

TRORC Regional Plan Equity Analysis

Regional Plans must address equity issues in both the *process* in developing the Plan as well as in the *product* of the Plan itself.

The main statutory directive to do this comes in [state planning goal #15](#):

“(b) It is also the intent of the Legislature that municipalities, regional planning commissions, and State agencies shall engage in a continuing planning process that will further the following goals: . . . (15) To equitably distribute environmental benefits and burdens as described in 3 V.S.A. chapter 72.”

Chapter 72 is on environmental justice, the core of which is, “that no segment of the population of the State should, because of its racial, cultural, or economic makeup, bear a disproportionate share of environmental burdens or be denied an equitable share of environmental benefits.” ([3 VSA section 6003](#)). TRORC takes this to mean that the TRORC Regional Plan will neither promote nor result in such burdens, and will not deny in policy or through subsequent use of the policies such benefits.

The second part of section 6003 is the process part that states that, “it is further the policy of the State of Vermont to provide the opportunity for the meaningful participation of all individuals, with particular attention to environmental justice focus

populations, in the development, implementation, or enforcement of any law, regulation, or policy.” TRORC takes this to mean that we must make special effort to reach out during the Plan development to ensure that environmental justice focus populations (EJFP) voices are heard.

EJFPs are defined at [3 VSA 6002 \(4\)](#) as:

“any census block group in which:

(A) the annual median household income is not more than 80 percent of the State median household income;

(B) Persons of Color and Indigenous Peoples comprise at least six percent or more of the population; or

(C) at least one percent or more of households have limited English proficiency.”

TRORC therefore conducted an analysis to see if and where such groups existed. Since statute defines such populations spatially using Census block groups, that is the data we started with.

TRORC has five Census block groups (CBGs) according to ACS 2024 data with households that have 80% or less of the State median household income (MHHI) of \$64,962. These are in the towns of Hartland (CBG 1), Hartford (CBG 5), Royalton (CBG 1), and Newbury (CBG 1 and 2).

However, the margin of error at the 90% confidence interval for these areas is huge. For example, the estimated MHHI of \$63,333 for Hartland CBG 1 is below the State median, but the figure is really likely to be from \$27,078 to \$99,588. This level of inaccuracy is enough that all of these five CBGs might not qualify, but also that many other towns not identified actually might qualify. For this reason, it is not useful to use MHHI data as a spatial indicator of EJFPs in the TRORC Region.

The second method is to use ACS 2024 Census block groups with at least 6% of the population as non-white. All TRORC towns qualify under this method as they range from 6.5% in Barnard to 26.1% in Norwich, however the margin of error averages 45% for this dataset. Thus, using this dataset also means the entire Region might not qualify under this metric. For this reason, it is not useful to use BIPOC data as a spatial indicator of EJFPs in the TRORC Region.

Lastly, ACS 2024 data identify three block groups in the Region as having over 1% as non-English-speaking (ESL) households (Pittsfield CBG 1 at 1.06%, Randolph village CBG 3 at 1.18% and central Woodstock CBG 2 at 2.16%). Again, the margin of error would put all but Woodstock out, and that same margin if applied to other towns could put them in.



For the reasons above, TRORC did not spatially identify any area at the Census block group scale that needs consideration as an EJFP. However, this does not mean there are not smaller areas with such characteristics, they are just not easily found. It also certainly does not mean that equity issues are not present for people that are lower-income, BIPOC, or ESL.

Due to these data limitations, TRORC instead took an approach that assumes there are equity issues in all TRORC communities, especially along income lines, as we know the percentage of households that have cost burdens (looking at housing costs) is significant across the region, whereas the other two indicators are much smaller percentages of populations. However, that in itself can be an indicator of equity issues, as the small percent of BIPOC or ESL populations can mean they are less visible.

Shifting away from a spatial CBG approach to reach environmental justice populations in our region, TRORC took a two-pronged approach: targeted outreach/focus groups and community-wide public forums. TRORC reached out to a variety of social service agencies to collaborate on organizing focus groups that would represent marginalized communities: [Capstone Community Action](#), [Clara Martin Center in Randolph](#), [Hartford Dismas House](#), [Upper Valley Haven](#), [Vital Communities](#), [Bugbee Senior Center](#), and [Vermont Adult Learning in White River Junction](#). Capstone Community Action and Hartford Dismas House agreed to collaborate, and we held focus groups with their clients, providing participants gift cards to compensate for their time. Besides staff, six people were in the Dismas House

group and seven in the Capstone group.

Issues raised in these groups centered on health/dental/mental health care, housing, food, social services, transportation/transit, daycare, aging, wages, social support networks, and job training. These issues were granular problems and policy solutions were incorporated into revisions. (See excerpted equity-related goals/policies/recommendations list at the end of this document).

