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ADDISON COUNTY REGIONAL PLAN

Addison County
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

How to Read this Plan

The Addison County Regional Plan is organized to provide both comprehensive analysis and accessible guidance for regional stakeholders, municipal partners, and community members. Whether you need quick reference information or detailed background on regional issues, this plan is structured to serve your needs.

SUMMARY PAGES: QUICK REFERENCE

The plan begins with summary pages for each major planning element. These pages provide at-a-glance access to the most essential information and are organized into three components:

Statement of Policy: These statements articulate ACRPC's fundamental positions and principles regarding each planning element. The policies guide regional decision-making and provide the framework for the Region's future growth and development.

Regional Context: This section provides a brief discussion of conditions, trends, and considerations specific to the Addison Region as they relate to each subject area. The context grounds our policies and actions in local realities.

Priority Implementation Actions: These are the selected action steps that ACRPC and its partners have prioritized for implementation during the lifespan of this plan. Each action identifies the responsible party for implementation if not the ACRPC.

Full Chapters: Comprehensive Analysis

Following the summary pages, nine full chapters provide in-depth examination of key planning topics. Each chapter presents the Region's history, current context, opportunities and challenges, and priorities for the future. Chapters conclude with complete goals, objectives, and recommended actions, along with indicators of progress for measuring advancement toward our targets.

Supporting Materials

Additional resources at the end of the plan provide context and detail. A glossary of key terms defines technical and planning terminology used throughout the document. Appendices contain detailed information, data tables, maps, and supplementary analysis referenced in the chapters.

Implementation Framework

The priority implementation actions featured on each summary page represent the region's program for implementing the Regional Plan's goals and objectives, including our recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services.

These priority actions represent carefully selected steps drawn from the comprehensive list of recommended actions found at the end of each full chapter section. The selection process considered:

Regional priorities identified through public input and committee deliberation
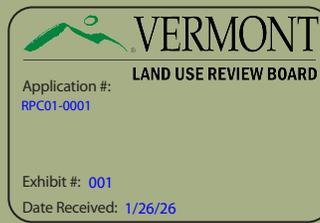
- ACRPC's capacity and resources
- Municipal needs and capabilities
- Funding availability and feasibility
- Alignment with state and regional goals

Complete Recommended Actions

While the summary pages highlight priority implementation actions, each full chapter concludes with a complete set of recommended actions. This comprehensive list provides detailed implementation steps with identified responsible parties.

The full recommended actions list serves as a living document that responds to evolving regional needs, funding opportunities, and emerging challenges. Together, the priority actions and comprehensive recommendations provide both clear direction for immediate implementation and flexibility to pursue additional strategies as opportunities arise.

This dual approach ensures that the Regional Plan remains both strategically focused and comprehensively resourced, enabling the Addison Region to make measurable progress toward our shared vision while maintaining the adaptability necessary for effective long-term planning.

Natural Resources

VERMONT
LAND USE REVIEW BOARD

Application #: RPC01-0001

Exhibit #: 001
Date Received: 1/26/26

Statement of Policy

ACRPC desires to protect, maintain, and enhance the quality and function of the Region's abundant natural resources—including groundwater and surface waters, prime agricultural lands, forests, wildlife habitat, scenic character, air quality, and mineral resources. It also supports a strong, diversified agricultural and forest economy, encourages responsible resource utilization, and supports providing safe, accessible recreational opportunities that serve the public health and well-being of the Addison Region's residents and visitors.

Summary

The Addison Region's natural resources are fundamental to the area's character, economy, and quality of life. Forests cover approximately half of the county, providing water filtration, carbon storage, wildlife habitat, and timber resources. Over 750 farms manage nearly 178,000 acres of highly productive soils, generating more than $173 million annually and supporting local food systems.

Water resources—including the Otter Creek watershed, Lake Champlain, and numerous streams, ponds, and wetlands—provide drinking water, recreation, and vital habitat. Groundwater aquifers supply communities throughout the Region. Recreational opportunities and historic villages reinforce community identity.

