycling as a means of everyday transportation, bicycle racks should be provided at convenient locations in the downtown area, at shopping centers, and at major employers. Adding "share the road" signs along important bicycling routes and adding bicycle racks to public buses and passenger trains will also be beneficial. The town should support educational programs offered by organizations such as the Vermont Bicycle and Pedestrian Coalition that inform people of how to safely enjoy bicycle transportation. The BCRC should update the regional bicycle road and route map it developed several years ago.

The Vermont Agency of Transportation includes a Bicycle and Pedestrian Section that is available to provide technical assistance to communities and to oversee grant funds that are targeted specifically for bicycle and pedestrian projects (sidewalks, pathways, or improvements to roadways). The Transportation Alternatives Program, also administered through the Agency of Transportation, is another source of funding for special bicycle and pedestrian projects.

6.4 Rail Transportation

An important railroad line passes through the northwestern part of Bennington (North Bennington Village), connecting to lines in New York State and continuing north to Burlington. The railway corridor is owned by the State of Vermont and leased to Vermont Railway. A his-

toric railroad station building is located along the rail line in North Bennington. A spur line that has been inactive since 1991 connects North Bennington and downtown Bennington.

In recent years Vermont has considered reestablishing passenger train service to the Bennington region from Albany (Rensselaer), New York. A federally funded "Track 3" planning study to support this effort has recently been completed. That study recommended initiation of a new service between Rensselaer and Rutland, with stops in North Bennington and Manchester. Federal funding will be needed for the over $110 million in capital improvements to the rail lines and new station infrastructure. In addition, Vermont and New York will need to provide annual operating subsidies of over $7 million. The town supports this effort, recognizing that such service would increase travel options for residents and advance economic development efforts by providing a convenient and enjoyable connection between the town and major metropolitan areas in New York State and along the east coast.

The historic railway station in North Bennington represents the past, as well as the future potential, of rail transportation in the region.

Many local residents already are accustomed to using rail transportation (out of the Albany station), and eliminating the drive to Albany would benefit those residents and provide convenient access to Bennington for tourists and business travelers from those major metropolitan markets. The track upgrades that would be necessary for passenger service to be initiated also would increase the potential for additional freight shipments by rail to and through the region.

Eventual extension of passenger service north through Manchester and Rutland to Burlington would establish another important connection along the western side of Vermont. The cost of track upgrades within Vermont is extremely high, and service times and projected fares not yet competitive with other transportation modes, so while this western corridor project should be pursued, initial efforts should focus on service between Albany and Bennington.

The high cost and extended timeframe required to begin passenger rail service to the region prompted state and regional transportation planners to examine the potential for an alternative means of connecting the town to the intercity passenger rail system. A dedicated Amtrak "Thruway Bus" service could be started at a total annual cost to the State of less than $500,000. This service would provide two round trip buses per day to Bennington and Manchester, timed to

An Amtrak Thruway Bus connection is a cost-effective transportation improvement that would be a significant economic development asset for the town.

meet Amtrak's Empire Service trains in Rensselaer. A significant benefit is that Bennington and Manchester would be added to Amtrak's regular schedule, allowing people to purchase a single through Amtrak ticket to or from these destinations. Local efforts should be undertaken to identify an appropriate station stop for the bus in Bennington and to coordinate the service with the available public transit and rental car services. This cost-effective transportation improvement should be a high priority for the town and state.

The rail spur line between Bennington and North Bennington also is a valuable public resource. There currently are no specific plans for use of this line for freight or passenger rail service, but that option must be preserved through continued public ownership of the line. The spur line does give rail access to several industrial sites and should be improved if a desirable industrial use that requires rail access would like to develop one of those sites. Because of the cost of necessary track improvements and travel times, it is unlikely that passenger rail service will be reestablished on the spur.

The rail spur, or a portion of it, would make an ideal candidate for a multi-use "rail trail." The rail line could be resurfaced to provide a 10 to 12 foot wide pathway for pedestrians and bicycles. It also would be possible to operate a low-speed trolley over the line. The concept has been studied and determined to be both feasible and an ideal candidate for funding through the Vermont Bicycle and Pedestrian Program or the Transportation Enhancements Program. The pathway would provide a scenic and safe travel route between the village and the town and would benefit tourism and economic development efforts. Any such rail-trail project must include design elements that preserve, identify, and explain the historic rail use of the corridor. If dedicated rail use of the line is needed to support an industrial use in the future, the track should be reestablished at that time.

6.5 Air Transportation

The William H. Morse State Airport is a general aviation airport located north of VT Route 9 in the western part of Bennington (Map 6-1). Direct ground access to the airport is from Walloomsac Road. One asphalt runway, extended to 3,704 feet in 1980, serves all of the aircraft operations, and 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.

There currently are 37 aircraft based at the airport and approximately 5,000 operations per year. The airport is an extremely important component of the town's transportation infrastructure and a critical economic development resource.

A number of improvements at the airport have been identified and are supported by the town:

- Construction of new security fencing (complete);
- Rehabilitate Runway 13-31;
- Addition of Precision Approach Path Indicator lights (complete);
- Construction of a parallel taxiway;
- Runway Safety Area improvements (elevate grade of area west of the runway);
- Removal of obstructions;

- Rehabilitation and expansion of the airport parking apron;
- Construction of hanger development;
- Replacement of medium intensity runway edge lighting and NAVAIDs;
- Land or easement acquisition.

These improvements are discussed in detail in the Airport Layout Plan Update (September 2014).

In order to regulate and restrict the height of structures and objects, natural or manmade, in certain areas near the William H. Morse State Airport, it is declared that:

- The creation or establishment of an obstruction has the potential of being a public nuisance and may injure the region served by the airport;
- It is necessary in the interest of the public health, public safety, and general welfare that the creation or establishment of obstructions that may be a hazard to air navigation be prevented;
- The prevention of these obstructions should be accomplished, to the extent legally possible, by the exercise of the police power without compensation.

Therefore, zoning around the airport should conform to 14 CFR part 77 and require FAA Form 7460-1 no more than 45 days prior to construction in areas described in 14 CFR part 77.

Most Bennington residents rely on the Albany (NY) International Airport for regular passenger service. Albany International also serves business and tourist travelers to Bennington. It is important that good traffic flow be maintained along the VT 9/NY 7 corridor so that access between Bennington and that airport is not inhibited.

6.6 Public Transportation and Intercity Bus Travel

Public transportation provides a vital service to people who do not have access to a car and also can reduce fuel use and traffic congestion. The Green Mountain Community Network (GMCN), doing business as the Green Mountain Express, is the local public transportation provider, offering fixed route, demand responsive, and ride-match services. Funding to support these operations is provided by the Federal Transit Administration and the Vermont Agency of Transportation.

The *Green Mountain Express* provides a valuable transit option for Bennington residents.

Fixed route services operate throughout Bennington and the region. Some of the main destinations include large housing developments, shopping centers, the hospital, medical offices, schools and colleges, and downtown. It will be important to continually monitor these services to be sure that the destinations and times match local needs.

GMCN also provides door-to-door transportation to and from medical appointments, as well as special trips for elders, nursing home residents, and persons with disabilities. Other human service agencies in Bennington provide similar van-based services for their particular clien-

tele. These services are extremely important to the people served and the town should cooperate with GMCN and the other agencies to ensure their continuation.

A regional bus connecting Bennington to Manchester and to Williamstown, Massachusetts also is operated by GMCN. Connections can be made in Manchester to continue to Rutland, while connections with various intercity routes can be made in Williamstown.

The Green Mountain Express connects to The Bus out of Rutland to provide three daily trips along the Route 7 corridor. Yankee Trails offers two daily trips to Albany, New York.

With a grant from the Federal Transit Administration, the Vermont Agency of Transportation created a new intercity bus service, operated by Vermont Translines. The new service, which began in 2014, has two routes. The main route connects Burlington to Albany, NY via Bennington and Rutland, the other connects Rutland to White River Junction and Hanover, NH. The bus service makes one round trip per route per day.

Because of the importance of intercity bus service to residents and economic development, the town should continue to support appropriate north-south and east-west connections and an improved transit station and parking lot.

A renovated and expanded facility to house the GMCN fleet of vehicles, maintenance facilities and administrative offices was recently completed. This is a hub for connections between modes, including parking for cars and bicycles. Bus stop shelters, benches, and informational signs should be provided along existing bus routes.

6.7 Transportation Policies and Recommendations

1. The safety and convenience of all users of the transportation system, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, freight operators, and motor vehicle drivers shall be accommodated and balanced in all transportation and development projects so that each can efficiently use these travel ways.

2. Recognize the importance of quality multimodal transportation infrastructure to the downtown, including roads, parking, public transportation, sidewalks, and bicycle facilities. These facilities should be maintained and enhanced, in keeping with the historic character of this vital commercial center, and efforts should be made to improve the aesthetic quality of entrance corridors to the downtown.

3. Prohibit changes from rural/residential land use designations in the vicinity of the VT 279 interchanges because such changes would lead to sprawl or traffic congestion, and would detract from efforts to restrict commercial and industrial development to existing commercial and industrial zones.

4. Maintain traffic carrying capacity and safety on local and state highways through implementation of planned improvements and application of access management and traffic calming techniques.

5. Consider appropriate locations for new public roadways and development of an Official Map.

6. Require that new public and private roads and driveways be designed according to town standards and accepted access management principals. Such construction must

also avoid adverse impacts to natural or scenic resources.

7. Road naming should reflect local historic content and not commercial entities.

8. New or reconstructed bridges shall be consistent with the town's rural and historic character and shall include provisions for safe passage by pedestrians and bicyclists.

9. Parking lots shall provide adequate, but not excessive, spaces for users of the site, include provisions for safe and efficient vehicular access and circulation, be carefully sited and fully landscaped to avoid adverse aesthetic impacts, and shall include safe and convenient facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

10. The town, the Better Bennington Corporation, and their downtown economic development partners should work to improve the quality and supply of parking and related facilities in the downtown. Pursue funding through Transportation and Downtown programs to support development of parking lots and a parking garage.

11. Consider expansion of sidewalk and public spaces along Main Street to further enhance the appearance and use of the downtown as an attraction that serves as a destination for both tourists and residents.

12. Maintain and extend the town's system of sidewalks to serve areas of residential and commercial use. Implement the Sidewalk Infrastructure Plan. Ensure that provisions are in place for safe pedestrian crossings at all required locations.

13. Complete the Bennington Pathway to the Molly Stark School and create extensions to the pathway system along the Walloomsac River and to North Bennington.

14. Inventory and preserve public access to important recreational trails.

15. Implement plans to develop new trails and pathways through town initiatives, cooperation with landowners and community groups, and by using available grant funds. Protect the feasibility of such routes by requiring easements and/or land dedications of development applications involving planned trails or pathway corridors, and by ensuring that roadway construction projects preserve the routes.

16. Establish pedestrian linkages within and between residential neighborhoods.

17. Highway paving and reconstruction projects shall include paved shoulders or wider lanes, as appropriate, consistent with need , Vermont's Complete Streets Legislation and the Vermont State Roadway Design Manual and the Pedestrian and Bicycle Facility Design Manual.

18. Identify and eliminate roadway hazards for bicyclists and provide signs, bicycle racks, and other facilities to support bicycle use.

19. Support railroad track upgrades and the reestablishment of passenger and freight rail

service to Bennington. Improve rail connections between Bennington, Albany, and Burlington, including a Manchester/Bennington shuttle to Rensselaer Station.

