

**TO:** Mount Ascutney Regional Commission  
**FROM:** Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development  
**DATE:** April 15, 2026  
**RE:** Mount Ascutney Regional Commission Regional Plan Pre-Application  
**SUBJECT:** FORMAL REVIEW AND COMMENT BY DHCD

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## Overview

- This memo provides formal review and comment by the Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) on the proposed regional plan referenced above.
- The primary objective of this Memo is to address potential issues prior to RPC hearings, support review and comment by the CIB, and support a positive determination of compliance by the LURB.
- The LURB is ultimately responsible for holding hearings and determining compliance with a regionally adopted plan (24 VSA §4348).

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## Process

- The **Mount Ascutney Regional Commission (MARC)** submitted a pre-application to LURB on **March 4, 2026**.
- The LURB provided notice to partner agencies on **March 4, 2026**, with [submitted materials](#).
- To establish the new community investment designated downtown centers and village centers and neighborhoods, the LURB must ensure future land use areas (FLUA) proposed for designation meet the requirements under 24 V.S.A. § 5803 and 5804 for designation as downtown and VCs and neighborhood areas (10 VSA §6033).
- A positive determination of compliance by the LURB transfers all legacy State designated areas (Downtown Centers, Village Centers, New Town Center, Growth Centers, and Neighborhood Development Areas) and establishes eligibility for the new [State Community Investment Designations](#) and Act 250 Tier 1B and Tier 1A jurisdiction.
- Upon determination of compliance of the regional plan by the LURB, future land use areas (FLUA) that establish designation will be recognized as Community Investment Program designated downtown/village centers and neighborhoods and tracked in the State's Planning Atlas and Data Center.
- Proposed regional plans will now apply a [standard methodology for FLUA](#) mapping developed by VAPDA and the [Enterprise GIS Consortium](#) has adopted a regional plan FLUA data standard to support statewide-consistent map data. Both implement the land use categories established by statute: *downtown centers (DC), village center (VC), planned growth area (PGA), village area (VA), transition area, enterprise area, resource-based recreation area, hamlets, rural general, rural ag/forestry, and rural conservation* (24 VSA §4348a).
- The LURB developed a [Mapviewer](#) to assist in its partner agency reviews of the preapplication FLUA map.
- The Department's review and comments are primarily limited and focused on FLUAs establishing a Community Investment Designation and region-wide mapping topics or issues. The Department did not review the remainder of the plan.

- The designated downtown/village centers have three “steps” for (beginner [1], intermediate [2], advanced [3]) with graduated requirements and benefits. All *DCs and VCs* mapped by the RPCs enter the Community Investment Program. Centers associated with a legacy designated downtown enter the program at Step 3. Centers associated with a legacy designated new town center or village center enter the program at Step 2. All other centers, including all newly mapped centers with no legacy designation associated with it, enter the program at Step 1. Municipalities may then apply to submit an administrative application to the Department to advance to Step 2 and 3 (24 VSA §5803). The step data developed will support updates to the [Vermont Planning Atlas](#) and [Data Center](#) upon LURB determinations of compliance.

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## Municipalities & FLUAs Proposed for Designation

### Summary on FLUAs proposed as Centers & Neighborhoods

<b>Designated Areas Proposed</b>	<b>19</b>	
Total New	8	42%
Total Legacy	11	58%
<b>Centers</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>48%</b>
Step 1 Centers Proposed	1	9%
Step 2 Center Proposed	9	82%
Step 3 Centers Proposed	1	9%
<i>Legacy Centers</i>	<i>10</i>	
<i>New Center</i>	<i>1</i>	
<b>Neighborhoods</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>42%</b>
Planned Growth Area Neighborhoods	3	38%
Village Area Neighborhoods	5	62%
<i>Legacy Neighborhoods</i>	<i>2</i>	
<i>New Neighborhoods</i>	<i>6</i>	

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## Commentary

The Department of Housing & Community Development's (DHCD) most heavily weighted consideration in evaluating the Future Land Use maps is whether a region has included sufficient area in Centers and Neighborhoods to safely enable the region to achieve its [statewide and regional housing targets](#), established as part of Act 181 (24 V.S.A. § 4348a(a)(9)). MARC has conducted robust engagement with its communities and municipal leadership to identify the centers and neighborhoods where growth is most desired.