The Region's natural resources face a number of challenges including climate change impacts, development pressure on agricultural soils and forest connectivity, water quality concerns from agricultural runoff and emerging contaminants like PFAS, and agricultural labor shortages. However, forest cover increased by more than 5,400 acres between 2000 and 2024. Conservation programs continue protecting resources and improving water quality.

While we can always improve natural resources' functions, we should also cherish all that ACRPC's natural resources continue to offer.

Implementation Actions

- ✠ **Protect Water Quality:** Support water quality monitoring and implement Basin 3 Clean Water Service Provider projects, promote Best Management Practices, and protect riparian buffers to reduce phosphorus loading to Lake Champlain and maintain drinking water supplies.

- ✠ **Conserve Working Lands and Wildlife Habitat:** Preserve prime agricultural soils, significant natural communities, and contiguous forest blocks through clustered development, conservation easements, and Vermont Conservation Design framework to maintain productive landscapes and wildlife connectivity.

- ✠ **Support Sustainable Use of Natural Resources:** Partner with municipalities to include sustainable farming, forestry, recreation, mineral extraction, and groundwater use in local planning and regulation.

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Energy

Statement of Policy

ACRPC's energy policy supports two key pillars, reliability and affordability. Within this context, ACRPC has adopted three key energy priorities for this plan: **energy justice**–pursuing affordable, accessible, and clean energy for all of its residents; **climate change resilience**–reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving energy infrastructure; and, **energy security**—developing local energy sources to limit dependence on imported fuels and technologies.

Summary

The Addison Region is a largely rural area where more than 36,000 residents consume approximately 3,760 MMBtu of energy annually across transportation, thermal heating, and electricity sectors. Transportation currently consumes 1,591 MMBtu annually, with fossil fuels dominating all vehicle classes. Regional targets require transition to electric vehicles: 6,338 passenger EVs and 8,792 light-duty truck EVs by 2035. Other opportunities include expanding EV charging infrastructure, promoting carpooling and public transit through Go! Vermont, and encouraging denser development patterns in village centers to reduce vehicle dependence.

Residential thermal heating demands 1,610 MMBtu annually, with 85% from fossil fuels (46% fuel oil, 22% propane, 17% wood). Regional targets require eliminating fuel oil and coal by 2050 while dramatically reducing propane and natural gas use. Weatherization programs, cold climate heat pumps, and thermal energy networks capturing waste heat offer pathways to reduce fossil fuel dependence while lowering energy costs.

Electricity demand totals approximately 286 MWh annually, split evenly between residential and commercial/industrial users, and grew 5% annually from 2019-2023. While overall energy demand needs to decrease through efficiency measures, electricity use will increase as transportation and heating electrify. Meeting this demand requires substantial expansion of local renewable generation, alongside aggressive energy efficiency programs through Efficiency Vermont. The Region has exceeded its 2025 renewable generation target (152% of goal) and currently produces 102% of its 2035 target and 78% of its 2050 target, demonstrating significant progress in renewable energy development.

Implementation Actions

- Collaborate with regional partners to expand energy resources available to Addison County residents through grant technical assistance, community education and outreach, and coordinating access to weatherization programs and energy efficiency services.

- Support municipalities in developing enhanced energy plans, adopting energy-efficient policies and building codes, and planning community-scale infrastructure including solar arrays, EV charging stations, thermal energy networks, and municipal efficiency projects.

- Advocate with state agencies for enhanced energy planning resources, expanded financial incentive programs targeting weatherization and renewable installations, improved utility programs infrastructure improvements, and policies that reduce barriers to local energy project implementation.

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Transportation

Statement of Policy

ACRPC seeks to develop and maintain a transportation system that promotes the economy by effectively moving people and commerce, safely supports all modes of travel, promotes energy efficiency and conservation, enhances regional land uses and the Region's sense of place, exhibits resilience to natural hazards, and receives sufficient funding to conduct timely, cost-effective maintenance and growth or adaptation to meet the Region's emerging and future needs.

funding for cost-effective maintenance. ACRPC supports expanding public transit services, improving bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in villages and along key corridors, and utilizing Complete Streets principles appropriate to the Region's rural character. Regional planning efforts address ongoing challenges, including high crash locations, aging bridges, and truck traffic impacts on village centers, while preserving community character and supporting economic vitality.