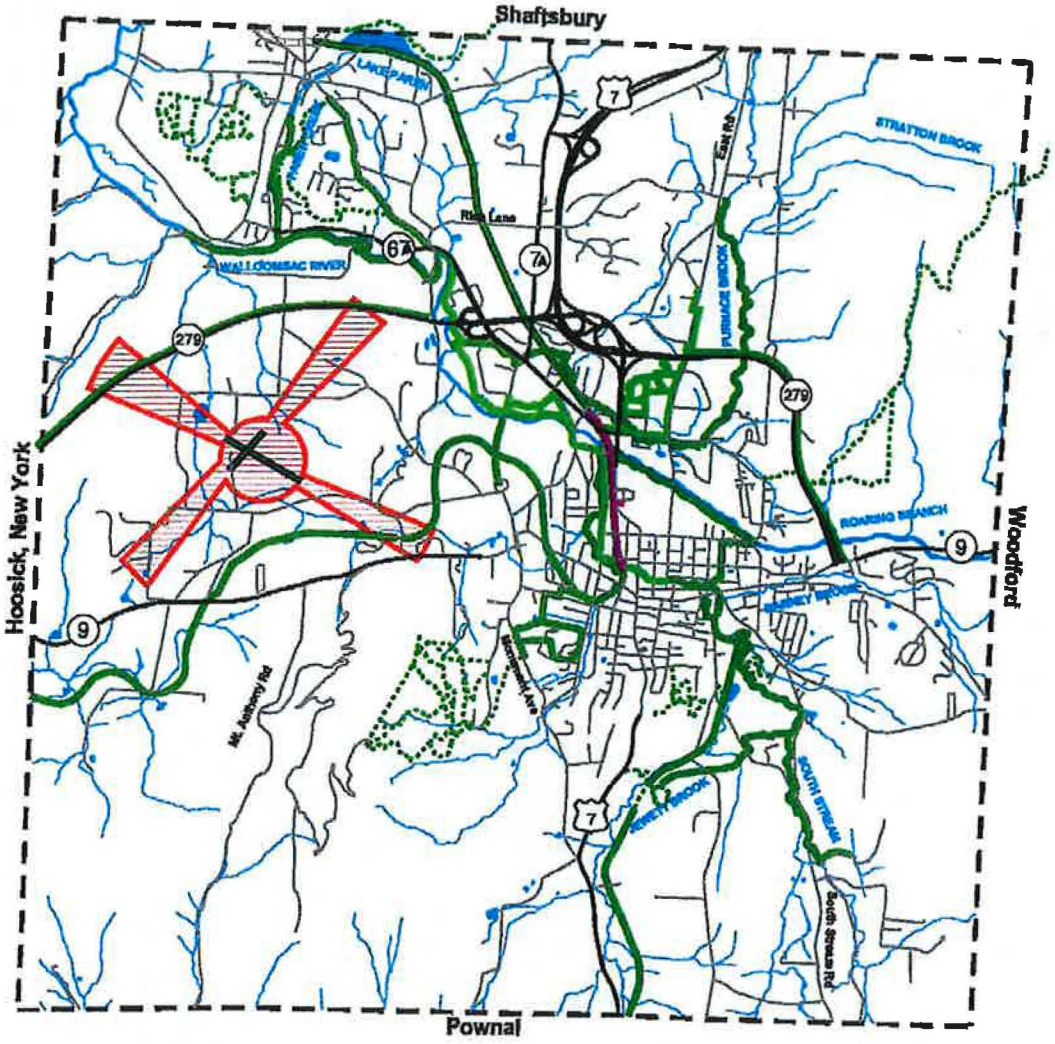
20. Protect the airport environs from incompatible development and support safety and operational improvements at the airport that will provide economic development benefits without having undue adverse impacts on residents.

21. Support existing public transportation services and extensions, including intercity bus service, to meet demonstrated demand, especially more frequent bus trips between Albany, Bennington and Burlington.

22. Promote utilization of alternative fuel vehicles and other energy conservation measures in the transportation system.

23. Require road, driveway, and pedestrian connections between adjacent developments.

Map 6-1
TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM
Bennington, Vermont



Map produced January 21, 2014 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
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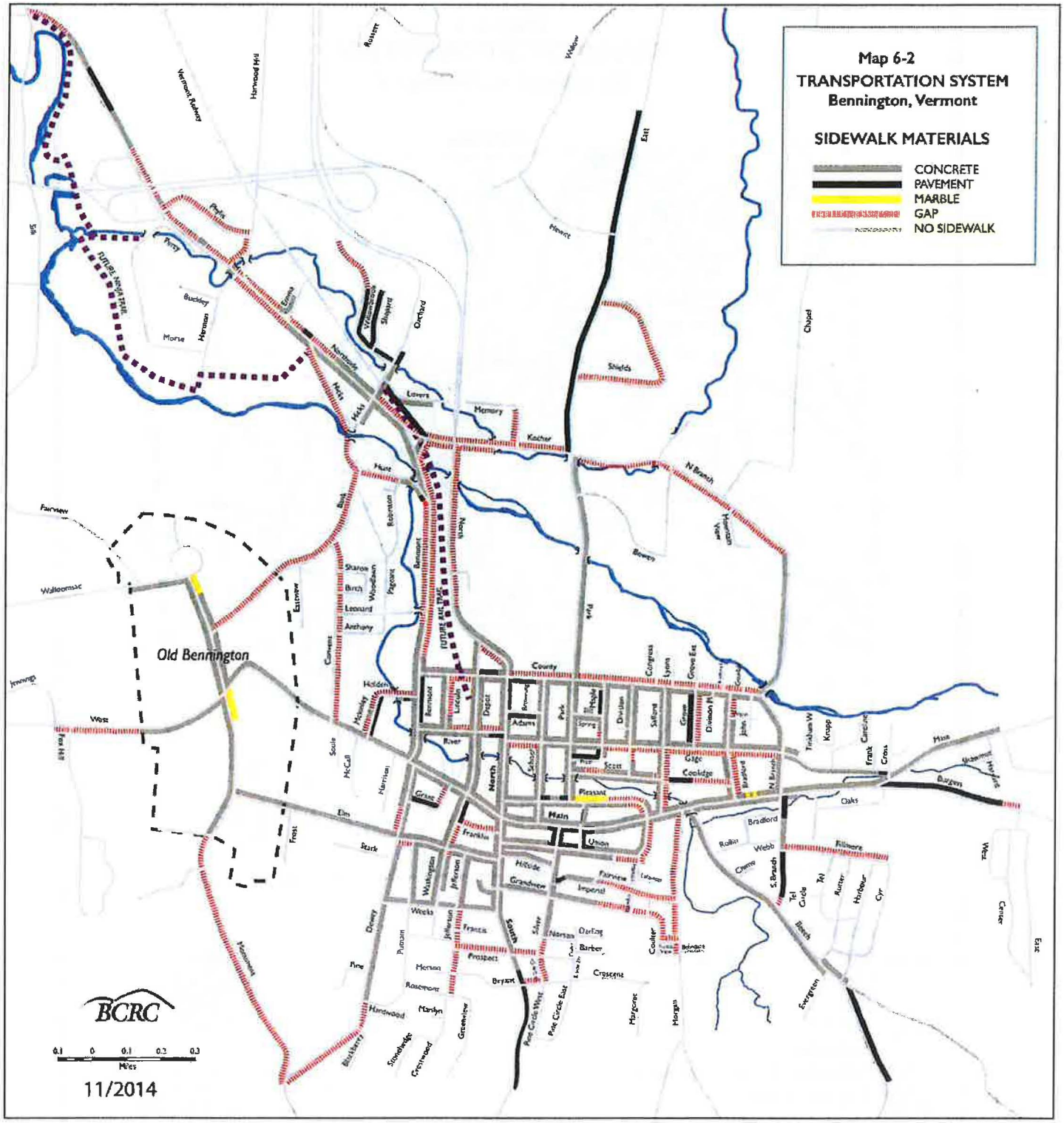

Map 6-2
TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM
Bennington, Vermont
SIDEWALK MATERIALS
CONCRETE
PAVEMENT
MARBLE
GAP
NO SIDEWALK
Old Bennington
BCRC
0.1 0 0.1 0.2 0.3
Miles
11/2014

Chapter 7: Community Facilities and Services

7.1 Overview

A wide range of facilities and services essential to residents' quality of life and the economic vitality of the town are provided by public agencies and public service organizations. As the community grows and economic conditions and needs change, the type and quantity of services provided must change. Because considerable public and private investment is needed 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. A Capital Budget and Program is updated and adopted by the town annually to aid in the planning and financing of such improvements. That document should be consulted during preparation of the annual municipal budget.

7.2 Water Supply

The town of Bennington owns and operates a 4.0 MG/D (million gallons per day) water filtration plant with a 0.5 MG storage facility located near Bolles Brook in Woodford. Treated water is stored in a 3.0 MG tank on Chapel Road. Smaller storage tanks are located off Route 9 near Mount Anthony Road and off Burgess Road. The Morgan Springs source has been integrated with the municipal system and adds approximately 1.0 MG/D of capacity to the total supply when needed. Some of the Morgan Springs water also is sold to a commercial bottled water company. The town has an approved Source Protection Plan it follows to ensure the protection of the water supply.

The Bennington water supply system serves a residential population of approximately 13,000 and concentrations of non-residential development, primarily within the Urban Growth Area (Map 7-1, Water Service Area). The capacity of the municipal system appears to be adequate to meet the long term needs of the community, provided certain improvements and conservation measures are implemented, including complete metering of all system users (Bennington Infrastructure Committee Report, 2002). Extensions beyond the Urban Growth Area also should be strictly limited and undertaken only in the event of a severe public health problem.

The Bennington Water Department staff have identified and prioritized water system improvements with the assistance of a local engineering firm. Those needs are detailed in Table 7-1 of this document. Several other projects, some ongoing, are needed to continue to meet current and future water system demands and a growing list of Federal EPA's Safe Drinking Water requirements. Some of these improvements include: specific water storage tank maintenance and improvements as well as annual infrastructure improvements such as water main replacements.

Several smaller private sources have historically served a limited number of residences. Strict compliance with all local and state environmental regulations pertaining to water supply and wastewater disposal is necessary to ensure the continued quality of existing and future small private and on-site systems.

7.3 Sanitary Sewer and Stormwater Disposal Systems

Bennington's Wastewater Treatment Facility is located along the Walloomsac River on Harrington Road in Bennington. The facility has a design capacity of 5.1 Million Gallons per Day (MGD) with an annual daily average of 3.5 MGD for the year 2014. Ongoing system improvements and the elimination of known infiltration and inflows sources have accounted for a 400,000 GPD reduction in daily average flows over the past 10 years.

The municipal sewage system serves approximately 14,000 persons within the sewer service area (Map 7-1). These services are located primarily within Bennington's Urban Growth Area, with some service to North Bennington, Old Bennington, and a small area in Shaftsbury. To preserve the capacity of the system and reinforce the town's land use plan of concentrated development in the town center surrounded by a lightly developed rural landscape, further extensions of sewage service beyond the Urban Growth Boundary shall not be permitted except in the event of a severe public health emergency.

Table 7-1. Water System Improvement Priorities

Highest Priority

1. **The South Side Water Project:** Build a 750,000 gallons water storage tank, pump station and 4,600 feet of pipeline to upgrade and meet state pressure standards for the south section of town.
2. **Upgrade All Pressure Reducing Stations** in order to better control system pressures during high flow demands such as fire flows, water main breaks or drought.
3. **Chapel Road Water Storage Tank (3.0 MG):** Extensive repairs to the 3.0MG tank based on assessment report.
4. **Bolles Brook Water Storage Tank:** Interior concrete structure continually being monitored for repairs.

Needed Pipe Replacements and Loops

Highest Priorities

1. **Monument Avenue to Dewey Street:** Phase II of the South End Water Project.
2. **Benmont Avenue Bridge Water Line:** The existing water line on Northside Drive will be extended to the South end of the bridge.
3. **Main Street Loop Re-Connection:** Main Street water line loop between Washington Avenue and Grant Street was isolated due to severe water main leak. This loop needs to be re-connected for higher quality drinking water.
4. **Interconnection between Route 7A (Harwood Hill Road) to North Bennington Road:** This loop would allow a second water feed to the areas in case of a main failure or catastrophic event.
5. **North Street Water Line Replacement (Main Street to County Street):** This would upgrade water quality in this area and provide better fire protection.