Statute (24 V.S.A. § 4302(c)(1)(A)) requires that a substantial majority of the units be encouraged in downtown centers, village centers, planned growth areas, and village areas. The upper targets for the MARC region as established in the statewide and regional housing targets are 1,781 during the period of 2025-2030, and 7,391 during the period of 2025-2050, indicating average annual unit creation in the County of 356 per year to achieve the 2030 target or 295 per year to achieve the 2050 target.

According to the [DHCD Housing Development Dashboard](#), MARC's current pace of 91 units per year puts the region far behind the pace for their upper 2030 housing targets. The region is on pace to build 388 units during the 2025-2030 period according to the dashboard. According to building permit data obtained from the US Census Bureau and as reported on [HousingData.org](#), between 2008 and 2024, Windsor County permitted an average of 96 units per year.

While this is a review and comment of the Regional Plan, and thus indirectly the underlying municipal plan, it does not provide direct comment on local zoning and bylaws. The Department encourages MARC and municipalities to ensure that zoning and bylaws account for and accommodate the growth needed to achieve the statewide and regional housing targets and to enable the growth sought by this Regional Plan.

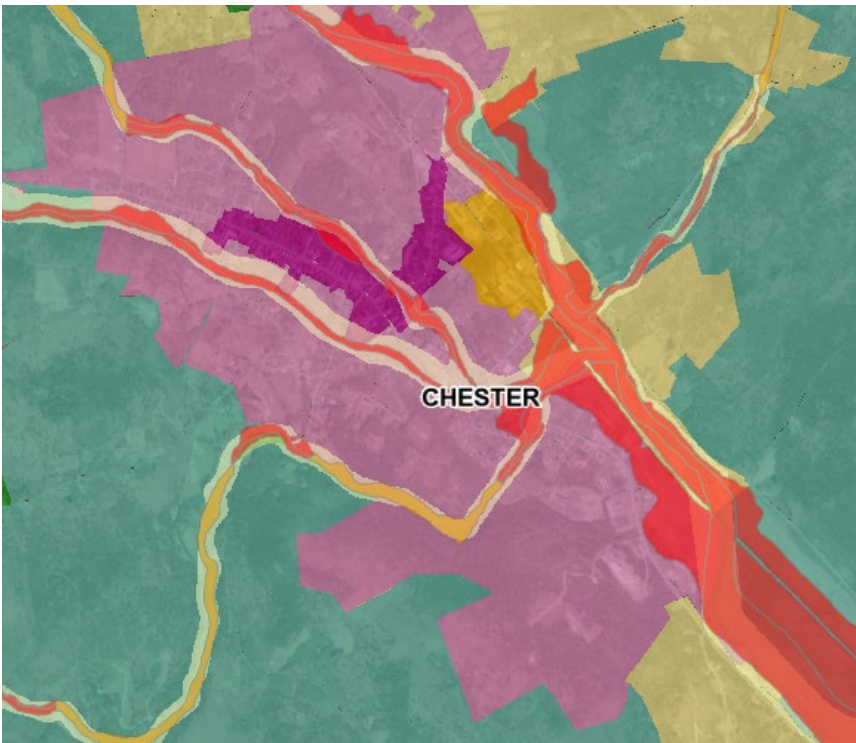
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## Region-wide Mapping Topics

