



Brownington Town Plan

Adoption Date: January 8th, 2024



*BUILDING COMMUNITY, ONE
NEIGHBOR AT A TIME*

Acknowledgments

This plan was developed with the assistance of a Municipal Planning Grant from the State of Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development

Vermont's Planning and Development Act Title 24 VSA Chapter 117 governs municipal planning and zoning activities. 24 VSA Section 4387 requires municipalities to renew, revise, and readopt their plans at least once every eight years in order to keep plans current.

Zoning and subdivision bylaws need to be built on the foundation of the plan's policy and documentation (24 VSA Section 4401 (a) (1)). The plan is the basis for testimony before the District and State Environmental Boards under Criterion 10 in Act 250 hearings (10 VSA Section 4350).





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Changes Since Last Town Plan Update

Required Elements in this Section: Statement on how the development of the plan relates to adjacent communities

Each adjacent community - Barton, Charleston, Coventry, Derby, Irasburg, and Westmore - has updated its Town Plan since Brownington's last update. Roads, forests, surface waters, and more interconnect with Brownington and beyond town boundaries.

Brownington both recognizes and respects the relationship with these communities and does not foresee goals and strategies from this Town Plan Update significantly or negatively affecting these communities. It's possible that the potential Village Center Designation for the Evansville Trading Post could bring more commerce to the local community, particularly Westmore and Barton.

The COVID-19 pandemic clearly has produced significant changes and challenges since the last town plan update. Migration trends, food and job security, and housing availability have all changed significantly in a short period of time. Many of us are still registering and adapting to these changes, and it is the intention of this town's plan to re-instill a sense of security, resilience, and reliance in the wake of such changes.

Lastly, there are new requirements within the town plan that must be addressed, including priority forest block and habitats a S100 Housing Bill, which are both addressed in this plan.



How this plan connects to and is informed by Brownington Connects

This plan was heavily informed by its citizens through a survey and through the work that Brownington Connects committed to with the help of the Vermont Council on Rural Development. The survey was filled out by 102 members of the community.

The goal of Brownington Connects was to create a culture of planning in Brownington. It was established that rebuilding trust takes time. Additionally, Brownington residents voiced their interest in looking towards a future in Brownington where:

- There is a strong community spirit and sense of identity
- A wide variety of residents connect and come together to form a strong community
- We are welcoming to newcomers
- Families want to live because it is a safe place to raise children
- We feel safe walking and biking on our roads
- We embrace a “live and let live” lifestyle where people feel they can live their lives and aren’t told what to do. However, there is a responsibility to neighbors and the overall community that comes with it.
- We are a quiet community where you can enjoy the sounds of nature
- Community members feel a sense of belonging, integration, and connection

It is the hope and aim of the Planning Commission to fulfill this future set by work initiated from this Town Plan. Materials within this Town Plan, though ambitious at first glance, can greatly improve the pursuits of funding and grants by addressing the needs of the town and working from a creative approach in attempting to solve these needs.

Overview of Vision

Required Elements in this Section: Statement of objectives, policies, and programs

This Town Plan defines a long-term vision for the Town of Brownington and a means of achieving that vision. The purpose of the Town Plan is to emphasize the continued desire for local control while exploring non-regulative strategies to help shape the development of the town over the next several years. It should be noted that everything within this Town Plan serves only as guiding support to future decision-making and *is not* a regulatory document. The Planning Commission acknowledges that resources in Brownington are limited and that giving effort to an idea often means pulling resources away from another endeavor. No strategy within this plan will derive from taxpayer dollars without the full support of the community.

Although the work on these initiatives will hopefully continue well into the future, this Plan attempts to reflect the ideas and concerns that were expressed during the Community Visit Process and to suggest resources and strategies that may help the respective Task Forces in their efforts. Ideally, Brownington can maintain its sense of rural tradition while still being welcoming to calculated growth and change. It was heard loud and clear that Brownington will remain rural and keep its traditions intact.

Below is the vision of the Planning Commission utilized to address the intersection of issues Brownington is faced with. While many of the town's issues are not unique to the village, there are specific needs within these issues that the following goals and strategies aim to address. Each Planning Realm overlaps the required elements in a multi-faceted approach to express that there are numerous ways to address the needs of the community. Each section ends with *actionable implementation recommendations*, with those in bold as priority steps to achieve first.

Planning Realm	Goals	Strategies	Policies
Social Capital	<p>Maintain current land use patterns of residential and village-scale commercial development in and around Brownington's villages.</p> <p>Create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all newcomers to Brownington.</p> <p>Promote and enhance recreation opportunities for residents and visitors alike.</p> <p>Establish and sustain a culture of planning in Brownington.</p>	<p>Maintain Village Center Designation for Brownington Village and pursue Village Center Designation for Evansville. Educate the public, property owners, and local realtors on the benefits of Village Center Designation.</p> <p>Beautify gateways to village areas with plantings, signage, and public art.</p> <p>Establish a Welcome Wagon committee for newcomers.</p> <p>Adopt an Equity Policy to guide public meetings and decision making.</p> <p>Create a community communications plan linked to the new Town website. Include regular online postings (such as Front Porch Forum) and a quarterly newsletter.</p> <p>Conduct an annual community planning outreach campaign to gauge progress and identify new issues. The campaign should include a community survey and annual event, such as a communal meal.</p> <p>Host an annual celebration accessible to all Brownington residents that incorporates recreation, such as a community sledding day or a fishing derby.</p> <p>Establish a recreation equipment lending library.</p>	<p>New and substantially improved community gathering spaces should be located in or immediately adjacent to established centers of development.</p>

Planning Realm	Goals	Strategies	Policies
Local Prosperity	<p>To retain the town's rural character and maintain the viability of its working lands.</p> <p>Encourage the sale of local food and forestry products.</p> <p>Improve telecommunications.</p> <p>Build a working relationship with regional and statewide economic development officials.</p>	<p>Rebuild and rebrand the Greater Brownington Business Association and create a communications network to publicize grants, low-interest financing, and technical assistance opportunities for working lands businesses.</p> <p>Participate in the Communications Union District.</p> <p>Promote opportunities to improve rental housing through tax incentives, such as the Village Center Designation program.</p> <p>Create a task force to identify and enhance afterschool programming opportunities.</p> <p>Establish a babysitter training and certification program for Brownington's student-age population.</p> <p>Establish a local food pantry.</p> <p>Identify resources to improve housing stock for seniors, young families, and other households that may face income challenges. Publicize availability of these resources, which include USDA Rural Development, HEAT Squad, and Habitat for Humanity.</p> <p>Establish a good neighbor fund (eg. Barnet and Craftsbury)</p>	<p>The Town encourages the use of non-regulatory tools to preserve the economic viability of working lands, such as enrollment in the Current Use Program and the pursuit of conservation easements through the Vermont Land Trust.</p> <p>The Town prioritizes the use of local foods when hosting public events.</p>

The development of this plan was made possible by the acquisition of a Municipal Planning Grant in December 2021. The Planning Commission sought these funds to better address the changes in and around Brownington so that Brownington could be more in control of its future and not dictated by outside influence. The Planning Commission worked with Regional Planners from the Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) to highlight issues and develop goals, strategies, and policies in a way that could be achievable in time while acknowledging limited capacity and resources.

	Goals	Strategy	Policies
A Sense of Stewardship	<p>Minimize runoff from hydrologically connected road segments.</p> <p>Encourage stewardship of the town's natural resources through conservation and effective land management.</p> <p>Preserve Brownington's historic assets.</p> <p>Preserve Brownington's iconic scenic viewsheds.</p>	<p>Continue to participate in the Grants-in-Aid program</p> <p>Host local nature walks and workshops.</p> <p>Identify lands suitable for a Town forest.</p> <p>Host or publicize workshops for owners of large forested tracts.</p> <p>Encourage and promote grant opportunities to restore and rehabilitate historic properties.</p> <p>Complete a viewshed study that will guide Act 250 and Section 248 review.</p>	<p>Roads, driveways, and utilities should be designed to avoid the fragmentation of identified forest blocks.</p> <p>The Planning Commission supports development that takes place near the edges of forest blocks in order to reduce fragmentation of the blocks by roads, clearing, and development. If there is no land that is physically suitable for development at the edge of the blocks, the development should be located in order to minimize fragmentation of the blocks.</p> <p>Roads longer than 1,000 feet are discouraged within the forest blocks unless a longer road reduces impacts on natural resources.</p> <p>When land is subdivided, provisions should be made to ensure access for forest management and should avoid potential conflicts between land uses.</p>

	Goals	Strategies	Policies
Connectivity in Brownington and Beyond	<p>Ensure safe access and travel on Brownington roads, whether by car, on foot, on bicycle, or by horse.</p> <p>Improve overall conditions on Brownington's roads.</p> <p>Establish an informed, multi-faceted basis for site-specific solutions to speeding and unsafe road conditions.</p> <p>Provide the Selectboard and the Local Sheriff's office with the tools to enforce speed limits.</p> <p>Instill a culture of driving responsibly.</p>	<p>Participate in the regional Transportation Advisory Committee.</p> <p>Support the local road foreman and road crew with technical assistance from Vermont Local Roads.</p> <p>Keep the information in the online inventory tool (VT CULVERTS) up to date.</p> <p>Support studies of Brownington's local connectors, including Hinman Settler, Pepin, Old Stone House, and Frog Pond. Obtain speed data and relevant data on adjoining land uses, users, access, and site lines.</p> <p>Evaluate opportunities to narrow roadways along hydrologic segments in remote areas that will reduce runoff and discourage speeding.</p> <p>Raise awareness about speeding with an "Our Town, Slow it Down" styled local campaign with events and signage.</p>	<p>The Town will support the establishment of village-scale commercial and service enterprises that reduce vehicle use.</p> <p>The Selectboard, which is ultimately responsible for implementing traffic calming solutions, relies on a collaborative exchange of information between the Local Road Committee and regional and state partners, such as NVDA and Vermont Local Roads.</p>

	Goals	Strategies	Policies
Climate Resilience	<p>Minimize the future impacts of natural hazards in Brownington.</p> <p>Work to secure the maximum level of State assistance to repair public infrastructure damaged by natural disasters.</p> <p>Establish a local emergency response committee that is focused on the "neighbor to neighbor" approach.</p> <p>Reduce energy use in all public buildings and gathering spaces.</p> <p>Reduce Brownington's reliance on non-renewable energy sources.</p> <p>Reduce energy burden for Brownington households.</p>	<p>Review the revised FEMA map data when it is available.</p> <p>Host a public workshop on joining the National Flood Insurance Program.</p> <p>Keep the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan up to date.</p> <p>Keep the Local Emergency Management Plan up to date and include an annex for heat emergencies.</p> <p>Establish a Brownington energy committee.</p> <p>Work with the energy committee and regional partners such as HEAT Squad and Efficiency Vermont to educate the public on weatherization and fuel-switching incentives for low- and moderate income households.</p> <p>Establish a level 2 EV charger for public use in Brownington Village or Evansville by 2025.</p>	<p>Any new or substantially improved public facility in Brownington must meet stretch energy codes (i.e. more stringent energy codes, which are required for development under Act 250 Jurisdiction).</p> <p>The Town supports residential scale wind (9.5 kW) and residential scale solar up to 15 kW to promote energy independence.</p>

	Goals	Strategies	Policies
Local Governance and Services	<p>Foster a sense of leadership and civic commitment among newcomers and Brownington youth.</p> <p>Establish a Community Center.</p>	<p>Establish a Capital Budget and plan.</p> <p>Set up a recruitment table for potential volunteers at Town Meeting day.</p> <p>Set up secure Brownington email addresses for committee members.</p> <p>Complete a feasibility study for a Community Center and determine an operating structure and budget.</p> <p>Support a community volunteer day at the Brownington School.</p> <p>Maintain active involvement on the regional planning commission.</p>	

How to Use This Plan

This plan update took a creative approach to accomplishing the required elements of a town plan through aligned themes and overlapping topics. The sections that cover these required elements are arranged in themes of importance and relevance for Brownington: Social Capital, Local Prosperity, A Sense of Stewardship, Connectivity in Brownington and Beyond, Climate Resilience, and Local Governance. Each section provides goals, strategies, and policies to guide the actionable steps for implementation for the next eight years and beyond. Each heading below represents the required elements and where they can be found within the plan and sections. The implementation section provides the planning commission a guideline and timeline of tasks for the coming year and the next eight years. Goals, strategies, and policies are not meant to be interpreted as prescriptive but rather as guidance for if and when the Town approaches the subject or individuals within the community seek resources.

Introduction

As you drive through the villages of the scenic rural community of Brownington, you are treated to views of the Northeast Kingdom that will take your breath away. Looking one way, there is a clear view of the iconic Willoughby Gap and in other directions, the rolling hills, farm fields, and village centers that define the region. The Town of Brownington includes three villages: Evansville, Brownington Center, and Brownington Village. Each of the villages of Brownington showcase characteristics that make up this unique community – the Evansville Trading Post, which serves as a key local business and gathering spot, community center points at the Town Office and Brownington Central School, the historic Old Stone House Museum, and the observatory that offers 360° views across the region. This is a community deeply rooted in its agricultural history with a wealth of assets and opportunities for the future.

Here, lifestyles new and old converge. As people hark to a traditional lifestyle based on the land and their neighbors, growing population trends have sparked different needs to be met. As the town has diversified in its background, the continuing outsourcing of essential services and goods is too heavy a strain when not supported by the enhancements of today's world. In order to maintain Brownington's roots this Town Plan looks to support the following actions that were prioritized in the Brownington Connects process.

- Expand Community Events
- Improve Road Safety and Maintenance
- Boost Local Food Access, Agriculture, and Business

Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to serve as a timestamp of Brownington's growth from its previous Town Plans; and to be a visionary guide for planning and legislative processes for the next eight years. It should be used as a reference for town officials for both Brownington and adjacent communities, yet ultimately as a resource guide for the community members of Brownington with the hope and intention of reflecting community values back to the people it serves.

Brownington does not have zoning, and the town does not intend to use the plan to adopt zoning. Nevertheless, planning supports a number of non-regulatory initiatives, such as:

- Village Center Designation: This is a non-regulatory designation for core village areas. Renewable every eight years, owners of income-producing properties can receive tax credits for re-investment in their properties.
- Grant writing: Some grant programs, such as the Vermont Community Development Program, require an adopted Municipal Plan in order to receive grant funding for housing or economic development projects. Other grant programs will consider funding for initiatives that are consistent with the Municipal Plan.
- Act 250 Development: The intent of a Municipal Plan is considered in Act 250 hearings, as well as Section 248 hearings for telecommunications and energy projects. To be effective in this capacity, specificity about desired development patterns and outcomes is essential.
- Town Forests: The Town can purchase lands for the purpose of preservation, public recreation, protection of wildland habitat, watershed protection, and/or timber management for the purpose of maintaining the health and intactness of those forestlands.

Implementing the Plan

Required Elements in this Section: Recommended program for implementation of the plan

The results of the survey “Building Community, One Neighbor at a Time” contain a number of goals and actions, some of which represent a substantial commitment of time and effort. To ensure forward motion, the Planning Commission has selected five priority actions, some of which can be implemented quickly to yield immediate benefits.

The ultimate success of this plan will rely on creating a culture of planning, one that involves ongoing communication and continuous reassessment. Each year, the Brownington Planning Commission will work to establish a greater volunteer capacity and outreach through engagements like Green-up Day to gauge progress and identify new issues. This campaign will also feature an annual event, such as a communal meal.

Below are priority actions identified by the planning commission to engage upon as soon as possible. When, by whom, and how these actions will begin to be implemented through timelines, responsibilities, and resources is described in Putting the Plan Into Action.

Priority #1: Communications Plan

What: Create a community communications plan linked to the new Town website. Include regular online postings (such as Front Porch Forum) and a quarterly newsletter.

Priority #2: Village Center Designation

What: Maintain Village Center Designation for Brownington Village and pursue Village Center Designation for Evansville. Educate the public, property owners, and local realtors on the benefits of Village Center Designation.

Priority #3. Community Trail System

What: Establish a network of trails throughout the community that provide year-round access to recreation and more.

Priority #4. Establish a Community Center

What: Establish a place for people to gather and celebrate year-round. Complete a feasibility study for a Community Center and determine an operating structure and budget.

Priority #5. Improve Housing Stock

What: Identify resources to improve housing stock for seniors, young families, and other households that may face income challenges. Publicize the availability of these resources.

Social Capital



Social Capital

Required Elements in this Section: Land Use Plan & Map

Building a vibrant community requires social capital: a sense of belonging to a network of neighbors who work together for the betterment of all. Brownington is a rural community with a dispersed pattern of residential settlement, often marked by pockets of rural isolation. As individuals, we value the sense of privacy that comes with this rural lifestyle. We cherish peace and quiet. We embrace a “live and let live” philosophy where people can live their lives and aren’t told what to do.

Yet Brownington also has a strong collective identity and community spirit. We are proud to call Brownington our home, and we want to create a safe, nurturing, and welcoming environment for all ... from newcomers to long-time residents ... from children to young families just entering the workforce, to seniors who wish to age in place. It’s in that collective spirit by which we strive to build our social capital, reinvigorate our village centers, and create more opportunities for residents to collaborate on community projects and celebrations.

History

The first modern inhabitants of the region of what is now the Northeast Kingdom were the Abenaki – Native American groups who frequented the areas between Lake Champlain and the Connecticut River. Much of the Abenaki culture was centered near the area’s rivers and lakes. Primarily, the region was used for hunting and fishing, with seasonal agriculture bordering the region’s many lakes and rivers. At the time of European contact, Abenaki groups inhabited much of the upper Connecticut River Valley. Native American settlements at the time of these early contacts included: South Bay and Indian Point near Newport, Derby, East Charleston on the Clyde River, Barton on Crystal Lake, and Magog.

The fur trade in the 17th and 18th centuries increasingly brought these indigenous groups into contact with Dutch, English, and French entrepreneurs. The English eventually dominated much of the fur trade in the Connecticut River Valley, while the French controlled the St. Lawrence and Champlain Valleys.

While the French came to the new lands as explorers, traders, and missionaries, the English arrived primarily as farmers and colonists. Yet, the Northeast Kingdom remained a relatively unsettled region throughout the French and Indian wars (1754–1763) and the American Revolutionary period (April 19, 1775 – September 3, 1783).

Orleans County is the largest county (715 sq. miles) in the region; the larger population centers in the county are Newport and Derby. For most of the 20th century, the Northeast Kingdom existed in relative isolation up until the 1970s, when Interstate 91 sliced its way northward. This essentially created two “gateway towns” to the area; improved access bringing new residents and visitors to the area. The largest urban center is St. Johnsbury, where Interstate 91 enters the region from the south. Route 2 heads east to Maine, and Interstate 93 leaves for the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Newport, only six miles from the Canadian border, is the northern gateway community off I-91.

Town of Brownington Historical Perspectives

The Town of Brownington was granted in 1782 and chartered in 1790. It does not appear to have been settled until 1796, when Peter Clark, a potter from Lyndeboro, New Hampshire, made his home near the present-day Samuel Read Hall House in Brownington Village. By 1799, the year the town was organized, further settlement occurred in or near the Village, as well as in the east end of town near the Westmore line. Although the town was named for two original grantees - Timothy and Daniel Brown - the land, including a “gore” that later became the eastern tip of the Town of Morgan, passed through the hands of speculators before the various lots were sold to individual settlers. Most of these early settlers were of British descent and came from southern New Hampshire and southern New England.

The “Timothy Hinman Road” was laid out in the early 1790’s to connect Derby with the towns of southern Orleans County. This road followed the present-day course of the Churchill Road, connecting Derby to Brownington Village. In those days, travel and settlement tended to follow the ridges. From the start, there was always some sort of non-agricultural economic activity, even in a hill town such as Brownington, and the town supported both lumber and grist mills from the early 1800’s. The arrival of the railroad in the 1850s followed a valley route, causing valley settlements, such as Barton and Orleans, to flourish at the expense of the ridges and hills. The transportation revolution was accompanied by an industrial revolution that called for larger amounts of waterpower than were available in most of the town, with the exception being along portions of the Willoughby River, including “Skunk Hollow,” later known as Evansville.

Until 1816, Brownington was designated as a “half-shire town” and functioned, along with Craftsbury, as a county seat. The cellar of a Brownington Village home was used as a jail, while the court was held in a building nearby. A more permanent county seat was established as Irasburg in 1816 and later moved to Newport. In the early days, (1800 – 1820), many settlers came from the Newport area to Brownington to receive their mail. During the 1800’s, there were post offices in the Village, the Center, and in Evansville. Today most mail comes through the Orleans Post Office.

In 1823, Brownington was chosen as the site for the Orleans County Grammar School, a secondary school designed to serve all of Orleans County. The present-day Grange Hall, originally located north of the Congregational Church, served as the classroom building. The Rev. Alexander Twilight was hired in 1829 to be the school's principal and served in that capacity for most of the time until his death in 1857. The school closed permanently in 1859.

