

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Notice is hereby given that the Ira Planning Commission will hold a public hearing at the Town Office in Ira, on Tuesday, March 10, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. The purpose of the meeting is to consider for approval and submission to the Selectboard, a new Town Plan. The geographic area affected by the Town Plan is the entire Town of Ira.

Copies of the Town Plan and accompanying maps are available for public review at the Ira Town Clerk's office. Copies may also be obtained via email, by submitting a request to: iraclerk@vermontel.net

Section headings in the Town Plan are as follows:

- Introduction
- Community Profile
- Community Facilities and Services
- Housing
- Natural Resources
- Flood Resilience
- Economic Development
- Energy
- Transportation
- Future Land Use Plan

Date: January 28, 2020

IRA PLANNING COMMISSION

Bob Kirbach, Chair
Bob Toppin
Bob Kulig
Jeff Barden
Tim Martin

TOWN OF IRA PLANNING COMMISSION

TOWN OF IRA PLANNING COMMISSION WRITTEN REPORT

JANUARY 29, 2020

This report on the Town of Ira proposed Town Plan update is in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4384(c) which states:

When considering an amendment to a plan, the planning commission shall prepare a written report on the proposal. The report shall address the extent to which the plan, as amended, is consistent with the goals established in §4302 of this title.

The Town of Ira is currently considering the adoption of a comprehensively updated Town Plan in accordance with the goals set forth in 24 V.S.A. §4302.

The changes made to the plan are to comply with state planning goals, to reflect changes that have occurred in the Town of Ira, and to be consistent with the Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC) *Regional Plan*.

Significant changes and/or updates have been made to all chapters of the Town Plan, including:

- Introduction
- Community Profile
- Community Facilities and Services
- Housing
- Natural Resources
- Flood Resilience
- Economic Development
- Energy
- Transportation
- Future Land Use Plan

The proposed Ira plan does not include changes to any boundaries or land use designations therefore this report does not need to address any of the points required by 24 V.S.A. §4384(c) regarding alteration of land area designations.

IRA PLANNING COMMISSION

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IRA, VT TOWN PLAN



Adopted by the Town of Ira Selectboard **Month Day**, 2020

IRA PLANNING COMMISSION

Bob Kirbach
Bob Kulig
Tim Martin
Bob Toppin
Jeff Barden

IRA SELECTBOARD

Bob Toppin

THIS TOWN PLAN WAS PREPARED BY THE IRA PLANNING COMMISSION WITH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION.



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INTRODUCTION

The Vermont Planning and Development Act enables the legislative body of all municipalities to create a Town Planning Commission which may consist of not less than three nor more than nine members. Members are appointed by the Ira Selectboard and must serve without compensation. At least a majority of the Commission must be permanent residents of the community. In accordance with the Act, the Ira Planning Commission is given the authority to prepare a Municipal Development Plan and to implement this document by the development and adoption of bylaws. The Ira Planning Commission is comprised of 5 members.

Statutory Authority

The Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act (Chapter 117 of Title 24, Vermont Statutes Annotated) guides the preparation of Town Plans and includes required and suggested elements and adoption procedures. The Vermont Statutes (24 VSA §4382a) require that all plans contain twelve required elements: a statement of objectives, policies, and programs; a land use plan; a transportation plan; a utility and facilities plan; a statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas; an educational facilities plan; an implementation program; a statement indicating how the Plan relates to development trends in adjacent communities; an energy plan; a housing plan; an economic development plan; and a flood resilience plan. While all twelve elements must be included, communities are not prohibited from combining closely related elements.

The Ira Town Plan

Responsibility for the preparation of the Town Plan rests with the Ira Planning Commission. In the course of developing the Plan, the Planning Commission and Town contracted for technical assistance with the Rutland Regional Planning Commission. A Town Plan or Municipal Development Plan must be approved by the Ira Planning Commission and duly adopted by the Town. It is the official policy of the community, with regard to future growth and development, to provide standards of development to ensure that the Town's distinctly rural character and its scenic viewsheds are protected and preserved. It states the goals, objectives, policies, and priorities for action that guide the community towards its vision for the future.

There are many ways to implement the goals and action items of this Plan, which fall into two general categories: regulatory and non-regulatory options. Regulatory options consist of zoning regulations and other town ordinances. Non-regulatory implementation options include, but are not limited to capital planning, special studies, advisory commissions. Adoption of the Plan is the only means available for the Town to legally establish growth and development policies. It is intended that the Plan be used in a positive manner; as a tool in guiding the direction of growth in a way that is both economically feasible and environmentally acceptable. The Plan, by identifying unique and fragile areas, or those regions of high scenic, natural, or historic value, seeks to guide development by respecting both the potentials and constraints offered by nature, balancing these as well as the current and long term needs. It promotes equity and efficiency and the recognition of the public interest in the resources and investments that are found in the Town. As required by law, it should also serve as a foundation for local land use controls such as zoning, subdivision, and health regulations. Furthermore, the Plan should be given full effect in all appropriate regulatory proceedings, such as Act 250 and the Section 248

(Certificate of Public Good) process. Finally, the Plan and its technical reports should be used as a source of local information. All contain information that can be valuable to citizens, businesses, and members of local boards and commissions.

Because Town planning has been characterized as a flexible, continuing process, the Ira Town Plan may be reviewed from time to time and may be amended in the light of new developments and changed conditions affecting the municipality. The Town Plan shall expire and have no further force and effect on the date eight years from the date of adoption. The Plan may be readopted in the form as expired or about to expire and shall remain in effect for the next ensuing eight years or until amended.

History of the Plan

For the first time in over fifteen years, the Town of Ira adopted a comprehensive Town Plan on September 21, 1989. Three times since then the Plan was revised with the assistance of the Rutland Regional Planning Commission and a State grant, commencing in 1993 with the preparation of the first technical reports. This 2020 Plan represents a revision of the 2015 Plan, incorporating 2013 – 2017 U.S. Census' American Community Survey data and information. This update, as required every eight years, complies with State requirements for municipal plans.

The Rutland Regional Planning Commission prepared for the Town various maps in support of this Plan. They are: Transportation and Community Facilities, Future Land Use, and Natural Resources I – III. These maps can be found at the end of the plan.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

History

Ira's first settlers are said to have arrived from southern New England in the 1760's. The first annual Town meeting was held in 1779, and in the following year, residents petitioned the legislature for a charter. To a large extent, the patterns of land use and development seen today reflect those which existed two hundred years ago. The Town's development reflects an economy which was based, since the Town's founding, on agriculture - principally farming, and to a lesser extent, logging.

The early development took place not only in the valleys flanking Ira Brook and the Castleton River, but at higher elevations as well. Much of Ira's early development was represented in the establishment of hill farms, and today five of the six remaining operating farms are hill farms. In the more remote or steep sloped areas in Town, logging has been productive and may represent the highest and best use of such lands. Throughout the Town's history, less accessible or developable lands have lent themselves to other activities including maple sugaring and recreation (including hunting and fishing).

Aside from farming and logging, there were other trades conducted which were largely interdependent with the agricultural-based economy. In the 1800's, Ira had sawmills, blacksmith shops, wagon repair shops, a tannery, a wool-carding mill, a shingle mill and a cheese factory. In addition, there were several taverns or inns, which provided meals and overnight lodging to stage travelers. Several small gold and silver mines were also operated in Ira in the 1800's.

In the early 1900's, the focus of farming shifted from the raising of sheep and wool production, to dairying. The population of Ira, which peaked at 519 in 1810, declined to below 300. Presumably, residents were drawn to the Rutland region by jobs, a trend which continued to the point where Ira became a bedroom community. Today, most residents work outside of Town.

A general decline in farming in the 1900's brought with it several changes. The carding mill and tannery ceased operation. A commercial lime kiln was constructed and successfully operated near the base of Herrick Mountain for many years. A small ski area was operated in the 1960's on the north face of Bird's Eye Mountain in the Towns of Ira and Castleton. The lime kiln and ski area ceased operation years ago, and the remaining businesses in Town represent small home or cottage industries -- there are fewer than five operating farms, an auto body repair shop and a radio-communications shop. Much of the land no longer used for crops or pasture has reverted to wood land.

From a historical perspective, development patterns in the Town reflect a healthy respect for significant physical limitations. Much of the Town is ringed with high mountain peaks and ridges, which have never been settled. Historically, there have been two settled areas in Town. One is in North Ira in the Castleton River valley, and the other is near the Town Hall, in the Ira Brook valley. Travel from one settled area to the other within Town is practically impossible and can only be accomplished by traveling through abutting Towns. There has never been a village, downtown or concentration of residences as may be found in neighboring communities. The Town's meeting hall (C. 1810), Town clerk's office, the former one room schoolhouse (C. 1860), and the Baptist Church (C. 1852) are centrally located in Ira valley and continue to provide the Town's only civic focal point.

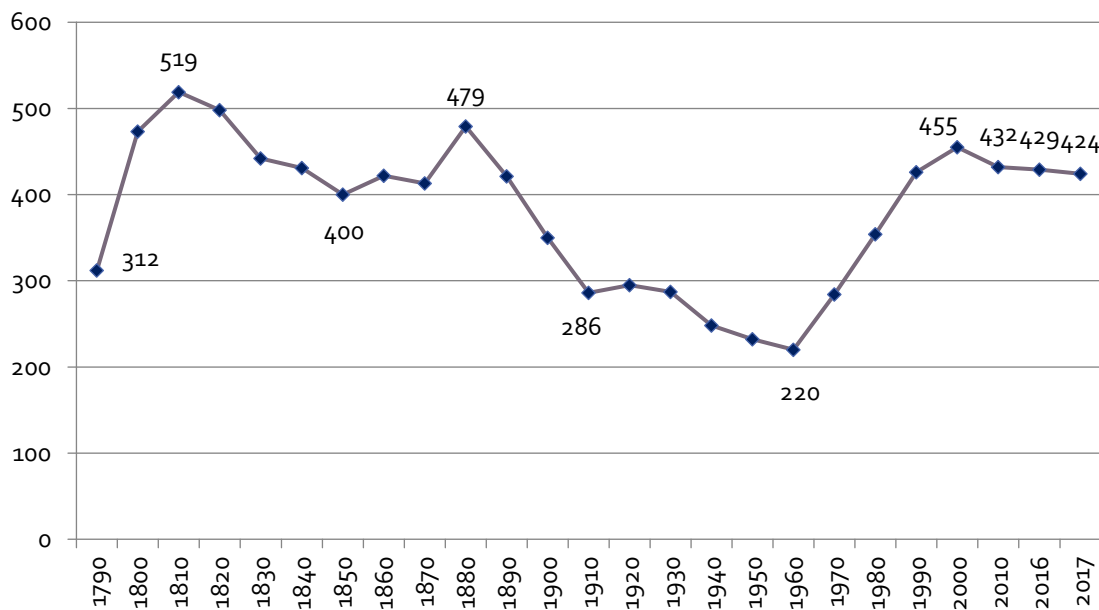


Ira Town Hall. Source: RRPC.

Population

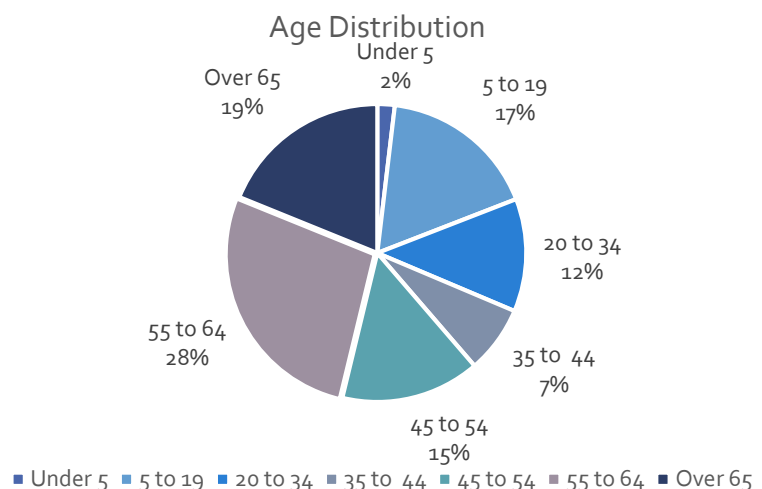
According to the 2017 American Community Survey, there were approximately 424 residents living in Ira, making it the third smallest town in the Rutland Region. From 1960 to 2000, the Town's population more than doubled, however in the past decade Ira's population decreased 6.8%. The density of Ira is 19.9 persons per square mile. Currently, there are an estimated 42 school age children in Ira (37 estimated students as reported by the school district and an estimated 5 homeschooled children). The Town pays tuition for the Town's children who attend public school in the schools of neighboring communities.

Ira Population 1790-2017



Source: 2017 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates

Two significant demographic shifts have taken place in Ira over the past two decades. While much of the population base has remained relatively stable, there has been a clear increase in the median age from 31.1 in 1990 to 53.1 today. According to the 2017 American Community Survey, residents age 45 to 64 made up 41.4% of the total population, and those over age 65 represented 18.8% of the total.



Source: 2017 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates

Households

The 2017 American Community Survey estimates that Ira is comprised of 166 households with 47% of households headed by those over the age of 60. The average household size decreased over the last decade, from 2.79 persons per household in 2000 to 2.55 persons in 2017. This is consistent with a downward trend in household size in both the Region and State.

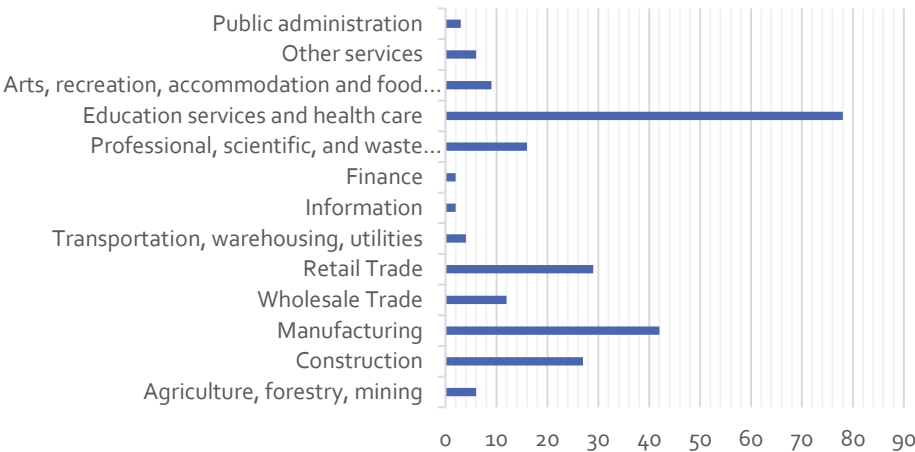
Income and Poverty

The median household income in Ira, according to the 2017 American Community Survey, is estimated to be about \$70,000, or about 24% higher than the estimated median household income for the Rutland Region. The median family income in 2018 was \$68,743 (Housingdata.org). However, the Survey also estimates that 11.1% of Ira residents have an income level below the poverty line.

