

Burke Town Plan

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Vision

The Town of Burke is a dynamic community. Its rich history and heritage is grounded in the Vermont doctrine of freedom and unity. Our agrarian past has left a legacy that is prominent in our landscape and continues to influence the character of our community. While we are indebted to our past, the Town's recent history has been one of transition.

The changes that have affected the town mirror those influencing the state as a whole. Our resource-based economy, founded on agriculture and forestry, is now built on recreation and an enviable quality of life. The town has been transformed from a quiet farming town to a resort destination, and increasingly, a center for innovation and commerce. Resource-based industry and value-added processing has caused our community to re-evaluate the balance between innovation and commerce with quality of life. This transformation has not been without costs: to tranquility, to the landscape and to the insular nature of the community. Burke has managed, however, to retain many of the best elements of its past and merge them with a modern economy driven by tourism, technology, accessibility, and respect for our natural and social heritage.

As we look to the future, we can only conclude that change will continue. To best confront the future, the town should look to its past, to the path provided by our forefathers. In this way, we can arrive at the following principles which are found throughout this plan.

- Open debate, accessible institutions and democracy are the basis of our local government;
- Economic and cultural opportunities for local citizens enrich the entire community;
- Access to quality education, a livable wage and safe and affordable housing are critical elements of a civil society;
- All current and future residents of the town share the same rights and responsibilities, regardless of status or background;
- As economies become more globalized, focusing on sustainable development and the careful stewardship of local resources will become increasingly important;
- The town's heritage, as defined by the historic settlement pattern of concentrated villages surrounded by an open countryside and forested mountains, is among its greatest resources;
- The Burke Mountain recreation area and other recreation businesses will be prosperous and join in public/private partnerships that benefit the town;
- Individual rights and their responsibility to the community should be balanced, as provided by local, state and federal law.

Purpose of the Town Plan

The town plan is the principal policy document for the Town of Burke. It articulates the aspirations of the community, and provides a framework for achieving those aspirations. It is intended to guide how the town addresses such diverse community issues as land development, the provision of municipal services and facilities, environmental protection, economic development and transportation. In developing and updating the plan, an ongoing attempt has been made to consider the factors that will affect the town's growth well into the future.

In addition to guiding local officials and citizens in making decisions regarding Burke's future, the Town Plan is intended to be relied upon as the basis for making decisions in a number of specific settings. Uses of the plan include:

- Provide the framework for planning the future of the town.
- Guide local decision-making in local regulatory reviews.
- Serve as the basis for local decision-making during the Act 250 review process and Section 248 reviews, and guiding the Planning Commission and Selectboard in making determinations of compliance with the town plan.
- Provide a foundation for updating and revising subdivision, zoning bylaws, and flood hazard regulations.
- Assist with the formulation of local policies and programs.
- Serve as the primary resource document for private parties desiring to learn of the town and its goals and policies.
- Establish a basis for the town's interactions with Burke businesses, neighboring towns, and other levels of government.

Each chapter of the plan contains one or more overall goals for the topic, background information regarding the existing status of the topic and its sub-topics, statements about future possible actions, and strategies for achieving the future desired results.

Burke residents have a rich tradition of democracy and participation in town government. Spirited debate, and occasional discord, is a predictable part of resolving important community issues. This plan was built with a focused public outreach effort designed to solicit greater community input regarding key issues facing the town's future. The 2006 Town Plan was developed following a community survey of all town voters and landowners. Approximately 1,600 surveys were distributed and 500 surveys were returned, for an overall response rate of 31%. There were also a considerable number of comments and suggestions from survey respondents. A copy of the complete survey results along with all the comments is available at the Town Clerks office. The survey results were used to address a wide range of issues in this Town Plan. Valuable input was also provided as the result of several public meetings and from citizen advisory groups formed as the result of the public meetings.

As is usually the case, there is room for additional public involvement at all levels of the planning process. The use of surveys and questionnaires, public forums and greater coordination between interest groups and the town has ensured the past participation of town residents in local decision making. The ongoing coordination with owners of the Burke Mountain recreation area, local citizen groups, businesses, and regional agencies will ensure that such involvement continues to shape town policies.