Summary

The Addison Region's transportation system serves as the primary infrastructure connecting residents to jobs, services, and recreation across the Region's municipalities. The system includes air transportation, navigable waterways including ferry service, freight and passenger rail service, and an extensive roadway network anchored by major state routes. The Transportation Advisory Committee guides regional planning efforts and establishes project priorities with state agencies and local municipalities.

This Plan balances short-term needs—maintaining roads, bridges, and existing infrastructure—with long-term climate adaptation goals. Climate change has heightened the need for enhanced flood resilience, requiring transportation infrastructure to be designed and maintained to survive increased rainfall intensity and flooding severity. Transportation also contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions in Vermont. This Plan encourages incremental, systematic changes to reduce transportation energy use and emissions regionwide by promoting electric vehicle infrastructure, reducing vehicle miles traveled through alternative transportation modes, and promoting land use patterns that reduce reliance on personal vehicles.

The Region's transportation infrastructure must serve multiple goals simultaneously: supporting all modes of safe travel, enhancing the Region's historic communities and scenic landscapes, and leveraging sufficient

Implementation Actions

- ✖ **Expand and Improve Multi-Modal Infrastructure:** Implement safety improvements at high crash locations, construct EV charging stations, support public transit electrification, and develop bicycle and pedestrian connections.

- ✖ **Support Freight and Commercial Transportation:** Implement alternative truck routes to reduce village impacts, upgrade rail infrastructure, and encourage best practices to minimize road damage.

- ✖ **Enhance Resilience and Reduce Environmental Impact:** Assist municipalities with compliance requirements, encourage hazard mitigation plans, and promote ridesharing and active transportation.

- ✖ **Strengthen Community Livability Through Context-Sensitive Design:** Utilize Complete Streets principles, encourage roundabouts and traffic calming, and ensure projects enhance regional character.

- ✖ **Secure Adequate Funding and Long-Term Planning:** Help municipalities implement capital budgeting, assist with alternative funding access, and advocate for increased state and federal support.

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Community Infrastructure

Statement of Policy

ACRPC will support municipalities in developing and maintaining community infrastructure that enhances quality of life for all residents and visitors. We will provide technical assistance, regional coordination, and planning expertise to ensure communities have access to sustainable water and wastewater systems, high-speed broadband, well-maintained cultural and historic resources, and recreation facilities that preserve the Region's distinctive character.

Summary

The Addison Region's community infrastructure encompasses the essential systems, services, and cultural resources that define quality of life and enable communities to thrive. Critical infrastructure—water, wastewater, solid waste, and communications—face common challenges of aging systems, capacity constraints, and adapting to modern environmental and technological standards. The Region's mixed settlement pattern creates varied infrastructure needs, with some village centers relying on public systems while rural areas depend on private wells and septic systems that face different challenges related to drought, soil conditions, and system maintenance.

The Region's cultural infrastructure—historic buildings, libraries, museums, trails, and recreation facilities—strengthens community identity and connection to place while requiring ongoing stewardship. Many municipalities manage aging town offices, highway facilities, and community buildings that need expansion or upgrades to meet accessibility, environmental, and operational requirements. Historic structures originally built as churches, schools, and town halls continue serving civic functions but often lack space and features for modern needs.

Emerging priorities include expanding broadband access through community-owned solutions, addressing deferred maintenance in educational facilities, and developing recreation infrastructure that connects communities to natural resources. ACRPC supports municipalities navigating these infrastructure challenges through technical assistance, capital planning, grant writing, and regional coordination that enables small towns to access resources and solutions otherwise beyond their reach, ensuring investments support sustainable growth, environmental protection, and equitable access to services throughout Addison County.