### **Flood Hazard (FH) & River Corridor (RC) Areas in Proposed Neighborhoods**

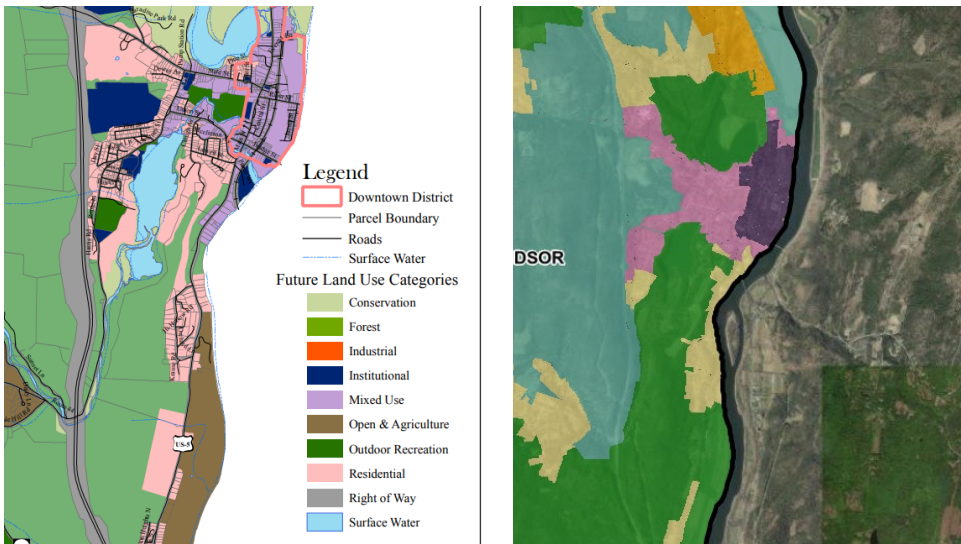
FH and RC areas are included in all proposed designated areas, some in municipalities with RC regulations and some without. In those municipalities without, areas should be mapped as another FLUA to minimize hazard risk.

All the proposed neighborhoods in the MARC region include undeveloped FH and RC areas. The FH and RC are not appropriate for village area and planned growth area mapping and are better mapped as another FLUA to minimize hazard risk.

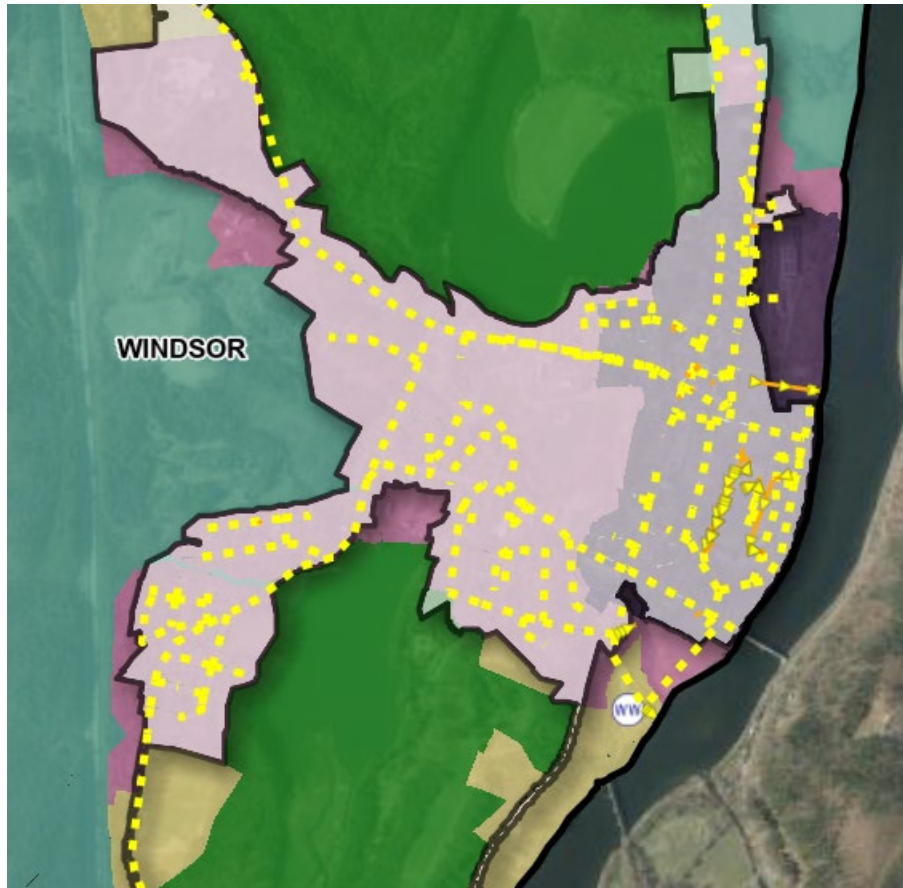


### Proposed Planned Growth Areas: Density, Infrastructure, Complete Streets

The Department encourages MARC and municipalities to ensure that zoning and bylaws account for and accommodate the growth needed to achieve the statewide and regional housing targets and to enable the growth sought by the Regional Plan. The regional maps are intended to roll-up and recognize municipal work to establish the condition for smart growth and development consistent with the State’s enacted goals. Areas within a proposed neighborhood, like in Windsor or Chester, where the municipality does not allow high-density residential and mixed-use development should be rezoned by the municipality to those uses, otherwise, they may be more appropriately mapped as another FLUA.



