

**BRATTLEBORO PLANNING COMMISSION
NOTICE of PUBLIC HEARING
to Consider an Amendment to the Brattleboro Town Plan
Monday, April 6, 2015, 6:00 PM
Brattleboro Municipal Center, Selectboard Meeting Room**

In accordance with State Statute 24 VSA Ch. 117 §4384, the Brattleboro Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on **Monday, April 6, 2015, 6:00pm**, in the Selectboard Meeting Room at the Brattleboro Municipal Center, 230 Main Street Brattleboro, to receive public comment regarding an amendment to the Brattleboro Town Plan. The proposed amendment will help the Town be eligible to renew downtown designation and village center designation.

This amendment affects properties in the existing downtown designated area as well as in the designated village center. The designated downtown district is generally bounded on the north by the Windham County District Court, Terrace and Williston Streets; to the east by the Connecticut River; to the south by the Whetstone Brook, Canal Street, the Marlboro College Graduate Center, and the industrial waterfront; and to the west by the edge of existing commercial and other nonresidential development. The designated begins just west of Melrose Street and extends along Western Avenue to just past Garfield Ct.

The section headings for the Town Plan includes all of the required elements set forth in the Act [§4382], including the following specific chapters:

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|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 11. NATURAL RESOURCES |
| 2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT | 12. LAND USE |
| 3. ENERGY | 13. TOWN PLAN CAPABILITY |
| 4. AGRICULTURE | 14. IMPLEMENTATION |
| 5. EDUCATION | APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE |
| 6. HOUSING | APPENDIX B: ARTS AND CULTURE
INVENTORY |
| 7. TRANSPORTATION | APPENDIX C: HISTORIC SITES and DISTRICTS |
| 8. ARTS and CULTURAL RESOURCES | APPENDIX D: NATURAL RESOURCES
INVENTORY |
| 9. HISTORIC and SCENIC RESOURCES | |
| 10. MUNICIPAL FACILITIES and SERVICES | |

Copies of the full text of the proposed amendment to the Town Plan are available for examination at the Planning Services Department on the 2nd Floor of the Municipal Center and at the Town website (www.brattleboro.org). Interested citizens are invited and encouraged to attend the hearing or submit comments in writing to the Brattleboro Planning Commission, 230 Main Street, Suite 202, Brattleboro, VT 05301 or by e-mail at sfillion@brattleboro.org. Written comments must be received by 5:00 PM on Monday, April 6, 2015. For specific accommodations please call the Planning Services Department at 251-8154.

Brattleboro Planning Commission Report
Proposed Amendment to 2013 Brattleboro Town Plan
March 2, 2015

In accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4384(c), The Planning Commission is required to report on proposed amendment to the Town Plan. The Town Plan was adopted in 2013 following a comprehensive municipal rewrite that included extensive public input and visioning. The proposed amendment would add a discussion and maps of the Downtown and West Brattleboro Village Center Designations to the Land Use Chapter (Chapter 12).

There are no changes to the goals, policies, or actions in the Town Plan.

Background

This Town Plan amendment is being proposed so that the Town can reapply for Village Center Designation for West Brattleboro Village. The current Village Center Designation expires in July 2015. In June 2013, the governor signed Act 59 that added a new requirement for Town's pursuing Downtown Designation and Village Center Designation. It required that any renewal application that comes in after July 1, 2014 include a statement in the municipal plans that explains how designation supports community goals. It also requires that the municipal plan have a least one map that shows the boundaries of the designation. Brattleboro's Town Plan was adopted in February 2013, before the bill was signed. Therefore, in order to renew the Village Center Designation, the Town Plan must be amended to include the required elements.

Compatibility with State Planning Goals

This amendment will help the Town be eligible to renew downtown designation and village center designation. The Vermont downtown and village center designation program recognizes and supports local revitalization efforts across the state with specialized training, dedicated staff and funding to help designated downtown organizations build and foster strong communities. Benefits include tax credits for historic, façade improvement, and code improvement); priority consideration for Municipal Planning Grants and funding from the Vermont Community Development program; and the ability to create special assessment districts. Downtown designation offers additional benefits including eligibility for the Downtown Transportation Fund, traffic calming options, and new signage options.

All of these benefits are designed to support Vermont's historic downtown and villages and improve their ability to attract residents and businesses by enhancing their livability and unique sense of place. This also will promote healthy, safe, and walkable downtowns by increasing investments in these locations. Focusing attention on these historic development centers also maintains Brattleboro's traditional settlement pattern.