The capacity of the sewage disposal system can be strained when excess storm water flows into the system. A major separation project was undertaken in 1985, but further improvements are needed. In addition, a large number of homes and businesses discharge sump pumps and surface stormwater drains into the sewage system. The town must continue efforts to reduce infiltration and separate sources of stormwater discharge from the system to maintain and improve its capacity.

The Bennington Wastewater staff have identified and prioritized Sanitary Sewer system improvements with the assistance of a local engineering firm. Those needs are detailed in Table 7-2 of this document. Several other projects, some ongoing, are needed to continue to meet current and future sanitary sewer system demands and a growing list of Federal EPA's requirements for sanitary sewer and stormwater discharges.

The Town of Bennington's Stormwater system is currently in the process of identifying all of its structures and piping and prioritizing the needs for repair and replacement of the current inventory. Detailed mapping will follow with the system being put into a GIS system format that can be overlaid with other critical infrastructure for future planning. Significant problem areas with the existing system exist in the downtown and along Northside Drive where periodic flooding has occurred. New development projects must plan for adequate and environmentally sound stormwater discharges and may be required to participate in necessary upgrades of subsurface drainage facilities.

The municipal wastewater treatment plant includes an innovative sludge composting facility.

7.4 Solid Waste Disposal and Recycling

The town owns a solid waste transfer station at a former landfill site on Houghton Lane (Map 7-2) which is leased to a private operator. Over 3,000 tons of solid waste are handled annually at the transfer station, with an excellent volume-based recycling rate of nearly 40 percent. Household hazardous materials and waste oil are disposed of through use of a special collection facility at the transfer station. Continued incentives to encourage recycling will reduce long-term solid waste disposal and associated environmental costs.

Recycling in Bennington switched to Zero-Sort recycling in 2014. Zero-Sort makes recycling quick and easy by allowing all recyclables to be collected together in one bin without the need to separate. Another change in 2014 included the development of a composting facility at the transfer station. The facility collects food scraps and other organic wastes and processes it into compost.

The Universal Recycling Law, Act 148, was passed by the Vermont Legislature in 2012. The primary purpose of the law was to significantly reduce the amount of material going into landfills. The law is being phased in over time to allow for the creation of the systems for managing materials. In June of 2014, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (VT ANR) adopted a Materials Management Plan, as required under the Universal Recycling Law. Bennington is one of 13 towns in Bennington County responsible for implementing state materials management policies and the requirements of the Universal Recycling Law. Currently, Bennington is working together with the other towns to develop a new Solid Waste Implementation Plan that must be in conformance with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Materials Management Plan. The plan will focus on education and outreach to encourage schools, businesses and institutions to recycle, compost and properly dispose of hazardous materials, phamaceuticals and electronic waste. The plan must be adopted by Bennington, and the other towns, and approved by VT ANR by June 18, 2015.

Bennington's Solid Waste Plan includes detailed data on solid waste generation and disposal and should be updated to reflect current conditions and needs. Adequate facilities also must be available for disposal of construction and demolition debris.

7.5 Emergency Services

Critical emergency services are provided by the Bennington Police and the Village and Rural Fire Departments and the Bennington Rescue Squad. The emergency response system is coordinated through the Enhanced-911 service which operates a statewide dispatch that is able to direct responders to a caller's exact location.

Police protection throughout the community is the responsibility of the Bennington Police Department, with additional services provided by Vermont State Police patrols on state highways as well as contracted services through the County Sheriff. The Police Department occupies the historic former Federal Building on South Street and employs 25 full-time officers. These public safety officers are deployed to ensure the safety of the town's roadways, homes, and businesses.

The 60 volunteers of the Bennington Fire Department provide service throughout the central part of the community from the 24,000 square foot fire station located on River Street (Map 7-2). That building also contains a large room that is often used for public meetings and forums. The Bennington Rural Fire Department has over 52 volunteers operating out of fire stations on Beech Street, Orchard Road, and West Road. Both of the fire departments provide vital fire suppression, prevention, and education services and their efforts to maintain up-to-date equipment should be supported by the town.

The Bennington Rescue Squad has been providing emergency medical care since 1963. The squad is a nonprofit corporation providing 24-hour service to the greater Bennington area. It has grown considerably and now is staffed with 18 full-time employees and 5 volunteers. The Rescue Squad headquarters is located on McKinley Street in a building with eight ambulance bays, space for equipment storage, administrative offices, and meeting and training facilities. Recent additions include central air, ready room, three bunk rooms, and base station radio, and generator—allowing the building to serve as an emergency/disaster center. Rescue equipment currently in use includes six fully equipped advanced life-support ambulances, a paramedic quick

Table 7-2. Priority Projects for Wastewater Disposal Systems

Highest Priority

1. **Upgrade Wastewater Treatment Plant** to meet and comply with Federal and State standards mandated by our State of Vermont Permit to Operate.

Wastewater Treatment Plant Priorities

1. **RBC Structure Updates**
2. **Prescreening of influent at the Headworks Building:** This removes rags, plastic and solids that are unable to be reduced by the current grinder.
3. **Replace Digester Heat Exchanger**
4. **Headworks Upgrade:** Any and all replacement parts for the four main raw sewage pumps are now unavailable or obsolete.
5. **Grit Building:**.The entire system is over 30 years old and in need of entire replacement.
6. **Control Building:** Additional space to allow for record storage and laboratory expansion.
7. **SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) System:** Provides optimum operational efficiency and maintenance planning.
8. **Sand Filter Upgrades:** This may need to be redesigned.
9. **Septage Receiving Station:** This will need to be redesigned.
10. **Combination Jet-Vacuum Unit:** This unit allows for increase ability and efficiency of cleaning sewer mains.
11. **Compost Storage:** Due to the fact that we are not composting at our facility at this time the priority had dropped until such time that we have a solution for our dust issues.

Sanitary Sewer Line Replacement and Rehabilitation Priority

1. **Replacements:** Corey Lane, Dewey Street and (East) Main Street.
2. **Rehabilitation:** Coulter Street, Crescent Boulevard, Cutler Street, Darling Street, Depot Street, Franklin Street, Grandview Street, Hall Street (North Bennington), Hamlin Street, Hunt Street, Imperial Avenue, Monument Avenue (Extension), Morgan Street, Norton Street, Oakes Street, Prospect Street, Soule Street, Water Street (North Bennington), Old Bennington (rural) sewer lines.
3. **Main Interceptor Joint Sealing and Slip-Lining:** The main line interceptor is a large source of inflow and infiltration, which reduces available capacity for the Town and increase treatment costs.
4. **Replacement of 6-inch Clay Tile Sewer Mains**: These lines cannot be slip lined and need to be replaced. Areas include Elm Street, Scott Street, South Branch Street, Imperial Avenue, Silver Street Prospect Street, Harrison Avenue, Putnam Street and Stark Street.

Sanitary Sewer Pump Station Upgrades

1. **Corey Pump Station:** New pump facility and holding tank to meet current needs and VOSHA Construction Standards.
2. **Beech Street Pump Station:** Most of the components associated with this station were installed in 1984. This station will require a total rehabilitation in the near future.
3. **Hildur Hill Pump Station:** The control panel has been upgraded and can now accommodate the Treatment Plant upgrades such as a SCADA system in the future. However, the actual pumps and collection system will need to be completely rehabilitated.

Note: Bank Street Pump Station's upgrade was completed in 2014.

response vehicle (not used for transport), a 20-foot mass casualty/command trailer that contains dispatch radios, field radios, and a substantial amount of emergency medical equipment. The Rescue Squad also owns a side-by-side ATV and snowmobile for off-road rescue in any season. Closer coordination between the Rescue Squad, town officials and staff, and local emergency planning committee would improve emergency preparedness in the community.

The Bennington Fire Department operates out of this impressive facility on River Street.

To facilitate local emergency response, all town officials and staff with a role in these activities should attend meetings of the local emergency planning committee. In addition, the Rescue Squad would benefit from traffic signal controls (such as an opticom system) at signalized intersections and warning signals at the intersections of McKinley/Main and Benmont /Holden, since main response routes are through these two intersections.

It will be 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 provider on an annual basis to consider the short and long term needs of each.

7.6 Education

Bennington's elementary, middle, and high schools provide educational services for the youth who will become the town's future workforce and business and civic leaders. It is crucial that the schools produce graduates with high levels of competency in core academic disciplines as well as specific skills that will support the needs of local employers and the future economic development needs of the community. Ongoing communication and coordination between the schools, local government, and business and industry groups, therefore, is essential.

The schools also serve as centers of activity for students, parents, and other residents of the town, and foster a sense of community and civic pride.

The Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union, with offices located on Beech Street, provides administrative, curriculum, and personnel support for a number of school districts, including those serving Bennington. Active consideration, at both the local and state levels, is currently being given to governance changes that may include consolidation of school districts. The town should support efforts that will lead to improved efficiencies and educational outcomes.

Bennington's kindergarten through fifth grade educational program is housed in three elementary schools operated under the jurisdiction of the Bennington School District (Map 7-2). Those schools are the Molly Stark School, Monument School, and Bennington Elementary School. Total enrollment (Vermont Agency of Education, 2012-13) in the three schools was 786 students. The schools currently have adequate capacity but are nearing capacity and improvements are required at some of the schools to attain compliance with state standards. A comprehensive plan for facilities should be developed with input from all stakeholders.

The Mount Anthony Union High School District serves Bennington as well as the neighboring municipalities of North Bennington, Old Bennington, Pownal, Shaftsbury, and Woodford. The senior high school is centrally located at the corner of Park and County Streets and has a current (Vermont Agency of Education, 2014-15) enrollment of 950 students. The high school provides a full range of educational and interscholastic athletic programs and shares its site with the Southwest Vermont Career Development Center (CDC).

The CDC works with local businesses to provide youth and adults with the skills required to meet the needs of the local employment market. In addition, the CDC offers specialized training and re-training courses to groups of employees.

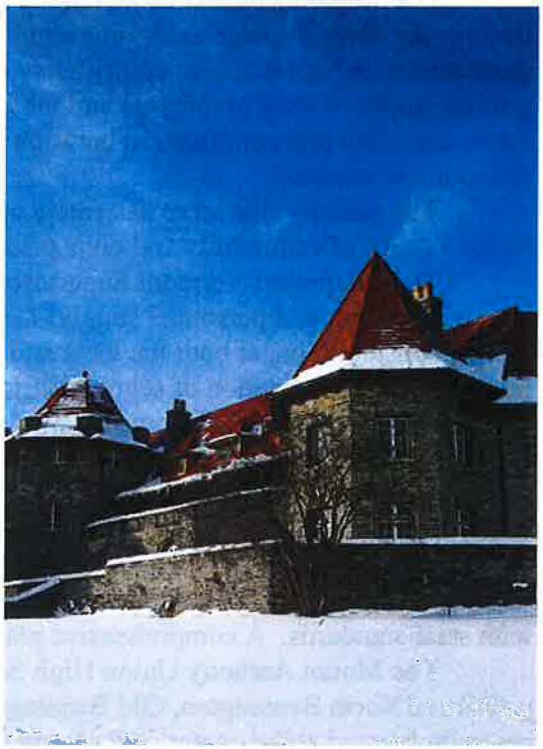
The middle school, located on East Road, serves Bennington students in grades six through eight, and students in grades seven and eight from other SVSU districts, in a well designed new building. The school site is surrounded by ample playing fields that can be used by students and other youth sports teams in the community. Current enrollment at the middle school is 572.

Mount Anthony Union Middle School on East Road.

Per student spending at Bennington's public schools is lower than the statewide average, partly because of economies achieved in larger schools and partly because educational measures have been taken to minimize cost. Student-teacher ratios at Bennington's elementary schools, for example, are about one-third higher than the state average. Costs are increased, however, by the fact that Bennington School District has a higher than average special education student population.