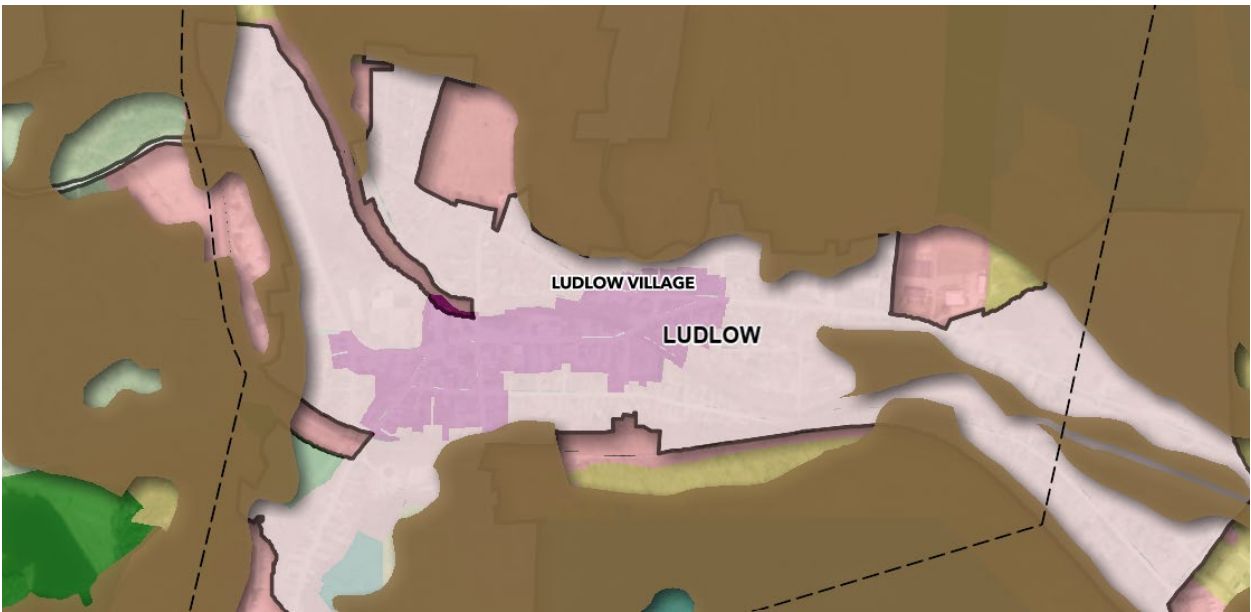
PGA Neighborhoods must also be served by public water/wastewater. MARC should ensure PGAs do not extend beyond sewer service areas and water lines.



Additionally, PGAs must be served by planned or existing transportation infrastructure that conforms with “complete streets” principles as described under 19 V.S.A. chapter 24. PGAs not entirely served by existing complete streets should be mapped as another FLUA, unless complete streets are planned and programmed in the municipal Capital Program. The [Vermont Planning Data Center](#) contains records on capital programs, municipal planning, and plan implementation and is updated annually (at a minimum) by the Region on behalf of its member municipalities. As an example, Chester does not have a capital plan to expand areas served by complete streets at this time.

## Village Areas (VA)

A VA must have Public Water/Wastewater/Suitable Septic Soils. The region maps some VA areas that do not appear to have suitable soils based on soil mapping. In some instances, a portion of the parcels would appear to support septic, in others, not. If areas like these are also not served by public water or wastewater, they may be better mapped as another land use; however, other considerations such as feasibility of septic to serve the whole parcel, and proximity and feasible access to public systems may be relevant to maintain those areas as currently mapped. Ludlow as an example:



Village areas must also be contiguous, compact, and adjacent to a center (except for necessary FH & RC exclusions). As an example, the Town of Windsor in the instance below, has a village area that is mapped without an adjacent center.