Twilight is known for his heroic role in the construction of a huge four-story granite block dormitory for the school, completed in 1836. It is now known as the "Old Stone House" and is used as a County Historical Museum. Twilight was the first African American to graduate from a U.S. college, Middlebury, in 1823, and the first to serve in a state legislature when he represented Brownington in the Vermont House in 1836-37. Other notable people associated with Twilight's school were: Samuel Read Hall (1795-1877), a pioneer in the field of teacher training, who taught at the school during the 1850s and served as minister of the Congregational Church; and William Barstow Strong (1837-1914), who attended as a student and later became the President of the Atchison, Topeka, Santa Fe Railroad. His brother, James Woodward Strong, was the first president of Carlton College in Northfield, Minnesota. It was Strong who erected the original observatory on Prospect Hill during the 1890's.

The fact that Brownington never developed into a major center for the region, coupled with the proliferation of competing high schools elsewhere in the county, made it impossible for the County Grammar School to survive. For the last 133 years, Brownington residents have had to attend high school outside of town. Until 1967, most were sent to Orleans; since that time, the town has belonged to the Lake Region Union High School district, busing its students to a facility in Barton. The 1878 Beer's Atlas shows that there were six elementary school districts in Brownington, each with its own small school. In 1966, the remains of that system were consolidated into Brownington Central School for grades 1-8. Since that time, a Kindergarten has been added.

In the mid-1800s, Brownington began to lose many of its people to the economic lure of the cities and of the American West. This out-migration was somewhat offset by new, often French-speaking, settlers from Quebec. As Quebec prospered, this source of settlement was largely dried up. During the past forty years, a new wave of settlers has emerged from urban areas of the northeast, particularly from the southern New England and New York City regions.

In spite of the fact that Brownington's growth did not keep pace with that of valley towns such as Barton, Orleans, Newport, and North Troy, there was a general increase in population until about 1870 (901), followed by one hundred years of slow decline. During the past four decades, the population has again increased gradually, while the number of housing units in town has increased dramatically. Although Brownington Village and the nearby "north ridge" area were the first to be populated, by the 1850s there was a substantial settlement at Brownington Center. A Methodist-Baptist Union Church was built there in 1854 (now Brownington Center Church). Evansville was named in 1871 for Joseph Evans.

The extent to which the “frontier spirit” still prevailed at the time is revealed by the fact that the village was named for the winner of a tree-chopping contest. It was the availability of waterpower along the Willoughby River and the presence of a whetstone-manufacturing firm that included a now-abandoned quarry in the southeast corner of the Town, a lumber mill, and a creamery that caused this village to flourish between the time of the Civil War and the Great Depression. In 1891 a Methodist Church was built; long-abandoned as a place of worship, it now serves as the gift shop portion of the Evansville Trading Post. Although manufacturing and retailing have played and continue to play a role in Brownington’s economy, most Brownington residents now employed in these areas work outside of town. During 1802, the majority of Brownington residents were employed in agriculture within the town. Now, the majority of employment is elsewhere. During this century, the trend has been toward fewer and larger farms.

Demographics and Development Patterns

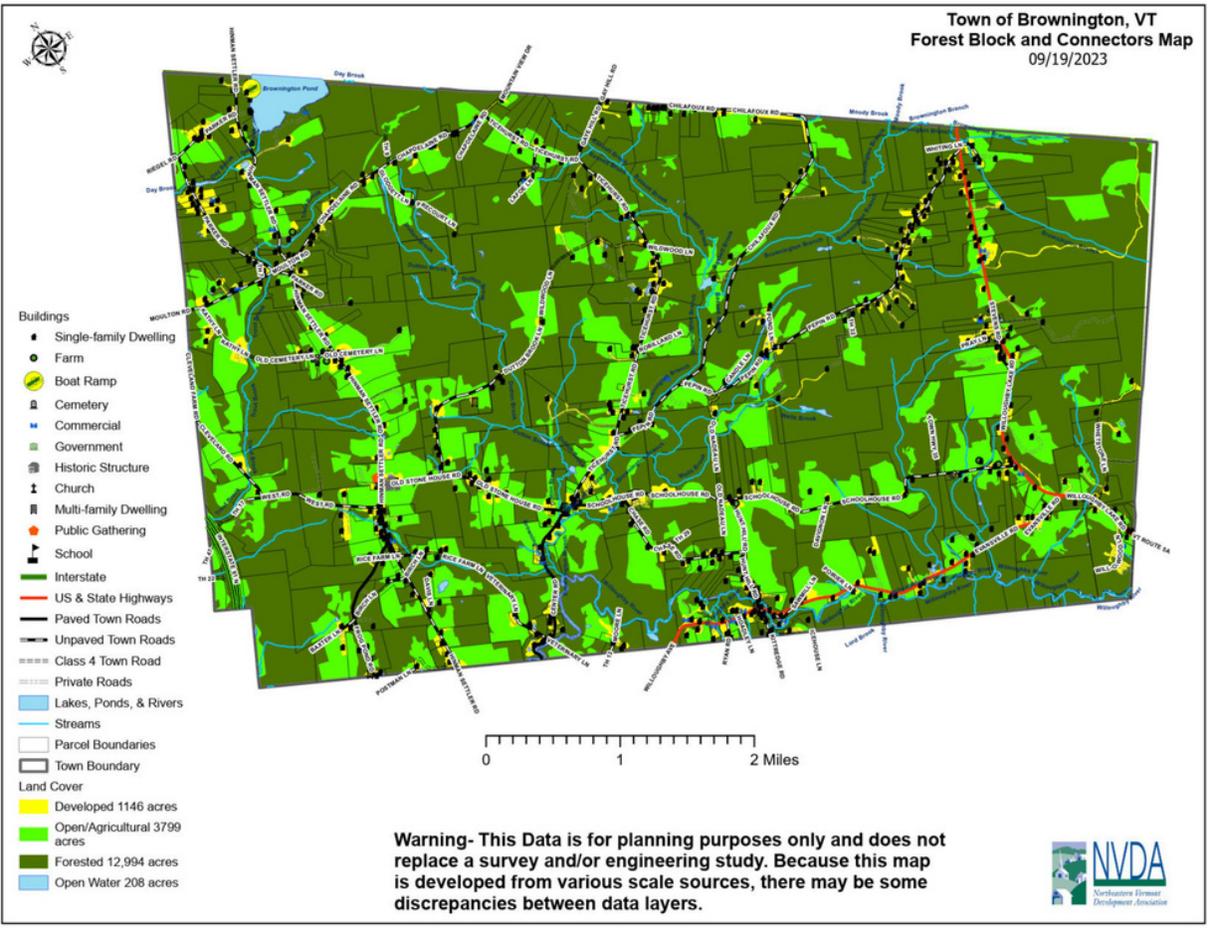
Brownington’s population is marked by generational tradition and tenure and is a true settlement of converging lifestyles new and old. Residents have long known their neighbors and their families for decades, offering social connectivity, resiliency, and accountability. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic began, people have seen less of each other, new people have arrived, and there is a growing disconnect from the days that once were. The galvanizing community effects from the moving of the Grammar School in 2016 feels like a long time ago.

And yet, there is a strong desire to reconvene and reconnect amongst the community. There still remains an eagerness to know and help neighbors, and bring tradition back in get-togethers. Greater communication from the town and establishing central gathering places within the town can help ingratiate newcomers and promote new traditions.

The residents of Brownington have a strong desire to remain rural amidst the changing hands of land. Though there is a strong interest in gaining access to certain social and domestic amenities, by and large, the Town wishes to keep large agricultural and forest lands intact, with continued utilization by small-scale industries such as farming, logging, and sugaring.

A Notice About the Following Data

The charts below represent data provided by Social Explorer’s five-year American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2017-2021, a data provider that sources information from the U.S. Census and other trusted public sources. This data is informed by annual surveys and then extrapolated to summarize changes and trends amongst communities. Given the small scale of a town the size of Brownington, the reliability and accuracy of the data are often difficult to project. Therefore, *the data are not meant to be viewed as concrete and literal, but to provide context in changes, developments, and patterns.* The following data allows Brownington a snapshot of the changes since the last Town Plan Update in 2015. While many members of the community likely don’t need data and charts to know that their town is changing, it is nevertheless informative in the specific ways change has occurred. For more information on housing topics and data for the State of Vermont, please visit housingdata.org.



Visualizing Changes

Brownington’s population increased moderately in the past decade. The population density rose by 8 people per square mile and by 20% overall. Much of this influx has come from new families, including large households of Amish families who bring unique distinctive culture to the area.

Family households increased by 52, a 5% jump from 2010.

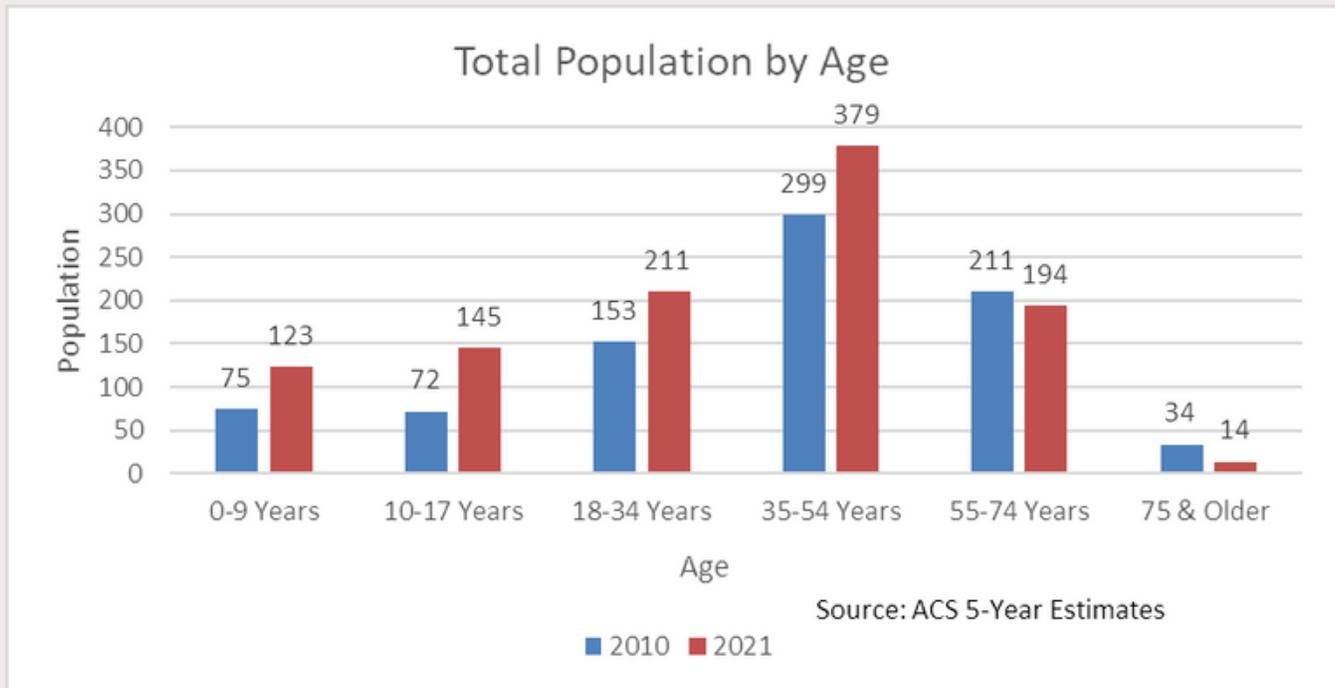
Overall, the average household size has increased from 2.4 to 2.8. Of particular note, 5- and 6-person households have seen a dramatic 179% increase in Brownington.



Source: Jim Cole (AP)

SE: A10008	2010	2021
Family Households	223	275
Total Households	346	388

SE: A00001 Total Population	2010	2021
Total Population	844	1066
Population Density (per Sq. Mile)	29.9	38.0

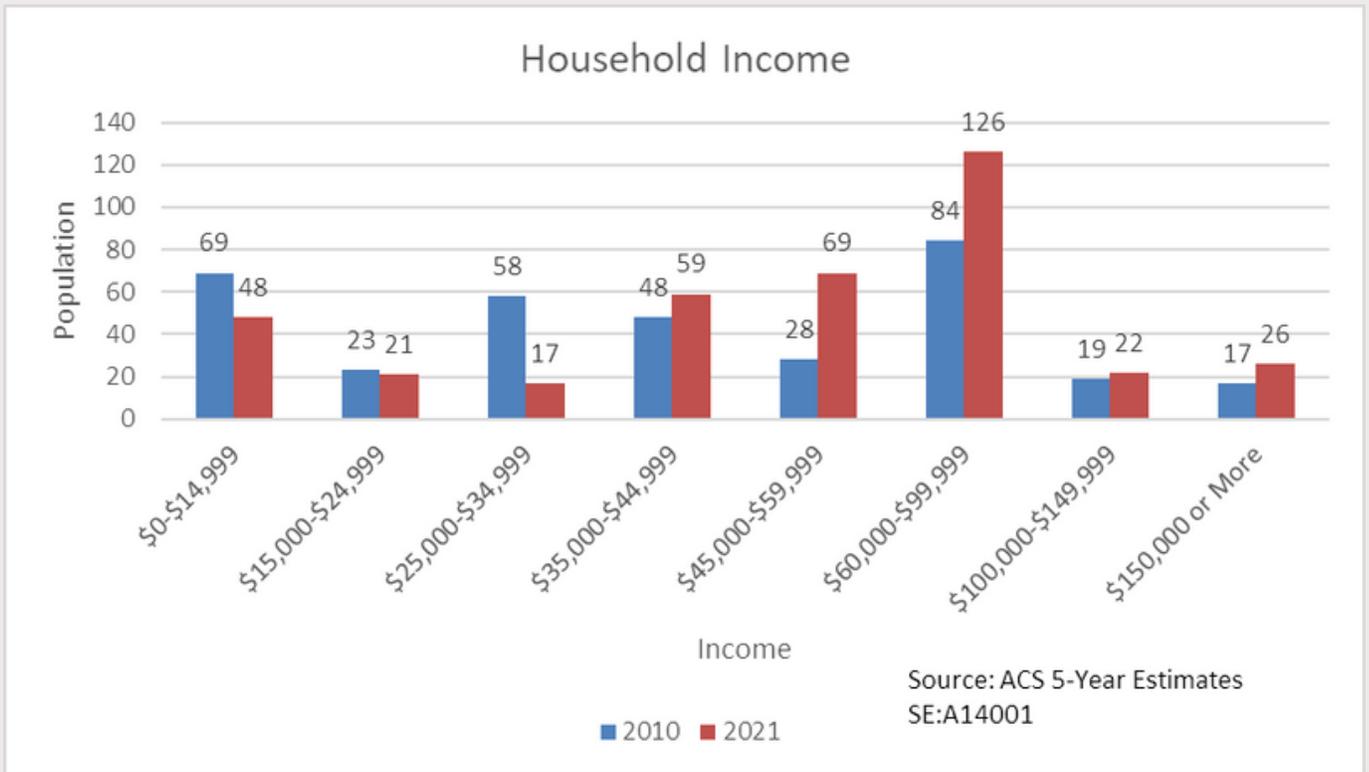


Brownington seems to be bucking the state trend of getting older, seeing sizable increases in children residents while observing a decrease in adults 55 and older. An 82% increase in the population of 17 and younger represent more working families with associated costs (food, childcare, healthcare, etc.), housing size increases, and a greater reliance on social community impact needs (community centers, places of engagement, and youth development).

Brownington has received a sizable increase in median household income, which is a positive development. Unemployment has dropped from 6.9% to 4.7%, further suggesting that stability within the town has increased. The figure below shows that despite growth in population, fewer households are making less than \$35,000 a year while incomes have increased substantially in the \$45,000-\$99,999 range.

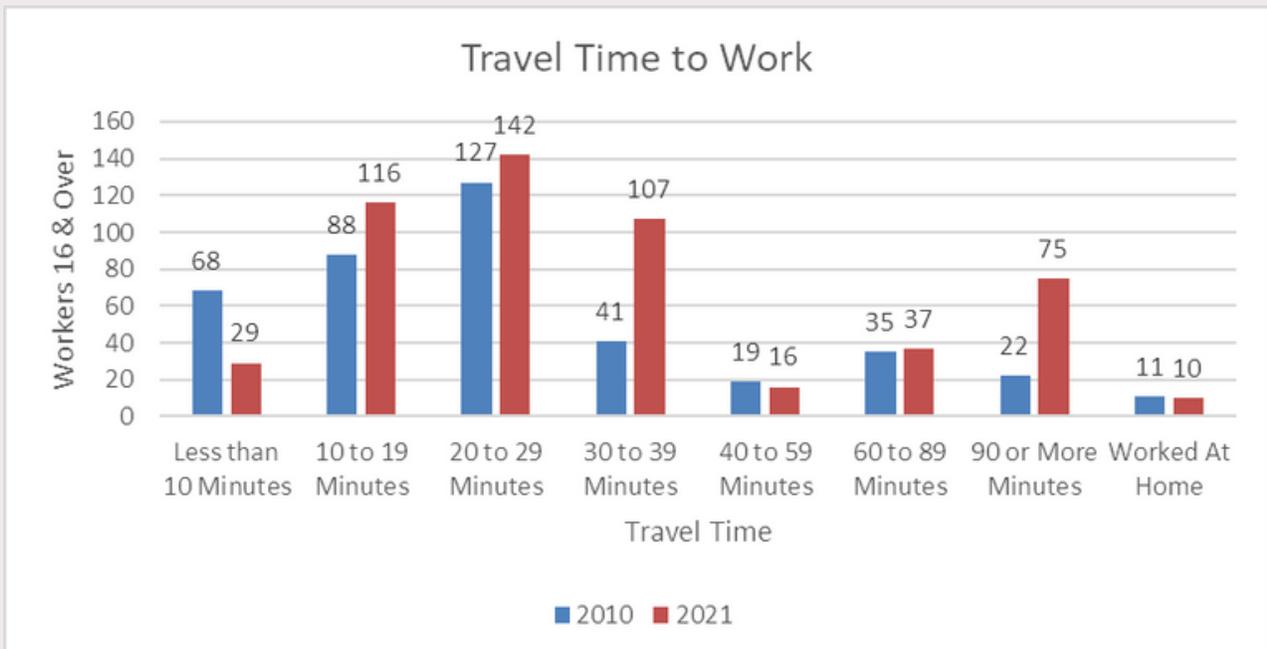
SE: A14006	2010	2021
Median Household Income	\$40,000	\$53,690

This explains the overall increase in median household income. However, digging deeper into statistics may suggest that not everyone is benefiting from this and that some households may be severely impacted by limited resources and other associated costs of living.

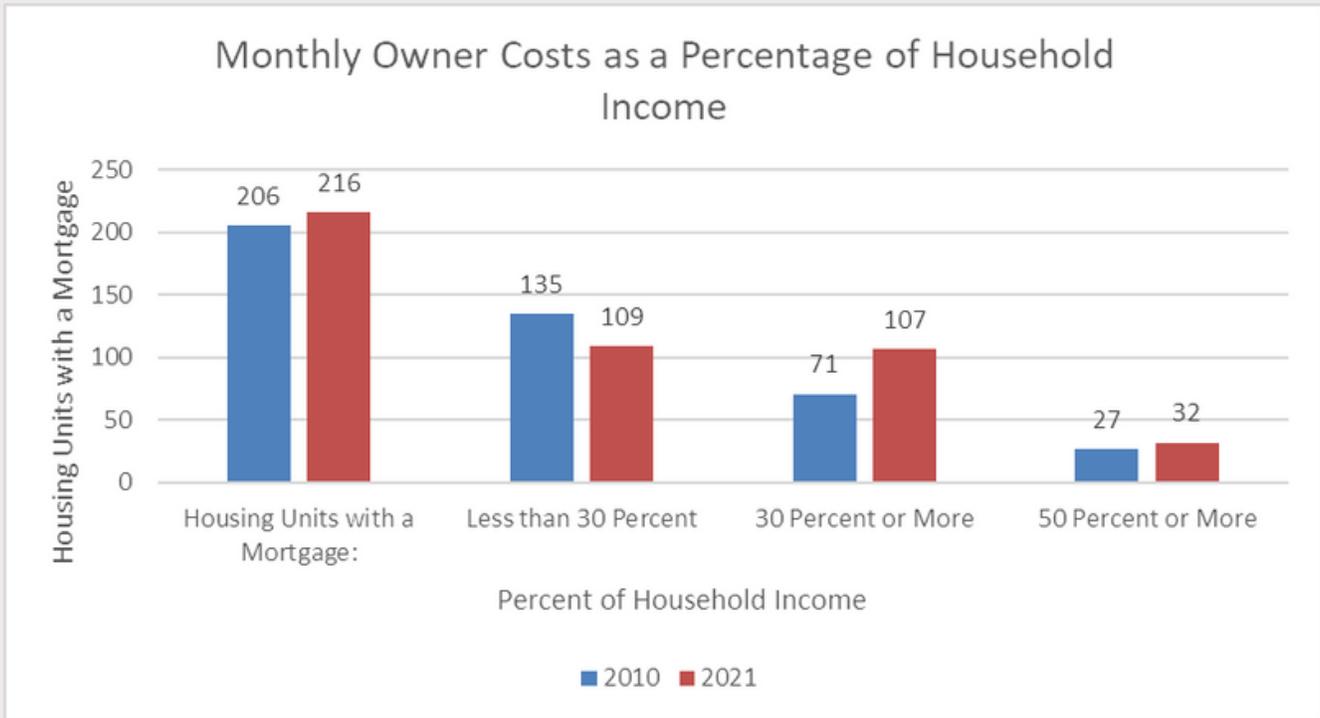


Highlighting Community Disparities through Needs

Though the unemployment percentage has decreased, significant travel times have increased, observed in the three-fold increase of residents driving 90 minutes or more to work. Increases in commute times between 10-40 minutes suggest that few residents find employment within or near town boundaries, while the substantial increase in larger commute times represents the lack of housing near regional employment centers (i.e. Newport, St. Johnsbury). A disparity between not enough housing in a bedroom community and not enough nearby employment increases the costs for working families.