The Burke Town Plan, as originally adopted in 2006, called for the creation of multiple zoning districts in order to protect the town's historic development patterns of compact village centers surrounded by open rural countryside. Following the adoption of the Town Plan, the Burke Planning Commission did further work to achieve this goal. The focus of their endeavor – which involved extensive public input – was on developing a clear understanding of the long-range impacts of the Town's planning and zoning bylaws. Using the goals and strategies outlined in the original town plan, the Burke Planning Commission developed a new bylaw which created multiple districts. The new bylaw was adopted by Australian ballot in 2007.

Yet, as with any long-range land-use plan, the Burke Planning Commission's work was far from complete with the adoption of the new bylaw. In 2008, the Planning Commission completed a Community Character Inventory, which attempted to identify and quantify Burke's "rural character," which had been cited frequently, but not fully explored, in earlier planning and public outreach efforts. The project compiled information gleaned from a community-wide survey, as well as a series of focus groups.

Prior to 2009 much of the planning efforts have been focused on managing growth from the proposed development on Burke Mountain. In 2010 public discourse focused on siting industrial uses. The Town conducted another community survey and held more public planning sessions to gain more insight into desired goals and strategies. The endeavor resulted in an update to our zoning bylaws that established classes of industry and performance standards.

Where relevant, this updated Town Plan references public input, insights, and outcomes gained from the above-mentioned efforts. The public discourse is far from over. However, much has been learned in the past decade about what Burke residents want for their community, today and in the future.

The goals established for the Burke Town Plan include:

- Encouraging the widespread involvement of Burke citizens and landowners at all levels of the local planning and decision-making process.
- Providing opportunities for citizens input at every stage of the planning and decision-making process.
- Decision making only in an open, public environment.
- Adopting a Town Plan that is consistent with state planning goals in Title 24 VSA Chapter 117 {4302}.

- Recognizing statutory hearing requirements as a minimum level of public involvement, and additional ones held in all instances where public interest is evident.
- Public forums, direct mailings, and notices placed in local newspapers to inform the public of planning activities.
- Review of the Town Plan and related planning documents on a regular basis and modifications made as appropriate to address changing circumstances.
- Coordination of planning activities with those of neighboring towns and regions.
- Provide neighboring towns with an opportunity to comment on local matters of concern through notification of pending decisions that may affect them.
- To support and request support from regional organizations that provide municipal planning services.

Chapter 2. Town History

The Town of Burke was chartered in 1782; the first settlers arrived in 1792. The town was organized in 1796 in the home of Lemuel Walter. He cleared land and built a cabin on land that was later Darling's Mountain View Farm. The first surveyors divided the town into lots of approximately 160 acres. Deeds today still refer to the original proprietors, who were given the land as payment for their efforts in the Revolutionary War. Only one or two of these first land holders ever came to the Town of Burke. The land was sold through land agents to the early settlers. The charter of the Town of Burke granted lands to 65 proprietors, most of who came from Litchfield County, Connecticut.

Burke was named after Sir Edmund Burke, a member of the British Parliament who tried to promote conciliation of the American colonies and avert a war for independence. The proprietors of the Northeast Vermont grant took his name for their yet unsettled town of Burke. Sir Edmond Burke had so well expressed their hopes for freedom and independence.

The settlers came by boat as far as they could and then walked, or they came on horseback or in ox carts along blazed trails. They found the freedom they wanted, the land they needed, and with hard work cleared the land and established a home. From the forests came a cash crop of potash and lumber for construction and sale. With the waterpower available, sawmills became the first industry. Roads were constructed and trade commenced, primarily with the areas to the south. Cattle and turkeys were driven over the roads while oxen and horses carried other products. There was a need for merchants, inns, teachers, blacksmiths and other craftsmen. Gradually the farms grew as the trees were driven back, and the lumber industry flourished.

The first settlers opened the land along the central ridge. The first public building, which was built on Burke Green, housed a school, church and meeting house. The central ridge proved to be too windy and the center was moved down the hill to Burke Hollow. The town spread out from there. South

Burke was at the fork of the road between Lyndonville and Sutton, with the fork in the road going to Burke Hollow by way of Bugbee crossing. East Burke was settled early, probably because of the river valley and its easy access to Lyndonville to the south. West Burke was probably settled because of its waterpower, lumbering and farming. The railroad caused West Burke to prosper as it was in a good location with the surrounding hills in Sutton, Newark and Burke. West Burke became an incorporated village in 1901.

In 1895, the residents of Burke founded the Burke Historical Society. The history of the town and its beginning has been kept by their early efforts to preserve the important documents and stories of early settlers. Their records contain histories of the principal families that settled in Burke. Two-hundred years and six generations later there are still descendants of those original settlers in town today.