Employment

Management, science, business, and arts accounted for over one third of the occupations of Ira residents at the time of the 2010 Census (see chart below), while production, transportation, and material moving occupations represented nearly one- quarter of the employed population. Meanwhile, education, health care, and social services, followed closely by manufacturing, were the primary *industries* that employed Ira residents in 2010.

Occupations of Ira Residents



Source: 2017 American Community Survey

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Introduction

Community facilities and services contribute to the health, benefit, safety, and enjoyment of the general public. They include water supply, waste disposal, general town administrative services, and police and fire protection. Community facilities and services have a significant effect on the municipality's ability to grow in an orderly and healthy way. Careful planning is essential for community facilities and services in order to meet local health, safety, and welfare needs and community goals for future growth. Community facilities in Ira are generally centered along the transportation corridor of Route 133. This is the same area that would be proposed in the Town's Village Center Designation Application through the State's Department of Housing and Community Development should the Town pursue it. The designation would bring with it additional technical support, trainings, and financial benefits (such as tax credits and priority consideration for State grants).

Water Supply

There are three methods or systems by which residents in the Town of Ira obtain potable water. The source most commonly found is the surface or groundwater well. These wells are penetrated to the water table by drill or other mechanical means and are then incased in metal or concrete for containment. This type of water system is less expensive than an artesian well but can prove unreliable at times. In dry seasons, when the local water table lowers, these wells fail to provide water in sufficient quantity for normal residential uses. In wetter seasons, these wells can be subject to contamination from foreign matter introduced to the well through runoff.

Artesian wells are deep wells, drilled into the subterranean aquifer and are the most reliable, and often the most preferred, sources of water. In Ira, the artesian well is second to the surface well in popularity of use. This type of system is the most expensive to construct and in Ira is more so, because of a greater average depth to the aquifer than in neighboring communities. Artesian wells in the southern half of Ira range in depth from under 100 feet to over 1,000 feet. There have been attempts on certain properties, mostly in the southern half of Town, to obtain useable delivery rates of water through artesian wells, without success.

When accessible and of good quality, ground springs are used by Town residents as the third water system of choice. Springs generally are regarded as a high-quality water source, in many cases are, but they can be subject to the same problems as are experienced with surface wells.

All or nearly all residences in Ira are supplied with water by use of electric pumps. Generally, a submersible pump is used when the source is an artesian well or surface well, and self-priming above-ground pumping systems are used with surface wells and ground springs. Some older homes with surface water wells or ground springs use gravity flow to transport the water, and to provide a head of pressure, which would otherwise be generated by an electric pump.

Ira has limited watershed. In contrast to some neighboring communities, there are no lakes, and there are very few ponds or other bodies of standing water such as marshes or bogs. Ira Brook, which flows north through the southern half of Town, and the Castleton River located in North Ira, are the two rivers in Town and account for the majority of wetlands indicated on the Town's land use map. The Town of West Rutland has a municipal

forest of several hundred acres located in a remote area off Clark Hill Road, which tract serves as the primary watershed for that community's municipal water system. The topography in Ira is such that the mountainous and mostly wooded areas in the outlying areas of Town serve to channel precipitation, in the form of runoff, to the lower lying and settled regions in Town which are dependent upon such water for residential uses.

Sewage Disposal

The Town adopted an on-site sewage ordinance that was substantially revised on June 14, 1990, incorporating State standards for acceptable on-site septic disposal. Because of recent changes to the Environmental Protection Rules for Wastewater System and Potable Water Supply Rules (adopted by the State, Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation) construction of new disposal systems and repairs or changes to existing ones will require a State permit, so the Town no longer needs to regulate wastewater systems.

Solid Waste Disposal

The Town is a member of the Rutland County Solid Waste District, which is the primary regional entity administering and addressing solid waste disposal problems on a regional level on behalf of its constituent municipalities. The District operates a transfer station located on Gleason Road in Rutland, which is available to Ira residents who pay an annual fee for use of the facility. The facility currently accepts household wastes, including glass, paper and metal. Continued use of the existing center and any other centers as may become available in the future, should be encouraged.

In 2012, Act 148—Vermont's Universal Recycling Law—was passed. The intent of the law is to divert recyclable items, leaf and yard debris, and food scraps from landfills. By July 1, 2015 recyclables will be banned from landfills; by July 1, 2016 leaf and yard debris and clean wood waste will be banned from landfills; and by 2020 food scraps will be banned. Facility owners and trash haulers will need to collect and manage these wastes accordingly. The Town will have to work with the District to ensure compliance with Act 148. Based upon the Town's sparse settlement patterns and population, it is anticipated that the future needs for disposal of solid waste will be met through continuation of the existing recycling and private contract haulage methods.

Electric Service

The Town of Ira is located entirely within the service territory of Green Mountain Power, which provides electric service to all currently settled areas in the Town. Along the U.S. Route 4A corridor in North Ira, there are two high-tension transmission lines which serve to carry electricity through the Town for eventual use or distribution at destinations outside Ira. One line is a 46 kv line owned and maintained by Green Mountain Power, and the other is a 115 kv line owned and maintained by Vermont Electric Power Company. A third transmission line is owned and maintained by Green Mountain Power in the northeast section of Ira. Like the transmission lines located in North Ira, this 46 kv line does not serve local needs in Ira.

The extension of existing distribution lines to new locations in Town is addressed on a case-by-case basis by Green Mountain Power, and the costs of line extensions as may be required are borne by the new customer or customers in accordance with the company's applicable tariffs. The existing distribution lines are located either

within Town highway rights of way, or on private property with landowner permission and/or easements. The responsibility for maintenance of transmission and distribution lines rests with the utility, and not with the Town.

With respect to line extensions and any new distribution lines, decision making on location, construction and maintenance will likely remain with the involved landowner(s) and the utility.

Telephone and Television Services

Fair Point Communications (formerly Verizon) and Vermont Telephone Company provide local calling service. Long distance calling plans are provided by a variety of regionally and nationally based companies. Existing lines are located within Town highway rights-of-way, or on private property, with landowner permission and/or easements. The responsibility for maintenance of lines rests with the utility, and not with the Town. There is one cell tower in Ira, located near the peak of Herrick Mountain, but cell service within many parts of the Town is quite limited.

Cable television service is available in some parts of Ira.

Internet

Internet services in town are available through Comcast, VTel, and satellite. Ira has taken the initiative of having fiber optic installed throughout the Town, and so has more reliable internet than areas without. As a result of rapid industry growth, emerging technologies, and industry permit leasing requirements, Vermont towns will see a sharp increase in applications for telecommunications towers over the next several years. Given the industry's plans to increase its presence in Vermont and the sometimes highly sensitive nature of telecommunications tower proposals, it has become increasingly urgent that every Vermont town adopt regulations specifically addressing siting and application requirements for these towers. Thoughtful regulations balance the desire for better communications facilities with the desire to preserve scenic landscapes and ensure safety in each community.

The Public Service Board regulates the siting, construction and modification of towers and cellular structures. Traditional tools that towns use to participate in the siting of cellular facilities is planning, adopting reasonable bylaws, and focusing on aesthetics, safety concerns (other than radiation) and character of the neighborhood.

Town Office

The Town Office building was built in 2009 and replaces a one-room schoolhouse which had served as the Town clerk's office. The building provides space for the land records, town clerk, listers and selectboard.



Source: RRPC.

Town Hall

A landmark red brick building, the Town Hall has been restored with the efforts of the Ira Selectboard and Ira Senior Go-Getters, and more recently the Friends of the Ira Town Hall. It was constructed around 1800 and has served as the location for municipal functions such as Town meetings, public hearings, school, and other civic functions. Friends of the Ira Town Hall have raised approximately \$15,000 which funded updates to the brick and masonry, all the downstairs windows were historically rebuilt, and the upstairs electric has been reinstalled. Currently the Town uses the building for classes and events such as weekly yoga, foot clinics, weightlifting, flu shots, community suppers, and more. The facilities are also available to rent for private events.

Emergency Management

Having emergency services available is among the basic needs of residents in Ira. The Town strives to be active in all four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Mitigation- Mitigation means taking action before the next disaster to reduce losses of life and property. In 2017, the Town received FEMA final approval on their first single jurisdiction, stand-alone Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. The Plan identifies the Town's highest risk natural hazards and locations where these hazards are most likely to impact. The Plan also sets forth a prioritized list of tasks to be completed to reduce the damage from future hazard events.



Source: Taino Consulting Group

High risk natural hazards in Ira include flooding and fluvial erosion, severe thunderstorms with high winds, and extreme winter storms with heavy snowfall, extreme cold, and ice/freezing rain.

Mitigation priorities in the 2017 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan include upgrading culverts, ensuring new development will not be vulnerable to flooding or fluvial erosion, and improvements to the Town Hall (the local primary shelter).

Since the FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plan expires after five years, the Town should begin working to prepare and adopt a new plan in 2021.

The Town has also completed an inventory of its bridges and culverts and adopted a series of codes and standards for road maintenance that ensure sustainable practices. Having these programs in place reduces the Town's match against State dollars for federally declared disasters and certain public works maintenance projects.

Preparedness- Preparedness involves activities and measures—such as training, plans, procedures, and equipment—taken in advance of an incident to ensure effective response. The Town has an appointed Emergency Management Director, who is responsible for coordinating the various components of the

emergency management system. One of the EMD's core functions is to maintain an up to date emergency management plan.

In 2019, Vermont Emergency Management released a new Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) to replace the Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP). Ira's LEMP was last updated and adopted on April 22, 2019.

The LEMP establishes lines of responsibility during a disaster and includes staffing and location information for the local emergency operations center (EOC); municipal purchasing agents for emergencies and emergency spending limits; a listing of municipal resources, mutual aid agreements, and local resource suppliers; selected methods for public information and warning; locations that are to be used as shelters; and a complete listing of contacts. The LEMP identifies the Ira Town Office as the primary local EOC. The Ira Town Hall is listed as the primary local shelter and the West Rutland School as the alternate local shelter.

The LEMP should be examined and re-adopted annually by May 1st to ensure all content remains current and accurate. In addition, Ira should consider exercising their LEMP on a periodic basis. Exercises enhance knowledge of plans; allow members of the local emergency team to improve their own performance; and identify opportunities to improve capabilities to respond to real events. There are different types of exercises that can be used to evaluate plans – tabletop exercises, functional exercises, and full-scale exercises.

Response- Response activities address the short-term, direct effects of an incident and seek to save lives, protect property, and meet basic human needs. In Ira response services include fire protection, rescue, and public safety/police.

Ira is served by the Ira Volunteer Fire Department (IVFD), a private organization formed in 1975. The fire department is a volunteer department and presently has ten members on the roster. It is funded by annual town taxes and periodically through fundraisers. The department is housed on a one acre tract of land and



Source: Bob Toppin.

operates out of a three-bay garage which includes a meeting/training room. Since the 2009 Town Plan, the building is now designated as being in the flood plain. The equipment on hand consists of:

- 1) 1984 Pierce pumper (750 gallons of water and 1000 gpm pump) which is 36 years old and is outfitted with a four-man cab. The rear two seats are open to the elements.
- 2) 2004 American LaFrance rescue pumper which was purchased in 2011. The cab seats four firefighters and is climate controlled. The truck has a 1500 gpm pump, 900 gallons of water, on board scene lighting system, generator and a hydraulic pump unit which powers the extrication tools.

The firefighters are outfitted with pagers and a cell phone app that sends notification. The pager service is through the Vermont State Police and dispatch is out of Rockingham. The

Mutual Aid System provides backup equipment and manpower from the surrounding communities 24 hrs/day. The IVFD has worked with the VT RC&D and has identified all the water sources for fire protection in town. There are two wet hydrants and two dry hydrant in operation. Ira has a modified shipping container which is used for live fires and training. Typical call volumes runs around 30 fire and 13 medical calls per year. In 2018, Ira established its EMS first responder crew of which there are five members is equipped with an automated external defibrillator, a medic bag, and oxygen. If the population (424) or number of houses increases, the department would have to be assisted in terms of manpower, water sources, and fire equipment. Likewise, houses built off the town roads with poor access create a challenge overall, but worse in winter and mud season. Four-wheel drive firetrucks in our mutual aid system typically have limited pump capacity and limited water volume.

Ira is a member of the Regional Ambulance Service, Inc., which has six ambulances with trained personnel capable of responding round-the-clock. If all regional ambulances are in use, Poultney and/or Middletown Springs will respond to an emergency in Ira as a part of mutual aid. In the event of a disaster, Vermont E.M.S. District #10 has a disaster management plan which would involve State Police and as many as 10 ambulances.

Ira has no police department. There are two elected Town Constables. Ira contracts with the Rutland County Sheriff's Department to provide its police services.

Recovery- Recovery is the process of rebuilding, restoring, and rehabilitating the community following an emergency. The Town should maintain records of costs incurred in the recovery from disasters, including road and culvert repairs. This information is reported to Vermont Emergency Management and aids the state in applying for federal declarations of disaster in larger events. It is also critical to ensuring the Town then receives the fullest amount of government financial assistance legally allowed during a federally declared disaster.

Vermont's Emergency Relief Assistance Fund (ERAF) provides state funding to match federal Public Assistance after federally-declared disasters. Eligible public costs are reimbursed by federal taxpayers at 75%. For disasters after October 23, 2014, the State of Vermont will contribute an additional 7.5% toward the costs. If the Town takes specific steps to improve flood resilience the State will contribute 12.5% or 17.5% of the total cost based on these requirements. Currently, Ira is at the 12.5% level because they have adopted the four mitigation measures described below.

12.5% for eligible communities that have adopted four mitigation measures:

1. National Flood Insurance Program (participate or have applied);
2. Town Road and Bridge Standards – (annually certify adopted standards that meet or exceed current VTrans Standards;
3. Local Emergency Management Plan (adopt annually after town meeting);
4. Local Hazard Mitigation Plan - Adopt a FEMA-approved local plan (valid for five years).

17.5% ERAF funding for eligible communities that also have adopted:

1. Maintenance of an active rate classification (class #1 through 9) under FEMA's Community Rating System (CRS) that includes activities that prohibit new structures in mapped flood hazard zones, OR;

2. Adoption of a Fluvial Erosion Hazard (FEH) or other river corridor or floodplain protection bylaw that meets or exceeds the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources FEH model regulations and scoping guidelines.

Cemetery

The Ira Town Cemetery is owned and financially managed by the Town. It is managed by a three-person volunteer committee and is seen to be a Town asset. All cemetery records have been computerized.

Educational Facilities

The Town does not have any public educational facilities, nor does the Town own any school buses or vans, and the Town does not currently provide transportation of students to any schools.