Implementation Actions

- Develop comprehensive regional water and wastewater strategies that protect water quality, ensure sustainable availability, enhance treatment capacity, replace failing systems, and support sustainable development in our villages.

- Expand affordable high-speed broadband to all underserved areas through support for Maple Broadband and digital equity initiatives that address affordability, literacy, and device access while promoting communications infrastructure for economic development.

- Assist municipalities in promoting adaptive reuse of historic structures, establishing historic review boards, designating historic districts, developing regulations, and providing planning and grant support for historical and cultural resources.

- Support municipalities with capital planning, facility improvements, and coordination for administrative buildings, community facilities, and recreation resources while continuing to develop and link trail systems throughout the Region.

- Facilitate regional coordination among educational institutions, municipalities, and organizations to strengthen shared facilities, support lifelong learning networks, and develop joint community use and capital improvement plans for public infrastructure.

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Population & Housing

Statement of Policy

ACRPC is committed to increasing the supply of safe, affordable, and accessible housing for all segments of the community through collaborative partnerships, sustainable planning practices, regulatory reform, and public education that supports housing development in designated growth areas while preserving the Region's agricultural and natural resources.

Summary

The Addison Region is undergoing significant demographic shifts. It needs to create significant new housing units to meet and reverse its shifting demographics. Population growth has stagnated, and the median age continues to rise. Vermont now experiences more deaths than births annually and household sizes are declining. Despite population stagnation, the number of households continues to grow, as more people live alone or in smaller family units.

New housing construction has not kept pace with this demand. Low vacancy rates and rising costs compound this challenge, threatening economic vitality and quality of life. Rental housing is particularly scarce, and many households struggle with affordability, lacking options across all income levels.

To address these challenges, Vermont established housing production targets through **Act 181** and the Statewide Housing Needs Assessment. The Addison Region must add thousands of new housing units to meet demand and support workforce development. Meeting these targets requires coordinated action across municipalities, strategic use of designated growth areas, water and wastewater, infrastructure investments, and regulatory reforms that remove barriers to housing development while protecting the Region's agricultural character and natural resources.

Implementation Actions

✖ Work with municipalities to understand housing needs, identify growth opportunities, apply for grants, create infrastructure solutions, develop tax incentive programs, support CHIP applications for new infrastructure, and reform bylaws regarding dimensional standards, allowable uses, ADUs, parking, and density bonuses.

✖ Provide technical assistance to municipalities for development review of new housing projects in Act 181 designated growth areas.

✖ Research innovative and sustainable options for manufactured and modular homes.

✖ Support municipalities in planning rural housing development through rewriting PUD standards that employ conservation design principles and incorporating density bonus standards.

✖ Develop outreach and educational programs including model bylaw language, housing forums and workshops, and research on regional septic solutions.

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Economic Development

Statement of Policy

ACRPC will collaborate with regional partners to cultivate a dynamic and diversified rural economy by creating community infrastructure supporting local entrepreneurs, responsibly stewarding natural resources and working lands, promoting small business development, enhancing quality of life for residents, and leveraging tourism to strengthen the regional economy.

Summary

The Addison Region maintains a strong economic foundation with over 700 farms, 150+ retail businesses, nearly 1,400 service businesses, and approximately 70 manufacturers. Major employers such as Simmonds Precision, Middlebury College, and Porter Medical Center anchor the employment base. The Region enjoys low unemployment and median household income of $88,478, exceeding state and national averages.

Workforce challenges including housing shortages are being addressed through Act 181 and project-based tax increment financing. However, limited childcare availability and an aging population constrain workforce participation. The gender pay gap has improved from 33.49% in 2013 to 20.40% in 2023, though further progress is needed. Workforce development partnerships strengthen connections between employers, educational institutions, and service providers.

Working lands and natural resources define the Region's character and economy. Agriculture generates $89.8 million in net cash farm income, with 42% of county land enrolled in Current Use programs. Working landscapes provide raw materials to value-add manufacturers while enhancing quality of life. Farm consolidation and succession challenges require continued attention. Tourism and outdoor recreation represent growing opportunities through investments in trails and downtown revitalization.