Electricity came into town at the turn of the century and automobiles and trucks soon followed. Most of the lumber had been removed from the area so there were few mills. Dairy farms gradually became larger and tractors replaced horsepower in the early 1940's. Many of the farmers had started farming after WWI and as the farmers aged there was no one to replace them. The small farms could not compete so dairy farming declined. In the 1960's, a government program to remove land from production, changed agriculture in the town to the way it is today.

In the late 1800's there was a move in Vermont to create a tourist state. Westmore prospered with Willoughby Lake as a summer residence for visitors who came to West Burke on the train then continued to the lake. This provided business in the village. After the roads improved, rail traffic declined while automobiles and trucks became the transportation of choice. Gas stations and garages replaced livery stables and feed stores. Stores changed as the townspeople started trading to the south. Social organizations declined as people were able to travel to larger places.

There were eleven school districts in the 1830's, the families were large and the school population was over 400 students. As the farm population shifted, some of the schools were not needed, so schools were consolidated and scholars were transported to other schools. In 1978, a more central building was constructed near the Town Hall. This left two school buildings. Currently there is one town school (kindergarten through 8th) on Burke Hollow Road in West Burke.

The early settlers worked hard during the week and wanted a church to attend on Sunday. Over the years there have been several denominations. The Congregationalist, Methodist, and Universalist churches are still active in the town.

Stock for saw mills was cut from the slopes of Burke Mountain and eventually a trail to the summit was cut and one shelter was built at the top. Gradually the timber on the mountain was turned into lumber. In 1904 Elmer Darling purchased Burke Mountain and in 1907 there was a forest fire. Elmer Darling saw the need for a fire detection service and agreed to furnish and erect a tower. A carriage road up the mountain was built in 1910 and became an auto road to the summit in 1932. With the road,

the gift of Darling land by the Darling Family for a park, and the work of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Burke Mountain started another phase of development. The CCC cleared over two miles of ski trails and constructed the stone house at the base of the toll road. The stone house was used as a home for the caretakers of the park. After the toll road was completed, local skiers used the road and trails for various events, mostly sponsored by the Lyndon Outing Club.

In 1953, 13 area men formed a corporation which began the development of the Burke Mountain ski area. With this development came vacation homes, an increase in out-of-town land ownership, and subsequent changes to Burke's landscape. The camp on the mountain summit was torn down in 1966 and Vermont Educational TV built a building to house its equipment. There is a steel tower that houses a variety of telecommunications facilities that service the area that once served as a fire tower. Several different groups have owned the ski area, each one adding something different and expanding some facet and success of the recreation area.

Elmer Darling made numerous contributions to the Burke area. He constructed buildings, purchased large amounts of land, operated mills, farms, and was actively involved in the community. When Elmer was 24 years old, he went to work for his uncle, Alfred, at the famous and elegant Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City. He was so successful, he became part owner and began to purchase land in Burke. In 1883, he purchased the Harley Hall farm and gradually purchased more land until he was reported to have the largest farm in the state of Vermont. Elmer's brother, Lucius, was the superintendent and his sister, Louise, did the bookkeeping.

By 1896, Elmer Darling owned 953 acres, mostly farm land on "Darling Hill". By that time, most of the men of East Burke worked on the Darling Farm. Elmer Darling was very interested in the Morgan horse and successfully bred prize winning and handsome horses to be admired at all the fairs.

In 1905, Elmer Darling broke ground for the construction of a colonial style mansion which was finished in 1908. He called the mansion "Burklyn Hall". It had 23 bedrooms and five caretakers. Elmer renovated the saw mill in the East Burke village in 1907, put in a new dam and a dynamo to run water to his Mountain View farm on the hill. He also put in an electric light plant for the farm and supplied the village with electricity. The flood of 1927 destroyed the plant and it was never rebuilt.

Elmer Darling built the Burke Mountain Clubhouse in the East Burke village as a community center, gathering place and a library. He then built a gazebo near the Clubhouse for the Burke Band to perform.

At the time of Elmer Darling's death in 1931, he owned between 7,000 – 8,000 acres. The acreage he owned on the mountain was deeded to the Forest and Parks division of the State of Vermont, hence, the name "Darling State Forest".