Several private schools, including the Sacred Heart School, the Grace Christian School, and the Hiland Hall School also offer educational services for area youth. The Bennington School is a private residential school offering elementary and secondary school programs to students with special needs.

Bennington is home to six colleges: Bennington College, a highly regarded liberal arts college with a campus off VT 67A near North Bennington; Southern Vermont College, occupying a beautiful campus on the lower slopes of Mount Anthony, another liberal arts college offering a variety of degree programs and continuing education courses; the Community College of Vermont, operating out of its facilities in the downtown, offering associate degrees and certificates in accounting, early childhood education, criminal justice, and communications; the Vermont Tech satellite campus, offering a Nursing Associate of Science degree and a Practical Nursing Certificate; Johnson State College External Degree Program offering six majors through online and weekend courses, the Community College of Vermont advisors are available for students located in Bennington; and Northeast Baptist College, offering a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies and a Bachelor of Science in Christian Counseling. These 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.


This impressive building is at the heart of the Southern Vermont College campus on the slopes of Mount Anthony.

7.7 Child Care

The availability of safe and affordable child care services is important both to local residents and to the town's economy. Child day care facilities serving a limited number of full and part-time children are allowed in all districts where single family homes are permitted, in accordance with Vermont state law. Facilities serving a larger number of children are allowed with Development Review Board approval in most of those districts.

There are numerous registered home day care providers and licensed early education programs offered in Bennington. Additional information on these child care 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) and the Bennington County Child Care Association (located in Bennington).

7.8 Health Care Services

Bennington is a regional center for health services. Southwestern Vermont Health Care (SVHC) operates a 99-bed hospital (Southwestern Vermont Medical Center) that offers a full range of inpatient and outpatient services, a 150-bed long term care facility (the Centers for Living and Rehabilitation), a home health nursing organization (VNA and Hospice), a regional cancer care center, and clinics in Arlington, Manchester and Wilmington.

SVHC has a stated mission to provide care and comfort for patients and their loved ones while making the communities they serve the healthiest in the nation. With several hundred employees, SVHC is the town's largest employer. The town should cooperate with SVHC in efforts to achieve their health care goals and support the community.

There are numerous medical professional and technical offices located near the hospital that offer a wide range of specialized medical services to residents.

Mental health, substance abuse, and services for mentally handicapped residents are provided through the United Counseling Service of Bennington County, which also oversees the Head Start and Big Brothers-Big Sisters of Bennington programs.

Several nursing homes, assisted living, and independent senior housing facilities also are available in the community, including the 138-bed Vermont Veterans Home which serves veterans and their spouses at its facility on North Street. A Veteran's Administration outpatient clinic on North Street offers veterans access to physicians, electrocardiograms, x-rays, laboratory tests, medications and mental health services.

Because of the growing importance of health care to the local economy, the town should continue to work to ensure that adequate educational training is available locally and that municipal and technological infrastructure is available to support expansion of facilities and services within the areas where these facilities are located (Map 7-2).

The medical sector is facing a period of major transition as fundamental changes to reimbursement methodologies are taking place, moving away from a fee for service structure toward an outcome-based system. In addition, there is a major push toward implementing electronic medical records. These changes are being fueled by federal laws such as the Affordable Care Act and by Vermont's Blueprint for Health, as well as by health care providers themselves. The Blueprint for Health, for example, is designed to be a program that "integrates a system of health care for patients, improving the health of the overall population, and improving control over health care costs by promoting health maintenance, prevention, and care coordination and management" (18 V.S.A. Chapter 13). Many challenges remain as changes have yet to be implemented. Continued adequate state and federal support for systems implementation will be essential for a successful transition.

7.9 Electricity and Telecommunications

Electricity and telecommunications (including land and wireless telephone, cable tv/internet, and wireless internet) are fundamentally important to local residents and businesses and are critical to future economic development in Bennington.

Electric 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. Siting of new overhead power lines, switching boxes, and maintenance of existing power lines should recognize the scenic and historic values of the community, and new service connections should be routed underground.

Implementation of a "smart grid" where supply can be more closely matched with demand as well as through development of a large number of small renewable-energy-based generating facilities distributed throughout the region can help address future electricity supply constraints.

High speed cable internet services—delivered to much of the area by fiber optic cable—are available in Bennington and the town should play an active role in planning for state-of-the-art communication technolo-

gies. Continuing efforts should be made to establish the best possible infrastructure to serve the information based economy.

Telephone and internet service is increasingly being conducted by wireless providers and good service is available throughout most of Bennington. The town should work with wireless companies to maintain and enhance these services, while remaining sensitive to scenic and environmental 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.

7.10 Library

The Bennington Free Library is located in the downtown on Silver Street. The library's mission is to provide free and open access to information, computing facilities, and educational, cultural and recreational resources. It maintains an extensive collection of books and periodicals, affords access to internet resources, and hosts a variety of children's and adult programs, lectures, concerts, and special exhibits. Several meeting rooms are used frequently by public and private organizations. The library is operated by a small professional staff and a large number of volunteers and is supported by public and private contributions and grant funds. The resources available through the library should be considered when evaluating the educational, cultural, and recreational resources of the town and should be identified as an important economic development asset.

The Bennington Free Library is an important community resource located in the downtown.

7.11 Governmental Services

Because of its role as a regional center, Bennington contains facilities housing a number of important state and county services. A recently reconstructed Vermont state office complex located off North Street houses several social service agencies and the Bennington County District Court. Additional state offices are located in a renovated building in the downtown that also houses the Community College of Vermont. The town supports locating public service agencies and associated offices in the downtown where they are accessible to residents while adding business and vitality to the area.

The Bennington County Superior Court is located on South Street, adjacent to the town Office Building. The town clerk, assessor, planning, zoning, community development, and town manager's offices are located in this historic building that has housed the municipal offices for many years.

The town Highway Department operates from three public works facilities: on Depot Street, Willow Road, and Grant Street. The delivery of services and overall efficiency of the Highway Department would be enhanced if operations could be consolidated at a single site.

This renovated historic building houses Vermont state offices and the Community College of Vermont.

7.12 Radio, Television, and Newspapers

A daily newspaper, the Bennington Banner, serves the town and surrounding communities. The newspaper is an important source of local, state, and national news, provides a forum for public opinion, and is a useful advertising medium for local businesses. In addition to social media, the Banner has an on-line edition that provides ready access to local information from anywhere the internet can be accessed.

Vermont Public Radio (VPR) maintains an FM transmission facility in Bennington. VPR offers a variety of state and national pub-

lic affairs programming. An AM station (WBTN) operated by a nonprofit organization provides an outlet for local news, information, and entertainment. Cable and satellite television services are available throughout most of the town, in addition to broadcast signals from commercial stations in Albany and Vermont public television.

Catamount Access Television (CAT-TV) is the local public access television station. It provides coverage of local events and public meetings as well as information on happenings and local organizations throughout the community. Residents can take courses in video production technology and produce their own programming for presentation to the community. The CAT-TV offices and studios are located in a historic building on Main Street.

7.13 Recreation and Open Space

Open Space Recreational Resources

Bennington's undeveloped open space—forests, fields, and parkland—are important natural and scenic assets and also support a wide range of recreational activities. Developed parks and other facilities add to the recreational opportunities available to residents and visitors. It is important that these open lands and facilities be maintained, expanded where appropriate, and properly managed. The Town's Park and Open Space Plan, an inventory and assessment of parks, recreation facilities, and open space resources, should be consulted when considering improvements to existing facilities, development of new facilities, and acquisition or preservation of open lands. An important objective of the plan is creation of a comprehensive pathway network that provides access to the town's natural and historic resources.

The town includes extensive publicly owned forest land, most notably the nearly 1,000 acres that are part of the Green Mountain National Forest on the slopes of Bald Mountain. These National Forest lands continue into adjacent towns, offering a vast reserve of public land for hiking, fishing, hunting, swimming, boating, skiing, and other sports. The Forest Service is authorized to purchase land anywhere in Bennington County, and additions to the National Forest in Bennington should be supported for contiguous lands that would ensure public access to important recreational areas.

Several other tracts of forest land and open fields are either publicly owned or provide for public access to natural resource based recreational opportunities. Southern Vermont College and the Mount Anthony Preservation Society each own substantial amounts of land on Mount Anthony that include a number of recreational trails. The McCullough Woods and Fields in the northwestern part of town (partially in North Bennington) is a large area of conserved land with well-maintained public use trails. The "Y-Woods" on Morgan Street and the Bradford-Putnam Wetlands off Burgess Road are town-owned properties that both include short trail systems through interesting woodlots. Much of Whipstock Hill is owned by the State of Vermont. Efforts to maintain these lands and ensure continued public access to them should be supported.

A trail through the Green Mountain National Forest.

The Norman and Selma Greenberg Reserve, south of the center of town, is owned by the New England Tropical Conservatory, which has developed a trail system, conducts outdoor educational activities, and plans to develop additional facilities. The lowland and upland portions of the reserve are bisected by the proposed southern leg of VT 279; a legal and safe pedestrian access between the two sections of the reserve should be secured, if the southern leg is constructed.

The Walloomsac River is an especially important recreational asset. The town should seek opportunities to provide secure public access to the river at appropriate locations and should pursue development of a pathway along the river that connects its three covered bridges.

Some important open spaces used for hiking, fishing, hunting, and other recreational pursuits are located on large tracts of private land that are accessible to the public through the generosity of the landowners.

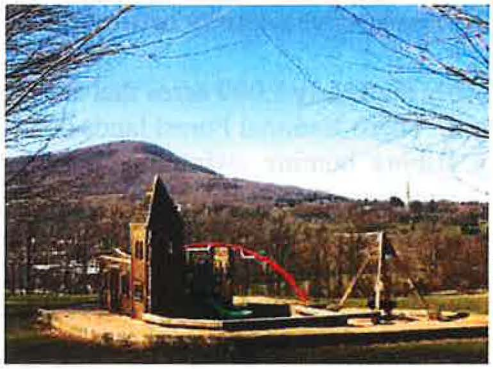
Recreational users should always obtain permission before entering these lands and must be careful to not cause any disruption or damage. If particularly important privately held recreational lands become available, acquisition of the land or easements by a conservation organization would allow continued public access to the land.

As noted in the Transportation chapter, the network of town and state roadways and the developing pathway system in the community are very important recreational, as well as transportation, facilities. Development and maintenance of these facilities shall recognize the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians as well as motorists. A pathway parallel to the eastern leg of VT 279 would be an outstanding resource for bicyclists and pedestrians while connecting existing sidewalks and trails. The town should ensure that rights-of-way along the highway/utility line corridor can be made available for such a facility.

Parks and Recreation Centers

Several parks and recreation centers owned by the town or school districts contain facilities that support a wide variety of recreational activities. Willow Park, occupying 60 acres between East Road and US 7, has soccer, baseball, and softball fields, tennis and basketball courts, horseshoe facilities, playground equipment, BMX trails, a cross country running course, two pavilions, and picnic areas.

The recently renovated Municipal Recreation Center is located at Memorial Park on Gage Street. This centrally located facility on nine acres has an indoor pool, weight rooms, a multipurpose game room, locker rooms, outdoor playing fields, and houses the Recreation Department Office. Two smaller town-owned parks offer a variety of recreational facilities to residents. The 6.5 acre Stark Street Playground contains a basketball court and a softball field. The Beech Street Field has a baseball field and multi-purpose field on an 18 acre site.



Playground facilities at Willow Park

Recreational facilities located at the town's elementary, middle, and high schools are used by students as well as neighborhood residents and community sports teams. Playing fields created as part of the Middle School project have filled a demonstrated need and the gymnasium, playing fields, and track at the High School are very popular with residents and organized youth and adult sports leagues.