Infrastructure improvements are advancing regionally. Fiber network development is expanding high-speed internet access. Vergennes and Middlebury are upgrading wastewater capacity, though gaps in municipal systems outside these centers constrain development. Over a dozen brownfield properties have been remediated, increasing development-ready land. Transportation infrastructure is generally in good shape, though six FEMA disaster declarations since 2020 highlight the need for climate resilience investments in roads, culverts, bridges, and electrical systems.

Implementation Actions

- Support ACEDC's economic development initiatives by coordinating regional business support, connecting entrepreneurs with resources, assisting with market research, and collaborating on strategic development projects including industrial parks and downtown redevelopment.

- Advance housing development through Act 181 future land use mapping, support municipalities in securing planning grants for zoning updates, and assist property owners in accessing state tax credits for adaptive reuse projects.

- Expand critical infrastructure by advocating for water, wastewater, and telecommunications improvements, engaging businesses in infrastructure planning, and promoting mixed-use zoning that enables shared infrastructure financing.

- Enhance quality of life and economic vitality by drafting a countywide master plan for municipal forests, measuring the economic impact of outdoor recreation, creating interconnected pedestrian and bicycle path systems, and supporting workforce health initiatives through partnerships like Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

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Flood Resilience & Emergency Management

Statement of Policy

ACRPC will encourage flood resilient communities by avoiding new development in flood hazard and river corridor protection areas, protecting and restoring natural flood mitigation systems, and maintaining robust emergency preparedness and response planning.

Summary of Regional Context

The Addison Region has done significant work to increase Flood Resilience over recent decades, but faces increasing vulnerability to flooding as precipitation patterns shift and extreme rainfall events become more frequent. Recent floods in 2023 and 2024, along with Tropical Storm Irene in 2011, have damaged homes, infrastructure, and farmland while isolating communities and prompting federal disaster declarations. These events highlight the ongoing need for proactive flood resilience planning.

The County's flood resilience strategy emphasizes three priorities: directing development away from flood hazard areas and river corridors; protecting and restoring floodplains, wetlands, and forested areas that naturally store and slow floodwaters; and, strengthening emergency preparedness through updated hazard mitigation plans and coordination of response strategies. Key waterways including Otter Creek, New Haven River, and Lewis Creek require protection from encroachment, while wetland complexes and upland forests provide critical flood mitigation benefits.

Municipalities in the Addison Region have done significant amounts of emergency planning. Nearly all towns participate in the National Flood Insurance Program. In contrast, only four have adopted river corridor protection regulations. By combining proactive land use management with ecological restoration and coordinated emergency planning, ACRPC can help Addison County communities adapt to increasing flood risks and safeguard public safety, property, and natural resources.

Implementation Actions

- Guide municipalities in updating zoning and flood hazard bylaws to restrict new development in floodplains and river corridors, using current flood maps, river corridor data, and best practices for resilient land use.

- Support restoration and conservation projects, especially including reforestation of upland areas, wetland and floodplain restoration, and establishment of riparian buffers, to enhance natural flood storage and reduce downstream impacts.

- Strengthen emergency preparedness and hazard mitigation planning by helping towns update Local Hazard Mitigation Plans, identify critical infrastructure at risk, and coordinate regional response and recovery strategies for future flood events.

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Future Land Use

Statement of Policy

ACRPC seeks to plan development that maintains the historic settlement pattern of compact villages and urban centers separated by rural countryside, supporting the Region's working landscape, natural resources, and quality of life.

Summary

The Addison Region's distinctive character stems from its three urban centers and additional compact village centers surrounded by productive agricultural land and forested mountains, a pattern that has defined the area since the 1760s when most municipalities were founded.