Having voted to maintain school choice, all elementary, secondary, and high school students are transported to other neighboring communities for education. The costs of this are borne by the Town's residents in the form of tuition payments made to the other school systems. Ira is in the Greater Rutland County Supervisory Union, with budgetary functions residing with the Town's School Board, which is comprised of three people. Residents have access to post-secondary educational opportunities and facilities in the region, including those at Community College of Vermont and Stafford Technical Center. The Ira Town Hall is available for events or presentations that involve ongoing education.

Libraries

There has never been a library in Ira; neighboring communities, including West Rutland and Rutland, have library facilities available to the public. The Town allocates funds to support the Rutland Free Library.

Recreation

There are limited recreational facilities provided by the Town or others and located in Ira. The State of Vermont owns 1,920 acres and 6 large tracts located on either side of Route 4 in North Ira, and although these parcels are undeveloped, they are part of the State's wildlife management areas and are open to sports enthusiasts. For those students tuitioned out to neighboring communities, recreational facilities are generally available as parts of the neighboring school systems. These facilities would include gymnasiums, playing fields, etc. The Vermont Achievement Center and Castleton State College have swimming pools open to the public.

Health Services

A full spectrum of health services is available in the Rutland Region, although no services (with the exception of services performed in connection with ambulance calls) are performed in Town. The Rutland Regional Medical Center provides a broad range of services to the Region and residents of Ira on in-patient and out-patient bases. In addition, there are a number of services available from physicians with offices or professional associations not directly linked with the Rutland Regional Medical Center. Many of these professionals maintain offices in Rutland, and to a lesser extent, some maintain offices in the Castleton Region. The Town contributes to Rutland

Area Mental Health, Rutland Area Hospice, Inc., and the Visiting Nurse Association, and the services provided by both entities are available to the residents of Ira. Currently, health service needs of Ira's residents are adequately fulfilled, and it is anticipated that in the future, such needs will continue to be met through the use of these available health services.

Childcare

Ensuring accessible, affordable, quality childcare is integral to sound economic development planning. Many families lead lives that require some type of childcare outside the home. Recognizing this reality, childcare is a critical community need. Investments in the childcare infrastructure, like investments in the infrastructures of transportation, public works, affordable housing and education, can have direct positive effects on the growth and vitality of the community.

While Ira is home to a number of children as shown in the table above, it is among a handful of towns in the Region with no registered home care providers or license childcare providers. It is difficult to assess the need for childcare facilities in Ira because of the high proportion of adults who commute to other communities to work. Vermont’s HousingData.org shows 58% of Ira residents travel between 15 – 29 minutes to work and 23% commuting more than 30 minutes. It is expected that many parents choose to have their children near their places of work, thus potentially reducing the need for facilities in Ira. Parents and any unregistered childcare providers in Ira should be asked to provide input on the need for additional childcare facilities.

Children in Ira	
Age	Population
Under 5 years	8
5 to 9 years	26
10 to 14 years	22
15 to 19 years	25

Source: 2017 American
Community Survey

Within a 15 mile radius from Ira there are 32 registered home care providers and 54 licensed childcare centers, which include early childhood and school-age care programs (Source: Dcf.Vermont.Gov). Rutland City accounts for approximately 41% of these providers, with 11 registered homes and 24 licensed centers. To improve the quality of services, Vermont has established the STep Ahead Recognition System (STARs) program to recognize regulated childcare, preschool, and afterschool programs that take measures to exceed state standards in providing services to children and families. STARs ratings range from 1 to 5 stars, based upon their success in five areas of performance (e.g. staff qualifications). As of November 2019, 84 childcare providers within a 15 mile radius of Ira were participating in STARs. Eighteen of those providers achieved the highest rating of 5 stars, and 23 had a rating of 4 stars.

There are critical issues regarding childcare that should be considered in Ira even with the current lack of childcare facilities in Town. First, low income families have difficulty accessing childcare and afterschool programs, due to financial constraints, lack of transportation, and the demands placed on working parents. Middle income families also struggle to pay for childcare. Statewide from 2015 to 2017, market rates saw an overall increase in rates of about 8% for licensed programs and 11% for registered programs. Rates for full time care at a licensed center as of 2017 are: \$240 for children under 24 months, \$232 for toddlers, \$219 for preschoolers, and \$180 for school aged children (Source: 2017 Vermont Child Care Market Rate Survey). Another deficiency is specialized childcare services for infants as well as children with special needs. Lastly,

childcare providers struggle financially due to insufficient state and federal funding, and workers are paid relatively low wages.

Administrative Services

The provision of administrative services through a local government is basically done through two groups. A three member Selectboard oversees and administers the general day-to-day affairs of the Town. Under State law, the Selectboard is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the Town's roads, municipal properties and general affairs. The School Board is responsible for all matters pertaining to the education of the children residing in Town. The Ira School Board, consisting of three residents, annually proposes a budget for the education of the town's school aged children, and the Vermont Department of Education regulates numerous aspects of the education provided to Ira's children. At the annual Town Meeting, the budgeted sum is approved or rejected by the voters following a floor vote. The Selectboard and School Directors' positions are filled by volunteers. To date, the provision of administrative services by the Selectboard and School Board members has served the Town well, due in large part to the low population in Town and to the willingness of volunteers to serve in these positions.

The land records and other documents pertaining to the Town are kept by the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk's Office is located in the newly renovated town office building. The Town Hall, which was constructed around 1800, has served as the location for municipal functions such as Town meetings, public hearings, and health clinics. It has also served as the location for civic functions such as potluck suppers, and other community-based uses.

As the Town grows, it may be necessary to share in the administration of certain services through joint efforts with neighboring municipalities or through regional entities such as the Rutland Regional Planning Commission.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

Preserve and continue the rural character of the physical and social resources in Town.

Action Items

- ▲ Prohibit local land filling or disposal of solid waste.
- ▲ Support continued use by residents of private solid waste haulers and encourage recycling.
- ▲ Maintain membership in Rutland County Solid Waste District.
- ▲ Keep municipal costs and taxes within the affordability of taxpayers.
- ▲ Channel new construction and residential growth in accordance with the land use plan in the rural residential district.
- ▲ Continue the process of budgeting for the Town's general expenses and school expenses.
- ▲ Acquire property or obtain rights of first refusal on property which the Town considers necessary or appropriate as potential sites for municipal uses.
- ▲ Encourage maximum flexibility for parents to have access to quality childcare providers.

- ▲ Permit the use of single family homes in Ira for small-scale family childcare facilities.
- ▲ Meet with current childcare providers and parents of young children to determine if there is a need for additional child-care capacity in Town.
- ▲ Assess the feasibility of applying for a Village Center Designation through the VT Department of Housing and Community Development.
- ▲ Provide adequate emergency services including fire and ambulance.
- ▲ Continue municipal support for the maintenance of the Fire Department.
- ▲ Continue membership in Rutland Regional Ambulance Service.

Housing

Introduction

National and regional trends regarding housing reflect smaller households, increasing auto ownership, and working a distance from one's residential community, as well as a decline in farming in recent decades. Ira's residential growth will be tempered by physical constraints to development including steep topography, limited transportation infrastructure, the availability of adequate water supply, and the capabilities of the ground to accommodate on-site septic disposal. Generally, Ira's development is characterized by low-density housing, located away from steep slopes, wetlands and floodplains.

Ira's residents live, for the most part, in single-family housing located along the few roads that traverse the Town. There is a slight, but by no means large, concentration of housing at the junction of Route 133 and Cross Road. There are 193 housing units in Ira according to the 2017 American Community Survey. Housing units in Ira are predominately single-family detached homes. The Survey also estimates 88% of housing

	2000		2010		2017	
	# of Units	% of Total	# of Units	% of Total	# of Units	% of Total
Total Housing Units	192	100%	193	100%	193	100%
Total Owner Occupied	141	73%	147	76%	156	80%
Total Renter Occupied	22	11%	24	12%	10	5%
Total Seasonal, Recreational, Occasional Use	24	13%	15	8%	19	10%
Total Vacant Units (excluding seasonal)	5	3%	7	4%	8	4%

Source: 2000 and 2010 US Census, and 2017 American Community Survey.

units are single family, and approximately 7% are mobile homes. Additionally, 4% of units are 2- to 4-apartment structures (usually duplexes).

Most housing units are owner-occupied—80.8 % according to the 2017 American Community Survey—with 5.4% being renter occupied and 10.2% being seasonal use.

Ira has experienced a slight downward trend in population, consistent with the region as a whole. According to the US Census Bureau, Ira’s population decreased by 6.8% between 2000 and 2017, while the Region experienced a 5.8% population decrease. At the same time Ira has seen a 1.8% increase in number of households, whereas the County has seen a 2% decrease. The increase in number of households despite the downward population trend can be attributed to a steady decrease in household size.

Households

Ira is composed predominately of family households. According to the 2017 American Community Survey, there are 166 households in Ira and a total population of 424 persons. The average household size dropped from 2.79 persons in 2000 to 2.53 in 2010 but has shown some growth at 2.55 in 2017. This is in contrast to the County which has an average household size of 2.28 – a number which has not changed since 2010.

The overall proportion of married couple families with children under 18 years of age in Ira is dropping in Ira as it is elsewhere in Vermont. In 2010 22.5% of households were families with children under 18 years of age compared to 19.3% in 2017. This is consistent with the aging population in Ira, where the number of children 19 years old and younger decreased from 115 in 2010 to 81 in 2017.

Non-family households are predominantly one-person households (88%).

The overall population of the Town is decreasing while the number of households is increasing (due to smaller household sizes). There seems to currently be an adequate amount of housing units in town for the population.

	2000	2010	2017	% Change	Source: US Census 2000, 2010, and American Community Survey 2017.
Housing Units (excluding seasonal)	168	178	166	-1.1%	
Households	163	171	166	1.8%	
Population	455	432	424	-6.8%	

Housing Conditions

The National Housing Act of 1949 defined an adequate house as a “decent, safe and sanitary” dwelling. This refers to both the external and internal condition of housing. The US Census Bureau uses three measures to gauge housing condition:

1. Overcrowding – units where there are more than one person per room

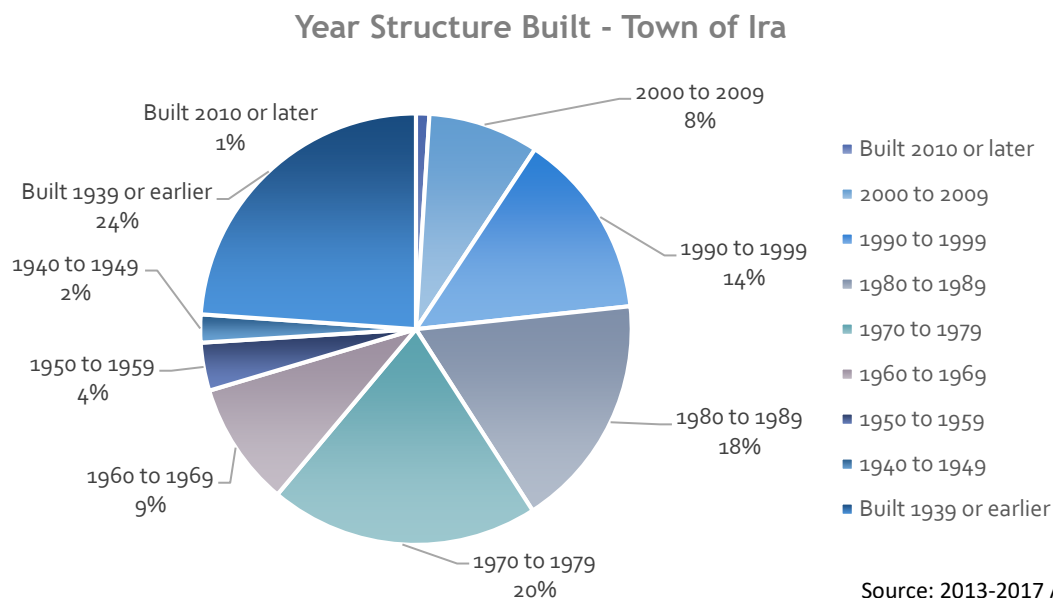
2. Age of housing – Housing structures built before 1939 are considered by the Census Bureau to be structurally/physically unsafe. Since this is cited for the nation as a whole, and not specifically Vermont, where much of the housing stock is older and some, or even many, of these structures may have been renovated and maintained, this may be an invalid measure. Also, it is difficult to get this information without conducting a site survey of the actual units in a given community.
3. Sub-standard units – Those units that have partial or no plumbing as well as units that have some or no kitchen facilities are categorized as substandard.

Overcrowding

In Ira, the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates showed there were only 2 housing with more than one person per room. Generally, overcrowded housing is not an issue in Ira.

Age of Housing

The age of structures is often associated with housing conditions. Ira's housing stock, like its neighbors', continues to age. Approximately 23% of all structures in the Town were built prior to 1940 (see chart below). These units require attention to ensure they remain in good structural form. A number of older homes are on the State list of historic places, and many have been maintained or restored to meet modern usage and safety requirements. Homes built in the last few decades are generally safe, adequate and in good repair.



Substandard Units

Only three housing units were listed as lacking complete plumbing facilities according to the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Two housing units were listed as having incomplete kitchen facilities. Overall, Ira has little problems concerning the livability of its housing units.

Special Needs Population

The special needs population, for the purposes of a housing analysis includes single parent households, physically and mentally impaired persons, elderly and the homeless.¹ In addition to requiring certain services that differ from typical single-family households (i.e. physical accessibility, assisted living) these groups also tend to be in the lower income category.

Using 2010 Census data (due to the 2017 American Community Survey lacking the following information), Ira was shown to have 8 single parent households with children under 18 years of age (5% of all households in town) and 14 residents over age 65 living alone (8% of all households). Recent Census information regarding Ira residents with disabilities is not available.

As noted above, the proportion of single parent households and elderly persons living alone is relatively low in Ira, compared to other towns in Rutland County. However, these groups, along with many 'traditional' families, have been facing an affordable housing shortage. There is currently no subsidized housing in Ira.

Housing Affordability

Nationwide, a trend toward fewer persons per household has changed the type of housing needs and increased the demand for housing, especially affordable housing, even with stable or declining populations. Identification of housing needs requires an evaluation of housing demand, housing supply, and buying power. Housing affordability is a regional issue. High rental and sale prices of homes in one Town do not only affect households currently residing within the Town. Unaffordable housing costs can also restrict those households wishing to move into the area but lack the household income to afford to live there. Discussion of Ira's affordability recognizes the lack of employment and educational opportunities and public transit service in Ira, necessitating an additional cost of travel by vehicle to these.

The 2019 *Out of Reach* report by the National Low Income Housing Coalition shows that the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Rutland County is \$939. This requires an hourly wage of at least \$18.06, or an annual income of \$37,560.² A household would need to work 67 hours a week earning minimum wage to afford that two-bedroom apartment. In Ira, the 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate showed that the median income for renter households in Ira was \$19,5830 (compared to the Rutland County median of \$27,201). While rental units are generally more affordable in Ira, an accurate count of the number of rental units and their availability is lacking, and the number of units may not be able to accommodate the elderly and low-income households looking for smaller, less expensive living situations.