The town also contains a wealth of privately owned and operated recreational facilities. One of the region's premier golf courses lies at the base of the Battle Monument, a popular bowling alley is located in a busy commercial area, two fitness centers are easily accessible in the center of town, a tennis center with eight indoor courts is located at the former Leonard J. Black park and the Bennington Sports Center located between North and School streets is a comprehensive soccer center with an indoor soccer facility and dormitory. In addition, several retailers sell a wide variety of sports equipment and clothing.

The Park and Open Space Plan identifies maintenance of the facilities at Willow Park, expansion of recreational facilities at neighborhood parks, and development of additional indoor recreational space, especially for winter sports and activities, as priorities for the town (in addition to the pathway network mentioned earlier).

7.14 Policies and Recommendations for Community Facilities and Services

1. The town has developed a comprehensive capital improvement budget and program which should be updated annually. The capital program also should consider plans and anticipated expenditures by the Bennington and Mount Anthony Union School Districts.

2. Priority shall be given to maintaining and improving the existing public water supply, wastewater, and stormwater systems based on facility needs and sound fiscal planning. There shall be no extensions to the water and wastewater systems beyond the Urban Growth Area or existing service areas

except in the event of a severe public health problem.

3. The town should consider metering for all users of the water system because tying usage directly to cost will encourage conservation.

4. A stormwater drainage improvement plan should be developed for the downtown and other areas where the current system is known to be inadequate. That plan should include recommendations for financing and phasing construction.

5. Water and sewer capacity allocation policies shall continue to be implemented to ensure wise use of the town's infrastructure. Efforts to reduce infiltration into the sewage system and to remove illegal drain connections also must be pursued by the town to maintain adequate capacity.

6. The town 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.

7. Maintain close communication with emergency providers to ensure that their staffing and equipment needs are met through careful and coordinated planning.

8. The town supports the development of a variety of quality child care services that meet the needs of residents and employers and which are compatible with the residential and commercial neighborhoods in which they are located.

9. High quality education must be available for residents at the local elementary schools, middle school, high school, and career development center. Strong support must be given to the educational programs and to maintenance of the school buildings and grounds. Cooperative planning is needed to ensure that educational programs meet the workforce development needs of local employers. The potential for cost savings and improvements in educational programming through consolidation or increased cooperating between school districts should be considered.

10. When planning for public school facilities, consideration shall be given to the town's land use plan, neighborhood needs, historic preservation, and available infrastructure. Maintenance, renovation, and/or expansion of existing school properties shall be given highest priority when evaluating new facility needs. If any school properties are closed, town and School District officials should work cooperatively to determine appropriate alternative uses of those buildings.

11. The six colleges located in Bennington are important educational resources and also bring students, economic activity, and prestige to the community. The town should continue to cooperate with these institutions to address their plans and needs and to further integrate the colleges into the life of the community.

12. Health care services are very important to residents and the local economy. The town should continue to cooperate with health care providers to ensure that high levels of care are available and supported by state of the art technology. Efforts to improve the quality of life for residents through implementation of health care initiatives shall be supported.

13. The town should work with electricity and telecommunication service providers to ensure that the best available services are provided to residents and businesses at reasonable cost. Continuing efforts should be made to establish the best possible infrastructure, including fiber optic and broadband technologies, to serve the new information-based economy. New facilities, such as telecommunication towers, should be provided as necessary, but must be sited with sensitivity to environ-

mental, scenic, and neighborhood concerns.

14. Public sector offices should be located in the downtown area. The town shall continue to pursue relocation of the municipal highway department to a single location.

15. High quality recreation opportunities shall be available for all residents of the town, including those with special needs, and for visitors to the area. Recognize the importance of both maintaining a high quality natural environment and of diverse developed recreation parks and facilities.

16. The town should refer to the Park and Open Space Plan when budgeting for new or improved park and recreational facilities and when developing priorities for land conservation and pathway development.

17. The Bennington Pathway should be extended northward to the Molly Stark School as planned, and strategies to complete further extensions along the Walloomsac River, including the Ninja Trail, pursued.

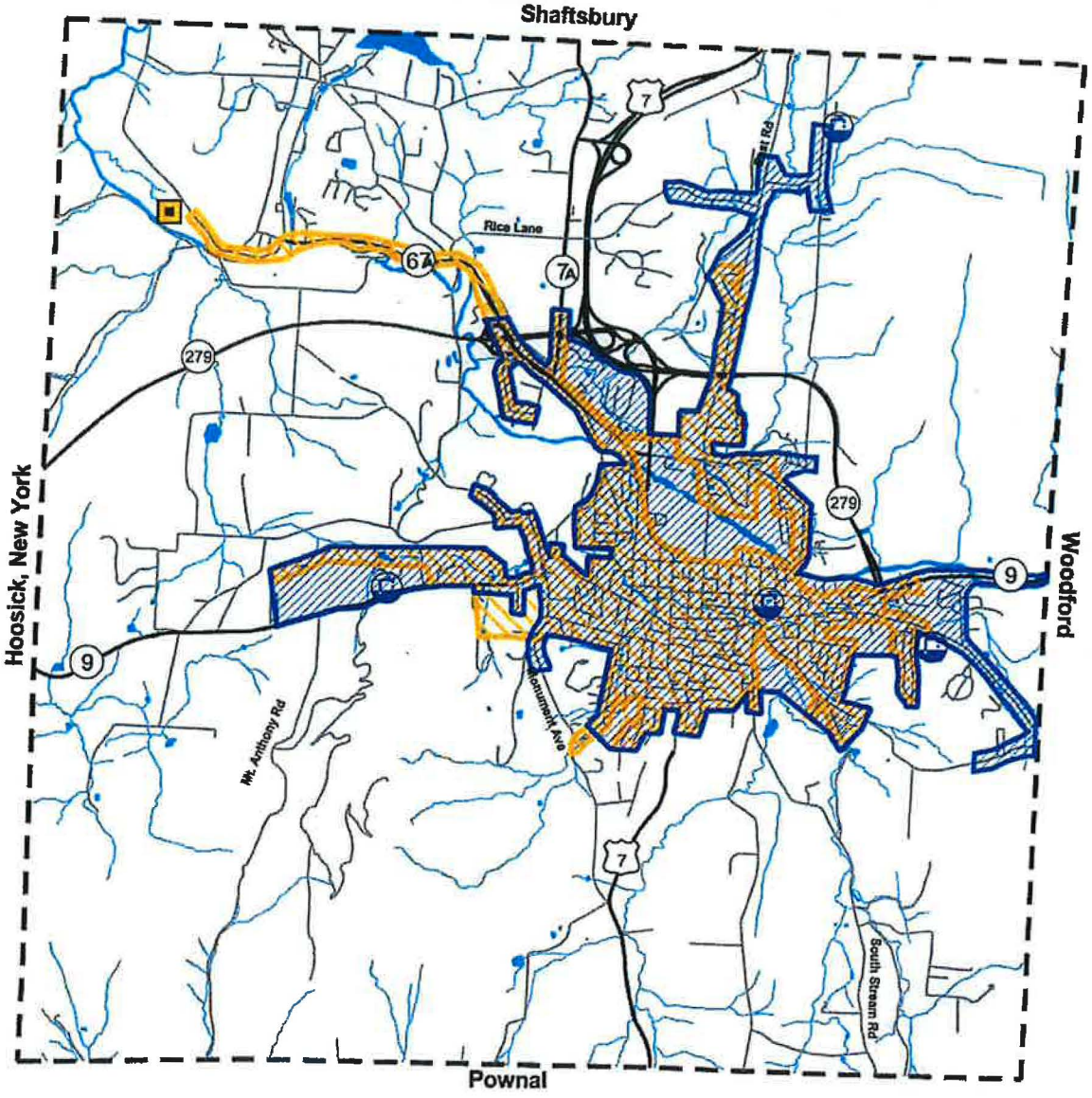
18. The town should develop additional indoor recreational space.

19. Continue to work cooperatively with the School Districts so that the recreational facilities at the schools serve the student population and the community at large.

20. The acquisition by conservation organizations of important recreational lands (or acquisition of easements to those lands) that will allow continued public access shall be supported.

21. Recognize the importance of open space for recreation in new residential developments, and require large-scale developments to provide open space in accordance with the town's land use regulations.

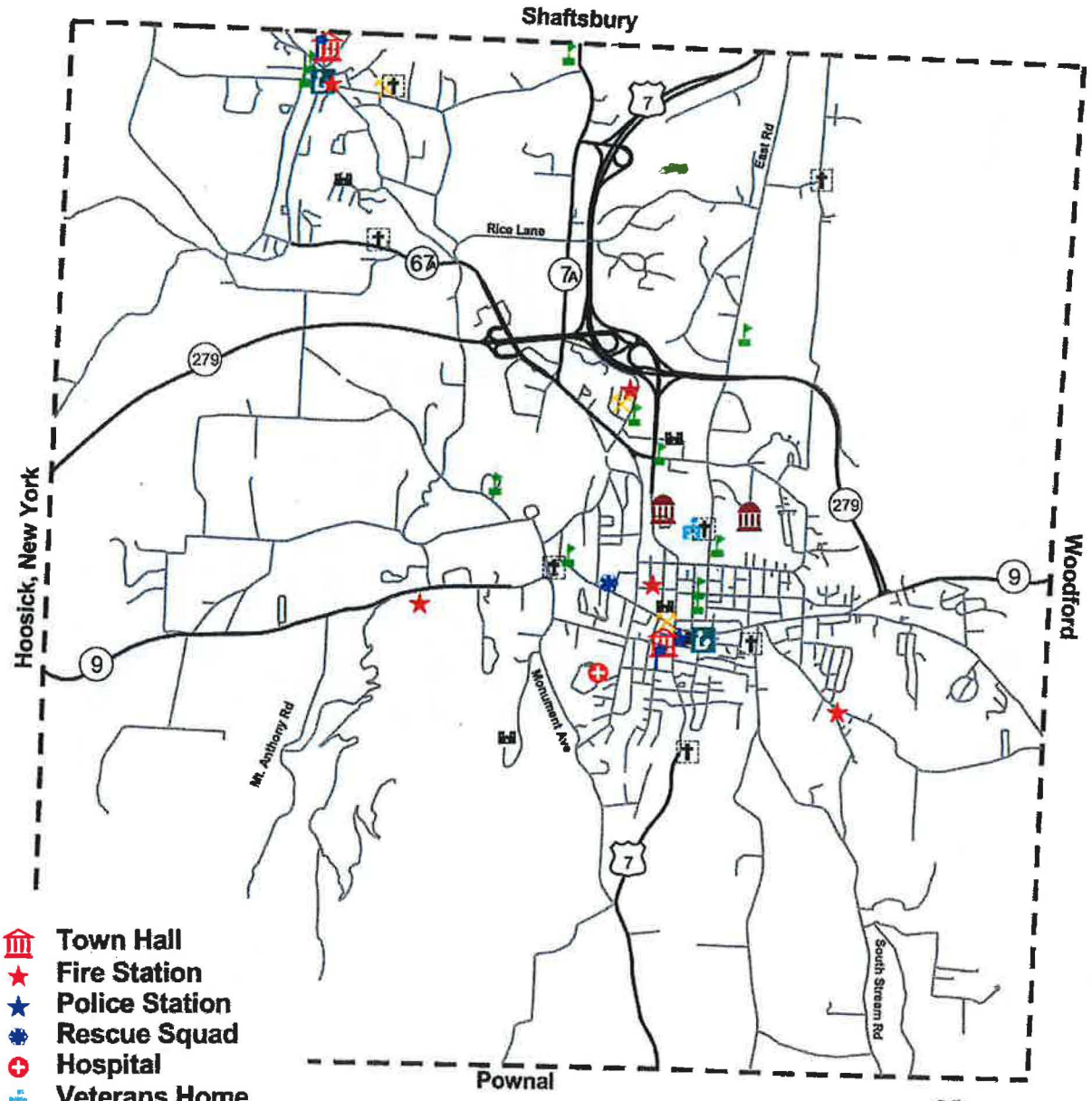
Map 7-1
MUNICIPAL WATER AND SEWER
Bennington, Vermont