The Plan organizes the Region into distinct land use areas ranging from compact Growth Areas and Village Centers to Rural Agriculture and Forested Areas comprising the working landscape, and Conservation Areas protecting natural resources. The Region faces a significant housing challenge, with targets calling for more than 1,600 new housing units by 2030. Sixty percent of targeted housing development is planned for Growth Centers and Village Areas, which encompass only 3.3% of the Region's land. The remaining development will occur in rural areas. Achieving these targets, especially in the villages, will require expanded water and wastewater infrastructure, supportive zoning regulations, and strategic use of programs like Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP) to leverage future tax revenue for infrastructure investment.

The Plan maintains the Region's commitment to preserving its working landscape. It balances growth needs with conservation of prime agricultural soils, forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and scenic resources that contribute significantly to the Region's economic vitality and character.

Implementation Actions

- Direct housing growth to village centers and growth areas through municipal plan and zoning reforms that clearly define compact settlement areas and promote development reaching regional housing targets.

- Build public infrastructure supporting compact development including water, wastewater, sidewalks, bike lanes, and energy systems in growth centers and villages.

- Protect and strengthen the working landscape through land conservation partnerships, Freedom to Farm policies, and support for value-added agricultural and forest product manufacturing.

- Leverage the Community and Housing Infrastructure Program (CHIP) Program to finance infrastructure investment using future tax revenue from development.

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Equity, Benefits, and Burdens

In 2024, the Vermont Legislature added the 15th State planning goal: to equitably distribute environmental benefits and burdens as described in **3 V.S.A. chapter 72**. Beyond this statutory requirement, ACRPC recognizes that resilient, thriving communities provide residents with equal opportunity to shape government policy and equal opportunity to access governmental services, resources, and infrastructure.

ACRPC is committed to ensuring that all residents have access to the resources of the Region, receive just treatment, and have fair consideration in planning and decision-making processes. We recognize that equity—the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals—is essential to building a sustainable, thriving, and resilient future for the Addison Region.

ACRPC's equity work is guided by the following principles:

- Structure policies and investments to benefit all residents and ensure they do not disproportionately burden areas containing priority populations.

- Structure the benefits of regional planning initiatives and economic opportunities to provide access to all residents.

- Develop community engagement practices that emphasize openness to questions and comments, promote transparency so that all can see and understand policies and decisions, demand civility to all groups and individuals, and provide equal opportunity for all groups and individuals to participate.

- Assess the impacts of proposed policies and objectives to understand who benefits and who may be burdened.

OUR APPROACH TO ASSESSING EQUITY IMPACTS

ACRPC's approach to equity assessment considers the following questions for each policy, objective, and decision:

- Who are the relevant stakeholders, target populations, and impacted communities?

- What are the intended outcomes and how will benefits and burdens be distributed?

- Are efforts being taken to mitigate or redress adverse impacts?

- What data and metrics are required to assess implications?

Throughout this Plan's development and implementation, ACRPC commits to evaluating policies, programs, and decisions that prioritize initiatives that reduce disparities and expand access to opportunities for all residents.

ACRPC'S EQUITY PRIORITIES

An equitable Addison Region is one in which:

- Infrastructure is planned, developed, and maintained to serve residents of all income levels, ages, and abilities, ensuring that essential services and mobility options are accessible and affordable throughout the Region.

- Resources, programs, and incentives that improve quality of life are accessible to all residents, particularly populations who face the greatest barriers or carry the highest burdens.

- Natural resources and landscapes are protected and accessible to the public, ensuring all residents can enjoy the environmental, recreational, and health benefits these resources provide without bearing disproportionate environmental burdens.

- Community representation reflects the diversity of our Region through intentional efforts to ensure diverse participation on our Full Commission, Transportation Advisory Committee, and among leadership in our member municipalities.

- Community engagement is accessible, inclusive, and designed to provide meaningful participation opportunities for all residents.

ACRPC commits to embedding these equity principles throughout our planning work in each of the areas identified above, consistent with the standards set by the State of Vermont. We recognize that achieving equity requires sustained effort, transparency, accountability to the communities we serve, and a willingness to continuously improve our practices as we learn and grow.