Homeownership in Vermont is also difficult for many credit-worthy households due to the high up-front costs of purchasing a home and the increase in median home values in recent years. The median monthly cost for homeowners with a mortgage was \$1,200, and 30% of Ira homeowners spend at least 30% of their household income on housing costs. Median home values in Ira rose from \$94,500 in 2000 to \$147,500 in 2017 (American Community Survey). The current median home value is unaffordable to a household earning the regional median income of \$52,635. However, Ira's buying power has increased disproportionately in the past

¹ Planning for Affordable Housing. Department of Housing and Community Affairs, February 1990, pg. 11

² A unit is considered affordable if rent plus utilities cost no more than 30% of the renter's income.

decade, with the median household income rising from \$46,875 to \$70,625, or 51%³. This means that either higher income people live or moved to Ira and lower income people have either relocated or choose not to live in Ira.

An analysis of Ira's situation indicates that the need for different housing types is increasing- the number of elderly householders living alone (4.7% of all households) and single parent households (6.4% of all households) are increasing, and overall household size is decreasing. These trends affect affordability as well.

Ira, like every community in the Region, is home to low-income households for whom affordability is especially difficult. The majority of these households are comprised of young adults or elderly community members, indicating the need for housing types that fit the unique needs of these groups.

The Town recognizes the need for, and the demands placed upon, affordable housing for all income groups. Two area agencies provide services that assist in the acquisition and/or rehabilitation of residential units for affordable housing. NeighborWorks of Western Vermont is located in West Rutland, and the Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council has an office in Rutland. The Town supports the assistance provided by these organizations and encourages homeowners and prospective homeowners to avail themselves fully of their services. There are other State and federal programs that address rehabilitation of existing residential units.

		2000	2011	2017
Median Household Income				
	Ira	\$46,875	\$60,000	\$70,625
	Rutland County	\$36,743	\$48,190	\$52,635
Median Home Value				
	Ira	\$94,500	\$126,500	\$147,500
	Rutland County	\$97,500	\$147,700	\$150,000
Affordable Home Value⁴				
	Rutland County	\$73,485	\$96,380	\$105,270
	Affordable Monthly Costs (Rent or Mortgage)⁵			
	Rutland County	\$735	\$964	\$1,053

Source: US Census 2000,2007-2011 and 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, and VT Dept of Taxes (property transfer tax records). Income figures not adjusted for inflation.

Housing and Land Use

In Ira, housing and overall land use are closely linked. Most of the development is residential structures. Given Ira's character, future construction in the community is likely to follow this pattern. It is therefore important to consider the impacts of new single family housing on the Town's overall landscape. As the Town's remaining farms continue to be divided into smaller, residential parcels, the need for an overall strategy for maintaining the Town's resources and uses is apparent. The Future Land Use element examines this issue in greater detail.

³ Source: US Census 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

⁴ This value obtained by multiplying 80% of the county median income by 2.5.

⁵ This value obtained by multiplying 80% of the county median monthly income by 30%, the standard affordability formula.

Future Housing Needs

Because of Ira's position as an outlying town, many households seeking to move into the area have the ability to look for less expensive housing in neighboring towns if Ira's housing is not affordable. The housing need in Ira is driven by the need for a diverse range of housing to accommodate present residents and those households that specifically wish to reside in Ira.

Ira's population is not likely to grow significantly in the next ten years. Between 2000 and 2017, the Town saw its population decrease by 6.8% from 455 to 424. This is not to suggest that there is no demand for housing, at an affordable rate, among Ira residents—especially given that the number of households is increasing as household sizes become smaller. This means that small single family and multi-family units, as well as rental units, will be needed to accommodate a changing population.

Much of the slow housing and population growth over the past decade can be attributed to the lack of land suitable for development given the topography and soil for septic systems. Recent changes in the statewide water supply and wastewater rules, however, combined with Vermont's increasing popularity as a residential environment suggest that there may be an increased demand for new housing.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

Safe, decent and affordable housing shall be available in a variety of types that meets the needs of diverse social and income groups.

Action Items

- ▲ Maintain a diverse mix of housing options available to the complete spectrum of household incomes and household types.
- ▲ Encourage construction of new and/or rehabilitated housing in appropriate locations, in particular located conveniently to transportation networks.
- ▲ Cooperate with not-for-profit housing organizations, government agencies, private lenders, developers and builders in pursuing options and meeting the housing needs of local residents.

Goal

Households with individuals with special housing needs, including the elderly, those with physical or mental disabilities, single parent households, as well as low and moderate-income households are able to attain suitable and affordable housing.

Action Items

- ▲ Encourage accessory apartments within or attached to single-family residences.
- ▲ Encourage improved access for all housing types to appropriate services.

Goal

Maintain and promote the historic character and development pattern of housing in Ira.

Action Items

- ▲ Encourage home ownership and property upkeep efforts of Ira residents.
- ▲ Ensure that new and rehabilitated housing is constructed to meet safety and sanitary minimum standards.

Housing Implementation Strategies

The following strategies suggest ways that Ira's housing goals and objectives should be implemented. The Town should:

- ▲ Encourage the preservation and rehabilitation of the Town's existing housing stock by various measures, including supporting applications for grants.
- ▲ Increase public awareness of the Town's affordable housing needs and policies making information on various assistance programs available and by offering technical assistance to those in need.
- ▲ Work with non-profit agencies to pursue low interest rehabilitation loans for affordable housing units:
 - Whenever housing units are offered for sale, bring the offers to the attention of non-profit housing organizations such as the Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council or Rutland County Community Land Trust. These organizations can look into the possibility of acquiring these housing units and thereby ensure they will remain affordable and in sound condition.
- ▲ Ensure that Town regulations actively support the rehabilitation and construction of moderately priced housing that maintains and enhances the Town's character. Tools may include:
 - Encouraging development to take place in a clustered form
 - Permitting the conversion of larger homes and structures to multi-family housing where feasible under septic laws.
- ▲ Identify units that can be rehabilitated to meet some or all of the unmet needs.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ira is located at the northern edge of the Taconic Mountain Range, which greatly influences its landscape. Much of the Town consists of steep, rugged terrain that ranges in approximate elevation from nearly 3,000 feet to less than 500. Ira's waterbodies, roadways and development occur in the few lowland valleys in Town. The natural communities that develop in a region are highly



Source: Ira Vermont Historical Society.

influenced by underlying geological and topographical characteristics. From the summit of Herrick Mountain to the floodplains of the Castleton River, many varied natural ecosystems such as mixed hardwood forests, high elevation spruce-dominated forests and wetlands are supported.

Topography

The Town of Ira is dominated by the northern edge of the Taconic Mountain Range. The steep and rugged terrain of the Taconic Mountains characterizes most of Ira's landscape. Approximately sixty five percent of the land in Ira has a slope exceeding fifteen percent. This is the maximum slope allowed under State subdivision laws for residential construction on tracts less than ten acres in size. Approximately twenty percent of the land in Ira has a slope between eight percent and fifteen percent, while about fifteen percent of the land has a slope of less than eight percent. Most of the existing residences in Ira are located in areas with slopes less than eight percent, and there are very few located in areas where the slope exceeds fifteen percent. Herrick Mountain and several neighboring peaks exceed 2,500 feet in elevation and are therefore subject to the State's land use law, Act 250.



Source: Ira Vermont Historical Society.

Elevations range from 2,726 feet at the summit of Herrick Mountain to 480 feet along the Castleton River. There are only two lowland areas in Ira, through which the two major stream systems flow. Ira's waterways, namely the Castleton River, paralleling Route 4 near the northern boundary of the Town, and Ira Brook, paralleling Route 133 along the eastern edge of Town are the only significant surface waters in Town. The Town consists of 14,252.26 acres and is approximately ten miles long by four and one-half miles at its widest point.

Geologically, most of the rocks belong to the Taconic Sequence, which consist largely of slate and phyllite with only minor limestone intrusions. Only in the southeastern portion of the Town do rocks of the Valley Sequence occur. These rocks are either siliceous or graphitic phyllite with frequently occurring limestone beds. Although rocks of the Taconic Sequence are considered to be older than those of the Valley Sequence, they generally overlie the younger rocks.

Much of Ira is mixed hardwood forest, largely dominated by sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), and at the drier sites by oak-hophornbeam forest with red oak (*Quercus rubra*) and hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) the co-dominants. At the higher elevations, red spruce (*Picea rubra*) becomes an important component of the canopy. Wetlands are largely restricted to the two major stream systems in Town. Although no floodplain forest remains, the area along the Castleton River supports a large wetland consisting of shrub and emergent zones. There are few wetlands remaining along Ira Brook.

Soils

Ira is made up of many different soil types, and the different qualities associated with each directly affect the capabilities and possibilities of the landscape to support varying uses. The most common soils in Town are generally unsuited for agriculture or development due to a shallow depth to bedrock, steep slopes and prevalent rock outcroppings. Other soils, found at the foothills of the Taconics are suitable for crops, pasture, and in areas characterized by glacial till, development is also appropriate.

There are four general soil associations found in Ira. The most prevalent, the Taconic-Macomber-Hubbardton Association is found on mountains, hills and ridges overlaying slate and schist bedrock. This soil association is common to areas with 15 to 50 percent slope and is generally unsuited for hay, pasture and cultivated crops because of slope, rock outcroppings and a very low available water table. The slope and depth to bedrock are also limitations on sites for sewage disposal systems, dwellings with basements and local roads and streets.

The Dutchess-Bomoseen-Pittstown Association occurs along Ira's side slopes and foot slopes. The steeper areas where this soil association occurs are often wooded. These soils occurring at the foot slopes are suitable for cultivated crops and pasture. Slow to very slow permeability and seasonally high water tables at the base of hills limits sewage disposal capacity.

The Paxton-Georgia-Amenia Association occurs sparingly in Ira and can be found in the east central part of Town. These soils are moderately well drained on glacial till plains, foot slopes and side slopes of hills and mountains and have formed in glacial till. Gently sloping areas have few development limitations, while depressed areas are limited by the seasonally high water table and slow permeability.

The Hinckley-Warwick-Windsor Association accounts for a small area in the northern part of Ira running parallel to Route 4. These soils are generally gently sloping and very deep. On slopes, this soil association is often excessively drained and has a poor filtering capacity, limiting onsite sewage disposal. In depressions and low areas near streams, this association is very poorly drained. These soils are generally suited to cultivated crops and to hay and pasture.

Agriculture Resources

Agriculture is an important economic activity; one that permits the production, manufacture, and distribution of a wide range of locally produced farm commodities. Agriculture is also the foundation of highly valued rural lifestyle and a significant factor in the appearance of the Vermont landscape.

"Prime" agricultural soils have a high agricultural potential and are considered by the Soil Conservation Service to be of national importance. "Prime soils have the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods" (Agricultural Value Groups for Soils, Rutland County, Vermont. p. 12). Prime agricultural soils make up only 5% or 748.57 acres of Ira's landscape.

A second grouping of agricultural soils are classified as "statewide agricultural soils" and have good potential for growing crops but have one or more limitations which restrict the choice of crops. They require more intensive management than prime soils. Statewide agricultural soils constitute about the same acreage – 705.29 acres - also 5 percent of the total land.

Because few tracts of land in the Town consist entirely of Prime or Statewide soils, most farms must also rely on lower quality soils to support their operations. Marginal agricultural soils make up a considerable area of grazing lands and pasture, which are of particular importance to dairy farmers. Lands consisting of marginal agricultural soils are also used for farm woodlots and sugaring.

In addition to soils, other factors influencing how well land will support agriculture are land use, parcel size, slope, and access. To the benefit of agriculture, little land in Ira is developed, although steeply sloped land and land with poor access both limit the viability of agriculture throughout much of Ira.

Forests

Local forests provide benefits as farm woodlots, sugar bushes, recreation areas, and wildlife habitats, as well as being a resource for the forest product and fuel-wood industries. The extent of high-quality forest soils is modest and scattered throughout the Town, occupying only 3034 acres or 21.3 percent of the Town's 14,252.26 -acre land base. Many soils classified as high agricultural potential also have high potential for forestry. Many of the physical and chemical characteristics that make land productive for annual crops are also desirable for tree growth.

Factors affecting the capability of land to provide forest-related values include: parcel size; contiguous acreage; attractive natural features; accessibility; and land use, the presence of unique habitats; size and distribution of forest openings; and the presence of wildlife food sources.

While Vermont is 80% forested, forest fragmentation is a growing concern throughout the state. The overall number of parcels in Vermont has been increasing and the amount of undeveloped large forest parcels is decreasing. It generally starts with the division of a parcel into two or more smaller lots, which leads to more parcel owners, new housing, and infrastructure development—ultimately fragmenting the landscape. Fragmentation may not be noticeable on a day-to-day basis, but it nonetheless has a lasting impact on the ecological and economic viability of forests. Ira is home to 2,084.16 acres of conserved land (or 14% of the total area) made up of the (West Rutland) Town Forest, State Wildlife Management Area, and the Vermont Land Trust lands.

Mineral Resources

The extraction and processing of mineral resources is also a significant economic activity in Vermont and Rutland County, although one which has only a minor presence in Ira.

Although no formal mapping or inventory has been undertaken, some sources of sand and gravel are likely to exist in Ira, as well as sources of aggregate (crushed rock). Potential sand sources make up just over one half of one percent (0.7) of the Town's total land area. Seven percent (7.0%) of the Town's total land area consists of potential sand and gravel sources. In many cases the same land area is also prime agricultural soils. None is in use today, but there was a gravel pit located where the development at Sunrise Place is now located, and gravel has been excavated from a small site on the north side of the West Road west of the bridge. Commercial sand and gravel excavation from streambeds is now prohibited by State law.

Statewide, sand and gravel resources are increasingly in short supply. Certain grades of gravel such as that used in leach fields for subsurface sewage disposal systems and for some types of sub-base in roads are particularly in short supply. The Town of Ira purchases sand and “shur-pack” for its roads, annually. The Town should identify potential sources of material not in Ira’s Highland Conservation District, which are of sufficient quality, and for which the impacts of extraction can be successfully mitigated.

Conflicts concerning the impact of trucks, crushing operations, and other nuisances are more likely when a significant gravel deposit is surrounded by residential uses. Because sand and gravel operations frequently extract material within a few feet of the water table, concerns are raised about the potential impact of fuel spills, compaction, and degradation of groundwater aquifers.