Sewer Treatment Plant
Water System Facilities
Water Service Area
Sewer Service Area

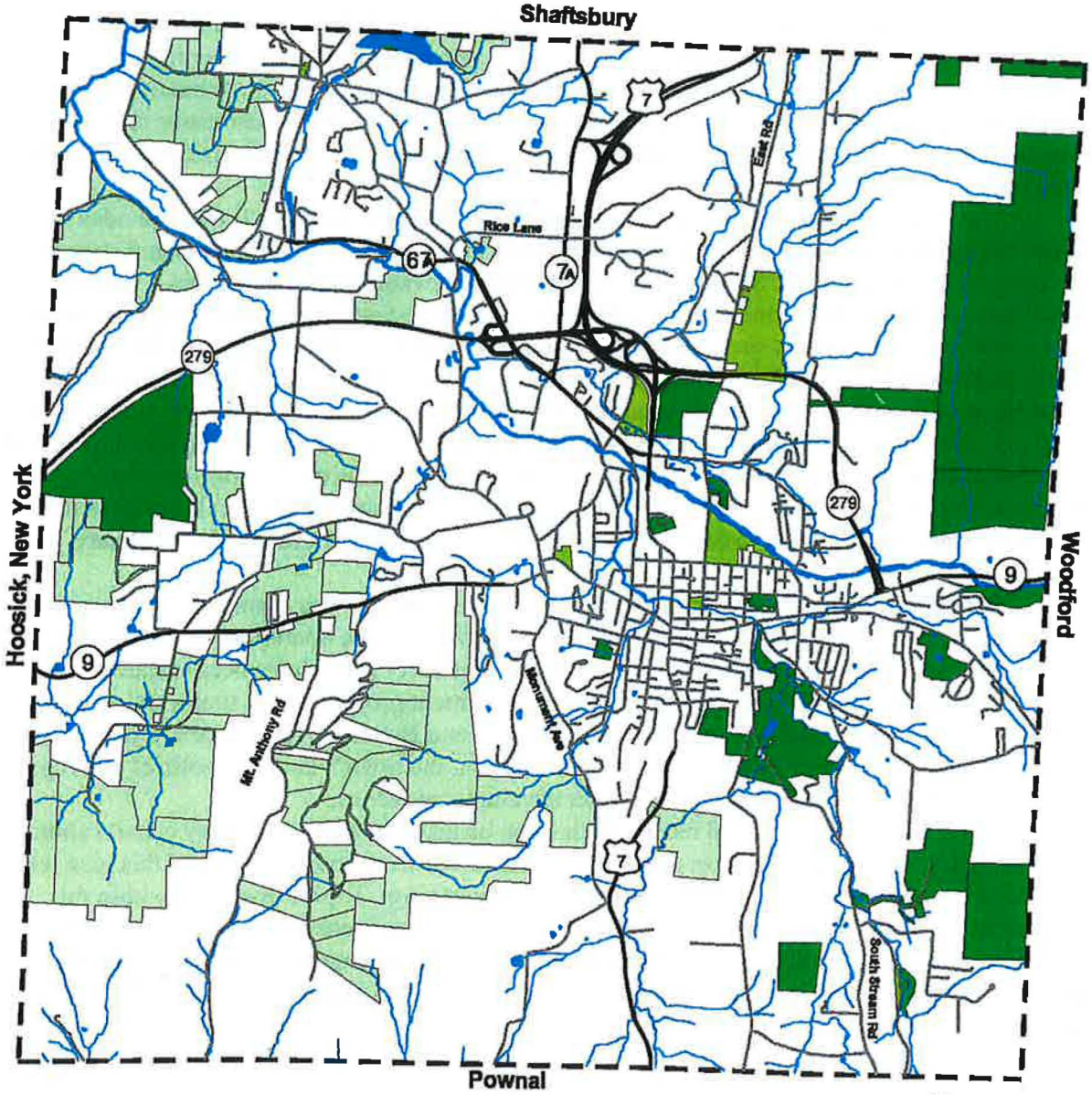
Map produced January 21, 2014 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
111 South Street, Suite 203
Bennington, VT 05201

Map 7 - 2
PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES
Bennington, Vermont



Map produced January 21, 2014 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
111 South Street, Suite 203
Bennington, VT 05201

Map 7 - 3
PUBLIC PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND CONSERVED LANDS
Bennington, Vermont



School Property
Public Open Space
Conserved Lands

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Bennington, VT 05201

Chapter 8 - Energy

8.1 Overview

Energy is a basic need of our society, but with most of it derived from scarce resources, effective planning for energy use and conservation is extremely important. Our transportation system relies on energy to propel the cars, trucks, buses, airplanes, and trains that transport people and goods to, from, and throughout the community. Homes and businesses require energy to power appliances and machinery and to provide heat in the winter and cooling in the summer.

The town recently completed a **Municipal Energy Plan** (July 2012) that provides detailed information on energy usage in the community and discusses opportunities and strategies for energy conservation and the development of local renewable energy resources. That plan notes that energy use in Vermont has continued to grow in recent years, with transportation uses now consuming the greatest share of energy resources. The majority of fuel used for transportation and heating and cooling homes and businesses is derived from nonrenewable fossil fuels. In addition to the negative environmental impacts associated with burning oil, gas, and similar fuels, the available supply of those fuels is strictly limited and within a relatively short period of time, production will not be able to keep pace with demand (for further details, see Bennington Regional Energy Plan, 2009). The result will be escalating prices and physical shortages of energy products that will begin to cause severe problems if we have not reduced our reliance on those fuels.

Recent efforts have yielded energy conservation benefits. The municipal wastewater treatment plant uses the methane it generates for powering its own operation, the public water plant generates hydroelectric power, efficient traffic and street lights have been installed, conservation features have been incorporated into improvement projects at the municipal recreation center and other town buildings, and two local schools and Bennington College use wood chips as the primary fuel in their heating systems. In addition, the town's land use policies and regulations encourage an energy efficient compact development pattern.

There are many additional measures that can be taken to promote energy conservation and efficiency. Because energy pervades all aspects of our lives, every section of this plan will contain some discussion of the importance of energy planning. Topics discussed within this chapter will include weatherization of existing buildings, use of renewable energy resources, provision of a transportation system that encourages reduced energy use, support for locally produced goods and services, and utilization of energy efficient building designs, vehicles, and appliances.

8.2 Improving Energy Conservation and Efficiency in Bennington

The development pattern of the town as a whole, and of individual residential, commercial, and industrial projects can contribute to energy conservation. Development that is concentrated in the town's designated Growth Center reduces the need for lengthy travel between destinations and allows for an energy and cost-efficient means of providing infrastructure. Compact planned unit developments, building orientation to take advantage of solar gain for heating and natural lighting, proper use of vegetation, and energy-saving insulation and appliances will enhance conservation efforts.

Many opportunities exist for reducing the amount of energy used in the town's residential buildings. The town should work to ensure compliance with the energy efficiency standards of the Vermont State Buildings Codes, specifically requiring that new buildings meet the Residential Building Energy Standards. To encourage homeowners to invest in energy efficiency improvements, the town should either exempt the value of those improvements from property taxes or make use of the recently enacted "Clean Energy Assessment District" to loan money to homeowners to pay for those improvements with the loans paid back over twenty years through an annual property tax surcharge.

Owners of existing homes can benefit from an energy audit; potential weatherization improvements are identified together with the cost and expected energy (and dollar) savings of each. There are a number of businesses in the region that now offer comprehensive energy audit services and organizations such as NeighborWorks of Western Vermont (NWWVT) and the Bennington Rutland Opportunity Council (BROC) provide audit and weatherization services.

New technologies and state and federal financial incentives also provide opportunities for homeowners to add renewable energy systems to their houses. Solar panels, evacuated tubes, and other devices can provide significant hot water and space heating while solar photovoltaics and wind turbines can generate electricity. Small geothermal and cold climate heat pump systems can also be used to increase space heating efficiency in many homes.

The Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program—recently authorized by the state—offers great promise in helping homeowners overcome the high initial cost of energy saving projects. Under this program, a town can establish itself as a PACE district, allowing residential homeowners to borrow money in amounts of up to $30,000 for weatherization and/or renewable energy improvement projects. The owner of the property then repays the loan through a surcharge on the annual property tax over a period of up to 20 years. The PACE loans are completely administered by Efficiency Vermont; the town's only responsibilities are to create the district and to assess and collect the tax surcharges. PACE loans run with the property, not the property owner, and are secured through Efficiency Vermont. Moreover, eligibility for a loan is contingent upon a technical analysis documenting that annual energy cost savings will exceed the annual surcharge.

Energy conservation can support business vitality and progress by reducing costs and increasing operational efficiency. The town should encourage and assist businesses and industries in conducting energy audits, making energy improvements, and installing renewable energy systems. Consideration should be given to use of a revolving loan fund for such projects. The town should adopt minimum energy efficiency standards for new commercial and industrial construction using the Vermont Commercial Building Energy Standards.

Businesses, institutions, and other organizations should also consider changes to their procedures and operations to conserve energy. Support for employee ride-share, public transportation use, and telecommuting should be considered. Whenever possible, local raw materials should be used and local markets identified for products. The town and economic development organizations such as the Bennington County Industrial Corporation should support business growth in areas focusing on energy conservation and development of renewable energy resources.

Efficiency Vermont, the State's energy efficiency utility, reduces energy use and costs by offering technical assistance and financial incentives to help Vermont residents and businesses identify and pay for cost-effective approaches to energy-efficient building design, construction, renovation, equipment, lighting and appliances. The town should partner with Effi-

ciency Vermont to ensure that their services are utilized to the maximum extent possible. Local schools should take advantage of services offered by the Energy Smart Schools program of Rebuild America. That organization provides guidance in making energy saving improvements to school buildings and by supporting energy education.

With the heavy energy use in the transportation sector, fuel efficiency should be a major consideration in every vehicle purchase when the town is replacing existing cars, trucks, and highway equipment. Consideration should be given to use of alternative fuel (including electric and "plug-in hybrid") cars as they become available and to biodiesel fuels, when available, in the town's diesel powered vehicles, changes that also would benefit air quality.

The design of the local transportation system can contribute significantly to energy conservation. Bennington can be a very bicycle and pedestrian friendly community and efforts to promote such human-powered transportation should be strongly supported. The Bennington Pathway, planned extensions to North Bennington and other commercial and residential centers, and special projects such as the Applegate-Willow Brook pathway should be completed.

In addition, safe and well-maintained road lanes and shoulders should be provided for bicycling, and the sidewalk system should be maintained and extended. The town has developed plans for such "complete streets" improvements along the Benmont Avenue and Kocher Drive corridors, for example, projects that should be constructed using state and local funds as soon as possible. Safe roadway crossings, bicycle route signs, bicycle racks, and other amenities also will encourage non-motorized travel around the town.

Gasoline prices will fluctuate, but will continue to rise over time, and as they do, the attractiveness and energy saving measures of rail and other forms of public transportation will become more evident. The town should support local and intercity bus service and periodically assess the demand for new or different services, including a direct shuttle bus link to the Amtrak rail station in Rensselaer, New York. Adequate and sustainable federal and state funding must be made available to support necessary infrastructure maintenance and to support development of alternative transportation systems.

Generation of energy from renewable energy resources supports conservation of non-renewable energy resources while helping to maintain a clean environment. Potential renewable energy resources in Bennington include:

- Hydroelectric energy from the Walloomsac River (a hydroelectric generating facility is expected to be operating at the dam located at the former Vermont Tissue mill property).
- Small and commercial scale wind turbines to generate electricity at suitable sites.
- Solar energy to heat buildings, water, and to power photovoltaic cells. Commercial-scale solar electric generating projects are under development in town. These projects are important, but should be carefully sited to avoid impacts to important resources.
- Wood and wood chips (as used in local schools and

Biomass energy facility at Bennington College fueled by locally available wood chips.

at Bennington College to provide heating). These "biomass" systems also can be used at institutions such as the local hospital for both heating and cooling, and excess heat can be used to generate electricity in "combined heat and power" (CHP) systems. Opportunities for biomass-based "district heating" should be explored in areas where there exists a sufficient concentration of buildings.