As such, it is compatible with the following state planning goals:

- To plan for development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.
- To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.

- 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.
- To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.
- To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

This is a proposal to amend language in the Land Use Chapter of the Town Plan beginning on p. 149. Underlined language is proposed new language. Language that has a ~~strikeout~~ will be deleted. A full copy of the 2013 Brattleboro Town Plan can be found at www.brattleboro.org or by contact Sue Fillion at 802-251-8112.

Commercial

Downtown remains the heart of the community, serving as the central business district. It has a lively and eclectic mix of uses, including residential, retail, office, governmental, and municipal parking. It is fully serviced by public water and sewer and is a hub for public transportation.

There are three character areas within the downtown:

- **Commercial Core:** The traditional commercial core is located along Main Street from Canal Street to just north of High Street. Commercial storefronts define this area, with multi-story, multi-use buildings aligned at the sidewalk edge to create a solid building wall along Main Street.
- **Wells Fountain:** The area just north of High Street to the Brattleboro Common is characterized by lower-density development with institutional, commercial, and residential buildings set back from the edge of the road.
- **Waterfront:** There are several buildings along Depot Street on the Connecticut River. These are generally modest, utilitarian structures, some with potential historic value, that are oriented to the railroad rather than the waterfront.

West Brattleboro Village is also a historic, mixed-use center. The Village contains several public buildings including a school and post office, several small retail stores, and a densely settled residential neighborhood around a small triangular green at a main crossroads of three streets: South Street, Bonnyvale Road, and Western Avenue. The Village is served by public water and sewer as well as the Brattleboro BeeLine bus.

The broad land use pattern in Downtown is fairly well established, but there are opportunities for redevelopment and infill growth. ~~Many of the land use concerns in both Downtown and the Village revolve around preventing development that is incompatible with the historic development pattern and architecture. To support Downtown's viability and livability, the Town participates in Vermont's Downtown Program. This enables the Town to receive grants for improvements within the designated area, gives priority consideration for some state-funded grants, and allows owners of income-producing buildings to be eligible to receive tax credits for building improvements (historic, façade, code, and technology). Downtown Designation was first received in 1998 and has been renewed several times, it expires in 2018. The boundaries of the designated downtown are shown in Figure 12.x.~~

Building a Better Brattleboro (BABB) is the organization responsible for undertaking revitalization efforts in the Designated Downtown. In recent years, the organization undertook a Retail Market Analysis, secured grant funding for directional and wayfinding signage, and participated in a charrette held by the Vermont Downtown Action Team to identify opportunities to improve the physical infrastructure and economic recovery of downtown post-Tropical Storm Irene. Over \$1.4 million has been accessed by property owners in the downtown since 2005 to improve buildings. Recent Town investments include reconstructing sidewalks, repaving Main Street, and making improvements at Union Station and Depot Street. BABB receives a substantial part of their funding from a special assessment tax on properties in

the Downtown Improvement District (DID). Future revitalization activities will include increasing beautification efforts, continuing the façade improvement program, and participating in a downtown master plan process.

A Designated Village Center district in West Brattleboro was first awarded in 2005 and is due for renewal in 2015. The boundaries district are shown on Figure 12.x. Village revitalization efforts have focused on community and economic development and improving bicycle and pedestrian safety. In 2014, the Town conducted a bicycle and pedestrian scoping study with funding from the Vermont Agency of Transportation. Community members also met with the Windham Regional Commission and Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation to discuss opportunities for village revitalization. Future revitalization efforts will include implementing the scoping study report and continuing to support stakeholders. The Town will also continue to support property owners and businesses in the Village through the existing Small Business Assistance and Rental Housing Improvement programs. There are several income producing buildings in West Brattleboro Village eligible for tax credits if and when redevelopment opportunities arise.

Downtown and village center designations achieve the following goals:

- Furthering the intent of the Land Use Chapter – Downtown and West Brattleboro Village are important mixed-use districts. The Town Plan identifies the need to make public and private physical improvements in these area. Continued designation will focus additional resources to help these areas thrive, including the ability to have a special tax assessment in the DID and priority consideration for several grant programs.
- Preserving significant historic, architectural, and cultural heritage – The access to historic tax credits and code improvement tax credits will support redevelopment of older and historic properties, preserving the historic character of the Designated Downtown and Village Center districts.
- Create safe streets and inviting environments for all road users - The Town has benefited from the Downtown Transportation Fund to make improvements in the Downtown and will continue to seek improvements as necessary.