Wildlife Habitats

The benefits provided by wildlife habitats and other natural and fragile areas are numerous. They contribute to the economy by attracting travelers, recreation seekers, and wildlife admirers as well as add to the community's character and sense of place. Ira's varied landscape is host to many different wildlife communities. The highland areas of the Town contain "fragile areas," identified by the Nongame and Natural Heritage Program of the Vermont Department of Fish and Game. The continued presence of Ira's many plant and animal communities is directly related to the health of the ecosystems upon which they are dependent. Therefore, decisions regarding use of the land should consider the impact on these natural resources.

Wildlife habitats and other natural and fragile areas are mapped by the state and include deer wintering areas, bear habitat, migratory staging areas for waterfowl, fisheries, and sites of rare plants and animals. A number of these features are depicted on Ira's Natural Resource Map. There are ten mapped deer wintering areas in the Town, located primarily in the northern and southern parts of the community. The deeryards are predominately located in areas of low, south facing slopes and along watercourses. They cover 1,619 acres, or twelve percent of the Town's land area. Vermont is near the northern limit of white-tailed deer range in North America, and adequate food and shelter must be available if deer are to survive the deep snows and cold temperatures.

The Nongame and Natural Heritage Program of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife conducted a comprehensive assessment of rare and endangered species and habitats in western Rutland County in 1991. This effort resulted in an inventory being provided to the Town, which identified areas in Ira deemed to be of State and local significance. Six fragile areas in Ira were identified, all of which lie in the Highland Conservation District. Several of these areas are located on private lands, and while the areas are not subject to Town regulation, it is the Town's policy that future development should not disturb such areas and/or species.

A significant type of wildlife habitat is large intact forested tracts capable of supporting larger mammals and wildlife corridors. A wildlife corridor is an area of land used by wildlife to travel from one large block of habitat to another. In our area, the two blocks are the Green/Taconic Mountains and the Adirondacks, with a number of smaller "stepping stones" in between. While most animals do not cover the entire distance between the mountain ranges, maintaining a continuous network of habitat from one to the other allows for genetic flow between animal populations and lets individuals range as far as they need.

The State of Vermont, through the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), owns undeveloped lands located near Birdseye Mountain (the Bird Mountain Wildlife Management Area or WMA) and north of Route 4 (the Blueberry Hill WMA). These conserved lands are to be kept open for access by the public for hiking, hunting, fishing and other activities that do not include motorized vehicles. The State recognized the greater Herrick Mountain area as a rare and irreplaceable natural area (RINA) in 2010, and its expansion of the Bird Mountain WMA will serve to protect the RINA in harmony with the town plan.

Water Resources

Ira has limited water resources. The lack of significant surface waters in the form of ponds, wetlands, streams and rivers, coupled with a low water table in much of the Town, directly affects the capabilities of the land to support development. Ira Brook, which flows north through the southern half of Town, and the Castleton River located in North Ira, are the two rivers in Town and account for the majority of wetlands indicated on the

Town's land use map. The Town of West Rutland has a municipal forest of several hundred acres located in a remote area off Clark Hill Road. This tract of land serves as the primary watershed for that community's municipal water system. The topography in Ira is such that the mountainous and mostly wooded areas in the outlying areas of Town serve to channel precipitation, in the form of runoff, to the settled regions in Town, which are dependent upon such water for residential uses.

Watersheds

A watershed is a distinct, topographically defined land area that drains into a single river, river system, or standing body of water. Because smaller tributaries join to become larger rivers, many watersheds may be considered "subwatersheds" of larger watersheds. As one would expect, the activities taking place in a watershed play a critical role in the quality of the water draining from it.

The Town is within three much larger watersheds. The northeastern corner of the Town lies in the Castleton River watershed; the majority of the rest of the Town lies in the Otter Creek Watershed; a small southwestern corner lies in the Poultney River Watershed.

Rivers and Streams and their Corridors

In Ira, significant rivers and streams include the Castleton River paralleling Route 4 near the northern boundary and Ira Brook paralleling Route 133.

The benefits provided by rivers and streams and their corridors are quite diverse. Historically, rivers and streams have served as important power sources and routes of transportation. Other values commonly associated with rivers and streams and their corridors include recreation and wildlife habitat.

All surface waters in Vermont are categorized for management purposes (Class A or B), and the degree to which a body of water actually meets the objectives established by its classification is evaluated on an ongoing basis by the Agency of Natural Resources.

Both the Castleton River and the Ira Brook are categorized as Class B waters as they pass through Ira, and have management goals that include good aesthetic values, contact and non-contact recreation, public water supply, irrigation, and other agricultural uses.

Ira's water systems could be affected by a number of degrading factors such as nutrients, siltation, organic enrichment, thermal pollution, pathogens, and habitat alteration. Given the agricultural nature of the area, the production of crops could impact water quality.

Wetlands

Wetlands are land areas that are saturated with water at least part of the year. Although precise definitions vary, wetlands are normally identifiable by vegetation, soil type, and/or frequency of ponding. Wetlands include marshes, swamps, sloughs, fens, mud flats, and bogs. In addition to providing important wildlife habitat, functions of wetlands include storing stormwater, purifying surface and groundwater supplies, recharging aquifers, controlling erosion, providing areas for recreation, and serving as education and research areas.

Wetlands play critical roles in the reproductive cycle of many threatened species. Wetlands support plants that can help purify water by taking up nutrients and incorporating them into plant materials while releasing oxygen.

Wetlands in Ira are not extensive, although some specific sites are noteworthy. The area occupied by wetlands, as identified by the National Wetlands Inventory, is 208.61 acres, or 1.4% percent of Ira's land mass. The National Wetlands Inventory assesses the degree to which wetlands are being lost on a national basis. Because this inventory is based on aerial photography, some areas that would qualify as wetlands under State or Federal law may not be included.

The majority of Ira's wetlands are found along the Castleton River in the northern part of Town and on the Ira Brook.

There are three basic categories of freshwater wetlands. The first two categories are deepwater wetlands that include rivers, lakes, and ponds. The third category - palustrine - includes swampy and marshy areas. The majority of wetlands in Ira are of the palustrine variety.

Like other water resources, wetlands have been classified for management purposes by the state of Vermont. At the current time, all of the wetlands in Ira are Class Two. The Vermont Wetland Rules of 1990 established three classes of wetlands. Class one and class two wetlands are "significant" to the State and are protected by the state's rules.

According to the Vermont Wetland Rules, class one wetlands are wetlands considered to be "exceptional or irreplaceable in their contributions to Vermont's natural heritage." The majority of wetlands mapped by the National Wetlands Inventory are designated by the State of Vermont as class two wetlands. Class two wetlands are less significant to the state as a whole and, when located near development, must be protected by a buffer zone of fifty feet rather than 100 feet.

State wetland rules control development in wetlands rather than prohibit it outright. Farming and forestry uses, "soft" recreation, utility poles, and incidental residential uses are allowed as long as the outlet of the wetland or its pattern of flow is not altered and dredge and fill restrictions are met. Federal law also governs the use of wetlands. Federal regulations are different from state regulations and are primarily implemented through the Federal Clean Water Act. The Clean Water Act regulates dredging and filling of all public waters, which include the nation's wetlands.

The majority of threats to wetlands come from development--be it agricultural, residential, commercial, or transportation related.

The 2002 Farm Bill's Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts. The NRCS goal is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. This program offers landowners an opportunity to establish long-term conservation and wildlife practices and protection.

Groundwater

Groundwater is a critical resource for Ira, as most residences, farms, and businesses depend on private wells drilled into underground aquifers. Aquifers are recharged through the infiltration of surface water. Pollutants introduced into areas of influence surrounding wells can contaminate the groundwater used in residences. In Ira, the limited amount of groundwater has direct development implications.

The main reasons for planning for groundwater are to protect the health of area residents and insure adequate supplies of water for the future. Without clean groundwater supplies, the community could incur significant costs in terms of health and/or in locating alternative supplies.

To understand and plan for groundwater, it is helpful to recognize that groundwater is a part of the hydrologic cycle (which involves the continual movement of water between the earth and the atmosphere). Groundwater is water that has infiltrated into the soil and filled the pores and spaces in sand, gravel, or rock. The areas where groundwater is stored are referred to as aquifers. An aquifer is a geologic formation containing enough water to yield significant quantities to wells and spring. Places where groundwater is replenished by surface waters are known as recharge areas. Water moves from the recharge areas through the aquifer and out at discharge areas such as streams. Groundwater is drawn from aquifers through wells. Areas surrounding wells are areas of influence. In some situations (such as when a well from an aquifer serves a public water supply), the entire area surrounding an aquifer and having an influence on the quality of water in it is known as a wellhead protection area.

In general, there are two kinds of aquifers, unconsolidated and consolidated. Unconsolidated aquifers are mainly composed of materials such as sand and gravel. The coarse texture of these deposits typically allows for storage of large volumes of groundwater. Consolidated aquifers, also known as bedrock aquifers, are composed of fractured rock. These aquifers differ from unconsolidated aquifers because there are no spaces between individual grains of rock materials to store and transmit water. Instead, water is stored and transmitted in the fractures, joints, or faults in the rock.

Like other water resources, groundwater aquifers have also been classified for management purposes by the state of Vermont. According to the system used by the state, aquifers are assigned to one of four classes (I, II, III, or IV), which are based on existing and potential use as well as risk of exposure to contamination.

Class I aquifers are aquifers suitable for public water supply, with uniformly excellent character and no exposure to activities posing a risk to current or potential use as a public water supply. Class II aquifers are suitable for public water supply and have uniformly excellent character but are exposed to activities that pose a risk to current or potential use as a public water supply. Aquifers suitable as a source of water for individual domestic water supply, irrigation, agricultural use, and general commercial and industrial use are designated Class III aquifers. Class IV aquifers are not suitable as sources of potable water but are suitable for some agricultural, industrial, and commercial use.

All aquifers are initially classified as Class III aquifers. Individual aquifers may then be reclassified to prohibit activities or recognize influences within the area that threaten or affect its quality.

Scenic Resources

In the course of planning for Ira's future, it is important that the presence of high quality open space and scenic resources, broad scenic areas as well as scenic landmarks, are recognized and the integrity of such resources

preserved. Scenic resources have aesthetic, historical and economic value. Siting of future construction, community facilities and infrastructure should always consider the potential impact on the aesthetic, as well as the physical health of the community. Wherever possible, development should be located and tailored to preserve the undisturbed integrity of Ira's quality scenic and open space resources. The undeveloped mountain peaks and ridgelines in Ira's Highland Conservation District, especially those close to municipal boundaries and described in the appendix to the Plan, define and frame the Town. They are prominent physical features which make up much of the Town's land mass and unique character, and are visible from many communities in the region. They provide the backdrop for a very rural and sparsely settled community that has no commercial land use and is therefore quite peaceful.

Scenic resources have aesthetic, historical and economic value, enhancing the quality of life of Ira's residents. There are many pleasing views and vistas available to travelers on the Town's existing highways. Route 133 extends lengthwise through Ira valley, which contains a large portion of the Town's open and agricultural low lands; the southern portion of the valley is flanked by steep, wooded ridges to the east and west. To the east is the ridge running along the boundary with Clarendon, which includes Susie's Peak. To the west is Train Brook Ridge running along the boundary with Middletown Springs. The West Road also provides travelers with pleasing views of other working farms, yet from generally higher elevations, and in some places, with long-range views across neighboring towns to Killington, Pico and Shrewsbury peaks.

The Ira Birdseye Road in North Ira also affords travelers with excellent views of the steep mountains that flank that portion of Town. To the east is a long ridge extending from near Spruce Knob at the south end (where the boundaries of Ira, Poultney and Middletown Springs intersect) to Route 4A at the north end, which includes Herrick Mountain and the peak of Ben's Slide. The undeveloped ridgelines lying along Ira's boundaries with Clarendon and Poultney are prominent viewsheds visible from many municipalities in Rutland County.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

Protect and preserve the natural features in Ira, particularly the areas of high elevation, and promote land uses appropriate to the natural character of the land.

Action Items

- ▲ Keep the rugged and poorly accessible mountain and forest areas free from development and reserved for forestry and other suitable uses.
- ▲ Further identify and map areas of particular scenic and ecological importance to the community and the environment.
- ▲ Maintain or improve surface water quality to protect drinking water, aquatic habitat, and recreation.
- ▲ Encourage pollution abatement in the Town's water sources.
- ▲ Activities that are potential sources of non-point pollution, including but not limited to agriculture and silviculture, should be conducted as follows:
- ▲ Logging practices should follow Acceptable Management Practices developed by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources or other practices recognized by public agencies or professional associations.

- ▲ Agricultural activities should follow Best Management Practices for Agriculture.
- ▲ Encourage development which will minimize run-off in vulnerable areas.
- ▲ Continue to support the road crew in employing gravel road maintenance techniques that prevent soil erosion and road surface deterioration.

Goal

Maintain and enhance the quality of ground water resources and their resource protection areas from adverse development.

Action Items

- ▲ Encourage on-site sewage disposal systems to be installed in appropriate areas.
- ▲ Land use activities, which potentially threaten ground water quality, should be carefully studied to prevent undue loss of groundwater quality.
- ▲ Identify and protect all wetlands which provide significant functions and values in such a manner as to achieve no net loss of such wetlands and their functions.
- ▲ Significant wetlands and other critical natural communities should be protected from development by encouraging the maintenance of an undisturbed buffer strip of naturally vegetated upland at least 50 feet in width around the edge and by preventing runoff and direct discharge into wetlands.
- ▲ Encourage areas with rare, threatened, and endangered species to be protected to the greatest extent possible.
- ▲ Encourage landowners to develop their property in a manner that retains the greatest possible amount of prime agricultural land for traditional uses.
- ▲ Maintain agriculture and forestry as viable industries in Ira.

FLOOD RESILIENCE

Following the devastation from Tropical Storm Irene in 2011, the Vermont Legislature added a requirement that all communities address flood resilience as part of their municipal plans. Flood resilience is planning for a municipality's capacity to absorb a flood related shock and recover quickly as well as be prepared for future events. As such, this planning is now required by 24 V.S.A. §4382(12)(B) as well as by the Town's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP), which identifies flooding as the greatest hazard the Town faces.

There are two types of flooding that impact a community like Ira: inundation and flash flooding. Inundation occurs when water rises onto low lying land. This type of flooding happens slowly, but flood waters can cover a large area. It may take days or weeks for inundation flood waters to subside which may lead to severe property damage. Flash flooding is a sudden, violent flood which often entails fluvial erosion (stream bank erosion). It does not typically cover a large area, but the water moves at a very high speed and flood waters rise quickly,

making flash floods particularly dangerous. Fluvial erosion can severely damage roads and property – both public and private.

Severe storms with particularly heavy precipitation can create flash flood conditions. However, over an extended period of time, severe storms may cause inundation flooding due to the cumulative effects of continuous rain, saturated soils, and high watertable and aquifer levels. Both floodplains and river corridors fill an important need in making space for flood waters and dispersing erosive energy.