- Methane sources from the sewage treatment plant and dairy farms;
- Liquid biofuels such as vegetable oils and biodiesel from crops such as canola and sunflowers;
- Geothermal energy (as used in the state office buildings in town and at the CAPA building at Bennington College) and cold climate heat pumps (efficient electricity-based systems) for residential and commercial buildings.

Solar photovoltaic panels that automatically track the sun's movement greatly increase electrical generating capacity.

Much of the town's energy is used in the form of electricity and it is critical to assure an adequate supply from both generating sources and the capacity of transmission and distribution systems. With the closing of the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant, an increased amount of electricity used in Bennington is derived from large regional generating plants and from Hydro Quebec. It will be important to maintain those sources of supply while additional generating capacity is developed. Ultimately, a "smart grid" will be needed to much more efficiently manage the generation, transmission, and use of electricity. It is likely that the smart grid will rely on many distributed small generators located closer to the points where the electricity is used; consequently, the town should support economically and environmentally sound development of local electricity generating capacity, improvements to the "Southern Loop" distribution system, and development of smart grid technology.

Educational efforts can contribute a great deal to energy conservation by making residents and businesses aware of the value of using energy-efficient appliances, construction techniques, and other practices. For example, Efficiency Vermont is working to educate business and home owners about weatherization and electricity conservation, and offers workshops on innovative technologies like cold climate heat pumps and financing options like the PACE program. The town should cooperate with Efficiency Vermont and other sponsoring organizations and should help publicize them widely in the community.

8.3 Energy Policies and Recommendations

1. Actively promote the energy-related benefits of town policies that:
    - Lead to consideration of energy use, including short and long-term energy costs, in municipal decision-making;
    - Focus Development in the Growth Center;
    - Require efficient residential and commercial subdivision design and construction;
    - Support development of renewable energy resources including commercial-

scale projects in appropriate locations;
- Provide dedicated facilities for bicycles and pedestrians and improvements to roadways to encourage walking and biking;
- Require pedestrian linkages between adjacent residential developments and between adjacent commercial developments;
- Encourage mixed uses in the downtown; and
- Support public transportation services, ride-sharing programs, and improved freight and passenger rail service to the town.

2. Create and support programs and facilities that provide stable, affordable, and clean renewable sources of energy, including wood (and other biomass), wind, water (hydroelectric), solar, and geothermal. Give strong consideration to the energy needs of the community when evaluating the environmental and economic affects of such programs and facilities.

3. The town will make an effort to reduce fossil fuel use in its municipal facilities and operations.
   - Fuel efficiency should be an important consideration when the town replaces vehicles and heavy equipment.
   - Opportunities for employing renewable energy resources in municipal buildings and facilities should be pursued.

4. The town should regularly update its comprehensive energy plan and implementation program to document annual energy use and costs as well as savings from implementation measures.

5. The town should consider completion of a comprehensive municipal energy audit.

6. The town should continue to pursue energy conservation measures and renewable energy projects.

7. New construction should meet or exceed state residential and commercial energy efficiency standards. Awareness of LEED and Energy Star construction techniques should be improved and projects designed to achieve certification under those programs supported.

8. The town should encourage participation in Efficiency Vermont energy conservation programs.

9. The town should consider utilizing innovative programs such as the Clean Energy Assessment District to provide incentives and support financing of energy conservation and efficiency improvements.

10. The town should work with other organizations to promote energy conservation through regular educational programs and initiatives.

Bicycles provide an energy efficient way to get around town.

Biodiesel production facility at a farm in Shaftsbury.

The Bennington Farmer's Market supports local businesses, the local economy, and energy conservation goals.

A 2.5 KW wind turbine like this one can supply most of the electricity demand for a typical home.

Chapter 9 - Flood Resilience

9.1 Overview

The importance of preparing for, responding to, and recovering from serious flooding events was brought into sharp focus in Bennington, and throughout Vermont, when Tropical Storm Irene hit the area in August of 2011. Several inches of rain fell in a short period of time over the central Green Mountains and the torrents of water that poured down through streams, rivers, and other drainageways caused catastrophic levels of damage in many communities. Roadways, bridges, homes, and businesses were damaged in Bennington, and the huge amount of debris deposited along the Walloomsac River and its tributaries necessitated a costly cleanup and implementation of an extensive plan to provide a proper floodway for the river.

As serious as the damage was in the Bennington region, other parts of the state suffered even more severe losses, with entire downtown districts suffering major damage and business loss, several communities completely cut-off from outside road access for weeks, and entire riverside neighborhoods destroyed, unfortunately with some loss of life.

Inspecting the section of the Route 9 bridge east of Bennington that was destroyed during Tropical Storm Irene.

Changing climate conditions mean that extreme weather events and flooding are likely to occur with much greater frequency. It is imperative, therefore, that communities properly prepare to minimize future flood damage and to develop the capacity for post-flood resilience. 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 effectively rebuild and recover. Following through on risk reduction strategies is critical at this stage, as is the ability to effectively access financial and other support from federal and state government agencies.

9.2 Assessing Hazards

The rivers and streams flowing through Bennington have been accurately mapped as have areas that are at risk from various types of flooding (Map 9-1). 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 the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (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

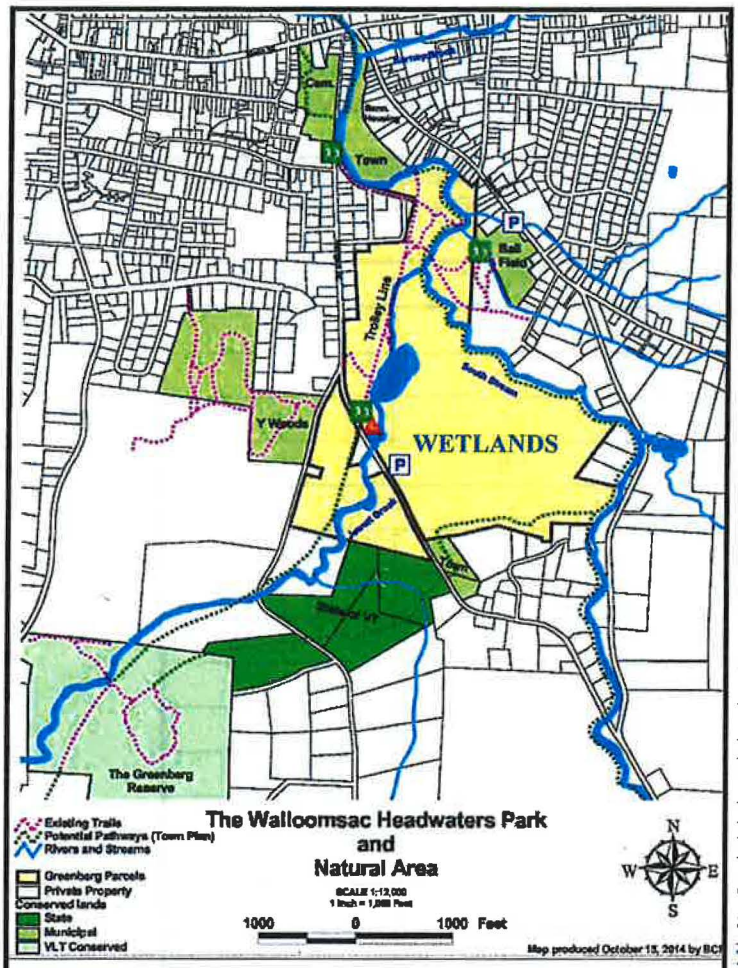
maintains land use regulations that control the type of development that occurs in these areas. A large number of existing structures are located in these areas, however, because the town is located on a level plain where several streams merge from various directions (Table 9-1).

Table 9-1. Structures in the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA, or "100-year floodplain") and Fluvial Erosion Hazard Zone (FEH) in Bennington.
Source: BCRC GIS analysis.

Type	SFHA	FEH
Single-family Dwelling	129	58
Multi-family Dwelling	115	
Mobile Home	15	8
Commercial	178	13
Commercial w/ Residential	3	
Industrial	4	
Development Site	1	
Government	2	
Fire Station	1	
Law Enforcement	1	
Health Clinic	1	
Education	4	
House of Worship	2	
Other	35	
Total	491	79

River corridors and Fluvial Erosion Hazard (FEH) zones 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 are required to accommodate meanders and changes in course that are needed to maintain dynamic equilibrium over time. River corridor maps have been developed based on scientific, location-specific assessment of the geomorphic condition of a river developed by the Vermont Rivers Program. The major river corridors in Bennington have been delineated by the Bennington County Regional Commission in cooperation with the Bennington County Conservation District and the state. The maps show corridors within which the rivers are likely to meander over time to find their most stable path while efficiently moving and storing sediment loads. The orientation and width of these meander belts varies with valley shape, surficial geology, and the natural channel length, slope, and width. With its broad and relatively level valley, some river corridors in the center of Bennington are quite sinuous.

As noted above, most flood-related damage in Vermont results from the erosive power of water causing damage to buildings and critical public infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and culverts (i.e., structures within FEH zones). Public water and sewer systems, parks, and important historic sites also have been damaged by flooding-related erosion. Where stream meanders are confined by human activity, the waterways lose their equilibrium and become



These conserved lands along Jewett Brook and South Stream help mitigate downstream damage from flooding during severe storms.

steeper, straighter, and more powerful, significantly increasing the risk for damage.

9.3 Limiting Risk from Flooding

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 ~~Natural Area.~~ Park.

The town's Flood Hazard Regulations control development in areas prone to flood inundation, enable Bennington to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program and, through that program, for property owners to have access to flood insurance. The regulations required by the insurance program set development standards that minimize adverse impacts on structures that would be caused by high water. The town also has adopted regulations to protect mapped FEH zones within river corridors. The most important reason to protect these FEH zones is to allow the river to adjust to changing
levels of water, sediment, and energy, thereby dissipating destructive potential prior to impacting concentrations of residential or commercial development or critical public infrastructure. New municipal and state infrastructure should be located outside any of these hazard areas, or when that is impossible (as with the case of some highway, bridge, and water treatment facilities) that it be properly designed and constructed. More information on protecting these investments can be found at the municipal planning section of the Flood Ready Vermont website.

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 creating plunge pools that damage roads and imperil nearby properties. Consequently, the town is en-

gaged in an ongoing assessment of the physical and geomorphic condition of its culverts and bridges and developing a plan for needed upgrades. Bennington's roadway design standards should remain consistent with the most current "VTrans Orange Book" standards to correctly size replacement structures.

New Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF) Standards took effect in 2014. This program provides state funds to communities after a declared disaster to cover a portion of the cost of repair and restoration work not covered by federal funds. Communities receive additional state funding if they have taken specific steps to reduce the current risk (an extra five percent for steps 1-4, below, and another five percent for also implementing step 5):

1. Participate in the National Flood Insurance Program;
2. Annually certify that Road and Bridge Standards meet or exceed the standards in the current *VTrans Orange Book: Handbook for Local Officials;*
3. Annually update and adopt a Local Emergency Operations Plan;
4. Adopt a FEMA-approved local hazard mitigation plan (or, a draft plan has been submitted to FEMA Region 1 for review);
5. Protect River Corridors from new encroachment; or, protect flood hazard areas from new encroachment and participate in the FEMA Community Rating System.

Local hazard mitigation plans involve identification of local hazards while prioritizing the steps needed to mitigate risk and providing access to a funding source through the FEMA Flood Mitigation Assistance Program. To be effective the local hazard mitigation plan must clearly identify and prioritize specific projects. Funding to implement these mitigation projects may be available through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) in Vermont or through other FEMA Flood Hazard Mitigation Assistance programs.