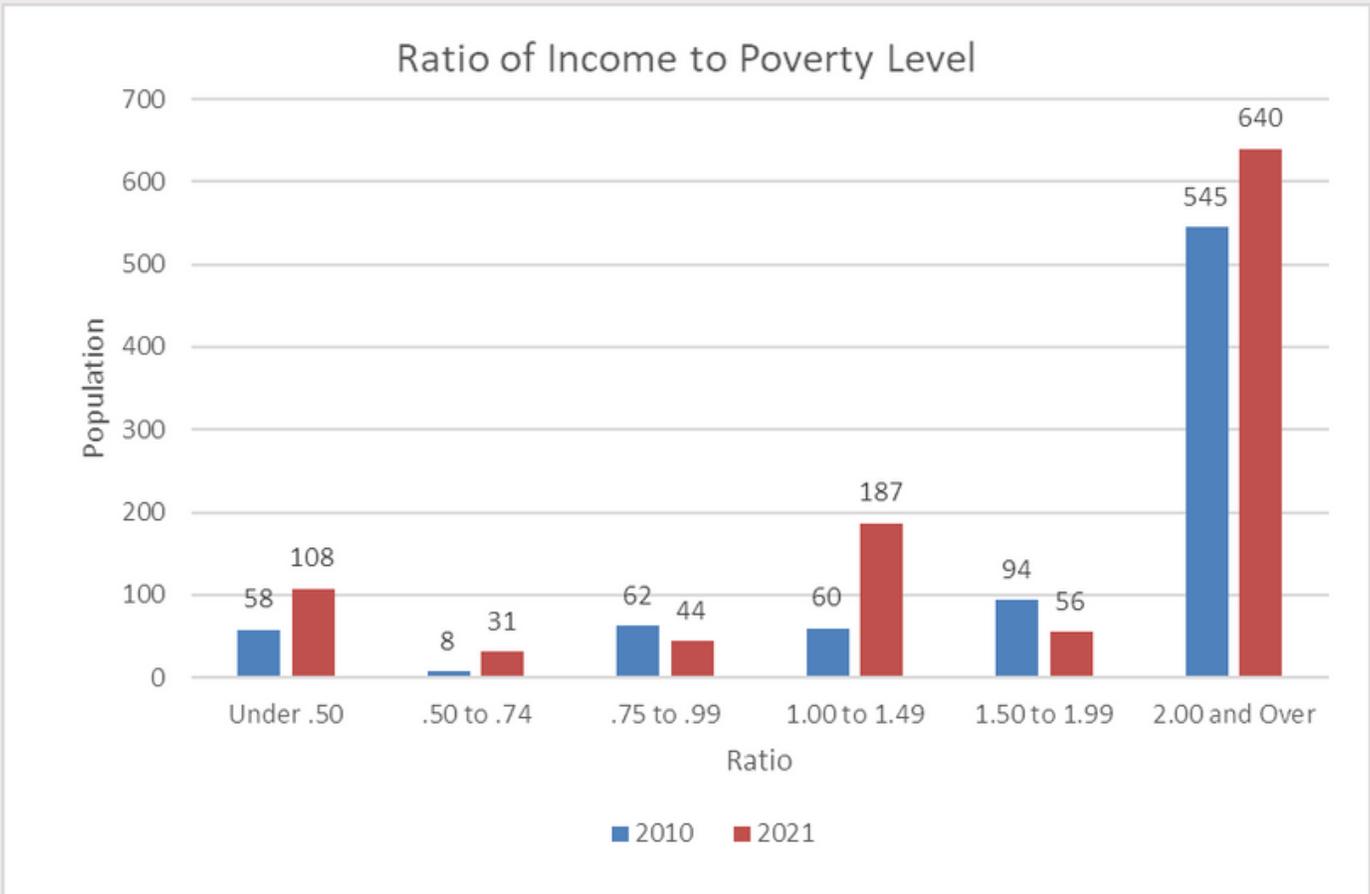
When we look at monthly costs for household owners, we can see that while housing units with a mortgage have had minimal increases, cost-burdened residents have increased at a much higher rate. This puts a heavy strain on costs for food, health, childcare, savings, and overall quality of life.



This strain is represented in Brownington’s Ratio of Income to Poverty Level, which determines the poverty status by comparing the person’s total family income with the poverty threshold appropriate for that person’s family size (the 2020 National Poverty Guideline for a family of 3 was \$21,720). Those that have a ratio above one is considered able to meet their economic needs and thus above the poverty threshold.

Percent of Housing Units			
SE:B10040: Monthly Cost for Households	Less than 30%	30% or More	50% or More
2010	65.5%	34.5%	13.1%
2021	50.5%	49.5%	14.8%

Brownington has seen a significant jump in residents with a ratio of 1-1.49 and above 2.0, which correlates with those residents that have increased household income. However, proportionally there has been a 5% increase in residents with a .74 or lower income-to-poverty level ratio, meaning that a greater proportion of people in Brownington are severely struggling to make ends meet. When you consider this statistic with the growing number of children and families, a need for social services and community assistance is highlighted.



Changes in Housing Development

The rise in seasonal housing inventory across the state of Vermont hasn't seemed to affect the housing availability in Brownington, with a modest increase in overall housing stock compared to minimal changes in vacant and seasonal housing units in the last decade.

There are 222 more people with 48 new housing units since 2010. However, using the 2021 household size of 2.8, that new housing inventory (48) would accommodate 134 people. Since more people have moved to Brownington than the growth of housing units, this represents a housing availability strain. Renter-occupied housing units have increased by 4%, and the number of mobile homes have also increased by about 4%, but the number and availability of single-family or multi-unit homes have not kept up.

Housing Inventory				
	Units	Households	Vacant	Seasonal
2010	471	346	125	125
2021	519	388	131	122

Median House Value has stayed relatively unchanged, from \$138,500 to \$141,600, suggesting that market availability and influences haven't affected home value significantly.

Fragmentation of Brownington

What has changed in Brownington over the past decade has been the subdivision and parcelization of large tracts of land. This fact may be both a figurative and literal representation of the feeling of not knowing one's neighbor. Woodland and farm acreage have decreased while large-lot rural developments have increased. The Vermont Natural Resources Council maintains an active database of land use trends throughout the state called VT Parcelization. Between 2005 and 2020, Brownington experienced a 55% loss in forested woodlands, an 18% loss in acreage of farmland, and a 9% increase in residential acreage. Those numbers increase when only looking at parcels greater than 50 acres. On the positive side, Brownington has preserved over 1,700 acres submitted into Vermont's Current Use program.

SE: A10032. Housing Units in Structure	2010	2021
Housing Units	471	519
1 Unit, Detached	358	373
2 Units	0	3
3 or 4 Units	0	2
Mobile Home	110	141

Village Center Designation

Village Centers in Vermont establish the location for neighbors to convene and businesses to thrive, being defined by law as “the core of a traditional settlement, typically composed of a cohesive mix of residential, civic, religious, commercial, and mixed-use building”. They can attract entrepreneurship and tourism to a place that already possesses local historical significance. At its core, village centers promote walkable neighborhoods and complete streets.

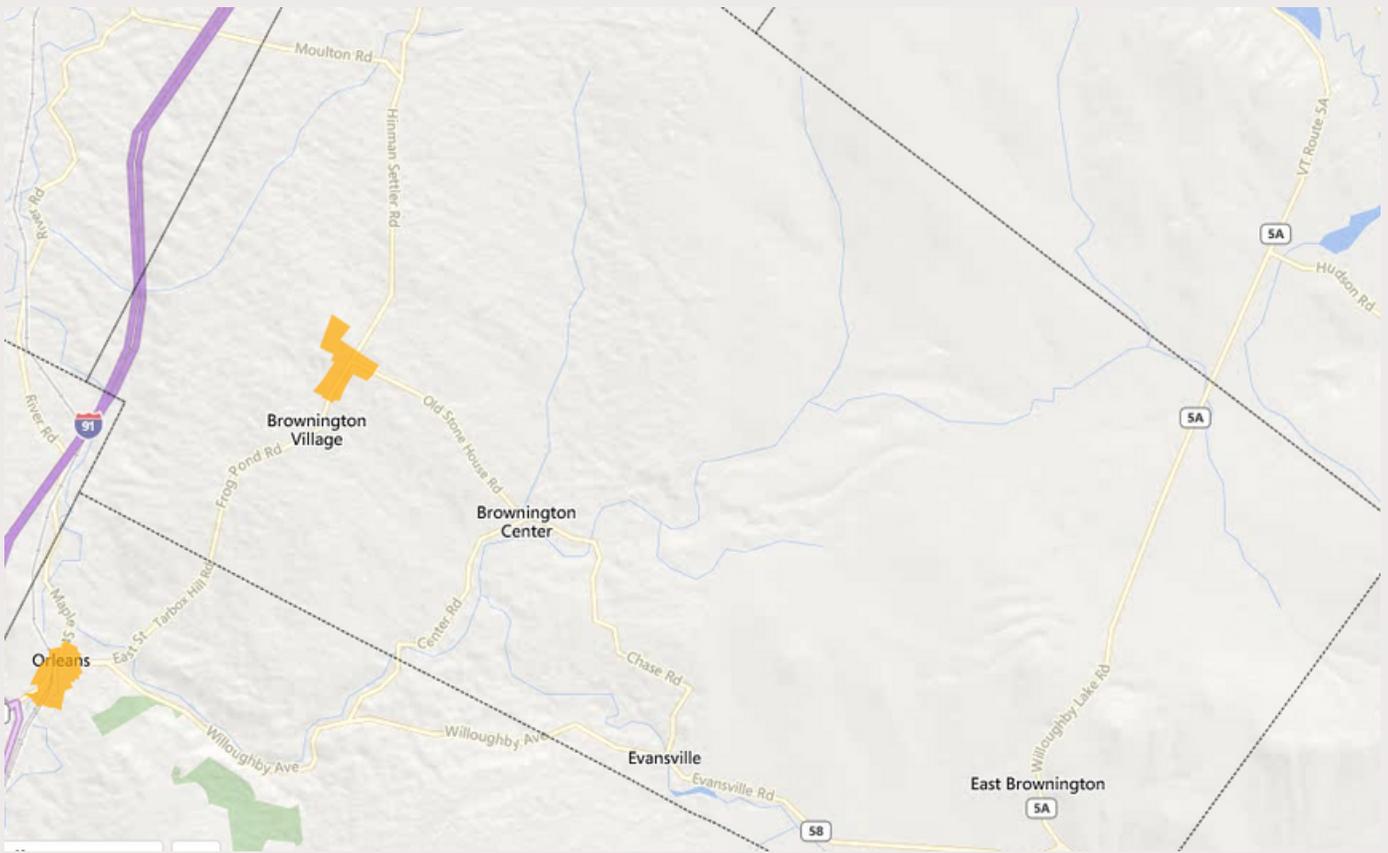
A designation supports the revitalization efforts by providing technical assistance and state funding to help municipalities build strong, resilient communities. Once designated, the community will be eligible for the following benefits:

- Technical assistance is provided by the state to support local village revitalization and planning efforts.
- Downton and Village Center Tax Credits:
- Priority Consideration for State Grants
- Priority Consideration by State Building and General Services (BGS)
- Neighborhood Development Area (NDA) Eligibility

Currently, Brownington has an established village center in Brownington Village with a renewal date of February 2025.

Recreation in and around Brownington

Brownington has access to multiple recreation activities that include fishing, hunting, horseback riding, ATV riding, birding, and more. There are multiple private hiking and horseback trails. The Willoughby River and Brownington Pond have areas of local, private access. The Pond, an area of 136 acres with a maximum depth of 33 feet, does have a public boat launch.

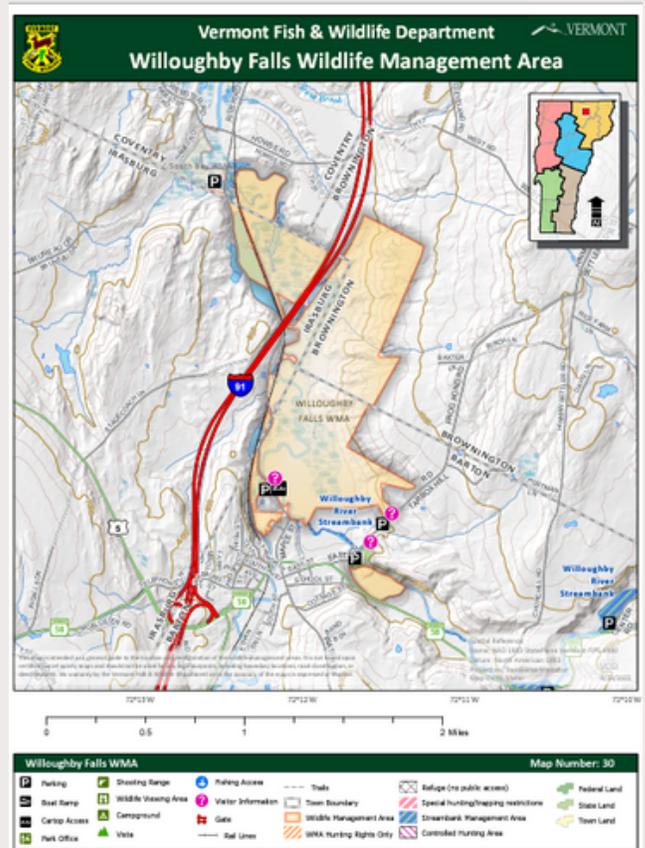


Village Center Designations in Brownington and Orleans. Source: [DHCD Planning Atlas](#)

Willoughby Falls lies on the border between Orleans and Brownington, which is fed from the Willoughby Falls State Wildlife Management Area (WMA), an area of 592 acres in parts of Brownington, Irasburg, Coventry, and Barton. Within the WMA lies a steelhead fishery and spawning sites. It is known as a birding hotspot and provides abundant habitat for an array of unique reptiles and amphibians.

To the north, adjacent to Brownington Pond lies the Derby Town Forest. There are multi-use trails within the forest boundaries that are well marked that can be accessed from Town Forest Road. There is also mention of a disc golf course within the forest boundaries maintained by the Derby Rec Department, first developed in 2022.

Along the Old Stone House property is the Twilight Educational Trail that spans the outer limits of the property consisting of just over a mile of trails. Given its central location in the



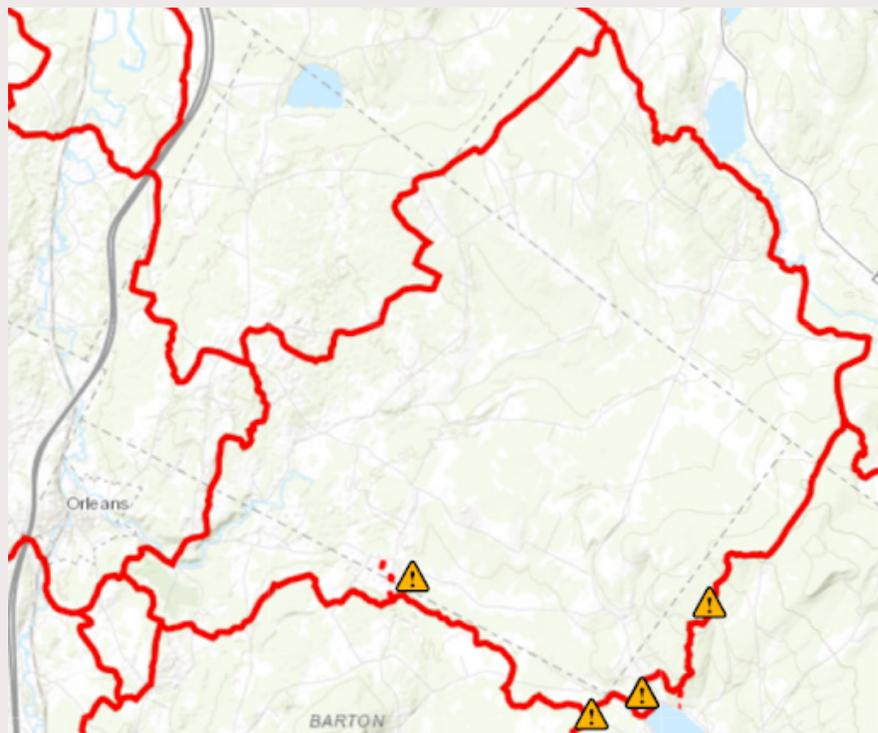
Map of Willoughby Fall Wildlife Management Area. Source: Vermont Fish & Wildlife

Village Center and along arterial roads for the community, the town could consider expanding the path network to Brownington Center, the Observatory, and more, provided with private access and coordination. This idea could alleviate pedestrians' co-mingling with automobiles on roads without sidewalks or safe speed limits.

The Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) trail network cuts between Brownington Village and Center, splitting near the Old Stone House Road. These trails also have connectivity potential to other uses, where the community is interested.

Overall, while the town possesses tremendous viewsheds, landscapes, intact forest lands, and waterways, Brownington could do more to showcase the region's beauty and celebrate its unique geographical standing between Lake Memphremagog and Lake Willoughby. Ideas such as developing an outdoor recreation committee, partnering with groups, and pursuing the outdoor recreation task force highlighted in Brownington Connects could begin bringing greater coordination to outdoor opportunities. Working with groups like the Stewardship Center, Ridgeline Outdoor Collective, and the Catamount Arts would be great ways to build external capacity. The appreciation of Brownington's beauty is a shared community value. The history of these places can be tied to the villages' scenic and natural resources.

As gatherings go, Brownington has a robust foundation of events to build from including Brownington Celebration Day, Old Stone House Day, summer music events, Green Up Day, pumpkin races, fishing derbies, kite festivals, and fall events. The planning commission is



Screenshot of VAST trails in & around Brownington. Source: <https://vtvast.org/trails.html>

interested in developing a town directory of events, businesses, and local offerings. The Brownington Grange Meeting is held the last Saturday of each month, with a potluck lunch at 12 p.m. followed by the meeting at 1 p.m. Arnold's Rescue Center has also been known to hold public gatherings. The community has shown interest in developing more kid-centric activities to build community and resilience among families.

Old Stone House Day, in mid-August, represents one of the Kingdom's biggest annual events with a farmer's market, picnic, kids' activities, live music, crafts demonstrations, and more. There are different annual themes, music, games, and events each year.

Goals:

- Maintain current land use patterns of residential and village-scale commercial development in and around Brownington's villages.
- Create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all newcomers to Brownington.
- Promote and enhance recreation opportunities for residents and visitors alike.
- Establish and sustain a culture of planning in Brownington.

Policies:

- New and substantially improved community gathering spaces should be located in or immediately adjacent to established centers of development.

Strategies:

- **Conduct an annual community planning outreach campaign to gauge progress and identify new issues. The campaign should include a community survey and an annual event, such as a communal meal.**
- **Create a community communications plan linked to the new Town website. Include regular online postings (such as Front Porch Forum) and a quarterly newsletter.**
- **Maintain Village Center Designation for Brownington Village and pursue Village Center Designation for Evansville. Educate the public, property owners, and local realtors on the benefits of Village Center Designation.**
- Beautify gateways to village areas with plantings, signage, and public art.
- Establish a Welcome Wagon committee for newcomers.
- Adopt an Equity Policy to guide public meetings and decision-making.
- Host an annual celebration accessible to all Brownington residents that incorporates recreation, such as a community sledding day or a fishing derby.
- Establish a recreation equipment lending library.

The bold type denotes a priority action. See the Implementation Plan.