Climate change will likely exacerbate flooding in Vermont. According to the Vermont Climate Assessment (2014), precipitation has and will continue to increase, particularly in the winter months. Since 1960, average annual precipitation has increased 5.9 inches; almost half (48%) of this change in rainfall has occurred since 1990. Because precipitation will likely occur in shorter, more intense bursts, it will likely produce precipitation that runs off the land rather than filters into it. Records across Vermont show that “flashy flows” are increasingly common in Vermont rivers.⁶ Also, the expected increase in precipitation during the winter may lead to added snowmelt and flooding in the spring.⁷

History of Flooding and Vulnerable Assets

Ira’s LHMP also outlines the Town’s historical flood events and assets vulnerable to flooding.

The frequency of extreme weather events fluctuates from year to year. In the past Ira has experienced bad flooding at least once every 3 or 4 years. More recent and notable events include: January 1996, countywide flooding resulted in a federally declared disaster (DR1101) that caused \$3,641 in damages in Ira; December of 2000, another declared disaster (DR1358) due to flooding caused \$19,336 in town damages; August 2011, Tropical Storm Irene (DR4022) resulted in \$49,840 in damages to the Town from flooding and fluvial erosion. Additional events include those in June and July 2013 (DR4140), July 2017 (DR4330), and April 2019 (DR4445).

Areas that routinely flood are outlined in the LHMP and include: VT RT 133 and Toppin Rd, which routinely flood in the spring; and a bridge on VT RT 133 near Goodrich Rd. All the back roads in Ira are gravel, and most of them are extremely steep in some places. Damages, such as loss of gravel and culverts, can occur during heavy rain events on the steep areas of these roads. While none of the residential structures are within the floodplain, many accessory structures such as garages are. These are at the greatest risk. Some homeowners have seen Ira Brook reach the foundations of the residences as well.



Flood damage to a road. Source: Bob Toppin.

⁶ Galford, Gillian et al. *Vermont Climate Assessment*. Burlington: Gund Institute for Ecological Economics and the Rubenstein School for Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont, 2014.

⁷ Betts, A.K., *Climate Change in Vermont*. Atmospheric Research Report, prepared for Agency of Natural Resources, State of Vermont, 2011.

Assets that are shown to be located within the current FEMA mapped special flood hazard areas are: a single-family dwelling and a critical facility – the fire station. Twenty structures lie within the river corridor: 17 are single family homes, and the rest are camps.

Past flooding of the firehouse may have caused cracking of the concrete slab floor. In addition to physical damage to the firehouse, the ability of the fire department to respond to other emergencies could be complicated in the event of flooding.

Flood Hazard Mapping and Assessment

Maps of Ira's vulnerabilities and hazards can be found in the Town's LHMP as well as in both the Future Land Use and Natural Resources (I) maps located in the appendix of this document.

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) was created by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to address inundation hazards. Flood insurance rates are based on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) or Digital Flood insurance Rate Maps (DFIRMs) which delineate areas of the floodplain likely to be inundated during a flood. These are identified as a Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) or with a 1% annual chance of flooding (100 year flood). Town participation in NFIP is voluntary. However, in Vermont, two thirds of flood damages occur outside of federally mapped flood areas. There is currently an active, community engaged update for the Otter Creek Watershed FIRM underway. This mapping update is anticipated to be finalized in 2023.

Vermont's River Corridor and Floodplain Management Program, developed by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR), delineates areas subject to fluvial erosion. River corridor maps are designed with the recognition that rivers are not static. A certain amount of erosion is natural when Ira floods because of the Town's relatively steep terrain and frequent storms. Development in the river corridor and stream channel engineering over time have increased channel instability. While these management practices may create the illusion of stability, these engineered channels when tested by a high flow, such as a flood, cannot be maintained. Special mapping and geomorphic assessments can identify fluvial erosion hazard areas along rivers, more comprehensively defining high hazard areas.

Two rivers in Ira have undergone Stream Geomorphic Assessment (SGA); Gully Brook and Ira Brook. In the case of Gully Brook, a River Corridor Management Plan has been developed for the Castleton River. These studies and plans are vital in determining river and stream alterations, which affect water flows and could potentially lead to future flood damage. They also suggest potential remediation actions that can be taken to reduce the risk of future flood damage including planting stream buffers, stabilizing stream banks, removing berms, removing structures and restoring incision areas.

Unmapped River Corridors/Fluvial Erosion Hazard (FEH) Areas of the Town of Ira should be included in this Town Plan as they become available.

Flood Mitigation Strategies

The Town's LHMP identifies the Town's capabilities to plan for and mitigate hazards including actions and projects and should be referenced for the most recent resources and strategies identified. Primary strategies include: NFIP participation, Flood Hazard Area Regulations, and community outreach and planning.

NFIP Participation

The Town of Ira received a FEMA flood hazard boundary map in December of 1974 and joined the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) on September 18, 1985. The Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) and Flood Insurance Study were first published in September of 1985. The Rutland County DFIRM became effective in August 2008. The hydrology and hydraulics were updated in the DFIRM.

As of February 2019, there are two flood insurance policies through the NFIP covering \$208,000 in value for properties in Town. Flood insurance is available for any structure in town regardless of previous losses or location. The cost of flood insurance premiums rises in areas identified at a high-risk level.

Flood Hazard Area Regulations

The Town's Flood Hazard Area Regulations (adopted 2008) meet requirements for participation in the NFIP. The land use bylaws do not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion by limiting new development in the floodway or Special Flood Hazard Area.

Community Outreach and Planning

Supporting smart land use and planning is critical to mitigating potential future issues. River corridor assessments aid communities in making knowledgeable and strategic decisions about how to best protect, manage, and restore watershed resources. Riparian buffers reduce flood hazards and stabilize stream banks, attenuate floods, provide aquatic and terrestrial habitat and wildlife corridors, filter runoff, absorb nutrients, and shade streams to keep them cool. Wetlands also prevent flood damage and are a vital component for maintaining the ecological integrity of land and water. In addition, upland forests also moderate flood impacts and attenuate flood impacts. Steep slopes, on the other hand, can be a detriment during flooding by amplifying water volume and velocity in rivers and streams.

Because impervious surfaces prevent the infiltration of water into the soil, these man-made surfaces exacerbate flooding by increasing the amount and velocity of stormwater runoff, particularly in areas where these surfaces are prevalent. For more connections between watershed resources and flooding, refer to the Natural Resources section. Informing property owners of the risks, correlations, and steps they can take to mitigate their risks (such as flood insurance, retrofit projects, property buy-outs, avoid new encroachments in harms-way) can support strategic decisions made on an individual level.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

The citizens, property and economy, and the quality of the Town's natural resources are protected by: sound planning practices to address flood risks; development in the Town that does not interfere with natural river functions and will not worsen flooding; and other measures that increase the Town's flood resilience.

Action Items

- ▲ Assess feasibility of adoption river corridor bylaws.

- ▲ Work with the RRPC and the state floodplain manager to establish and sustain a flood hazard area education and outreach effort to support flood damage mitigation and better insure community residents and property for future flood damage.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development is a critical component of a town's planning goals. Once the sole province of the private sector, economic development is the process by which the community sets out to improve the climate for retaining old and attracting new businesses that support jobs and sustain tax revenues. Like many other municipalities in Rutland County, Ira derives most of its revenue from the taxation of local property in order to support municipal services. While the Town budget is small and the town services are limited, they are no less affected by local, regional and national economics.

Ira, like other Vermont communities, will need to be active in managing economic growth to ensure the future of its tax base and quality of life. Economic growth should be targeted for certain areas of the Town and discouraged in others to promote a vibrant village center, maximize existing infrastructure, utilize multi-modal transportation means and preserve the rural, working and forest lands that surround the Town.

Agriculture

While Ira lacks continuous tracts of land capable of supporting much agriculture, soils classified as "Prime Agricultural Soils" are scattered throughout the Town. Combining the use of these soils with other agriculturally related operations such as grazing livestock or sugaring can help keep agriculture economically viable in Ira. Use of the land for forestry and mineral extraction are other activities that can supplement a farm's income.

The possibility of continuing Ira's traditional working landscape is dependent on factors outside of soil capability. Limiting factors such as highly variable and uncertain commodity prices, the loss of local markets, and the conversion of agricultural land to other uses such as residential development can work against the existence of farming related activities.

Supporting working landscapes means supporting the rural characteristics that help identify Ira. Many programs are available to aid in the continuation of farming. The statewide "Current Use" program helps alleviate undue taxation on large tracts of farmed

land. The preparation of an agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) to identify important agricultural properties is another way of highlighting and assessing agricultural capabilities of the Town. The



Source: RRPC.

modification of land regulations that limit the ability to subdivide marginal farmlands, and programs that allow the transfer of development rights, can also help protect agricultural resources and Ira's open landscape.

Forestry

In Ira, significant forested lands continue to be logged. A working forest landscape provides goods and services through stewardship, management, and conservation. The forest-based economy includes all of the activities that go into harvesting forest products and turning them into usable products. Managing forests sustainably involves a recognition of the ecological, social, and economic systems necessary to maintain forest health while providing benefits for this and future generations. [Northeast State Foresters Association, 2013]

Sustainable forest management requires long-term commitment, while the economic returns on timber and forest products fluctuate with market conditions and available outlets. This combined with high property taxes can lead many landowners to resort to development in order to finance their continued ownership of working forests. [Vermont Natural Resources Council, 2013]

Maple Sugaring

Production of maple syrup, whether by hobbyists or commercial producers, has always been a part of the working forest landscape in Ira. There are no fewer than ten maple operations in Ira, all of which rely upon maple sap from trees tapped in Ira and several of which involve bringing sap in from neighboring towns. Because output is affected by weather and other variables, accurate numbers are hard to derive, but a fair estimate might be that over 5,000 gallons of syrup are produced each year in Ira, with over 15,000 taps in town and the balance in neighboring towns. Hundreds of acres of woodlands in Ira are utilized in sugaring.

Home Based Businesses

Currently Ira has nine active registered home-based businesses, in addition to three registered nonprofits. Supporting home-based businesses is one way for the Town to support economic development while maintaining the Town's quality of life and rural and agricultural character.

Goals and Objectives

- ▲ Encourage development of home occupations and small businesses that do not disrupt neighborhood character;
- ▲ Encourage existing and additional agriculture and working forests;
- ▲ Discourage large scale commercial or industrial development that is inconsistent with the Town's rural and agricultural character; and
- ▲ Support conservation of agricultural and forest lands through current use program, or through efforts of third party entities whose principal functions includes conservation of lands (e.g., Vermont Land Trust).

ENERGY

Energy use in the Town of Ira parallels patterns throughout other Vermont communities – the movement of goods and people, heating of buildings, and the lighting of homes, offices, stores, and factories are the primary draws on fuel and energy. While Vermont has the lowest per capita energy use in the country, its per capita energy expenditures are among the highest in the nation. The Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimates that each resident of Ira spends \$4,145 on energy a year.

The Rutland Region is a net importer of energy. Electricity and the fuels for heating and transportation (mostly petroleum) overwhelmingly originate outside the Region’s boundaries. Although local sources of electrical generation have increased, and wood plays a growing role in heating buildings, the Region remains reliant on national and international energy delivery systems.

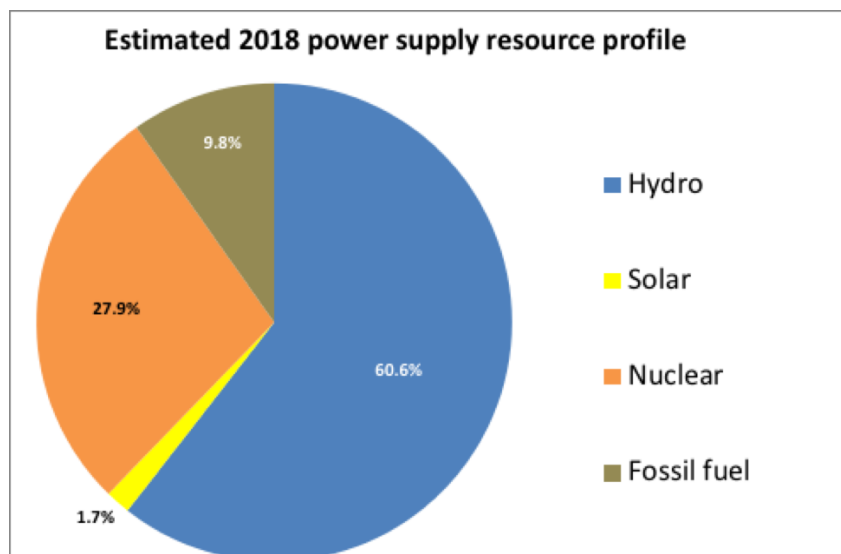
Energy planning is essential for addressing three crucial issues: energy security, environmental protection, and economic needs and opportunities. Ira recognizes that as conventional fuel resources dwindle, future resilience relies on lowering dependence on imported, non-renewable fuels, tapping local energy sources for enhanced self-reliance, and improving efficiency while maintaining a standard of living residents are accustomed to.

Ira could see significant savings in energy consumption and costs by adopting conservation strategies, replacing outdated appliances and switching to more efficient technologies, and participating in weatherization programs. To that end, the Ira Town Plan shall encourage energy efficiency and conservation, recycling, innovative house siting and design and renewable and alternate power and fuel sources within the Town of Ira.

Energy Use: Electricity

Renewable resources - primarily hydropower - provided 99.7% of Vermont's electricity generation in 2018, the highest share for any state, according to the EIA. Electricity accounts for half of all energy use in homes, and for two-thirds of energy use by commercial and industrial customers.

Green Mountain Power (GMP) serves all grid-connected electric customers in Ira. GMP relies not only on its own generation facilities but also hydroelectric dams, natural gas turbines, nuclear plants, and transmission networks as far away as northern Quebec, Niagara Falls, and the coast of Maine. In the Rutland Region, the few large sources of locally generated electricity include hydroelectric dams and solar panels. See the Community Facilities and Services section of this



Source: Greenmountainpower.com

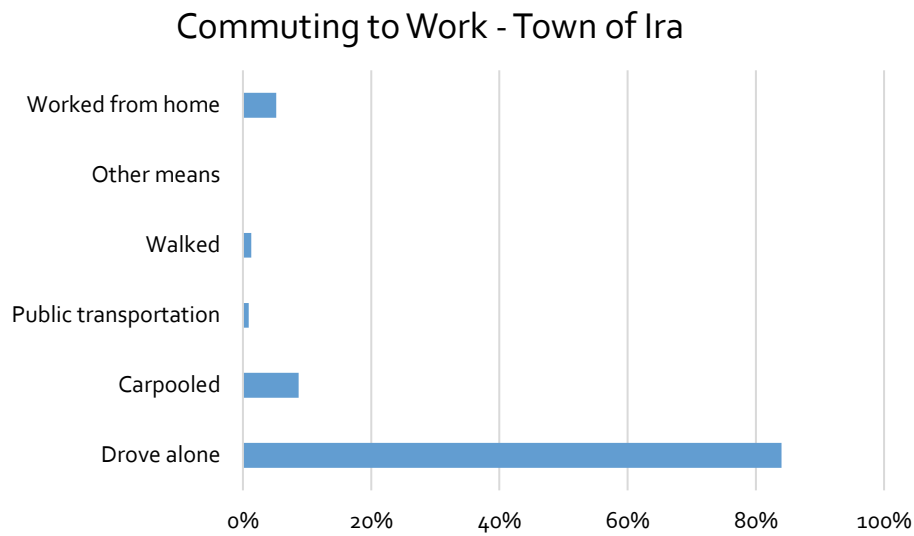
plan for information on electricity transmission.