Pedestrian and Bicycle Travel

Pedestrian and bicycle safety have been identified as top priorities in 2008 community surveys. There are limited pedestrian sidewalks in East and West Burke villages and none in Burke Hollow. Sidewalks will become increasingly important for safety as commercial and traffic growth continue. Likewise, crosswalks are currently lacking, and will become an important safety feature. The 2007 Burke Area Transportation Infrastructure study specifically calls for the creation of five-foot sidewalks with granite curbs along Route 114 in the East Burke village.

As noted earlier, few if any local residents cycle to work, but Burke is a premier cycling destination – the multiuse trail system maintained by Kingdom Trails Association, a local nonprofit organization, was recently recognized as the best trail network in North America by *Bike Magazine*. Kingdom Trails has its home office in East Burke Village and has become an asset to the area. The trails bring in tourists that support local businesses, especially in the summer season. The Kingdom Trails network includes more than 100 miles of interconnected trails on Darling Hill and Burke Mountain, as well as some local roads. Trails are maintained for non-motorized uses, including mountain biking, hiking, trail running, Nordic skiing and snowshoeing. The "Burke Bike Park" – a gravity downhill trail system accessed by the high-speed quad lift on Burke Mountain, opened in 2011 in collaboration with the resort. Much of the trail system has been established on private land, with permission from more than fifty local residents and businesses.

Burke has many Class 4 roads and a few legal trails that provide excellent walking and biking opportunities. In addition, many miles of private logging roads and trails are available to the public through the generosity of landowners. The local VAST chapter also maintains a network of snowmobiling trails, through landowner agreements, that connects to a statewide trail system.

Future

Maintaining existing trail networks, and enhancing pedestrian and bicycle travel, offer many benefits to the community. These include reduced traffic congestion, air pollution and reliance on non-renewable fossil fuels, fostering healthy living, providing recreational amenities for residents and visitors and reinforcing historic, pedestrian-scale settlement patterns. Kingdom Trails is researching the development of a path from East Burke to Lyndonville, which would serve as an important pedestrian and bicycle connection.

Private roads are often at risk of being posted; public access may be prohibited as landowner-user conflicts arise. The continuing subdivision of land poses both a risk to the informal network of private logging roads and trails, and opportunities to obtain path easements.

Limited public parking to access existing trail networks has also become an issue for some local land and business owners, particularly in East Burke. Future trail planning and development should

incorporate access and parking considerations, and include the identification of available parking areas in the vicinity of existing and planned trail heads.

Also, the town identifies East Darling Hill Road as a problem area where use by bikers travelling between East Burke Village and Darling Hill Road are in danger from motorists and vice versa. Consideration of future development of bike lanes should include East Darling Hill Road as an area where the town can improve safe pedestrian travel.

Strategies

- Pedestrian facilities, including interconnecting sidewalks and crosswalks should serve as a dominant organizational element in village development.
- Develop a traffic calming and pedestrian circulation plan for East Burke, especially on East Darling Hill Road.
- Consider undertaking pedestrian enhancements in East Burke, as recommended in the 2007 Burke Mountain Area Transportation Study, separately or as part of a larger village enhancement project, especially on East Darling Hill Road.
- Develop, in association with Kingdom Trails, Burke Mountain Resort and interested landowners, a long-range trail plan to maintain and conserve existing trails for public access and use, and to identify new trail corridors and public parking areas.
- Explore a "penny for trails" initiative – a one cent increase in the local tax rate – to help fund a Burke Trails Fund (a type of reserve fund) to be used to secure trail easements from willing landowners.
- Explore the potential for formalizing many informal trails by providing incentives under local regulations for the dedication of permanent trail easements.
- Explore the use of temporary easements for bicycle and pedestrian trails, a practice the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) has used with much success. The VAST network includes a number of winter-use trails throughout the Town of Burke and the surrounding area.
- Evaluate local roads for "share the road" use by cyclists.
- Consider improvements to VT 114 north of East Burke to Victory Road for safe bicycle use (e.g., wider shoulders, bike lanes).
- Promote public education to discourage inconsiderate recreational use of private trails (e.g., littering, leaving gates open), which is important if local residents are to continue to benefit from the generosity of landowners.
- Plan for the inclusion of bicycle lanes and/or walking paths on all paved town roads when roads are upgraded, as part of a "complete streets" policy.

Scenic Roads

Many of Burke's roads are scenic, but none to date have been formally designated by the town or the state as scenic roads. An initial inventory of scenic roads was developed by Smart Growth Vermont