Local Prosperity



Local Prosperity

Required Elements in this Section: Economic Development Plan, Housing Plan, Education Facilities Plan

A vision for Brownington is to build a prosperous community by leveraging its long-standing ties to the working landscape. We want to expand agriculture and food-related businesses, including farms, farm stands, food, dining, and agritourism in a manner that makes local and healthy foods more accessible to all. Existing businesses can be strengthened as well, especially through better telecommunications. The idea of Local prosperity also depends on creating an empowered workforce who can find a range of affordable housing options in Brownington, as well as access to vocational training and childcare opportunities. The following section lays out opportunities and ideas to meet these visions.

Building Tomorrow's Workforce

Brownington is a small rural town with a relatively small economy. According to the American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021, the town has a population of just over 1,000 people and covers an area of approximately 40 square miles. The racial and ethnic makeup of the town is predominantly White, with 98.2% of the population identifying as White alone. Other racial and ethnic groups make up less than 1% of the population.

In terms of age, the median age in Brownington is 38.5 years, with 8.0% of the population aged 65 years and over. The median household income in Brownington is \$53,690, which is below the state's median household income of \$67,674. The poverty rate in Brownington is estimated to be 9.8%, which is considerably higher than the state's poverty rate of 6.0%. The town's unemployment rate is estimated to be 4.7%, which is lower than the state's unemployment rate of 2.5%.

Employment and Industry

In terms of the economy, Brownington has a mix of industries, including agriculture and related businesses, tourism, home-based businesses, property management and short-term rentals, and small businesses. As of April 1, 2023, there were approximately fifty-five Brownington businesses registered

with the VT Secretary of State's Office. The most common trades reported by respondents to the 2022 survey of residents and taxpayers, Brownington, Vermont: Building Community One Neighbor at a Time, listed carpenter/builder, mechanic, logger, teacher/education, human services, and "retired".

According to the 2022 survey, the kinds of industries or businesses respondents would like to see in Brownington are farming/forestry, value-added agriculture processing, outdoor recreation, small retail, cottage industries/home-based businesses, hemp/cannabis cultivation, and tourism/hospitality. 35% of respondents said promoting local businesses is a town plan priority for them. The Planning Commission will continue to support this endeavor by building a business directory that is tailored for locals to use. Seeking Village Center designation at the Evansville Trading Post may give opportunity for entrepreneurship for local businesses as well.

Shopping and Dining

Survey respondents reported that they most frequently shop in Newport, Derby, Orleans, and Barton. When eating out, they cited Newport/Derby, Orleans, Lyndonville/St. Johnsbury, and Barton as the most common destinations. These responses reflect the fact that in Brownington there is one general store/gas station, the Evansville Trading Post; and one seasonal snack bar, the Will O Barn. The Gap Pub and Grill, just over the town line in Westmore, is a popular destination for locals, campers, snowmobilers, hikers, and visitors to Lake Willoughby.

Agriculture and Agritourism

Agriculture and forestry-related industries have been an important part of the economy and culture of Brownington throughout its history and remain a significant part of the local economy. The town has a rich farming history, and a few farmers continue to produce dairy products, beef, sheep, horses, hay, maple syrup, poultry, and eggs. There are several small-scale vegetable and fruit farms in Brownington that row a variety of crops, while some Brownington



farms have recently diversified into growing CBD hemp and marijuana. The Brownington farming community has grown significantly in the past few years as many Amish families have bought farms and returned them to production. Amish farm stands have become an attraction, especially famous for the donuts and quilts that are sold at the stands. The results of the 2022 survey of Brownington residents and taxpayers indicated that 35% feel that promoting agriculture is a town plan priority.

Tourism is an important industry in Brownington, and Agritourism could become an even more important factor in the Brownington economy. As described in the Vermont Food System Plan Agritourism Issue Brief, "Agritourism is a way for Vermont farms to differentiate themselves through authentic experiences that strengthen the Vermont brand and increase product sales."

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets works in partnership with public, private, and nonprofit entities to increase the economic impact of agritourism on the working landscape. Promoting agritourism would help to grow the economy of Brownington, could attract families to purchase homes here, and bring tourists to the area while respecting the desires of the townspeople to maintain Brownington as a “rural, quiet, beautiful, friendly, scenic, small-town” community.

Survey respondents felt that Brownington’s culture is defined by, among other things, “large blocks of forest/farmland, commitment to stewardship of the land, a sense of history, and outdoor recreation opportunities.”

Arnolds Rescue Center is a refuge for homeless or displaced horses and donkeys on 90 acres in Brownington. Arnold’s Rescue Center also serves as a breeding facility for the critically endangered Baudet du Poitou donkey. There are less than 500 Poitou’s left in the world. In June 2021, under the guidance of the University of Illinois, Arnolds, and Cold Hollow Vet in Enosburg Falls, Brownington welcomed the first artificially inseminated Baudet du Poitou baby in the world. The barn at Arnold’s Rescue Center is often used for benefit dinners and a weekend farmer’s market.

The Kingdom’s Horse Drawn Wagon Rides has become a popular destination for locals, tourists, and school groups. Many people travel to Brownington to catch a glimpse of an Amish buggy or to purchase Amish baked goods. Sugar houses are popular destinations, while farm stands and orchards draw both locals and tourists.



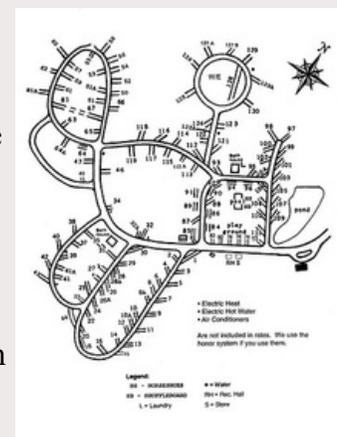
There are numerous farms in Brownington that raise horses, broiler chickens, turkeys, replacement heifers, and beef cattle, as well as those that produce maple products, fresh eggs, apples, bedding plants and vegetable starts, pumpkins, and a variety of seasonal vegetables, among other agricultural products. Travelers on Route 58 (Evansville Road) are treated to the bucolic sight of the sheep grazing.

Tourism and Recreation

Brownington is home to several historical sites, including the Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village, which opened in 1925. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the museum chronicles the history of Northern Vermont through its collections, exhibits, events, and educational programs. A featured stop on Vermont's African American Heritage Trail, the museum tells the story of African American Alexander Lucius Twilight. Mr. Twilight was the first African-American college graduate and state legislator in the United States, and he built the namesake Old Stone House which he called Athenian Hall. The museum also hosts events and workshops throughout the year, attracting visitors from around the state and beyond.

Will-O-Wood Campground hosts vacationers and seasonal campers every summer, featuring more than 125 sites. There are a few additional campsites offered by Brownington families, as well as at least eight short-term rental units in the town.

Brownington's natural beauty and rural setting provide ample opportunities for recreation all year round. The town offers a slower pace of life and access to outdoor recreational activities that many individuals find desirable. Brownington benefits from its location in the Northeast Kingdom, including its proximity to Willoughby Lake. Kayaking, canoeing, boating, and swimming are popular summer activities. The town is located near several popular outdoor recreational areas, including Willoughby State Forest, Jay Peak, Burke Mountain, and Kingdom Trails, which offer opportunities for hiking, biking, downhill skiing snowboarding, and cross-country skiing. Hunting, ice fishing, and ATV riding are activities that attract visitors to the town and are enjoyed by many seasonal and year-round residents, though many respondents to the survey expressed concern about the use of ATVs on the trails. Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) trails run through many parts of Brownington and are traveled by thousands of riders every winter. There are three nearby golf courses and others within 45 minutes. According to Brownington, Vermont: Building Community One Neighbor at a Time, in the 2022 survey of Brownington residents and taxpayers, 55% regularly take advantage of recreation opportunities in Brownington.



Many respondents indicated they would like to see more recreation trail systems developed in the town to provide additional options for hiking, biking, walking, trail-riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and “getting to the neighbors.” A common theme from the survey was that many people do not feel safe walking or riding horses on the roads in Brownington, as there is no posted speed limit in town. Vehicles, including large trucks, often exceed the state’s 50 mph speed limit for rural roads.

Title 23 V.S.A. Section 1007 authorizes the local governing body to establish effective and enforceable speed limits on town highways at not more than 50 MPH or less than 25 MPH and to do so on the basis of a traffic engineering investigation or study. The Selectboard and Brownington Connects are working with the State of Vermont to conduct traffic studies and eventually propose speed limits. The Selectboard has taken responsibility for this endeavor and has the desire to set speed limits that reflect the needs of the residents for safety. Numerous Amish reside in Brownington. Amish do not use motorized vehicles but rather walking and horse-driven transportation are relied upon. Residents in Brownington routinely drive to locate safe areas for walking or to exercise dogs because of unsafe speeds being driven on the primary town roads. **Results of the 2022 town plan survey showed that speeding was the #1 concern of the residents.**

Employment and Commuting

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, some of the most common occupations of Brownington residents include:

- Management, business, and financial occupations
- Sales and related occupations
- Education, training, and library occupations
- Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations
- Production, transportation, and material moving occupations
- Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations
- Office and administrative support occupations
- Food preparation and serving-related occupations
- Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations
- Personal care and service occupations

One of the main employers in Brownington is the Brownington Central School, which serves approximately 110 students in grades K-8. The school employs a number of teachers, administrators, and support staff.

Commuting is an important aspect of the economy in Brownington, as many residents work outside of the town in nearby larger towns, including Newport, Derby, Barton, Lyndonville, and St. Johnsbury. Some residents may also commute further distances for work, to larger cities like Burlington or Montpelier.

The town is located along Route 58, which provides access to these larger cities and other employment centers in the region. There is also easy access to Interstate 91. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2019 the average commute time for workers in Brownington was approximately 30 minutes. This is slightly higher than the average commute time for workers in Vermont as a whole, which was around 24 minutes.



The majority of employed Brownington residents commute to work in healthcare, social services, education, and other service-related industries. These jobs may include positions in nursing, counseling, teaching, or social work, among others.

Remote and Home-based Work

While many residents of Brownington commute to work, there are also opportunities for remote work and self-employment. In recent years, there has been a trend towards telecommuting and flexible work arrangements, which has allowed more residents to work from home or start their own businesses in Brownington. This trend has resulted in an increase in home-based businesses, such as consulting, freelancing, and online businesses. This trend is expected to continue in the coming years, as more employers offer remote work options and as technology continues to advance. Many areas of Brownington currently have limited access to high-speed internet and cell service. According to the 2022 survey, 50% of respondents indicated that they have adequate cell phone coverage. 71% of respondents said they have adequate internet access. 60% indicated that they would or might work from home if they had adequate cell and internet service. 40% of respondents said improving telecommunications should be a focus of the Brownington town plan. In the 2022 Census, 10 people reported working from home, while in the 2022 survey, 32.3% of respondents (31 people) reported working from home.

AT&T and Verizon are the primary providers of cell service in the area. Some residents have access to internet services provided by Consolidated Communications. In addition, some residents may be able to access satellite internet service, which can provide higher speeds but may be more expensive and may have data usage limits. The town is a member of NEK Broadband, a Communications Union District (CUD), a municipal entity building high-speed broadband internet infrastructure for underserved communities in the NEK.

Overall, while the job market in Brownington may be somewhat limited due to the town's size and rural location, many residents are able to find employment opportunities that meet their needs. According to the 2020 US Census, of the civilian employed population 16 years and over: 136 Brownington residents are employed in sales and office occupations; 123 in natural resources, construction, and maintenance; 108 in management, business, science, and arts; and 91 in service occupations. The numbers by specific industry include 134 in educational services, health care, and social services; 97 in manufacturing; 72 in construction; 62 in retail trade; 38 in arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodations and food services; 29 in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining; 25 in professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services; 22 in public administration; 21 in transportation and warehousing, and utilities; 17 in finance and insurance, and real estate and rental; 14 in other services, except public administration; and four in the wholesale trade.

Vocational Training Opportunities

While there may not be vocational training opportunities directly available in Brownington, there are several options within a reasonable distance that residents can take advantage of to gain the skills and knowledge needed for their chosen careers or to explore a change of career.

North Country Career Center is a regional technical education center, based at North Country Union High School in Newport, which serves students from several surrounding towns, including Brownington.



NCCC Adult Education Program offers a variety of adult education programs designed to help individuals improve their skills, knowledge, and career prospects. The programs are designed to meet the diverse needs of adult learners and are taught by experienced and knowledgeable instructors.

NCCC offers a variety of programs and services to its students, including:

- **Career and Technical Education (CTE):** programs in fields such as agriculture, automotive technology, building trades, culinary arts, health sciences, and welding.
- **Adult education and workforce development:** a variety of adult education and workforce development programs, including high school completion programs, English language classes, and workforce training programs in fields such as healthcare and manufacturing.
- **Workforce Training Programs:** a variety of workforce training programs designed to help individuals acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to enter or advance in the workforce. These programs include training in fields such as healthcare, manufacturing, and hospitality.
- **Personal Enrichment Courses:** a variety of personal enrichment courses, including courses in art, cooking, and music. These courses provide individuals with the opportunity to explore new interests and hobbies while also developing new skills.
- **Apprenticeship programs:** NCCC partners with local businesses and industry organizations to offer apprenticeship programs in fields such as electrical work, plumbing, and HVAC.
- **College and career counseling:** NCCC provides counseling and support to students who are planning to pursue higher education or enter the workforce after graduation.

Overall, the North Country Career Center offers a variety of programs and services that can be beneficial to residents of Brownington who are looking to gain new skills, pursue higher education, enter the workforce, or change occupations.

The Community College of Vermont has multiple campuses throughout the state. The nearest campus to Brownington is in Newport, approximately 20 miles away. The college offers a variety of vocational training programs, including healthcare, business, manufacturing, and computer technology. Some of the classes offered at the Newport location of CCV include:

- **Business Administration:** Provides students with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in a variety of business settings, including management, accounting, and marketing.
- **Criminal Justice:** Prepares students for careers in law enforcement, corrections, and the legal system.
- **Early Childhood Education:** Prepares students for careers working with young children by providing them with knowledge and skills in child development, curriculum design, and classroom management.
- **Environmental Science:** Provides students with an understanding of environmental issues and the skills and knowledge necessary to work in fields related to environmental science.
- **Human Services:** Prepares students for careers in social work, counseling, and other human services fields.

NVU-Lyndon offers a wide range of options for those wishing to pursue a degree, change professions, or simply supplement their learning:

- **Continuing Education:** Individual courses for college credit but not toward a degree or certificate.

- Campus Degree Programs: Students may complete a bachelor's or master's degree while taking courses on campus. Weekday and evening courses are available, along with a Master of Fine Arts degree in studio arts.
- NVU Online: Eleven 100% online degrees and certificate programs, allow enrollees to start or complete a degree in a flexible, affordable way.
- Certificates: Students may take a cluster of courses that introduce them to the fundamentals of a discipline but do not confer a degree. Certificates are available in accounting, small business management, sustainability, and advanced graduate studies.
- Center for Professional Studies: Non-degree education such as certificate and licensure programs through both traditional learning and online platforms.

Northeast Kingdom Learning Services (NEKLS) offers adult education and literacy services that include high school credentialing programs for adults sixteen and older, the GED, Vermont's High School Completion Program, transition services, college and career preparation, workforce readiness, workforce development, basic computer skills, and English as a Second Language, working cooperatively with North Country Career Center, Community College of Vermont, and other partners in the region. NEKLS offers a variety of services either on an ongoing basis or as needed:

- Workplace skills training
- CDL courses
- Financial literacy
- Support with the transition to employment
- Support with transition to higher education including preparation for entrance and placement tests

HireAbility VT, formerly the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, is an employment and career development resource for Vermonters living with a disability. They connect employees with local employers eager to find talented workers, and provide ongoing support to help ensure continued success on the job:

- Vocational counseling
- Assessment tools to help choose a new career
- Work incentives counseling
- Transition services for youth and young adults
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Vermonters
- Job placement and retention services
- Assistive Technology to help with accommodations and adaptations
- Post-employment support

There are several other colleges and vocational training centers in the region, including:

- Vermont State Colleges Continuing Education & Workforce Development Vermont State Colleges offer continuing education courses, professional skills building, and traditional degree programs. Vermont State Colleges System (VSCS) can prepare both traditional college-age students for their future careers as well as upskilling and reskilling Vermonters already in the workforce today.
- VTC Healthcare
- St. Johnsbury Academy
- Lyndon Institute Career & Technical Education Center
- Canaan School CTE Program
- Sterling College School of the New American Farmstead

These institutions offer a variety of vocational training programs, including nursing, automotive technology, electrical engineering, and more.

Daily life for contemporary families and professionals, whether for work, entertainment, or decision-making, occurs through reliable broadband connectivity. Remote work and social connections have increased due to needed behavioral changes due to COVID-19. Although not a direct catalyst for growth, broadband internet enables greater access for small communities to education services, healthcare, jobs, and other vital resources.

Improving Telecommunications and Broadband Infrastructure

At the end of June 2023, The Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB) announced that the State of Vermont will receive \$229 million in federal funding to expand high-speed broadband access. The Vermont Council on Rural Development works directly with the Northeast Kingdom, currently working with Glover, Greensboro, Lunenburg, Newark, and Westmore. The NEK Collaborative, a non-profit that is committed to furthering the quality of life for the region through community and economic development, is sponsoring the NEK Broadband Project. The Planning Commission for Brownington is committed to increasing the take rate of broadband for the town to gain greater priority in receiving more reliable broadband. Residents can pre-register their address to increase such support and priority here.

School-age Children and Childcare

According to the Census Bureau, there were 502 households in Brownington in 2019. Of those households, approximately 100 had at least one child under the age of 18 living in the home. While not all of these households may have a parent in the workforce, it is likely that a significant portion of them do. This data is based on households rather than individual workers, and it may not reflect the exact number of workers in Brownington who have school-age children. However, it does provide some indication that there is a portion of the town's population that may be balancing work and childcare responsibilities. The availability of quality childcare can have a significant impact on the local economy. Because there are few childcare providers in the town, access to affordable and reliable childcare can be a challenge for some families.

Licensed Childcare Providers

According to the Vermont Department for Children and Families Child Care Information System, there are currently two licensed childcare providers in Brownington, Kim Riendeau on Evansville Road and Katherine Douglas on Parker Road. There are additional registered infant, toddler, and preschool home providers within six miles of Brownington: Katherine Boivin on South Avenue and Francine Quintal on North Avenue, both in Orleans; Jennifer Lamoureux in Charleston, as well as Traci Horner and Michelle Gilcris in Barton. These providers offer care for children ranging in age from infants to school-age children.

Taking a wider view, according to the Census there are approximately 40 infants and toddlers registered home daycares within 20 miles of Brownington. Families often find that there are no slots available at these providers and are placed on a waiting list. This can have a huge impact on the family's income. 56% of those responding to the 2022 survey indicated that they do not have access to adequate childcare. There are, however, some other options for families that may help with childcare, such as Universal Prekindergarten (UPK).

Universal Prekindergarten (UPK)

Universal Prekindergarten (UPK), Act 166 of 2014, provides Vermont families with publicly funded prekindergarten education for their children. UPK is funded by school districts and is voluntary for families. UPK programs are located in public schools or community-based programs. In Vermont, school districts must offer pre-kindergarten for at least 10 hours per week, 35 weeks per year. Some public schools offer more than the 10-hour per-week minimum at no extra charge.

Children who are three, four, or five years old and not enrolled in kindergarten in their district of residence may attend any UPK program in Vermont that has openings. There are public UPKs at all nine North Country Supervisory Union elementary schools (Brighton, Charleston, Coventry, Derby, Jay-Westfield, Newport City, Newport Town, and Troy) as well as four registered private providers within a 20-mile radius of Brownington.

For Brownington, the district UPK is located at the Central Orleans Family Education Center (COFEC) in Barton. The Orleans Central Early Childhood Program (OCECP) is a collaboration between the Orleans Central Supervisory Union and the Northeast Kingdom Head Start/Early Head Start Program. The program offers a four-hour, part-day program for three-year-olds, and a "full school day" program for four-year-olds, five days a week.

Brownington After School Program

The Brownington After School Program runs for two hours, Monday – Thursday, from 3:30-5:30. During the program hours, there is a half-hour of wellness/physical activities outside or inside (weather depending), fifteen minutes of a nutritional snack, and one hour of a daily activity such as knitting, chess, cooking, arts and crafts, music, outside games, snowshoeing, arts, etc.

During the summer, the school offers four weeks (Monday - Thursday, 8:00-3:00) of enriching activities both on and off campus. The OCSU After School and Summer Program, which includes the Brownington program, is studying ways to improve the program, which may include offering

programming during school vacations and/or transportation after programming via bussing.

To address the need for childcare in the region, the state of Vermont has several programs and initiatives aimed at supporting families and providers. For example, the Child Care Financial Assistance Program provides financial assistance to eligible families to help cover the cost of childcare. Building Bright Futures (BBF) is a nonprofit organization working to improve the well-being of young children and families in Vermont. The state also offers grants and training programs to help childcare providers improve the quality of their services.