Energy Use: Transportation

Transportation is a significant consumer of energy in Ira due to our rural nature. As in other municipalities in Vermont, transportation consumes the most energy of any sector. There are an estimated 339 light-duty vehicles in the town traveling more than 4 million miles a year - at a cost of more than \$500,000 million a year and at a consumption rate of 26 billion BTUs. Of the 231 residents in the labor force, 194 (or 84%) drive to work alone. The mean travel

time to work residents is (2013-2017 Estimates).

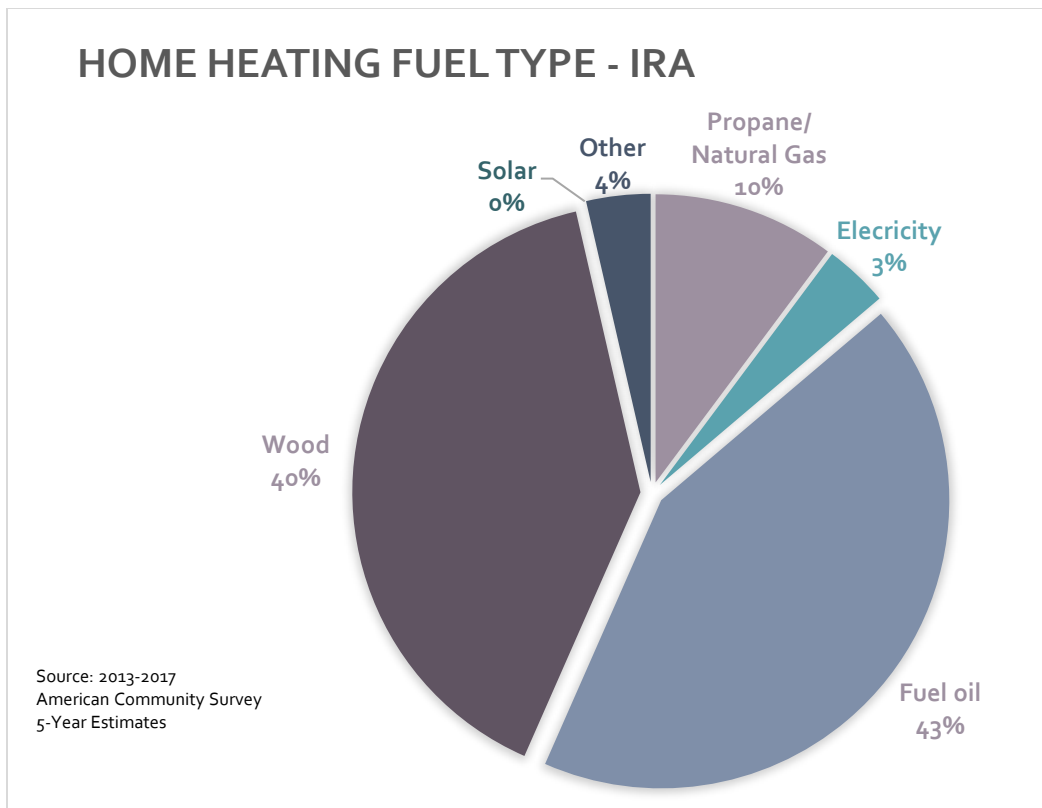
for Ira 26 minutes ACS 5-Year



Source: 2013-2017 American Community Survey. In the next few decades, it's anticipated that total energy for transportation will fall gradually to about 35% of current levels for light-duty vehicles. The efficiencies of electrification and a switch to biodiesel will account for much of this reduction.

Energy Use: Heating

Space heating is the largest use of energy in homes and a significant use in commercial and industrial facilities. Despite competition by new technology and new fuels, heating oil has remained the dominant fuel across Vermont since 1940. However, the ratio of fuel oil utilized by Ira residents for home heating is relatively low compared to in other towns. Cognizant of fluctuating fuel prices, many homeowners now rely on a combination of heating appliances to mitigate exposure to one fuel type.



Some homes rely upon bottled or LP gas, on a private contract basis, for heating, cooking and similar uses. There is no gas pipeline in Ira, although a Vermont Gas pipeline is currently proposed to be extended from Addison County to Rutland County in the coming years.

Energy Efficiency

In the interest of limiting the overall demand for electricity and lowering individual bills, Green Mountain Power and other utilities in Vermont have created energy efficiency programs. The largest statewide initiative operates as Efficiency Vermont. Efficiency Vermont is the State's energy efficiency utility—the first of its kind in the United States. Efficiency Vermont represents an innovative approach to helping Vermonters save energy and protect the environment.

The Vermont Public Service Board ordered the creation of the energy efficiency program in response to a request from the Department of Public Service (the Department is the state's Public Advocate), all of the state's twenty-two electric utilities, and a dozen consumer and environmental groups. Through Efficiency Vermont, Vermont consumers, businesses, manufacturers, and farmers across the State can participate in the same seven energy- and money-saving programs.

Efficiency Vermont offers money-saving programs to homebuilders and buyers, farmers, and residential, commercial and industrial customers. The programs help consumers capture energy-saving opportunities available through the installation and use of efficient construction designs, products and equipment. For example, low-income Vermonters can receive assistance to convert from costly electric heat and hot-water

systems to lower cost alternatives. Electric consumers can receive instant coupons or mail-in rebates for discounts on energy efficient lighting products and appliances.

Renewable Energy

Renewable energy as an alternative to energy generation with fossil fuel can provide for electricity needs while protecting the environment. Homeowners, businesses, communities, and energy developers are currently pursuing a variety of renewable technologies to generate electricity and to heat buildings. Many factors drive these choices, including interest in price stability, energy security, self-reliance, environmental impact, and simple economics.

Ira currently generates just 19 kW of renewable energy. The Town has the potential of generating 2,090 MW (2,090,000 kW) of solar and wind.

Solar energy is an important renewable energy resource. Solar energy can be harvested through solar panels in the form of electric current, to power appliances, or as a passive energy used to heat a home. Excess electricity generated added to the grid can earn credits from Green Mountain Power. Passive solar design uses the sun's energy in heating a structure, so that the need for supplemental heat is greatly reduced.

Wood is also a renewable resource when managed sustainably and is often used for home heating fuel. When a forest is managed so that for every tree cut there is a tree planted, a no-net carbon gain occurs. In this scenario, the use of wood as fuel wood is both renewable and environmentally benign.

The high ridgelines of the Taconic Mountains in Ira may have wind resources sufficient to power industrial-scale wind turbines. However, construction of large wind towers and related infrastructure such as roads, power lines and staging areas in the Highland Conservation District (shown on the Future Land Use map that is part of this Plan) would wholly undermine the specific goals and policies established for the Highland Conservation District, and should be strictly avoided. Industrial wind generation is also discouraged in the Rutland Regional Energy Plan.

Commercial or industrial-scale wind energy development also involves high potential for negative visual impacts and noise, which would directly conflict with provisions of the Ira Town Plan related to scenic resources. The character of the Town of Ira and surrounding communities is defined by the rural mountain setting, and the pattern of undeveloped highlands. Commercial or industrial-scale wind development in the Highland Conservation District would threaten the orderly development of the region because the effects upon the values sought to be protected in the Highland Conservation District in Ira, and those in adjacent communities necessarily affected by such development, would be profound.

Small scale wind turbines (not required to have strobe lights), appropriately sited and scaled for use by the residence or business located at the turbine, should be allowed in the Rural Residential District.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

Encourage the efficient use of energy sources in Ira.

Action Items

- ▲ Establish a strong and visible commitment to energy efficiency and increased use of renewable fuels in all buildings, especially new ones.
- ▲ Work to create opportunities for walking, cycling, and other energy efficient, alternatives to the single occupant vehicle.
- ▲ Encourage residents to utilize the resources of energy efficient programs such as “Efficiency Vermont” and will lead by example by having the Town Hall audited for energy use and upgraded (part of this would be supported by successfully receiving a Village Center Designation).
- ▲ Encourage the use of renewable sources of energy such as wind, solar, and wood.
- ▲ Promote more energy efficient methods of land use and transportation.
- ▲ The Town may also consider: co-sponsoring weatherization workshops for homes and businesses for new construction, retrofits, and existing structures; promoting the Town as a resource for conservation and efficiency information for townspeople by distributing related materials at the Town Clerk’s office; promoting the Go Vermont webpage, which provides ride share, vanpool, public transit, and park-and-ride options; and promoting the Drive Electric Vermont webpage which connects users to financial incentives, dealers, and recharging stations for EVs.

TRANSPORTATION

The Transportation Section of the Ira Town Plan is a guide to help focus transportation planning efforts in Ira. Effective transportation planning can increase a Town’s capacity to manage growth, foster community and economic development, improve health and safety, and assure accessibility, efficiency, and mobility. The Town will benefit greatly from implementing various planning resources and tools to help manage and grow an efficient and equitable transportation system. From managing assets such as culverts and roads to performing traffic and pedestrian studies, the Town will find that effective planning leads to cost effective town improvement.

Highway System

The rural character of Ira, like many other small Vermont communities, is supported, in large part, by its network of rural roads comprising the Town highway system. Town highways constitute the most substantial component of the transportation network in Ira. According to the 2019 VTrans Town Highway Data, Ira has a total of 14.65 road miles. The distribution of highway by class is included in the table below and maps of Ira’s transportation system can be found at the end of this document. Ira does not contain any Class I or II roads, and the total 14.65 road miles is split between 7.4 miles of Town owned Class III and IV roads and 7.25 miles of State/Federal owned highways. Vermont Route 133, a State highway, is the primary access and major arterial route in Ira, which

connects West Rutland to Pawlet, or Vermont Route 4A to Vermont Route 30. Vermont Route 133, Route 4A, and US Route 4 are owned and maintained by the State of Vermont.

TOWN OF IRA HIGHWAY BY CLASS					
VTrans Data	Class 3	Class 4	State Highway	US Highway	Total
Miles	3.74	3.66	6.081	1.168	14.649
Percent Total	25.53%	24.99%	41.51%	7.97%	100%

Class III and IV roads constitute the majority of the transportation system within the Town of Ira. West Rd is the largest town road at 3.89 miles, with primarily local use for residents. Ira is responsible for the maintenance of all town highways which are managed by the Town Selectboard. Currently, the Town of Ira does not have a formal highway department and outsources road maintenance to contractors.

The Town Capital Improvement Budget is an effective planning tool for the Town of Ira to manage town highway maintenance and upgrades. Capital Improvement Planning can provide structure for routine maintenance, prioritize upgrade projects, and allocate adequate funding. Ira has adopted the 2019 Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Town Road and Bridge Standards for maintenance, which can be found in the VTrans Orange Book (current edition 2017-2019). To support the Town's road work and maintenance, the Town has a 2016 Kenworth plow truck and sander, 1965 Caterpillar grader, and a 1990 backhoe.

Bridges and Culverts

Ira has a total of 98 culverts, all of which were inventoried in 2017. The full list of culverts, sorted by condition, material, size, and type can be access on the VTrans online culvert inventory – vtculverts.org. The online inventory is an important planning tool for the Town Capital Improvement Budget and can provide structure for routine maintenance, prioritize upgrade projects, and allocate adequate funding. Of the 98 total culverts, 23 culverts are listed as poor, critical, or urgent condition and should be scheduled for replacement and/or upgrade in accordance with the VTrans Town Road and Bridge Standards.

Ira has a total of 15 roadway bridges, 10 of which are State owned on State highways. The remaining five bridges are Town owned are eligible for State funding. Routine bridge inspection and maintenance are critical to ensure effective connectivity, safe travel, and a resilient transportation network.

Municipal Roads General Permit

The Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) is intended to achieve significant reductions in stormwater related erosion from municipal roads, both paved and unpaved. In order to comply with the MRGP, towns implement a customized, multi-year plan to stabilize their road drainage system. Ira, with the help of the RRPC, has conducted by a road erosion inventory to identify problematic road segments, develop mitigation strategies, and target potential sources of funding. The RRPC created a Road Stormwater Management Plan to assist the Town with planning road segment upgrades under the MRGP.

The full road erosion inventory can be accessed online through the MRGP Implemental Table Portal. The online portal is an important planning tool to ensure compliance with the MRGP. The online portal can help prioritize

road segments and identify sources of funding. Currently, the Town has one very high, four high, and several moderate and low priority road segments that need to be upgraded to MRGP standards.

Traffic Safety and Volume

Ira's geographic location, near the major arterial highway VT Route 133 creates a blend of local traffic on town highways and non-local through traffic on VT Route 133. The most recent VTrans traffic counts in Ira, taken in 2017, indicate an Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) of 1,500 to 2,400 vehicles along VT Route 133, and 1,800 vehicles along the short stretch of VT Route 4A. VT Route 133 continues to serve as the major link between Rutland and communities to the south of Ira including Middletown Springs, East Poultney and portions of Tinmouth. Overall, Ira experiences low traffic volume, especially local traffic on town highways.

According to the VTrans Public Crash Data Report, from 01/01/2015 to 01/01/2020, Ira experienced 12 vehicle accidents with five resulting in injury, all located along VT Route 133. There were no vehicle accidents reported on any Town highways.

The Town of Ira has reported traffic safety concerns relating to excessive speed of travel on local roads, particularly West Road. In fall 2019, the Town of Ira requested the RRPC conduct a traffic study of West Rd to evaluate speed and road safety conditions. The Town does not have funds available to bolster enforcement on local roads, and the Town relies on limited service of the Vermont State Police for local traffic law enforcement. The Town has considered lowering the posted speed limit to deter excessive speed on local roads. However, highway studies indicate that speed limit changes, without adequate enforcement, have little to no impact on vehicle speed reduction.

Alternative Transportation

Due to the rural nature and land-use patterns, there is limited access to alternative transportation in the Town of Ira. However, regional alternative transportation options exist within the Rutland Region. Marble Valley Regional Transit District (MVRTD or "The Bus") provides public transportation within the Rutland Region. The Fair Haven Commuter Route runs five times a day, seven days a week, with 27 stops between Rutland City, West Rutland, Castleton, Fair Haven, and Poultney. The Fair Haven Commuter Route is the closet public transit option for Ira with stops in West Rutland, approximately 5 miles from the town center. In addition, the Bus offers paratransit, Medicaid, and demand-response service by request.