9.4 Preparing for an Emergency

Once a flood or other emergency situation occurs, it is imperative that municipalities have a consistent and reliable system for coordinating response. A Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP) is an effective way to coordinate local response and facilitate contact with other towns and agencies. The LEOP 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. The LEOP should be updated annually and a copy submitted to the Vermont Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security.

During large events multiple towns may collaborate, sharing staff, equipment, and other resources to achieve the most rapid and cost-effective response. Bennington County's Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC #7) provides an ongoing forum for intermunicipal communication and preparedness planning. Municipalities also can execute formal intermunicipal mutual aid agreements that specify how support services are requested, cost sharing, and other issues. Having formal agreements in place will not only assist in the response phase of an emergency, but also can help recover reimbursable costs through FEMA in the event of a federal declaration.

9.5 Insuring Residual Risk

Most homeowner's insurance policies do not cover damage from flooding. The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), however, offers flood insurance for properties anywhere in communities that participate in the program - including the high risk Special Flood Hazard Area. While lenders must assure that mortgages for structures in Special Flood Hazard Areas are insured for flood risk, many existing structures in these zones either do not carry flood insurance or are not fully insured to receive "replacement value" after a disaster.

Flood insurance information is available for consumers at www.FloodSmart.gov. That site helps to identify properties in areas of defined flood risk, explains the FEMA map products, and outlines insurance options. Recent federal changes to the NFIP have resulted in an increased costs, but insurance for affected properties remains available through that program.

If a structure is not insured the owner assumes the entire risk of property loss. In the event of a flood disaster the owner may be eligible for FEMA's Individual and Households Program Assistance, but this funding will not cover any losses that could have been insured. At the time of Tropical Storm Irene, the maximum Individual Assistance grant was $30,200 and the average grant in Vermont was $6,752, while the average NFIP claim was $43,078.

Bennington participates in the FEMA Community Rating System. Because the town has taken extra steps to reduce flood damage, flood insurance policies are discounted from 5% to 40%. Additional information about CRS and other flood hazard initiatives is available from the Watershed Management Division of the Agency of Natural Resources.

9.6 Recovery After a Flood

armoring banks

Following the immediate response to a flood, communities often are faced with significant costs, such as those incurred by Bennington after Tropical Storm Irene. Repairs to bridges, removal of debris, and [redacted] cost the town several million dollars. After a federally-declared disaster qualified losses may be reimbursed through the federal Public Assistance program and Vermont ERAF. It may take a considerable dedication of municipal resources to navigate the federal bureaucracy after a disaster, a process made somewhat easier when complete and accurate records of damage and repair are maintained by the town.

Effective long-term recovery from a flood requires that each of the steps outlined in this chapter are followed. Working to minimize risk and future damage, maintaining a current emergency operations plan, and insuring residual risk to the extent possible are the best ways to support recovery and ensure that the community is as resilient as possible.

9.7 Policies and Recommendations for Flood Resilience

1. The town should work cooperatively with the BCRC and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources to maintain accurate flood and fluvial erosion hazard maps and to identify specific areas of concern that should be targeted for mitigation actions.

2. The town should continue to work with state and federal agencies, and conservation and watershed organizations, to maintain and enhance the ecological integrity of rivers, streams, wetlands, and upland forests.

3. 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. This buffer should be at least 50 feet wide for streams with minimal potential for lateral or vertical adjustment or 100 feet for streams with significant potential for such adjustment.

4. The town should maintain up-to-date regulations to limit and control development in flood and fluvial erosion hazard 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.

5. The town should remain current with the most recent Town Road and Bridge Standards and any updates as they are developed by the state. Bridge and culvert repairs and replacements should be designed based on hydraulic studies to avoid constrictions that would accelerate flow and cause damage to public infrastructure and private property.

6. Existing local and state bridges and culverts that would impede flow during flooding events should be reconstructed or replaced as part of regular scheduled maintenance or through special hazard mitigation initiatives.

7. The towns 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.

8. The town should maintain its involvement in the Community Rating System.

9. Owners of property in flood hazard zones should be encouraged to secure propane tanks, fire wood, boats and other items that could float away in a flood.

10. The town should maintain an up to date local emergency operations plan.

11. The town should develop and maintain a current hazard mitigation plan.

with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.

The Town Plan contains an Economic Development section that identifies the various sectors that make up the local economy. Key market sectors and infrastructure and technology needs are discussed, and recommendations put forward to support high quality economic growth that will provide good employment opportunities for residents. Specific attention is given to the need for strong local educational services to support the workforce development needs of the town's businesses. A new section on sustainable local economies was added to the plan in recognition of changing conditions. Economic development activities are guided by the *Bennington Strategic Economic Development Plan*, which was duly adopted by the Bennington Select Board in 2013. The Bennington Economic Development Partners, a group of businesses and organizations involved in support of economic development in the region, assists the town with the implementation of development activities.

3. To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

All of the local public and private schools, including the vocational Career Development Center and the six colleges located in the town, are identified in the Town Plan. The need for coordination between municipal, educational and economic development professionals is discussed in detail, as is the need to maintain high quality physical facilities and technology at the schools.

4. To provide for safe, convenient, economic, and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.

The Town Plan's transportation section includes and extensive discussion of the existing and planned transportation system for the community. Focusing development within the Urban Growth Area will promote economy and efficiency in the transportation system. Highway designs are to encourage safe and efficient movement of people and goods through use of creative approaches such as traffic calming and access management. Strong support is given to improved rail transportation and expanded intercity bus and local public transit opportunities. Policies call for inclusion of pedestrian and bicycle facilities in all new highway projects and commercial and residential developments. Specific plans for new and expanded pathways are included, as are recommendations for energy efficient vehicles and transportation systems.

5. To identify, protect, and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape.

The chapter on Natural, Scenic, and Historic Resources includes an inventory of those resources and references other studies and initiatives that have been undertaken to protect these unique features of Bennington's landscape. Regulation (including historic preservation districts and guidelines), acquisition, and funding opportunities for resource protection are identified and discussed. Special programs and projects, such as the Molly Stark Trail Scenic Byway and cooperative land conservation efforts on Mount Anthony, are described and supported. It is made clear that development activities must respect the need to preserve these resources.

6. To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, and land resources.

The Town Plan contains sections dealing specifically with the protection of air quality, surface and subsurface water resources, fish and wildlife habitat, and land conservation. Threats to local and regional air quality are identified and protective measures discussed. Rivers, streams, wetlands, lakes, and groundwater resources are described in detail with recommendations for various regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to protection. A map and discussion of the town's fluvial erosion hazard area are included. Critical wildlife habitat areas are described and mapped and protection from incompatible development is required. The town's land

use plan supports land conservation efforts by restricting high density development to the Urban Growth Area and prohibiting development in the mountainous areas of town. Individual rural subdivisions also must protect open space by using planned unit development techniques.

7. To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

The Energy element of the Town Plan has been considerably expanded and contains numerous recommendations to encourage energy conservation and the utilization of renewable energy resources. An efficient land use pattern and transportation network, greater reliance on energy efficient vehicles and appliances, and local development of wind, hydroelectric, and solar based energy sources are recommended approaches. A Municipal Energy Plan was recently completed and provides information on energy usage in the community and discusses opportunities and strategies for energy conservation and the development of local renewable energy resources.

8. To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

Recreational resources throughout the town are identified and the importance of maintaining those lands and facilities emphasized. Activities that are supported by public access to rural open spaces are discussed as are developed recreational facilities such as parks and playgrounds. The importance of the Green Mountain National Forest and related resource opportunities in Bennington and nearby towns is noted. The establishment of a Green Mountain National Park, as a way to promote interest in the area's recreational opportunities, is discussed. Public hiking trails and other noncommercial recreational resources are included on Town Plan maps and preservation strategies presented. The Bennington Parks and Open Space Plan is referenced and provides additional inventory information and recommendations for improvements.

9. To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

The land use plan permits only low-density development in rural agricultural areas and prohibits development on forested mountainsides. A specific objective of the land use plan is preservation of the working agricultural and forest landscape of the town. Extension of municipal water and sewer to outlying rural areas will not take place because of the potential for sprawl that would adversely affect the viability of agriculture and forestry. Several tax abatement, economic, and conservation programs designed to support agriculture and forestry are supported.

10. To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.

Natural resource based industries are encouraged and policies are established which protect the future availability of important earth resources. At the same time, requirements for environmental protection during extraction and processing of those resources and restoration of disturbed sites are set forth.

11. To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

The Town Plan recognizes the need to provide a variety of quality housing options for all segments of the local populations. The land use plan strongly endorses the development of additional quality housing units in and around the town center, in the vicinity of public services, employers, and commercial businesses. Redevelopment of existing buildings for housing and infill housing development are both supported by the plan. Locations for multi-family housing and manufactured housing are provided for and accessory dwelling units are permitted as required by state law. The plan also identifies various housing organizations and programs available to support the development and provision of housing for low and moderate income residents.

12. To plan for, finance, and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet fu-

ture needs.

Bennington contains extensive public facilities and services, all of which are described in the Town Plan. The condition of the facilities are described and needed improvements noted. The capacity of the facilities in relation to existing demand and anticipated future growth is discussed and ways of improving service provision are presented. The plan clearly states that public facilities should be concentrated within the Urban Growth Area to facilitate convenient and efficient access.

13. To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care workforce development.

The need for quality child care—as both a necessity for residents and for economic development—is explicitly identified in the Plan. A variety of child care facilities are permitted in many land use districts and the need for effective workforce development is discussed. The Town Plan identifies service agencies and organizations that exist to provide financial and technical assistance to child care providers.

14. To encourage flood resilient communities.

The flood resiliency chapter discusses the importance of becoming flood resilient. Some of the topics covered in this chapter are: the Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund, Fluvial Erosion Hazard Zones, Special Flood Hazard Areas, River Corridors, Flood Hazard Zones, and the new flood hazard zone maps. Structures located in the Special Flood Hazard Area and Fluvial Erosion Hazard Zone are listed, and the importance of helping these structures become flood resilient is addressed. The plan also acknowledges that Bennington has flood hazard area regulations that are included as part of their zoning bylaws, and that the regulations allow Bennington residents to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program and property owners to have access to flood insurance.

10.3 Relationship to Town and Regional Plans

The town has been a member of the Bennington County Regional Commissions since its creation and has developed a working relationship with the BCRC that has assured that local and regional planning efforts are compatible. The Bennington County Regional Plan recognizes Bennington as a regional center for commerce, industry, institutional uses, and public services. It includes an "Urban Center" land use classification that is consistent in geographical extent and purpose with the town's Urban Growth Area. The Regional Plan also encourages public and private investment to support growth and economic development activity in the town's center.

The Regional Plan emphasizes the need to protect natural, scenic, and historic resources in very much the same way as the Town Plan. Bennington's downtown and many regionally important natural resources located within the town are identified in the Regional Plan and strategies to ensure their protection are consistent with those proposed in the Town Plan. The outlying parts of Bennington lie in the Regional Plan's Rural and Forest land use districts, where low density residential uses are allowed and agriculture, forestry, and recreation are emphasized in a manner comparable to the town's objectives for those areas.

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 industrial growth, technology development, and workforce issues that the town has identified as critical to success.

Bennington has a particularly close historic, geographic, and economic relationship to the villages of Old Bennington and North Bennington. The residents of the villages also are served by many Bennington mu-

nicipal services. Both villages contain important historic 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 will work with the village to improve transportation connections, by pathway, railway, and highway, between the town and village centers.

Other nearby towns in the region include Pownal, Stamford, Woodford, Glastenbury, and Shaftsbury, as well as White Creek and Hoosick in New York State. 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. Those towns are much more rural than Bennington and lack the infrastructure needed for more intensive growth. Although some growth will, and should, occur in those communities, it is recognized that Bennington must 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 which 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 should remain that way. Residents of the area rely on Bennington as an employment and service center. 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, NY area and the interstate highway system.