While the availability of childcare in Brownington may be limited, the town's location and access to larger cities and towns in the region may provide more options for families seeking childcare. Additionally, there may be opportunities for new childcare providers to establish businesses in the town, particularly as the demand for childcare continues to grow.

Overall, the availability of quality childcare is an important consideration for families in Brownington, and the town and state should continue to invest in programs and initiatives aimed at supporting families and providers in the region.

The Future of the Economy of Brownington

One of the factors that may impact the town's economic growth and development in the coming years is the increasing demand for rural living and outdoor recreational opportunities, which could attract more residents and visitors to the area. Additionally, the town's location in the Northeast Kingdom region of Vermont, which has seen some recent growth in industries such as renewable energy and sustainable agriculture, may create new economic opportunities for Brownington in these sectors. However, like many small rural towns, Brownington may face challenges in attracting and retaining businesses and young workers, which could impact its long-term economic growth. Overall, the future of Brownington's economy will likely depend on a variety of local and regional factors and may evolve in unpredictable ways over time.

Village Center Designation

Brownington Center is designated as a Village Center by the State of Vermont. Brownington could benefit by gaining Vermont's Village Center Designation (VCD) for Evansville. VCD is a state program that provides a range of benefits to communities that are designated as "Village Centers." Some of the benefits of VCD designation include:

Tax Credits: Property owners in designated Village Centers are eligible for state and federal tax credits for certain rehabilitation and improvement projects.

Priority Funding: Communities with VCD designation are given priority consideration for certain state and federal grant programs, such as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.

Technical Assistance: Village Center communities are eligible for technical assistance from state agencies and non-profit organizations to help with planning, development, and other related activities.

Promotion: Village Centers are promoted by the state as unique and important places to live, work, and visit, which can help attract new residents, businesses, and tourists to the area.

Overall, the Village Center Designation program is designed to help promote economic development, historic preservation, and community revitalization in Vermont's small towns and villages. Many Brownington residents feel that the “World Famous” Evansville Trading Post could be revitalized through the Village Center designation. The Evansville Trading Post is an old-fashioned general store on Route 58 and has served the community for decades since it was founded by the late Ralph Swett in 1985. It is a gathering spot for both residents and visitors. Shoppers can buy gas, groceries, hardware, animal feeds, housewares, and gifts, including Native American crafts. They can redeem returnable bottles and lottery tickets, register the deer they shot, or get cash from the ATM. It is one of the true general stores of the area.

Community Center

Many of those who responded to the 2022 survey said they would like to see a community center created in Brownington, to help bring the townspeople together. The survey was titled Brownington, Vermont: Building Community One Neighbor at a Time because many planning commission members felt that we had lost the connection to our neighbors. The town is geographically spread out and includes three village-type centers, with no place to gather that can accommodate a fair number of people. The community center could host meetings, workshops, classes, a food shelf, and events, could include play and picnic areas, and could serve as a hub for the community. If established in Evansville, the Village Center designation could make it possible to receive grants to help with construction. It has also been suggested that the community center could be attached to or in the vicinity of the town clerk’s office. A community center could serve as a draw to families considering purchasing a home in Brownington, which would have a positive effect on the town’s economy.

Any attempt to apply for Village Center designation at the Evansville Trading Post would further statewide goals of supporting the revitalization efforts of small and medium-sized historic centers. The subsequent potential purchase would be done *only* through non-municipal means, as Brownington Connects is currently attempting to acquire non-profit status in order to manage and facilitate grants and other sources of funding. Under no circumstance would the town acquire the property.

Instead, the newly formed Brownington Community Trust will spearhead the endeavor through the pursuit of external sources of funding by seeking grants and donations. As the process unfolds, they will continue to engage the community and ensure questions are answered and uncertainty is addressed in order to receive the backing and support of Brownington residents.

There are other state-level and regional programs and resources that businesses and entrepreneurs in Brownington can take advantage of, including:

- Vermont Employment Growth Incentive (VEGI): Provides financial incentives to businesses that create new, full-time jobs in Vermont.
- Vermont Training Program (VTP): Provides grants to businesses to help offset the costs of training new and existing employees.

- Vermont Small Business Development Center (VTSBDC): Offers a variety of services to help small businesses in Vermont start, grow, and succeed.
- Vermont Business Assistance Network (VBAN): Provides resources and assistance to entrepreneurs and small businesses throughout Vermont.
- Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA): As the Regional Planning Commission, NVDA assists municipalities, organizations, committees, and individuals with a wide variety of planning and technical services. NVDA works on infrastructure improvements, assists companies relocating to the area, helps existing businesses to grow, and administers revolving loan funds.

Protecting Brownington from Unwanted Growth

Many people responding to the 2022 survey, as well as attendees at the community brunch and members of the Brownington Connects organization, have expressed a strong desire to protect the town from the possibility of undesirable or hazardous businesses. Brownington has prided itself on the fact that there is no zoning, but the possibility of a large industrial project is unsettling to many residents. The town has a strong sense of community and commitment to preserving its rural character. Many respondents to the survey, and attendees at the brunch, commented that they value the scenic views that surround the town in almost every direction.

When asked in the 2022 survey, “What do you like about living in Brownington?”, the top responses were:

- Quiet | Rural | Small town | Neighbors | No zoning | Beautiful

Overall, while there may be limited economic development incentives available specifically to businesses in Brownington, there are resources and programs available at the state level that can help support business growth and development in the town.

Housing

Brownington has experienced a moderate increase in housing development on a private lot scale. It has also experienced an increase in larger household sizes and an increase in the youth population, suggesting that families have a desire to live and raise children here. Housing value does seem to be increasing over the last decade, and there has been a greater demand for renter-occupied units. Given the distance between lots and the lack of everyday services nearby, establishing new occupancy as well as aging in place presents its own challenges.

The median house value of an owner-occupied unit in Brownington is \$141,600, with a median household income of \$53,690. The median gross rent is \$1,008.

Housing availability is extremely limited in Brownington, despite roughly 25% of the housing stock being vacant for seasonal or secondary home purposes. While there has been some multi-unit development in the last decade, by and large owners and renters are unable to seek alternative

housing to meet their needs. There are 222 more people with 48 new housing units since 2010. However, using the 2021 household size of 2.8, that new housing inventory (48) would accommodate 134 people. Since more people have moved to Brownington than the growth of housing units, this represents a housing availability strain.

As the Town's population has increased in the last few years, so has the acreage in residential properties. More people are moving here with the ability to invest, and newcomers with such an ability are currently free to develop their land as they see fit in Brownington. This trend has seen a decrease in farmland and woodland as a result of property owners shifting the use of their land into residential ownership. In particular, Brownington has lost almost 1,000 acres of forested land since 2005 from land parcels greater than 50 acres. This means that large properties that were once woodlands are becoming divided and curated for residential dwellings.

Brownington is becoming attractive to people with families (an 82% increase in population of 17 and younger), as well as households with a higher median income (a 45% increase in households with a household median income of \$60,000 or more). Whether the two are related or from the same household is undetermined. However, given the lack of social amenities, lack of reliable wireless internet for the increase in remote working, and overall availability of affordable housing in the current stock of housing, there is a general lack of attraction to the area for people with less financial assets and capital.

This is evidenced by disparate trends of increased mobile homes as housing structures (an increase of 31 since 2010), and an increase of house value of \$300,000 or more (38 more homes since 2010).

While people are free to do with their land as they see fit, it is apparent that what's being developed is not in the interests of creating housing that is affordable or attainable for working family residents. Since it is in the community's interest to remain rural, general new development on any scale beyond that of a single-family dwelling will likely draw resistance from the community.

While there is an increase in residents with higher incomes, more residents are also cost-burdened (more than 30% of their household income goes to monthly owner costs) and more are considered below the poverty level. Given the clear tug-and-pull nature of these issues and trends that Brownington is experiencing, it is unlikely that these situations will change anytime soon with any one magic decision. Working families are at threat of being pushed out due to increased costs and lack of choices, and there are acute social needs beyond housing that make implementing viable strategies a challenge with the availability of resources. Associated costs can include gas consumption from increased travel times to work or childcare, utility rates, food insecurity, and more.

We in Brownington believe our trajectory to be better built up rather than out, meaning that we support the residents we have in their housing stability before considering developing new housing. By turn, our hope is that greater stability will be seen as an attraction for more young working families to offer vitality and community spirit in the future.

Until these current needs of the existing community are addressed, and services and infrastructure have been established for future housing growth/production, it is not in the best interests of the community to seek new development. Therefore, this section would like to promote addressing greater housing security through local prosperity. By continuing to attract young families who wish to raise children in our beautiful landscape, we hope to attract the right investment.

S100 Housing Bill

In June of 2023, the State of Vermont passed Senate Bill 100, or Housing Opportunities Made for Everyone (HOME) Act, which requires towns to address the missing middle housing in Vermont. The goal of the act is to enable new opportunities for housing developments that meet local needs while removing exclusionary language in housing development. While a summary of the bill can be reviewed [here](#), some changes include:

- Municipalities cannot require more than one parking space per unit
- Municipalities must allow duplexes and multi-unit dwellings where single-unit homes are allowed.
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) must not be more restrictive than single-unit homes
- Requirements and allowances in areas served by municipal water and wastewater

The bill is intended to support private and public middle-market housing as well as support ADU's consideration to expand housing options and stability for all Vermonters.

Attracting Families to Brownington

Brownington hopes to attract more working families that aim to utilize their lands as working lands (farming, agriculture, forestry, silviculture, etc.). We hope to build back our demand to be an educational bastion as we once were in our history by being an enviable place to raise your children. We hope and encourage those who were raised and have familial ties and take care of their familial land and would like to attract people who wish to know their neighbors.

Brownington has a rich rural quality that is rarely matched, along with a history that is tied to its built environment. By continuing to support what has always been, we intend to grow within the town's own identity.

Goals:

- Retain the town's rural character and maintain the viability of its working lands.
- Encourage the sale of local food and forestry products.
- Improve telecommunications.
- Build a working relationship with regional and statewide economic development officials.
- Make Brownington more welcoming to the region's workforce by improving housing stock and availability of childcare.

Policies:

- The Town encourages the use of non-regulatory tools to preserve the economic viability of working lands, such as enrollment in the Current Use Program and the pursuit of conservation easements through the Vermont Land Trust.
- The Town prioritizes the use of local foods when hosting public events.

Strategies

- Rebuild and rebrand the Greater Brownington Business Association and create a communications network to publicize grants, low-interest financing, and technical assistance opportunities for working lands businesses.
- Build a pamphlet directory that supplies information on local and regional social services.
- Continue to participate in NEK Broadband, the local communications union district.
- Promote opportunities to improve rental housing through tax incentives, such as the Village Center Designation program.
- Create a task force to identify and enhance after-school programming opportunities.
- Establish a babysitter training and certification program for Brownington's student-age population.
- Establish a local food pantry.
- Support the school's ongoing participation in Green Mountain Farm to School.
- **Identify resources to improve housing stock for seniors, young families, and other households that may face income challenges. Publicize the availability of these resources, which include USDA Rural Development, HEAT Squad, and Habitat for Humanity. Research other funding sources for improving housing stock.**
- Establish a local resource for our neighbors in need (eg. The Good Neighbor Fund in Barnet and Craftsbury Neighbor to Neighbor)
- **Bold type denotes a priority action. See the Implementation Plan.**

A Sense of Stewardship



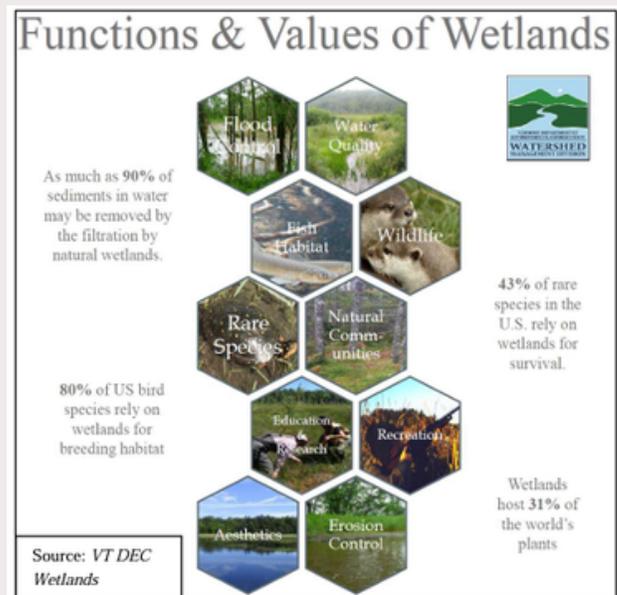
A Sense of Stewardship

Required Elements in this Section: Priority Habitat and Forest Blocks, Rare & Irreplaceable Natural Areas, Scenic and Historic Resources

Building our community will require an ongoing sense of stewardship – a commitment to preserve and protect the integrity of our wildlife habitat, air and water quality, scenic viewsheds, and historic structures. We view our Town as an example of natural beauty that will continue to attract visitors and newcomers, as well as new economic opportunities, for generations to come.

Water Quality in Brownington

The wetlands in Brownington provide natural filters for the community's spring-fed water sources. They serve to control flooding, minimize erosion, and offer unique habitats and ecosystems. Wetlands are natural climate mitigators and support carbon sequestration. Additionally, smaller wetlands can support adjacent agricultural growth by their nutrient processing of nitrogen and phosphorus. Wetlands are often described as the kidneys of the landscape. More on their functions and values can be read [here](#). The [Vermont Agency of Natural Resources \(ANR\)](#) wetland inventory map records 1,023 acres of woody wetland and 24 acres of emergent herbaceous wetlands, roughly 5.7% of Brownington's land cover.



Many of the town and region's recreational opportunities - such as hunting, fishing, birding, and paddling - depend on healthy wetland habitats. In 2018, the Vermont Forest Partnership valued wetland acreage at approximately \$590/acre from all their natural uses and services.

The main location of Brownington's wetlands is the drainage east of Brownington Pond, a large section of multiple tracts where Moody Brook is between Chilafoux Road and Pepin Road, along Bassett Brook between Ticehurst Road and Chilafoux Road, and in the southeast corner where Willoughby River runs south of Evansville Road

Tactical Basin Plan (TBP)

Brownington's watershed lies within the Basin 17 Lake Memphremagog, Tomifobia, and Coaticook Tactical Basin Plan (TBP). Brownington plays an integral role in watershed quality in the basin, being smack in the middle and the main receiver from Lake Memphremagog, meaning that the heavy phosphorus loads from the lake head directly into Brownington's local watershed. Vermont's ANR has identified 15 planning basins (or watersheds) throughout the state to help build capacity and coordination of understanding watershed flow and therefore protecting healthy surface waters. The basin planning process includes 5 major steps:

1. Monitoring water quality
2. Assessing and analyzing water quality data
3. Identifying strategies and projects to protect and restore waters
4. Seeking public comment and developing the plan
5. Implementing and tracking plan priorities (which is ongoing throughout the planning cycle)

Basin 17 plan sets priorities for meeting phosphorus load reduction targets by nearly 29% and to address high-priority stressors to achieve sustained ecological health from pollution runoff and other factors.

How this plan relates to and affects Brownington includes managing the Eurasian water milfoil in Brownington Pond, assessing the pond's water quality from the lake scorecard, and creating assessment goals by evaluating nutrient loads and finding a Lay Monitoring Program (LMP) volunteer. The TBP has specifically identified the lower reaches of the Brownington Branch and Willoughby Rivers in Brownington as sites for stream geomorphic assessments, which could make great strides in determining future flooding, fluvial erosion, and water quality for the town.

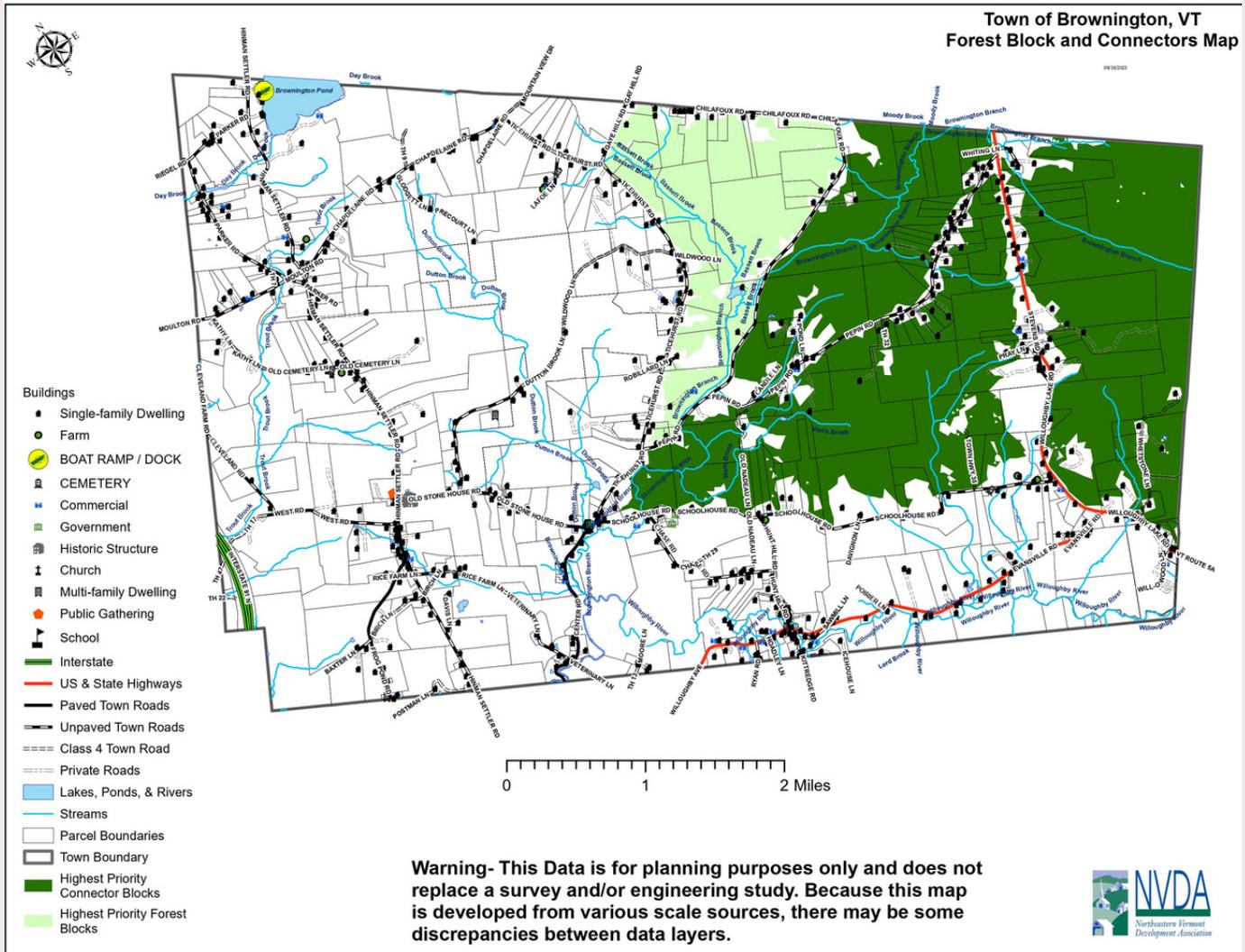
Brownington also contains roughly 18 miles of hydrologically connected road segments, which are shown in the image above, from the Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP).

These are roads that drain directly into the basin, affecting water quality through nutrient loading and runoff pollution. There are numerous water quality grants that municipalities can pursue to improve municipal roadways.

Currently, there is one proposed Clean Water Project in Brownington, on Dane Hill Road, that hopes to stabilize road washout and add water bars and stone-lined ditches.

Priority Habitat & Forest Blocks

Brownington’s municipal boundaries contain an abundance of forested habitats and priority wildlife landscapes. Of the 18,232 acres within town boundaries, approximately 9,600 acres are considered forest blocks, and about 4,400 acres are surface water and riparian areas. According to the Vermont Land Trust’s database, Brownington has seven conserved properties totaling 990.90 acres. The land includes a mix of farms and forests ranging between 100-200 acres.



Intact forestlands provide a wealth of biodiversity for wildlife species, and migration for new habitats, and are a vital source of carbon sequestration in the adaptation to a warming climate. They also provide integral economic and recreational value for the community and are cherished within Brownington’s community values. The Town is committed to protecting and preserving such habitats while providing access to working forests.

In the previous Town Plan, the following goals were identified in the Goals and Objectives:

C. To retain the town’s rural character and its economic base of working farms and productive forests without hampering the landowner’s ability to profit from either the use or sale of his or her assets.

1. Encourage stewardship of the town's natural resources through information and education.
2. Investigate the use of subdivision regulations to preserve parcel sizes that are economically viable for farm and forest uses.
3. Promote viability of resources through promotion of Current Use, Vermont Land Trust, and local Vermont products.

2022 survey respondents felt that Brownington's culture is defined by, among other things, "large blocks of forest/farmland, commitment to stewardship of the land, a sense of history, and outdoor recreation opportunities."