Putney Road north of the Veteran’s Bridge continues to serve regional and local shopping needs, as does Canal Street near I-91 Exit 1. Land uses in these areas consist of large grocery stores, auto sales and service, and traveler services, such as fast-food restaurants, gas stations, and motels. There is a noticeable lack of housing in the Putney Road commercial area. The result is a very automobile-dominated area.

Outside of these core commercial areas, there has been a spread of commercial businesses along arterial routes. The area extending along Route 9 Avenue west from Edward Heights to Sunset Lake Road has several commercial establishments that service both nearby neighborhoods and the traveling public. There are also several commercial businesses fronting Canal Street, downhill from the hospital to the intersection of South Main Street. This area had historically been residential in nature.

Commercial growth in Brattleboro has been slow. Data gathered from zoning permits indicate about a 1.5% increase in commercial square footage from 2005 to 2011, and some of these permits were obtained to replace or rebuild buildings that had burned down.

Proposed Amendment to 2013 Brattleboro Town Plan

The traffic function of both Putney Road and Canal Street has been diminished in these commercial areas by an excessive number of driveways with direct access to the main road. In addition, the overall appearance of the development along these corridors leaves room for improvement.

Figure 12.x: Boundary of Designated Downtown

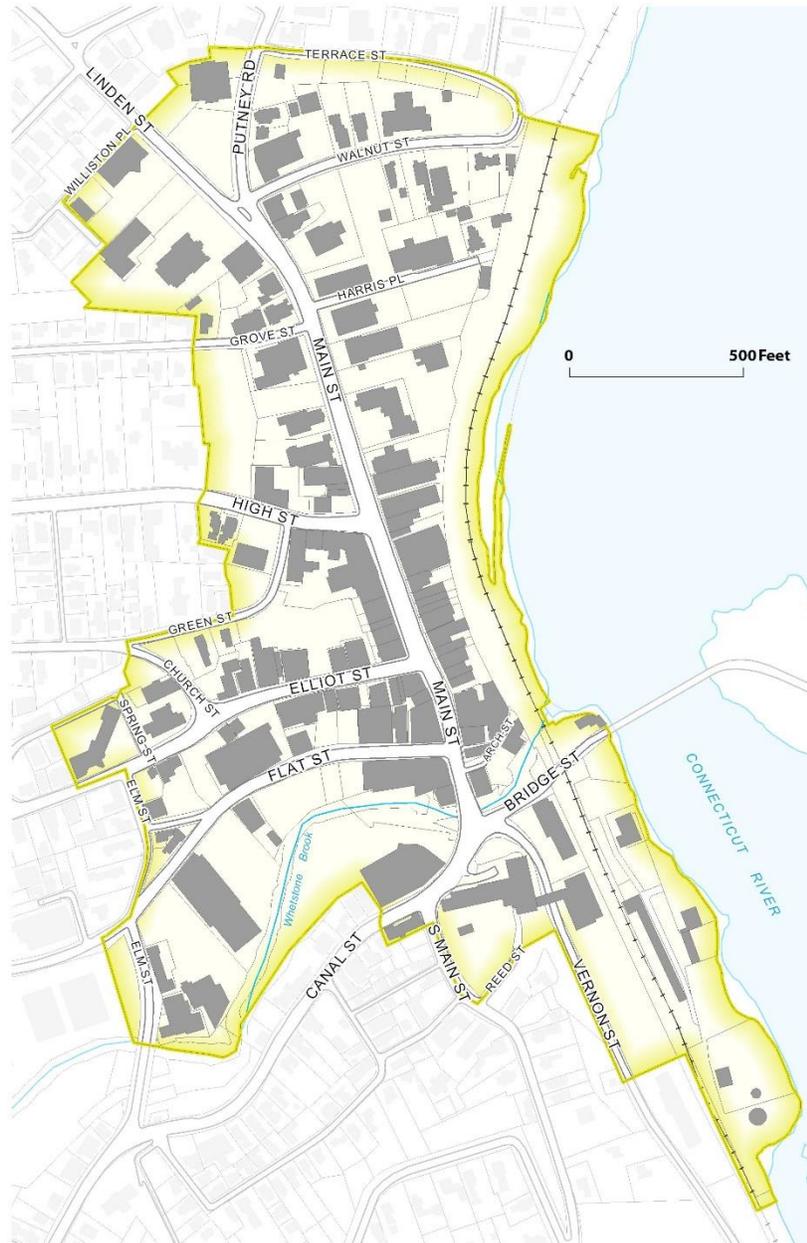


Figure 2: Boundary of Designated West Brattleboro Village Center