In addition to public transportation provided by MVRTD, air and rail passenger travel is available in surrounding Towns. Passenger rail service is available through Amtrak with locations in nearby Rutland City and Castleton. In addition, the Rutland Southern-Vermont Regional Airport, located in nearby Clarendon, offers commercial passenger air service to Boston through the carrier Cape Air. Access to air travel is important in the Rutland Region because it helps attract new business, industry and tourism to the area, helps to retain existing businesses, and opens the region to long distance travel.

Bicycling and pedestrian travel are recreational and practical transportation modes but limited by the availability of adequate facilities such as bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and road shoulders. No formal bicycle or pedestrian facilities exist in Ira. However, VT Route 133 is part of the Rutland Region Bicycling Network, which connects Ira to West Rutland, where other regional alternatives transportation modes exist.

The Town of Ira also owns and operates a Park and Ride facility located at 1800 Route 133. The Park and Ride contains 18 parking spaces and offers opportunity for carpooling for local commuters.

Regional Overview

Ira participates in regional transportation planning through a member appointment to the Rutland Region Transportation Advisory Committee (RRTAC), which consists of representatives from all Rutland Region Towns. The RRTAC identifies and develops solutions to town and regional transportation issues and serves to promote and support an integrated, sustainable, and resilient transportation system. In addition, the RRTAC serves a valuable role in the project prioritization process with VTrans to add and rank projects on the State Capital List for state and federal funding.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

Take an active role in transportation planning for the Town of Ira.

Objectives

- ▲ Make transportation planning a priority in Ira and continue to seek planning assistance from the RRPC and VTrans.
- ▲ Continue to seek grant funding for municipal planning and feasibility studies related to transportation.
- ▲ Continue active participation in the Rutland Region Transportation Advisory Committee.

Goal

Develop a Capital Improvement Plan to identify, prioritize, and fund transportation related projects.

Objectives

- ▲ Utilize vtculverts.org to plan culvert upgrades and maintain an up-to-date culvert inventory.
- ▲ Apply for state and federal grants to assist with project funding including funding to support replacement of aged equipment.
- ▲ Continue to seek a dedicated Road Foreman position for road maintenance.

Goal

Continue to comply with the Municipal Roads General Permit.

Objectives

- ▲ Continue to maintain roads to fully meet MRGP compliance.
- ▲ Utilize the MRGP Implementation Table Portal and the Road Stormwater Management Plan to plan upgrades to road segments that do not meet the standard.
- ▲ Apply for state funding from the Better Roads Program, Grants In Aid, and other VTrans stormwater funding source to improve roads and stormwater infrastructure.

Goal

Continue to improve highway safety on Town roads.

Objectives

- ▲ Continue to collaborate with the RRPC and VTrans on highway safety countermeasures.
- ▲ Seek funding sources to improve traffic law enforcement and implement safety countermeasures such as speed feedback signage.

Goal

Actively promote the use of alternative transportation in Ira.

Objectives

- ▲ Promote the use of public transit among students, commuters, residents, and the elderly or disabled and provide resources to improve ease-of-use such as bus schedule information, Go Vermont App, and Transit App.
- ▲ Promote the use of the Town Park-And-Ride and carpooling for commuters.
- ▲ Promote the use of active transportation such as bicycling by adding bicycle racks to the Park-And-Ride facility.

FUTURE LAND USE

The Future Land Use Section is shaped by the findings and recommendations made in all other elements of the Plan. It translates and synthesizes ideas on a wide range of topics into a coherent policy on future development. The Future Land Use Section is where the Town "puts together all of the pieces" of the planning "puzzle."

While goals and objectives and maps help define the Town's vision for the future, the Future Land Use Plan serves as a guide for the creation or amendment of programs (including adoption and amendment of bylaws) that implement the Town's vision. Local land use controls, for example, translate the desired development concept into a clear, attainable, and enforceable land use program.

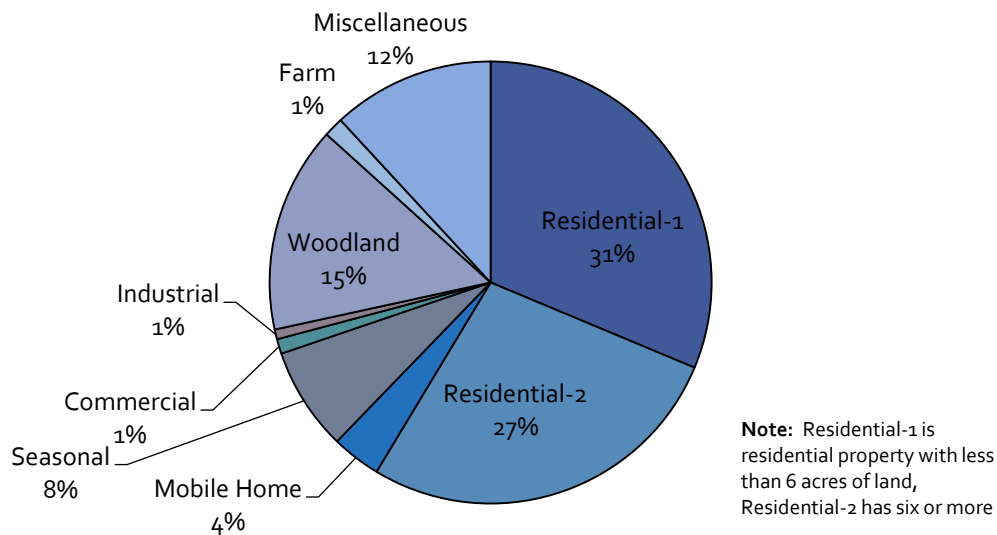
As required by state law, the Future Land Use Plan contains both text and a Future Land Use Map. The Future Land Use Map displays the desired future development patterns recommended by the Plan, while the future land use text explains the basis or logic for the pattern and the desired sequence of land development. The Map is intended to delineate those areas that are appropriate for specific land uses. The Map defines three districts in Town to serve as guidelines for future development. The Map is based upon information on the physical environment, such as soil depth, seasonal high water tables, slopes and overall capability to support

potential development, as well as cultural information that recognizes Ira’s historical land use trends, as well as existing land uses.

The Future Land Use Map in this plan is conceptual in nature. The lines showing the edge of districts are not intended to be definite, making it consistent with the generalized nature of the data and analysis used in preparing this plan.

The Future Land Use Plan for Ira contains three land use districts. The physical characteristics of the land in these three districts suggest different planning needs, issues, and community objectives. The districts shown on the future land use map are intended to establish basic guidelines for future land use and intensity. The districts were established in the Ira Town Plan adopted in 1988 and remain unchanged (except for slight changes to the flood plain mapping). The districts are shown on the Future Land Use map that is attached as part of this Plan. The data below is from the 2013-2017 American Community Survey and provides estimates for the distribution of Ira’s land use.

Land Use 2017 - Town of Ira



Floodplains and Wetlands District

This district encompasses flood plains and wetlands. In 1988, the Town adopted Flood Hazard Area Regulations that restrict and regulate development within the areas designated on the Town's Flood Hazard Area Map. Those regulations were replaced with updated ones in 2008. The land use map reflects those flood hazard areas, and also includes other areas designated as wetlands, development on which would likely trigger federal or state review. Further reference may be made to the flood plain maps prepared by FEMA, updates for which are expected by 2023.

This District encompasses agricultural soils, as well as deer wintering habitat and sand and gravel resources.

Damage caused to homes, improvements and infrastructure by Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 was minimal, in contrast to the level of damage experienced in other Rutland County towns. This is attributable to an historical absence in Ira of development in or near floodplains, and in areas in the Highland Conservation District where slopes are steep and runoff risks are an issue. The Town should continue to discourage development in such areas to minimize risks to public safety, and property (public and private).

Specific recommendations for the Floodplains and Wetlands District include the following:

- ▲ Development should be minimized due to the erosion potential along Ira Brook.
- ▲ Setbacks from the brook are encouraged for any development.
- ▲ Riparian landowners should be encouraged to pursue bank stabilization projects.

Highland Conservation District

This District serves several purposes. First, it is to protect high elevations and steep slopes that have shallow soils and fragile vegetation, and that provide significant recharge to the ground and surface water supplies of the Town and neighboring communities. Second, the District encompasses much of the land area in Town, which, in light of the physical criteria described above, is unsuitable for development. Third, the District encompasses areas that historically have supported activities or practices such as forestry, limited agriculture (e.g., maple sugaring or maintenance of apple orchards), and recreation including hiking, skiing, hunting, fishing and camping. The district also includes the ridgelines that frame the Town. The fourth purpose is to protect the natural resource value of lands that are undeveloped, lack direct access to arterial and collector roads, are important for wildlife and wildlife habitat (including deer yards), have high potential for forestry use, and include limited or significant natural, recreational or scenic resources. Within the Highland Conservation District lie the sites of five rare, threatened or endangered plants or animals. These important species are dependent on the continued health of their habitats and ecological communities.

Future Development

Historically, residential uses have not fallen within the Highland Conservation District, and there are currently no residences located within this District. Because of the fragile resources and limitations to development, no community facilities or services are anticipated to be developed in the Highland Conservation District. Limited, compatible land uses, such as outdoor recreational activities that do not involve structures, and forestry that does not create erosion problems or harm unique and fragile areas, should be permitted in this District. There are no roads in the Highland Conservation District other than Class 4 roads or trails. These will not be upgraded by the Town for the term of this Plan.

Specific recommendations for the Highland Conservation District include the following:

- ▲ All forms of development should be directed to other areas of the Town whenever possible;
- ▲ Development that does take place in the Highland Conservation District must avoid important natural areas;
- ▲ Public access to important resource areas should be retained as much as possible.

Development in the Highland Conservation District should be limited to very low impact uses. The Town and other major stewards within the district are committed to preserving and making public use of the unique natural environments of the Town in an unobtrusive manner.

While not contemplating development, the Town intends to assess the feasibility of applying for a Village Center Designation through the State Department of Housing and Community Development. The benefits of this designation include technical assistance, tax credits, and priority consideration for State grants. This priority consideration would have been beneficial for the 2019 Municipal Planning Grant application the Town submitted to fund the construction of a new town salt shed. The proposed Village Center would include the areas of the Town Hall, Town Clerk's Office, the church, and the former Ira Central school.

Rural Residential District

The remaining portion of the Town falls in the Rural Residential District, which encompasses all existing residential properties, and all lands currently used for agricultural purposes. Historically, these uses have been compatible, and it is anticipated that continued residential, agricultural and commercial uses should take place in the Rural Residential District.

Future Development in this District, low-density residential development that utilizes existing facilities and that can adequately accommodate sewage disposal in compliance with the State law, and that is compatible with the District purposes and guidelines, should be permitted. Further development of new roads in the Rural Residential District is not planned.

The current transportation network of the Town lies entirely within this district. Further development of roads in the Rural Residential District is not planned. Land uses in this District that do not remove the potential of the land for agricultural production such as open space, conservation and certain forms of outdoor recreation, are encouraged. Development should take place in such a way that any irreplaceable, unique or scarce resources or natural areas are not harmed.

The Rural Residential District encompasses some lands designated as unsuitable for development based upon considerations of slope, depth to bedrock and seasonal high water table. Development of such lands is not prohibited but should be avoided. Development in the Rural Residential District is also likely to be limited by the availability of adequate on-site water supplies.

Specific recommendations for the Rural Residential District include the following:

- ▲ Future growth in Ira should be targeted for this district;
- ▲ A mix of housing types and affordability levels is encouraged;
- ▲ Lot layout and building design should enhance the area's character and help maintain the balance of agriculture, forest and residential uses;
- ▲ Water supplies should be protected through careful siting and design of septic facilities.

Development should occur at a density that reflects existing conditions in the district. Wherever possible, the Town encourages developments to use the least amount of land possible for private residential uses in order to help retain land for agriculture and open space.

Compatibility with Adjacent Towns

The Ira Town Plan is compatible with the plans of adjacent communities and with the regional plan. At the heart of any town's plan is its land use plan. A town's statements of values associated with land use including the designation of districts within the town, the enumeration of interests to be protected, encouraged or balanced, and the listing of goals and objectives provide additional insight into the specific land use plan.

A review of neighboring communities' plans reveals that their land use plans are in harmony with that in Ira. In no instance does a district in Ira abut a district in an adjacent town and contain conflicting values and objectives. Each adjacent community has through its town plan set forth a land use plan including districts, maps, policies and objectives compatible with the land use plan in Ira. Most land along Ira's boundaries with neighboring towns is located in the Highland Conservation District, and abuts lands located in similar districts in adjacent towns. Generally, each town acknowledges that areas characterized by higher elevations or steep slopes involve threats to water supplies and aquifers, wildlife habitat, scenic resources and aesthetics. Land in Ira located near municipal boundaries is generally characterized by steep slopes and high elevations, similar to the land lying over the boundary lines in neighboring towns.

Large scale development in the Highland Conservation District in Ira near municipal boundaries would have a negative impact upon adjacent communities, given the fundamental nature of such lands. They are characterized by steep slopes, so that development impacts including soil erosion and water runoff will result downhill from the developed areas, regardless of where municipal boundaries lie. They are also characterized by high elevations, such that visual and aesthetic impacts will likewise affect areas outside Ira. Large scale development in the Highland Conservation District in Ira near municipal boundaries would conflict and interfere with the goals and objectives stated in the plans of the affected towns, and thus interfere with the orderly development of the region where the towns are located.

Goals and Objectives

Goals

- ▲ Protect fragile areas and resources including the ridgelines and peaks in the Highland Conservation District.
- ▲ Preserve agricultural land and open spaces.
- ▲ Accommodate continued patterns of existing land use.
- ▲ Support or encourage land uses that historically have been compatible with one another and are suited for particular areas.
- ▲ Channel growth into areas where it can be accommodated without undue adverse impact on the environment, and municipal costs.
- ▲ Avoid unplanned growth.

Objectives

- ▲ Continue to enforce existing on-site sewer ordinance and flood hazard area regulations.
- ▲ Within a given district, regulate to ensure compatibility of all permitted land uses.

- ▲ Establish zones based on the land use map and prescribe uses which are or are not permitted within such zones.
- ▲ Within a given zone, regulate to ensure compatibility of all permitted land uses.
- ▲ Establish zoning and /or subdivision regulations to permit and control compatible land uses and limit incompatibility of uses.
- ▲ Encourage participation in the State Current Use Value program.
- ▲ Encourage landowners and private land trusts to develop conservation easements and other methods to preserve lands.
- ▲ Assess feasibility of applying for a Village Center Designation through the Department of Housing and Community Development.

MAPS

Future Land Use

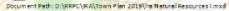
Natural Resources I

Natural Resources II

Natural Resources III

Transportation and Community Facilities





IRA VERMONT

Natural Resources III