In 2018, Act 171 was passed by State legislation, which requires town plans to identify important areas of forest blocks and habitat connectors and plan for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation. The Town Plan must highlight and consider the protection of locally significant forest blocks and habitat connectors. The Town will investigate the community active management strategies of these areas regarding development, protection, logging, timber production, recreation, and overall wildlife habitats.

The Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) "Biofinder" is a mapping tool that provides critical insight into the ecological function of unfragmented forest blocks, which provide core habitat as well as vital connectivity to larger forest blocks beyond town boundaries. They may be viewed [here](#).

Brownington, in particular, is a community in transition, as evidenced by its subdivision patterns identified in the previous town plan. It has the potential to create and maintain forest connectivity across three other counties and greater north-south connectivity in the region. Adversely, losing intact forest land within Brownington would both isolate and compromise adjacent forest block ecosystems while minimizing the pastoral and scenic quality of the village. As landowners continue to subdivide large acres of land due to large-lot rural residential development, new homeowners are able to develop as they please without any element of forest regulation or protection, resulting in the direct loss of core forest habitat.

A tool for assessing land fragmentation is offered by the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC). The VT Parcelization Website includes a series of interactive reports that allow you to select and visualize a range of metrics between 2004 and 2020. Their dataset shows that Brownington has lost about 850 acres (a 55% loss) of woodlands in that timeframe, including a 14% reduction of land parcels larger than 100 acres. In this same timeframe, land values have increased by 82%. More information can be found [here](#).

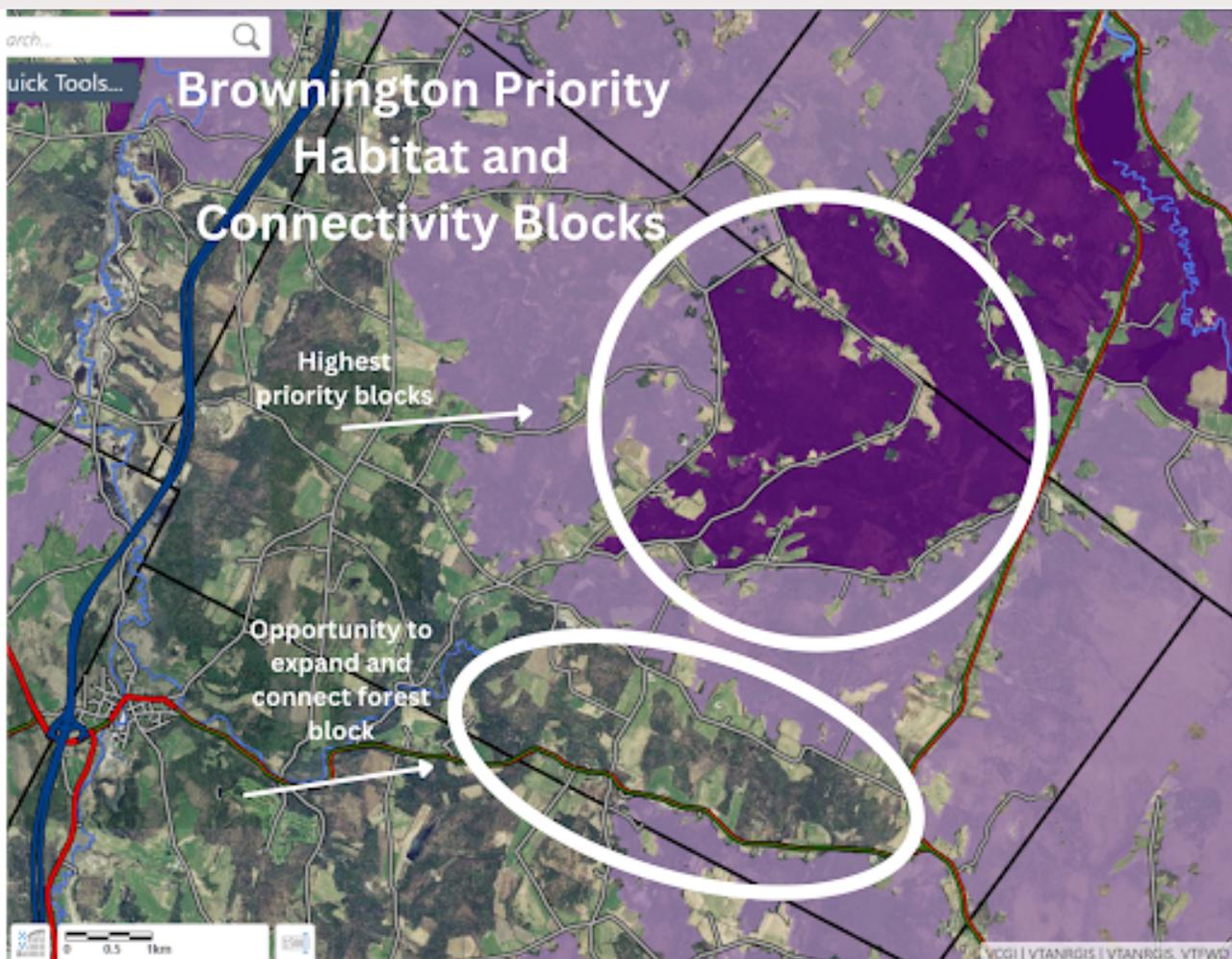
The loss of forests and their benefits reduces the overall sustainability and resiliency of habitat communities both near and far from the forest. In the short term, forest loss results in a reduction of economic goods and services, wildlife habitat, recreation enjoyment, and flood mitigation capabilities. In the long term, carbon sequestration, species migration, and climate change mitigation benefits are irreparably lost.

Connectivity blocks are required to ensure that various habitats can be accessed by species that require a wider range of resource gathering. When development occurs within a forest block, the size and configuration of the formerly contiguous area change. More forest edges are created and thus core forest is lost, reducing the genetic exchange of species populations.

Using [BioFinder](#), there are two large swaths of highest priority blocks centered among priority blocks in the north and southeast corners of municipal boundaries. The larger of the two is connected with forests in Charleston and is further recorded as the highest-priority connectivity block. This interior forest block, spanning 1,084 acres, is located on Ticehurst Road, Gaye Hill Rd, and Chilafoux Road.

Losing these priority habitat blocks in Brownington (and in Charleston) will widen the gap of forest lands between the Green Mountains to the west and the Northern Appalachians to the northeast, further isolating and receding each respective forest range. Maintaining and growing these priority habitat blocks may create the potential to conjoin these two large forests, creating resilience among ecosystems across the State of Vermont and beyond.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to establish forest connectivity in land parcels between Schoolhouse Road and Evansville Road. Working with multiple landowners to create stronger north-to-south habitat connectivity between these roads will be a first priority for the town to consider.



Source: BioFinder

The goals for Brownington should be to:

- a) maintain the health and viability of existing priority habitat, and
- b) build “micro-connectors” across fragmented parcels of land.

The Town of Brownington could develop a mapping committee whose focus is to coordinate and support these multiple forest tracts and their landowners towards a workable strategy or strategies that align with shared community values and raise awareness.

Contiguous habitats can include working forests. Through the use of forest planning, management, and best practices both goals of working forest lands and wildlife habitat with contiguous forest habitat blocks can be met together. Regardless of the method, it is crucial to identify and protect habitats that are key to the distribution and abundance of priority species.

By creating strategies for a more connective habitat, forests and species are more protected, climate resilience is increased, and stewardship of the land is enhanced. However, without the Town establishing regulation guidelines regarding development patterns or subdivisions, forested areas are at the mercy of cooperation from new and existing landowners’ development wishes. Some non-regulatory strategies Brownington can consider are:

- *Create a Town Forest* - Municipalities may designate land they own (and acquire land to designate) as municipal forest land. They may be managed for a variety of purposes, including wood products, water quality, wildlife habitat, education, and recreation. Some municipalities conduct timber harvests in their forests and use the revenue to fund stewardship or conservation efforts.
- *Encourage and educate residents who own land within the same forest block to create forest management plans* - Having a management plan can help individual landowners think about the long-term management of a piece of property regarding management approaches, sustainable harvesting techniques, and ensuring the protection of important ecological areas. Having a baseline inventory can also potentially help landowners apply for state and federal programs that exist to help with conservation or management projects.
- *Consider enrollment in the Current Use program* - Vermont’s Use Value Appraisal program allows landowners to pay reduced property taxes on their farm and forest land based on the productive value of the land rather than the development value. As a disincentive to development, the program also includes a Land Use Change Tax. Almost 50% of eligible forest land in Vermont is enrolled in the Current Use program.
- *Consider a Local Tax Stabilization program* - Municipalities have the authority to create an agreement with local residents and allow for parcels under 25 acres to be enrolled.
- *Create educational opportunities for residents on the benefits of connecting and maintaining forests* - There are numerous capacity-building and educational programs both regionally and statewide to support these initiatives for landowners.

Description of key words and phrases

Critical habitat: Refers to a specific geographic area(s) that contains features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management and protection.

Forest Block: a contiguous area of forest in any stage of succession, not currently developed for other uses.

Fragmentation: When roads, land clearing, development, or other land uses divide forests, waterways, or other natural habitats into smaller and smaller areas. Depending on the location and scale, fragmentation can negatively affect plant and animal species, wildlife habitat, and water quality.

Habitat Blocks: Forested areas of at least 20 acres with no roads or low densities of Class IV roads. They contain little or no human development such as buildings, parking areas, lawns, gravel pits, active agricultural land, and so forth, but can be composed of any natural land cover type: various successional stages of forest, wetland, and old meadow, among others.

Habitat Connector: Land or water that links wildlife habitat within a landscape, allowing the movement and migration of animals and plants and the functioning of ecological processes. Riparian areas along streams and rivers, strips of forest cover between developed areas, and even hedgerows/fencerows all represent potential connecting habitats for wildlife and other organisms. Generally, such areas are characterized by undeveloped forested and riparian corridors, including forest cover reaching road rights-of-way, which serve to link large tracts of unfragmented core habitat.

Interior Forest Block: Also known as core habitat, these are areas of the most highly contiguous forest and other natural habitats that are unfragmented by roads, development, or agriculture. The defining factor is that there is little or no permanent habitat fragmentation from roads, agricultural lands, and other forms of development within an interior forest block.

Working Forest: Forests that generate economic benefits. This usually indicates timber but can also include silviculture and products such as maple syrup, Christmas trees, or other forest products.

Irreplaceable Areas, Scenic, and Historic Features

Brownington shares Brownington Pond with the Town of Derby to the north. The pond's source is Lake Memphremagog, and it is fed by Day Brook. The Lay Monitoring Report for the pond provides physical specifications: 138 acres of surface area with a maximum depth of 33 ft. Its drainage basin area consists of 3,365 acres, becoming mostly wooded wetlands. Brownington Pond's Lake Scorecard rates the water quality and shoreland condition as good condition. However, the invasive species rating is in poor condition, with the overall watershed rated as moderately disturbed. The known invasive species listed are Eurasian milfoil.

The Brownington shore of the pond is largely undeveloped. As of July 1, 2014, the State of Vermont requires a permit for virtually all development or clearing within 250 feet of the mean water level of Brownington Pond.

Brownington also contains a stretch of the Willoughby River, which once powered industries in the Evansville area. Wetlands are a common feature and provide moose and beaver habitat. Some of the largest concentrations of wetlands can be found on the southeastern border of the town, south of Evansville Road, and on the northern border of the town, west of Willoughby Lake Road. Both areas also contain Northern White Cedar swamps and are identified as “uncommon significant natural communities” in the Agency of Natural Resources BioFinder. High-quality examples of these softwood swamps are considered to be fairly uncommon in Vermont and are cherished by the town. These areas are often unique habitats to beavers, warblers, and the fairy-slipper orchid to name a few, and specific habitats in Brownington are recorded homes of endangered species.

Most of Brownington’s land area is farm and forest land which is a rapidly disappearing resource in much of the state. Brownington has had a revitalization of large-tract farms from the influx of Amish populations, which has been a welcome addition to the community. Other farms have generational ties to the land and the food that is grown. The Town has opened the idea of establishing a location for processing, distribution, food swaps, and a food pantry within town limits.

Historic and Scenic Resources

The first road in Orleans County was the Hinman Settler Road, which connected Brownington to Greensboro and Derby. Before the arrival of rail travel, Brownington Village was once a stagecoach stop for travelers between Canada and Boston. The village was a bustling center of commerce and cultural activity and was home to the county’s first grammar school.

Brownington Historic District consists of the northern portion of Brownington Village. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1973, the district contains an impressive assemblage of historic buildings and sites that speak to the Town’s rich and unique history. They are valuable resources to be managed and protected. The Orleans County Historical Society owns seven buildings and 55 acres of land in or near the district: the Samuel Read Hall House, the Cyrus Eaton House, the Twilight Homestead, the Twilight Farmhouse, the Old Stone House, and the Lawrence Barn. The latter is not original to the site as it was donated by the Ruth and Roland Lawrence family of Albany in 1997. The barn is currently being used to house an exhibit of farming and farm equipment in Orleans County. The Orleans County Grammar School building (now known as the Grange Hall), opened in 1823 and was deeded over to the Orleans County Historical Society in early 2015. Buildings in the district not owned by the Orleans County Historical Society are the former Rice and Going Hotel, and the Brownington Congregational Church.

Also located in the district is the Observatory, which offers sweeping views from the top of Prospect Hill. Originally built in 1898 by William Barstow Strong, an alumnus of the school, the Observatory has since been rebuilt twice. The Observatory and the land on which it is located are owned by the Orleans County Historical Society, which is committed to protecting this scenic asset.

Brownington Village's rich history is inextricably linked to the legacy of Alexander Twilight. Born in Corinth, Vermont, and educated at Middlebury College, he is the first African American known to have earned a bachelor's degree from an American College or University and the first to serve as a state legislator. He arrived in Brownington in 1829 and became the principal of the



Orleans County Grammar School. He also did double duty as the minister of the Congregational Church. At that time, students came to the school from all over Orleans County (and some from even further away) and boarded at residences in the village. When an academy in Craftsbury was chartered by the legislature in 1829, Alexander Twilight looked for a way to keep the school sustainable and competitive in the face of emerging competition. His vision for a central boarding facility, the four-story stone "Athenian Hall," was not shared by the trustees of the school. Construction commenced in 1834 and continued over the course of the next two years, largely due to the sheer will and determination of Mr. Twilight, who endeavored at great personal expense.

Alexander Twilight left the school in 1847, and the Stone House closed in 1859 due to diminishing enrollment. For a while, Alexander Twilight's widow remained in the Stone House. By 1918, the long-vacant structure was acquired by the Orleans County Historical Society.

The Orleans County Grammar School was moved to its present location in 1869, was acquired by the town, and became the Grange Hall. In 2014, the building was essentially "condemned" because it was no longer deemed insurable, due to the lack of running water and bathrooms, as well as some structural issues. In 2015, the Orleans County Historical Society acquired the property from the Town with the intention of restoring its functionality in a way that would respect the historic integrity of the building. On August 8, 2016, more than 2,500 spectators gathered to witness a team of 46 oxen, with the help of a hydraulic carriage, move the Orleans County Grammar School a third of a mile down Hinman Settler Road to its original location. The structure, once restored, will be available for community functions as well. The transfer of the Grange Hall to the Orleans County Historical Society was approved by the voters at the annual town meeting.

State Register of Historic Places

Properties listed in the State register or deemed eligible for the State register are subject to special consideration in Act 250 reviews in order to determine if a proposed development will have an undue adverse effect on the historic resource. Other projects that use state or federal funds will be subject to review.

National Register of Historic Places

Properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register may be eligible for grant funds for rehabilitation or restoration (such as grants from the Department of Historic Preservation or Preservation Trust of Vermont). Properties may also be eligible for substantial federal tax credits for rehabilitation projects. In 1973, the Brownington Village Historic District was added to the National Register. Its listing describes the significance of the district:

“[The district] represents the survival in an exceptionally pure form, of the hill village typical of the first settlements in northern Vermont. The village has retained the integrity and architectural character of an agricultural community of the early 19th century in a setting of exceptional natural beauty. The combination of farms and residences within the village and the placement of institutional buildings on a common street illustrates both the agricultural nature of the region and a planning concept characteristic of New England.”

Village Center Designation

The Downtown and Village Center Tax Credit program offers tax credits to fit up or rehabilitate income-producing properties. The property does not have to be “historic” to be eligible for tax credit – just built before 1983 and located within the Village Center designation area. However, if a property is listed in the National Register and eligible to receive federal tax credits, it can be eligible for substantial state tax credits on top of the Federal credit – about 10% of rehabilitation costs up to \$500,000. Entities without an income tax liability, such as a nonprofit, can sell the tax credit to a bank or insurer for as much as .90 on the dollar. This program can significantly boost the cash flow for a potential rehabilitation project. Brownington’s current Village Center designation allows the Stone House Museum to apply for tax credits. Although no tax credits have been awarded yet, applying for such would be a positive step toward retaining the aesthetic and architectural integrity of the Village. Currently, there are plans to expand designation approval to Evansville, with the hope of revitalizing a town center for use by citizens of Brownington.

Land use for Recreation: Currently, all Brownington roads are open and available for ATV use. This is in conjunction with the state-wide trail use regulation governed by the State and the Vermont ATV Sportsman’s Association (VASA). This ease of access allows Brownington to be fully utilized by ATV riders and to bring additional tourist capital to our small town. There are trails designated for hiking and horseback riding in the town, which is another aspect of inviting additional tourism, as well as providing a safe area for Brownington residents to recreate.

Goals:

- Minimize runoff from hydrologically connected road segments.
- Encourage stewardship of the town's natural resources through conservation and effective land management.
- Preserve Brownington's historic assets.
- Preserve Brownington's iconic scenic viewsheds.

Policies:

- Roads, driveways, and utilities should be designed to avoid the fragmentation of identified forest blocks.
- The Planning Commission supports development that takes place near the edges of forest blocks in order to reduce the fragmentation of the blocks by roads, clearing, and development. If there is no land that is physically suitable for development at the edge of the blocks, the development should be located in order to minimize fragmentation of the blocks.
- Roads longer than 1,000 feet are discouraged within the forest blocks unless a longer road reduces impacts on natural resources.
- When land is subdivided, provisions should be made to ensure access to forest management and should avoid potential conflicts between land uses.

Strategies:

- Continue to participate in the Grants-in-Aid program
- Host local nature walks and workshops.
- Identify lands suitable for a Town forest.
- **Identify a network of trails for passive recreation (e.g. hiking, snowshoeing)**
- Host or publicize workshops for owners of large forested tracts.
- Encourage and promote grant opportunities to restore and rehabilitate historic properties.
- Complete a viewshed study that will guide Act 250 and Section 248 review.

- **Bold type denotes a priority action. See the Implementation Plan.**

Connectivity in Brownington and Beyond



Connectivity in Brownington and Beyond

Required Elements in this Section: Transportation Plan

Brownington's roads are our community's lifelines, connecting neighbor to neighbor, to work, and essential services throughout the region and beyond. Our rural, highly dispersed settlement pattern along with very limited public transportation options makes us highly dependent on our cars for daily living. Nevertheless, Brownington's roads must give equal consideration to all modes of transportation, including walkers, cyclists, ATV riders, and horses so that all may use our roads safely.

Roads

Brownington possesses arterial access to all adjacent communities, being only a short distance from Interstate 91. Within town boundaries, Hinman Settler Road provides north-south access through the western portion of town, where residents commute to Derby and Newport to the north and Orleans and Route 58 to the south. Route 58 runs west-east, meeting with Route 5A, which runs north-south on the eastern end of town to Charleston and Westmore. Routes 58 and 14 provide access west and southwest to Burlington and Montpelier.

Many residents work outside of Brownington and so the traffic patterns generally follow routes that take them to the larger towns nearby, in the mornings and evenings on workdays. Traffic increases on the weekends, around holidays, and in the summer/ fall with the influx of tourists and summer residents. The town also recognizes the dramatic increase in horse and buggy traffic in the last 5-10 years with the growth of our Amish community and the increase in ATV and snowmobile traffic on town roads due to the legal access permitted now.

Altogether, Brownington has 47.36 miles of roads - 10.98 miles being Class 2 roads, 28.89 miles regarded as Class 3 roads, and 7.49 miles as Class 4 roads. The Town receives state aid for Class II & and III roads. The Highway Department had a 2022 budget of \$571,270.19, slightly up from \$570,823.45 in 2021. Equipment listed in the 2022 Annual Report includes a loader, a grader, a backhoe, an excavator, four trucks, and a trailer. Listed in the report are numerous projects

funded by grants, which included slope stabilization on Center Road, a Better Roads program, and Grants-In-Aid funding each year for culvert replacements along Hinman Settler Road and other roads throughout town. ARPA funds were used to resurface a section of Frog Pond Road as well as the Center Road paving project. The use of ARPA funds also includes a generator for the Town Clerk's Office, a generator for the garage, a glass divider in the office to separate people from employees in case of another pandemic, a security camera for the office, a door lock and camera for security for office, digitalizing land records, 2 computers (one with built-in camera and another camera that can be moved from computer to another one).

The town plans to use the remaining ARPA funds for a down payment on a new truck for the Highway Department. A Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) grant was also awarded in 2023 to pay for the final construction of a stormwater mitigation project to protect against runoff into the Willoughby River. Lastly, the section of Schoolhouse Road to the Town Clerk's Office was paved in June of 2023.

The town remains in compliance with VT Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) status and permitting. The Town adheres to State of Vermont Town Road and Bridge Standards required for the Town to receive state aid for highways, which is necessary to meet the annual costs of maintaining our roads. Adhering to these standards is also one of the requirements to receive a certain level of public assistance from the State following a presidentially declared disaster.

Despite high turnover from the road foreman position in recent years, Brownington's road foreman, crew, and Selectboard have been very proactive in road improvements. The crew received training from VTRANS in 2022-23 from the Transportation Advisory Committee's technical assistance program.

Because of these projects and other ditching segments of hydrologically connected roads, Brownington fared fairly well during the Great Floods of July in 2023. As a result of this proactive work, Brownington's road crew not only kept local residents safe and with access while saving money from potential damage but the crew was also utilized to support Barton and Orleans recovery efforts because they didn't have extensive repairs to take care of in town.

Multimodal Transportation

Our rural roads serve our walkers, bikers, and riders (horses and mechanized vehicles) for necessary transportation needs and for recreation. The 2022 Community Survey results shared the concerns about road safety shared by many of our community members who want to feel safe as they use our roads. Speeding, excessive noise levels, and poor road conditions are all reasons shared as to why they do not feel safe.

Old Stone House Road, Center Road, Frog Pond Road, and Schoolhouse Road receive more neighborhood traffic than others. Travel patterns change significantly during the summer months, with an increase in seasonal visitors. These same roads are commonly used by ATVs, horseback riders, cyclists, and pedestrians alike, creating natural congestion (and at times, tension) among local roads.

These are often the routes where people feel most unsafe, with many respondents voicing displeasure with speeding while observing other uses on the roadway. Safer roads were highlighted as a way to improve the numbers of those raising a family in town, and “addressing speeding” gained the highest response when asked what the town plan should focus on for the next five years. Needless to say, this is an important issue that puts Brownington at a proverbial crossroads as their town grows.

People also voiced in the community survey that they would like to see walking trails as recreation opportunities. Walking trails could also act as equestrian trails and could relieve a modicum of safety and tension with the current road uses.

Brownington has been without speed limits, making the default limit 50 mph under Vermont Law. When you consider all the uses these roads have locally, safe access on these roads requires slower speeds. Traffic studies, which could help justify a reasonable change through information and fact-finding, have been conducted and should be completed within 2023. This will allow the Selectboard to make informed and legal decisions on changing the limits to safer speeds.

Title 23 V.S.A. Section 1007 authorizes the local governing body to establish effective and enforceable speed limits on town highways at not more than 50 MPH or less than 25 MPH and to do so on the basis of a traffic engineering investigation or study. The Selectboard & Brownington Connects is working with the State of Vermont to conduct traffic studies and eventually propose speed limits, and the Selectboard will make their authoritative decision on which speed limits to propose.

On September 9, 2019, the Brownington Select Board proposed an ordinance requiring motor vehicles to travel at 35 miles per hour on all Brownington Town Highways. The 2019 Select Board ordinance to create speed limits in Brownington was petitioned and brought to a vote; the Town voted down the ordinance, leaving the town to continue without speed limits (it was voted down, 51-Yes, 47-No.). Objections included the lack of a traffic study.

Selectboard efforts have focused on addressing both previous objections as well as future potential objections to setting speed limits. Work has continued with the Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) to complete a traffic study though COVID and the 2023 floods have resulted in delays. To help prepare for potential future objections or concerns, the Selectboard suggested a review of all towns and villages in the Northeast Kingdom to better understand Vermont towns and villages’ approach and viewpoints about road safety, particularly regarding speed limits. This report was created by a volunteer community member and provided to the Selectboard in May of 2023 (information was gathered in February, March, and April 2023). The traffic study report will not include recommendations for speeds, but it will assist the Selectboard in their decision if desired. NVDA stressed that community input should be provided to the Selectboard regarding the determination of the speed they will assign to each road.

Brownington is currently working towards setting speed limits though it is noted that the local governing body can pass a traffic ordinance unless petitioned by at least 5% of the voting residents, in which case a vote of the townspeople is required. (The Amish are not registered voters therefore,

though they are a sizable portion of the town’s population, they are not part of the voting constituency.) It will be important to continue to gain an understanding and support for increasing road safety.

The traffic study report is anticipated in late November 2023. A formalized document reflecting community input will be provided to the Select Board.

Connectivity to the Region

Increasing carpooling and public transportation opportunities will lessen emissions and we can share information and resources to fully inform our residents. The Town can also explore and prepare for the gradual conversion to hybrid and/or EV vehicles within Vermont. Charging stations and funding opportunities will be a priority for our state government, and our Town can do our best to support and participate in those efforts.

Among other methods of transportation, there are airports, buses, and trains all available regionally, that serve domestic and international travel. There is a parking lot in Orleans Village, just past the bridge at Routes 5 and 58, as well as a park & ride immediately before the Orleans Ambulance on Route 5 headed towards the town of Barton. These lots are regularly used by Brownington residents. There are volunteer rideshare



Regional Map of Rural Community Transportation Routes. Source: <https://www.riderct.org/>

programs that residents can look into from the Vermont Public Transportation Association. The Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) offers a few different options to help area residents access or share rides for work, school, medical appointments, and social events. Residents can register and join the Go Vermont database that connects people who are looking to carpool around the state.

ISLAND POND DERBY

KINGDOM SHOPPER

4th Wednesday of Each Month:

From ISLAND POND to DERBY		AM
1	Sunrise Manor	8:30
2	Rainbow apartments, Orleans	9:05
3	Barton Chambers	9:20
4	Glover Housing	9:30
5	Walmart Derby	10:00

4th Wednesday of Each Month:

From DERBY to ISLAND POND		PM
5	Walmart Derby	1:30
4	Glover Housing	2:00
3	Barton Chambers	2:10
2	Rainbow Apartments	2:25
1	Sunrise Manor	3:00

KINGDOM SHOPPER:
RCT offers shopping shuttles that operate throughout the Northeast Kingdom and Lamoille counties. The Kingdom Shopper 2 operates the fourth Wednesday of each month. If you live within 3/4 mile of the shopper route and would like to ride the bus, please call (802) 748-8170 between the hours of 7:30 Am and 4:30 PM Monday through Friday to schedule a pickup.

The Rural Community Transportation (RCT) bus service provides multiple routes serving the Northeast Kingdom, including the Kingdom Shopper, which runs through Route 58. You can also schedule a ride to get to and from school, health care appointments, jobs, and more. Regionally, Greyhound bus stops are located in Burlington, Montpelier, and White River Junction.

The Northeast Kingdom International Airport has a growing list of services, with four runways and one that spans 5,300 feet. It can now handle private jets with the hope and potential for smaller commercial carriers in the future. Other regional airports the Brownington residents can utilize are Burlington, Manchester, Montreal, and Boston.

The John H. Boylan State Airport in Island Pond is a public state-owned facility that maintains two turf surface runways, and a seaplane base located on Lake Memphremagog in Newport.

North Country Hospital in Newport has a helipad to accommodate the Dartmouth Hitchcock Advanced Response Team (DHART). Their medical and aviation personnel provide medical transportation services within our communities and transport patients of trauma and medical emergencies to the closest Trauma Center in the Northern New England region.

Goals:

- Ensure safe access and travel on Brownington roads, whether by car, on foot, on bicycle, or by horse.
- Improve overall conditions on Brownington's roads.
- Establish an informed, multi-faceted basis for site-specific solutions to speeding and unsafe road conditions.
- Provide the Selectboard and the Orlean's County Sheriff's Department with the tools needed to enforce speed limits.
- Instill a culture of driving responsibly.

Policy:

- The Town will support the establishment of village-scale commercial and service enterprises that reduce vehicle use.

Strategies:

- Participate in the regional Transportation Advisory Committee.
- Support the local road foreman and road crew with technical assistance, such as Vermont Local Roads and the Road Foreman Trainings at the regional planning commission.
- Keep the information in the online inventory tool (VT CULVERTS) up to date.
- Support studies of Brownington's local connectors, including Hinman Settler, Pepin, Old Stone House, and Frog Pond roads. Obtain speed data as well as relevant data on adjoining land uses, users, access, and site lines.
- Evaluate opportunities to narrow roadways along hydrological segments in remote areas that will reduce runoff and discourage speeding.
- Raise awareness about speeding with an "Our Town, Slow it Down" styled local campaign with events and signage.

Climate Resilience



Climate Resilience

Required Elements in this Section: Flood Resilience Plan, Energy Plan, Utilities Plan

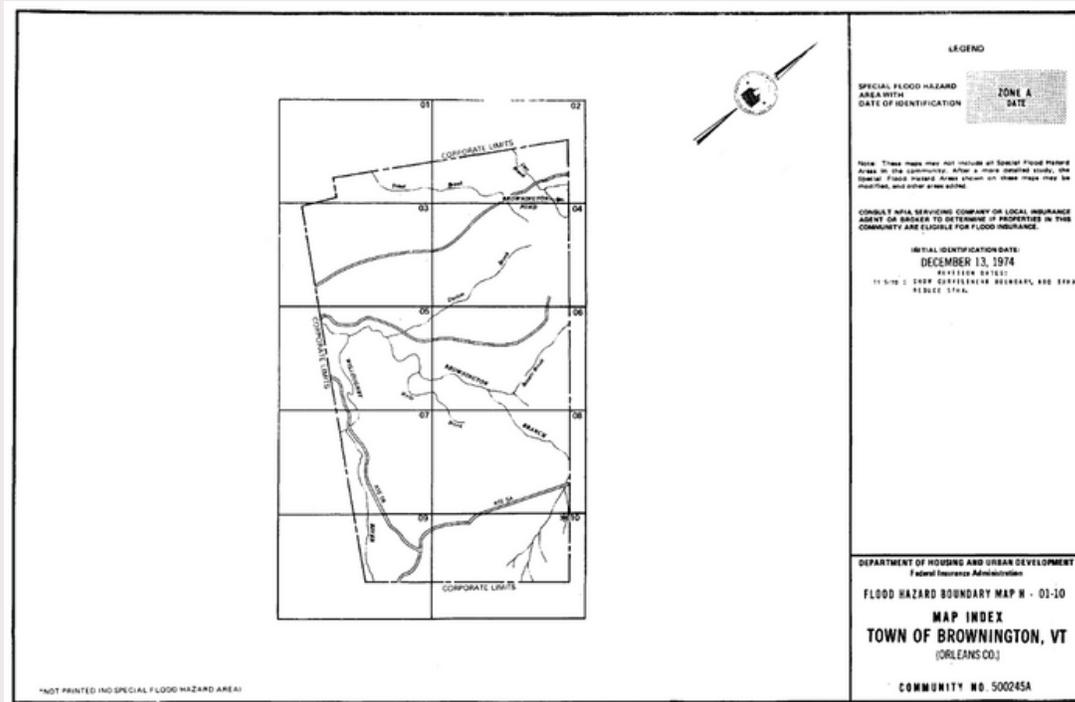
Building a resilient community requires being prepared to face natural hazards such as flooding. Climate change is already making flooding and other natural hazards more frequent and costly. The choices we make today can minimize the impacts of a turbulent future and reduce our contribution to global warming. Transportation, for example, accounts for about 40% of Vermont's greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing our energy use and switching to cleaner-burning fuels is paramount.

Flood Resilience

Brownington's All-Hazard Mitigation Plan was updated and adopted in 2021 and addresses the impact and risks of multiple hazards, which notes continual inundation points within the Barton River watershed that affect the town's infrastructure. The plan notes a steady increase in flood events over the past two decades, including road washouts and the bridge being destroyed on Center Road during Tropical Storm Irene. All of Brownington is located in the Barton River watershed, a drainage area of approximately 164 square miles.

Now that Vermont has experienced even greater historic inundation flooding from the events in July 2023, it is readily apparent that these events will continue to occur throughout each season as temperatures rise and thunderstorm intensity increases.

Vermont's Flood Ready tool provides summary sheets for municipalities' flood hazard assessment, listing the number of structures in a Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) (based on limited available mapping), a town's floodplain compliance, and their Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF) rate. According to the state's Summary Report, Brownington has 21 structures in the SFHA. However, FEMA's SFHA map of Brownington dated 1974 notes that there are no areas within town limits in a flood zone (pictured below). Because the town does not have floodplain development restrictions, the town does not qualify for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The town is also without River Corridor Protections. Brownington's current ERAF rate is 7.5%, meaning that the state matches that amount of funding and assistance from federally declared disasters.



Were the town to develop floodplain regulations and participate in the NFIP, the town’s rate would increase to 12.5%. Establishing River Corridor bylaws, which establish regulations from encroaching development upon riverbanks, would increase disaster assistance to 17.5%. This difference in assistance can accumulate upwards of over \$1 million per disaster depending on the damage experienced. River Corridor boundaries, which can be viewed [here](#), are currently recorded for the Willoughby River, Brownington Branch, Dutton Brook, and portions of Bassett Brook and Day Brook.

The Vermont Agency of Transportation recently released the Transportation Resilience Planning Tool (TRPT), which allows users to visualize and interact with roadway risk and vulnerability. Town officials can utilize this information to prioritize conditions of potential washouts and even offer reasons for vulnerability and strategies to mitigate risk. For example, the only two sections of roads with high risk in Brownington are Kittredge Road south of the intersection with Evansville Road, and Evansville Road east of the intersection. Both have high erosion scores (9/10) for being too close to a river corridor. They were also scored to have “high criticality”, meaning these are arterial roads people use often.

Options for minimizing loss include continuing to report and use the road erosion inventory system, adhering to and utilizing relevant tactical basin and river corridor plans, pursuing strategies identified in the All-Hazard Mitigation Plan, and going through the pros and cons as a planning commission to address the town’s participation in the NFIP and River Corridor protections.

Maps Below are screenshots of river corridors and wetlands in Brownington located at the Agency of Natural Resources, which can be found [here](#) and [here](#).



Planning for other Local Hazards

Using the tools above is just one of the ways Brownington can prepare for local hazards. Heavy snow, ice jams, and high winds can also affect day-to-day life. Both the All-Hazards Mitigation Plan and the previous Town Plan have expressed storm intensities increasing. The after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have had and will continue to have, far-reaching implications on social assistance, business success, and other basic needs within the community. Inflation, weather changes during growing seasons, and agricultural feed shortages have all put a dynamic strain on local communities in the Northeast Kingdom.

In order to build back much of what was lost during the pandemic, leveraging social capital within the community can be the community's strongest asset. Ensuring local basic needs are met through community outreach and support, checking on your neighbor, and continuing to rebuild gathering events for trust and cohesion can ensure people are fed, their housing is warm, their child's needs are met, and that they can find attainable employment. Raising the bar together can help community security the next time another hazard occurs.

Social Impacts of Climate Change

As experienced by The Great Vermont Flood and the ensuing rainfall throughout the summer of 2023, weather in Vermont will continue to be unpredictable as warmer masses from the Arctic and Atlantic meet over Northern New England. The region experienced its first taste of smoke and compromised air quality from the Canadian wildfires. Greater episodes of icing and thawing are occurring, and the prevalence of aquatic and terrestrial invasive species is further increasing.

All of this is to say the communities throughout the Northeast Kingdom will continue to experience changing weather patterns from what has been traditionally anticipated. Agriculture such as corn and grain production could be impacted, sugaring seasons will occur earlier, and the region's recreational income base is likely to incur impacts.

Many of the social impacts of climate change can be felt in the changing of neighbors, as one of the results of climate change (and the COVID-19 pandemic) has been a phenomenon called climate migration. This can be felt particularly in the region's housing shortage and affordability.

Another anecdotal factor of the social impacts of climate change that can be recorded at a local level is the influx of Amish families from Pennsylvania and Ohio. From a community that works directly and exclusively with the land, this could be a social indicator of the changing seasonal and weather patterns from where they came.

In efforts to reduce the financial impacts of living expenses beyond mortgage and rent, the town of Brownington is interested in and committed to creating more accessible services to reduce the amount of traveling that is currently necessary to meet the daily needs of essential services. The prospect of the Evansville Trading Post being a community center sheds light on the potential of having a location for childcare, a local food processing facility, a recreation center, or anything that helps the town

reduce outsourcing for such facilities and hopefully reduce vehicle miles traveled. While there are many tools the town can use to address and direct the potential changes of climate migration and influence, without specific land use regulations prospective homebuyers will be free to change, implement, and adapt their land as they see fit.

Energy

Current Conditions

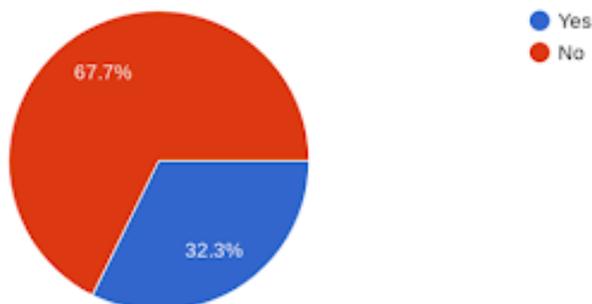
Brownington is one of the few towns in Vermont serviced by three separate utility companies. Barton Village Electric covers the majority of the town, followed by Orleans Village Electric (OVE) and Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC), the last two being the most efficient and reliable.

Barton Village Electric (BVE) has a high rate of outages within the town due to a lack of maintenance, support, and coordination with other utilities. The Town has been informed that the utility outsources maintenance and resources. BVE rates continue to rise, and they are hostile to net metering which impacts residents' ability to install renewable energy upgrades. This energy burden

From the 2022 survey of Brownington Residents:

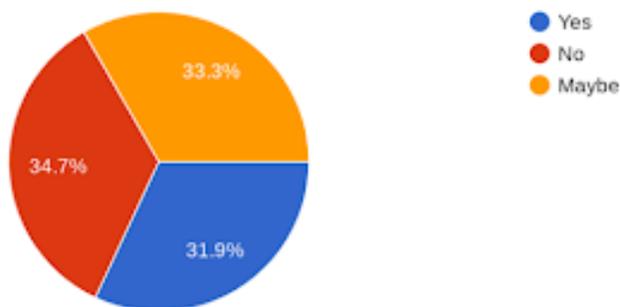
15. Do you work from home?

96 responses



18. If you had adequate internet and/or cell phone access, would you work from home?

72 responses

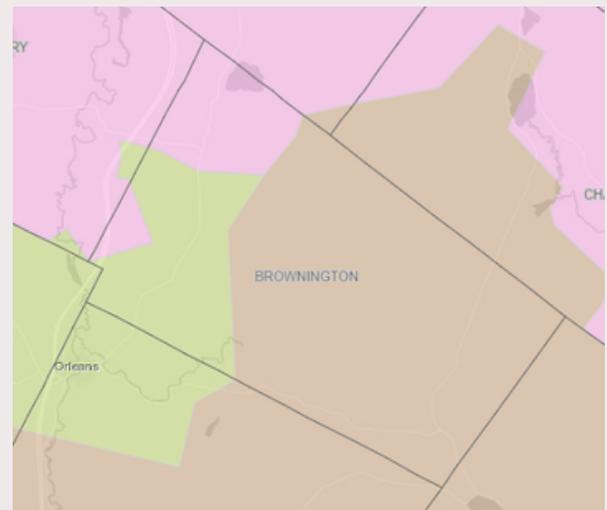


impacts Brownington residents, as the unreliability limits families in completing school and work during power outages, not to mention being able to contact emergency services. Remote learning has changed the dynamics of equitable learning, and it's a priority for the town to have reliable internet and electric utility service to meet the educational needs of today's schooling environment.

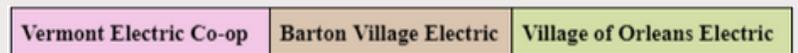
Each utility company was contacted for outage data within the Town of Brownington. VEC and OVE were able to provide detailed outage information down to street level (seen in the Appendix), however, Barton Village Electric was not able to provide outage information, even on a town scale. Since Barton Village voters rejected a proposal for VEC to acquire BVE in May of 2022, rate hikes and power outages have increased, while maintenance and support have decreased. Grants and other financial assistance cannot offset the 18.27% rate hike, work stoppages from power outages, or education stifling from kids getting sent home early with no power. It would benefit the majority of Brownington residents to find a more reliable utility to service the town.

Brownington's ability to procure a FEMA grant for a backup generator for the school took five years because the town was unable to provide accurate outage numbers to the grant application with the three utility configurations. Since that time the town clerk's office and town garage have procured "on-demand generators" for those buildings. The school is getting a generator this year using OCSU Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) monies as a result of the pandemic relief program from State and Federal governments. In case of catastrophic events, Brownington Central School would be an emergency shelter and the town clerk's office would be the command center.

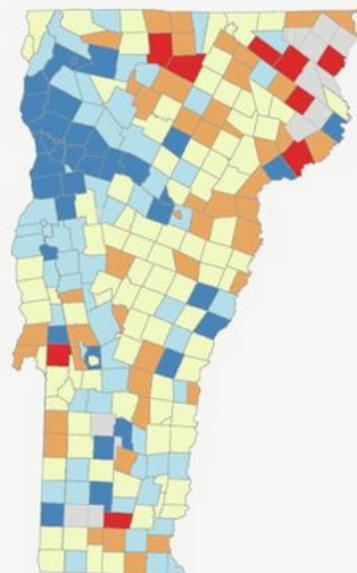
The brown section is Barton Village Electric coverage, which covers three-quarters of the town of Brownington. The green section is Orleans Village Electric, and the corner of pink is Vermont Electric Cooperative coverage.



Source: Department of Public Service



2023 Vermont Energy Burden Report
Total Energy Burden by Town



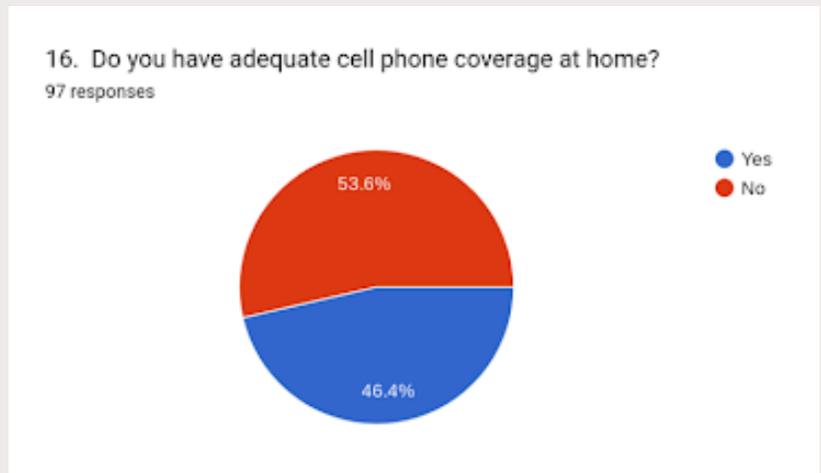
Total Energy Burden

- 15.1%+
- 12.1% - 15%
- 10.1% - 12%
- 8.1% - 10%
- up to 8%
- No data

Internet coverage in town is adequate for those who filled out the community survey but it is not consistent across the entire town. Brownington is a member of the Communication Union District made up of 56 towns in the Northeast section of Vermont. NEK Broadband is the principal entity tasked with bringing fiber optic high-speed internet to the town in 2024. They will provide download/upload at 100 Mbps or greater as their capacity builds. All of this is at an affordable rate based on the number of community members indicating interest in their service. Community members interested in increasing broadband availability should pre-register for service to help the Town be prioritized for the eventual hookup.

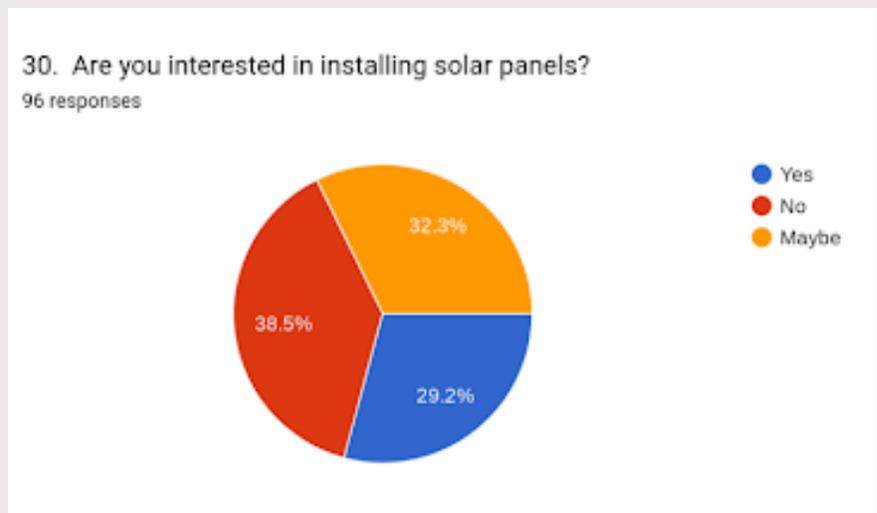
Town	Total # of Households	Median Household Income	Thermal	Electricity	Transportation	Total Energy	Total Energy Burden Bin
Brownington	388	\$53,690	4%	3%	6%	13.40%	High

Cell phone coverage is spotty at best. Depending on the carriers, you might have one bar or none in different areas of the community. Even at the town clerk's office cell phone coverage is nonexistent at times. Cell phone service is great if you operate on a Wi-Fi service from your home or you are lucky to find a spot in town to get it on data. But generally speaking, cell coverage in Brownington is inadequate to meet most people's needs.

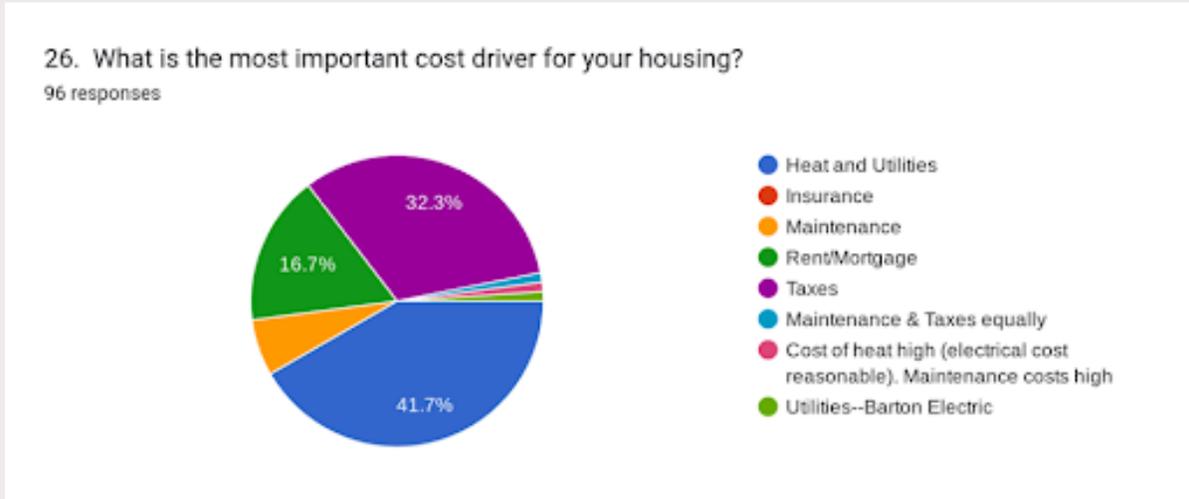


Town Capacity and Resources

Brownington needs the support of electric companies to develop an “enhanced energy plan,” not to mention trying to meet state energy goals for 2050. Electric companies that institute limits on net metering used in conjunction with renewable energy systems completely contradict the State of Vermont’s focus on these energy goals, much less a town like Brownington’s ability to achieve and participate in them.

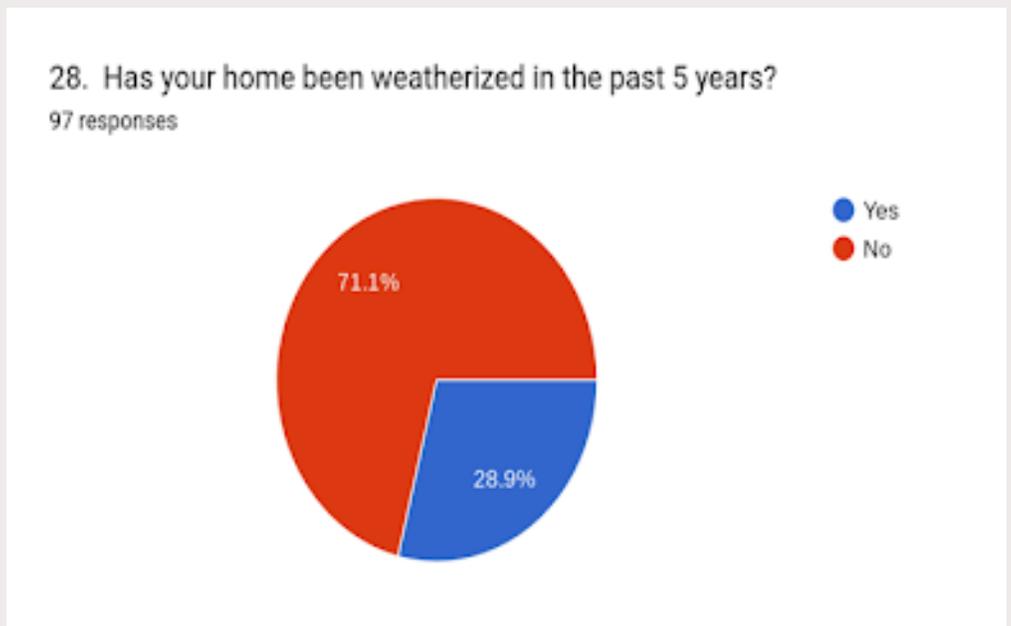


In the survey, the majority of Brownington residents indicated interest in solar arrays, but money was a deterrent.



Looking at the chart above it is clear that heat and utilities are most important to Brownington residents with taxes a close second. And fossil fuels are the major source of heat energy in most homes as indicated in the chart below. Brownington has a long way to go to come close to the statewide energy goals.

Less than 30% of homes in Brownington have been weatherized in the last five years according to the chart below:



Weatherization would provide residents with considerable energy savings. Organizations like Heat Squad and Efficiency Vermont have affordable programs to address these needs. Personalized workshops and education would be advantageous to the community for purposes of energy conservation and utility savings.

Goals:

- Minimize the future impacts of natural hazards in Brownington.
- Work to secure the maximum level of State assistance to repair public infrastructure damaged by natural disasters.
- Establish a local emergency response committee that is focused on the “neighbor to neighbor” approach.
- Reduce energy use in all public buildings and gathering spaces.
- Reduce Brownington’s reliance on non-renewable energy sources.
- Reduce energy burden for Brownington households.

Policies:

- Any new or substantially improved public facility in Brownington must meet stretch energy codes (i.e. more stringent energy codes, which are required for development under Act 250 Jurisdiction).
- The Town supports residential-scale wind (9.5 kW) and residential-scale solar up to 15 kW to promote energy independence.

Strategies:

- Review the revised FEMA map data when it is available.
- Host a public workshop on joining the National Flood Insurance Program.
- Continue to maintain the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan by keeping it up to date.
- Keep the Local Emergency Management Plan up to date and include an annex for heat emergencies.
- Establish a Brownington energy committee.
- Work with the energy committee and regional partners such as HEAT Squad and Efficiency Vermont to educate the public on weatherization and fuel-switching incentives for low- and moderate-income households.
- Establish a level 2 EV charger for public use in Brownington Village or Evansville by 2025.

Local Governance and Services



Local Governance and Services

Required Elements in this Section: Facilities Plan, Education Facilities Plan

Serving an active, engaged, and informed citizenry can be a challenge in a rural community with limited resources. Brownington seeks to make the most of its town properties, as well as paid and volunteer personnel through careful budgeting and planning.

Municipal Properties

There are two municipal buildings in Brownington - The Town Clerk's Office and the Town Garage. There is also a K-8 school building, Brownington Central School, which is owned jointly by the seven districts of the Lake Region Union Elementary and Middle School District of Orleans Central Supervisory Union. The school serves K-8 students with a staff directory of 26 employees.

Brownington students grades 9-12 are served by Lake Region Union High School (LRUHS) in Barton. LRUHS students may participate in programs at the North Country Career Center in Newport. Under Vermont's school choice limited option, Brownington students may attend North Country Union High School (grades 9 through 12) in Newport. United Christian Academy is a private school in Newport that serves grades K through 12. St. Paul's School in Barton is a private school that serves students from grade 8. Some parents home-school their children, both part-time and full-time. The COVID-19 pandemic changed how some students receive their education.

Services

Brownington does not currently have a police department or emergency medical services that are dedicated or paid for by the town. The Town currently has a contract with the Orleans County Sheriff's Department (OCSD), which provides some services to the community and some policing during the week. Dispatching for the OCSD is done jointly by the Newport City Police Department and the OCSD. The VT State Police are obligated to respond to 911 calls but are extremely short-handed. The town contracts with the Orleans Emergency Unit for emergency response services. The local recycling station is located at the Town Garage on 614 Schoolhouse Road, and is open year-round on Saturday, 9 a.m. - noon., through the town's membership in the Northeast Kingdom

Waste Management District (NEKWMD). Brownington is represented on the NKWMD board of directors. Solid waste is handled privately by each household which hires private waste haulers or transports their waste to local facilities. The nearby waste and recycling centers used by the community are NEK Waste Management at 224 Church St., Lyndonville VT, and Newport Recycling Center at 651 Coventry Street, Newport, VT. Private sewage disposal is the only form of disposal for the community at this time.

Hazardous waste materials can be brought to the NEKWMD at 224 Church Street in Lyndonville. Water and wastewater are provided by private wells and septic on each individual's lot.

People Power

Brownington's governance is run by roughly 20 people at any point, including a three-member selectboard that meets on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month, a nine-member planning commission that meets the third Wednesday of each month; a three-member team of town listers; a three-member team of auditors; a town clerk, assistant town clerk, and treasurer; a fire warden, and members of the Justice of the Peace. These people, along with other positions, are elected either at the yearly Town Meeting or are selected by word of mouth. The Select Board will also reach out to people in the community who they know are interested in participating. More information on town officers can be found in the Brownington Annual Report.

Part of the role of Brownington Connects is to engender greater community involvement in both town positions and volunteer opportunities, with the hope of spearheading initiatives to improve town connectivity, gatherings, and social support.

Budgeting

Brownington has budgeted approximately \$770,809 of annual capital to run the town for the FY-2023 year, according to the 2022 Annual Report. The budget is outlined and then voted on at the annual Town Meeting at Brownington Central School. The Town runs a capital budget and plans accordingly and with detail, including external funding and grants. A full expense and revenue report can be found in the Annual Report.

Cultural Facilities

Public facilities that can accommodate events are Brownington Central School and the Town Clerk's Office. The Town Clerk's Office is often used for Select Board Meetings, Select Board and Planning Commission meetings, along with other meetings of a similar type.

The Brownington Central School serves Kindergarten students through 8th grade. The school building is used extensively beyond the regular school day. The cafeteria/gymnasium and classrooms are used for after-school programs, and the gym is used steadily for numerous basketball teams. Annual school concerts are held in the cafeteria/gymnasium, which is the site of the annual Town Meeting and has recently been used for Brownington Connects development meetings. Other organizations use the school as a meeting place. However, insurance costs and types of functions that can be held here are limited.

There are a few private facilities that can also accommodate small and or specific types of events. The Old Stone House Grammar School provides availability for some functions though insurance and capacity are an issue here as well. Other options are local churches, the Old Stone House, and Arnold's Rescue Center, though these share similar limitations and are privately run.

The Town currently does not have a public location that can accommodate more than 50 people comfortably for a cultural function, which also does not have limitations for a variety of reasons. The recently created Brownington Connects Group has discussed the need for a community center and has suggested a couple of locations, one being the Evansville Trading Post. The Trading Post has long been a community asset and meeting point, yet has been up for sale for some time and needs a revamp and rehabilitation to meet the current needs of the community.

The goal is to create a community center that could house all events, large and small, from a youth center to Jam Nights for local musicians, as well as a marketplace for local produce to be sold. The Brownington Planning Commission is currently working toward establishing Village Center status in Evansville, as this would qualify the Town for future financial assistance to aid in the setting up of a Capital Budget and plan for this Community Center. A part of the Commission's goals will be applying for Village Designation for Evansville. Brownington Connects does not have the authority to pursue this. The Planning Commission is working with the Brownington Community Trust as an avenue to achieve their project goals. Achieving Village Designation will go a long way providing tax credits and grant opportunities for the Evansville TP project. It is a win/win for the town of Brownington since no taxpayer money is involved in the project.

Recreation

The Elementary school is used by many for sports and recreation. The Old Stone House provides the Twilight Trail and there is access to the VAST Trails across from the Evansville Trading Post. However, there is interest in creating an expanded trail system for locals and visitors to use. Creating such a network of trails could offer unique sights, and communal connectivity, and increase road safety by getting walkers off high-speed streets.

Cemeteries: Brownington Village Cemetery, Brownington Center Cemetery, East Cemetery, North Cemetery, East Brownington Cemetery

Lakes and Reservoirs: Brownington Pond, Lubber Lake Streams; rivers, and creeks: Moody Brook, Lord Brook, Dutton Brook, Bassett Brook, Wells Brook, the Willoughby River, Brownington Branch Park: Brownington Village Historic District

Services Outside of Town

Given that Brownington is by and large a bedroom community, many of the services relied upon exist outside of town. The closest hospital is North Country Primary Care in Newport and there is also a walk-in clinic at Northern Express Care. There are three libraries within a short driving distance of Brownington - the Goodrich Memorial Library in Newport, the Jones Memorial Library in Orleans, and the Barton Public Library. Community Centers nearby include the Coventry Community Center and the Burke Community Building.

Goals:

- Foster a sense of leadership and civic commitment among newcomers and Brownington youth.
- Establish a Community Center.

Strategies:

- Establish a Capital Budget and plan by the responsibility, effort, and expense of the Brownington Community Trust.
- Set up a recruitment table for potential volunteers at Town Meeting day.
- Set up secure Brownington email addresses for committee members.
- Complete a feasibility study for a Community Center and determine an operating structure and budget.
- Maintain active involvement in the regional planning commission.

Bold type denotes a priority action. See the Implementation Plan.

Putting the Plan into Action (Implementation Plan)

Required Elements in this Section: Recommendations for implementation of the plan

Putting a Town Plan into action is a daunting task. Some goals are larger than others and will take multiple years just to get off the ground. It's important for the town to consider that many of the issues presented are long-standing and that their solutions are often intended for future generations. In order to keep the community and its town officials engaged in the planning process (and by way of creating the aforementioned culture of planning in Brownington), it is recommended that the town conduct annual events to discuss critical issues facing the community, along with a community survey on specific issues every other year. The town should also maintain a planning budget that allows for sufficient ongoing public participation to keep citizens engaged and informed while bringing newcomers into the fold.

Below is a table of the town's priority actions, with their strategies, potential timelines, and resources. The town should stay abreast of local and regional non-profits (such as supporting Brownington Connects in receiving NPO status), as well as continue to coordinate resources from the Regional Planning Commission.

Priority Action	Strategies	Timeline	Resources
Communications Plan	Create a community communications plan linked to the new Town website. Include regular online postings (such as Front Porch Forum) and a quarterly newsletter.	Short-term Ideally a local community member or part-time town official can maintain upkeep of the communications plan	https://ggcity.org/city-files/communication-strategy_0.pdf https://www.lexingtonma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2549/E-CiL-Report-PDF?bidId
Village Center Designation	Maintain Village Center Designation for Brownington Village and pursue Village Center Designation for Evansville. Educate the public, property owners, and local realtors on the benefits of Village Center Designation.	Mid-Long term Brownington Connects is seeking 501c3 non-profit status. The Town should be very explicit on which development it would like to attract.	https://ptvermont.org/ https://ruraledge.org/ https://accd.vermont.gov/housing/partners/housing-organizations https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/designation-programs/village-centers
Community Trails System	Establish a network of trails throughout the community that provides year-round access to recreation, and more.	Mid-Long Term If private landowners are willing to have a walking/horseback trail system within their area, local neighbors should meet to consider how to develop such a trail system, and develop a committee of interested community members.	https://fpr.vermont.gov/recreation/partners-and-resources/vermont-trail-system https://fpr.vermont.gov/recommended-trail-standards https://www.calaisvermont.gov/?SEC=784D3E87-6623-484D-9A6A-1934CFBF8FC6
Establish a Community Center	Establish a place for people to gather and celebrate year-round. Complete a feasibility study for a Community Center and determine an operating structure and budget.	Long-term Numerous essential needs and social improvements could be met with a designated community center that are identified within this plan.	https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development https://www.Roadusda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program/vt-nh
Improve Housing Stock	Identify resources to improve housing stock for seniors, young families, and other households that may face income challenges. Publicize availability of these resources.	Short-Mid Term Locals could drastically benefit from greater housing security through rehabilitation of existing structures.	https://www.nwwvt.org/heat-squad/ https://www.encyvermont.com/ https://accd.vermont.gov/vhip#:~:text=The%20Vermont%20Housing%20Improvement%20Program,on%20an%20owner%20occupied%20property.