We also organized three sub-regional forums to gather input from towns that are geographically distant from resource/service centers, with the recognition that residents of those towns who are socially marginalized experience compounded burdens. These forums had public newspaper notice, emailed notice to towns, and flyers (example shown) posted in the areas. Food was provided at the forums. The three forums centered on groups of towns: Granville, Hancock, Braintree, Rochester, Pittsfield, and Stockbridge (10/23/25, 37 participants); Topsham, Newbury, Bradford, and Corinth (10/27/25, 44 participants); and Tunbridge, Vershire, and Chelsea (11/11/25, 20 participants).

Some of these towns have relatively high percentages of their populations with incomes below the poverty level. A total of 101 people participated in the forums. We also distributed written surveys for forum participants to fill out or to take home to those not able to participate in the forums. 32 surveys were completed.

Issues brought up in these forums focused on: housing and homelessness, drugs/public safety, public transportation, jobs, community cohesion and awareness of activities, senior care, trade schools, bike/ped safety, grocery stores, community gardens, municipal capacity, retaining schools, childcare, activities for teens, pharmacies, aging, recreational opportunities, and local food. As above with the focus groups, these issues were incorporated into plan revisions.

In addition to the new equity goal in the state

**NORTHERN TOWNS
GATHERING**

**MONDAY
OCTOBER 27
5:30 - 7 PM**

**172 North Main St
Bradford
(Former Bradford
Academy)**

**Bradford
Corinth
Newbury
Topsham**

Free Program, Refreshments Provided

Please join us for an informal discussion about the future we want to build for our communities, and how we can work together to get there.

5:30 – 6 pm: Munch and mingle

6 – 7 pm: Facilitated community conversation

Can't make it in person?
[Click here to register to attend remotely!](#)



planning goals, several other goals and their subsequent policy areas are meant to create benefits or reduce burdens across all populations, but some have more import for those with less mobility, income, or economic/social support. These include state planning goals [#2](#), [#3](#), and [#4](#), [#11](#), [#13](#), and [#14](#):

2) To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.

(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

(4) To provide for safe, convenient, economic, and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.

(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

(A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income,

and consistent with housing targets provided for in subdivision 4348a(a)(9) of this title.

(B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.

(C) Sites for multifamily and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family dwellings.

(D) Accessory dwelling units within or attached to single-family residences that provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives, elders, or persons who have a disability should be allowed.

(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

(14) To encourage flood resilient communities.

TRORC largely addresses these issues and those raised through outreach in chapters on land use, housing, transportation, health, and utilities and facilities. While the whole Plan is aimed at improving the quality of life, state of natural resources, and economy of the Region, and would therefore benefit persons of all groups, there are some areas that seem especially connected to equity issues. Throughout the Plan the “E=” symbol is used to denote these areas.

There are many places where background text addresses equity-related issues, but the “E=” symbol is only used for the goals, policies, and recommendations of the Plan, as this is where the Plan mainly aims to have effects on local, regional, or state actions. Goal statements, which are visions of desired future conditions create social momentum and the basis for policies. Policies promote beneficial results or deter negative ones. Recommendations for agencies or organizations (including TRORC) urge them to take actions that would work toward a more equitable future. Selected parts of the Plan with the “E=” denotation are called out in the table below that shows where they can be found in the Plan and what category of effect they have.



Table of Goals/Policies/Recommendations by topic area

Page	Type	Number	Effect
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2-7	Policy	1	Improves physical/mental health
2-7	Recommendation	3	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
2-7	Recommendation	5	Removes barriers to accessibility
2-8	Goal	1	Improves physical/mental health
2-8	Policy	1	Improves physical/mental health
2-8	Recommendation	6	Improves physical/mental health
2-9	Goal	1	Increases transportation access/mobility
2-9	Recommendation	6	Removes barriers to accessibility
2-10	Policy	2	Removes barriers to accessibility
2-10	Policy	4	Removes barriers to accessibility
2-10	Recommendation	1	Removes barriers to accessibility
2-10	Recommendation	2	Removes barriers to accessibility
2-10	Recommendation	4	Removes barriers to accessibility
2-10	Recommendation	5	Removes barriers to accessibility
2-12	Goal	2	Improves physical/mental health
2-12	Recommendation	4	Increases transportation access/mobility
2-12	Recommendation	6	Removes barriers to accessibility
2-12	Recommendation	7	Removes barriers to accessibility
3-5	Policy	13	Improves physical/mental health

Page	Type	Number	Effect
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3-6	Policy	9	Increases transportation access/mobility
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3-7	Recommendation	4	Improves physical/mental health
3-9	Recommendation	3	Increases transportation access/mobility
3-12	Policy	2	Increases affordable housing options
3-15	Goal	1	Reduces poverty/Increases income
3-26	Goal	1	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
3-26	Goal	4	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
3-27	Policy	2	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
3-27	Policy	14	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
3-27	Policy	16	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
3-28	Recommendation	4	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
4-8	Goal	3	Increases transportation access/mobility
4-8	Policy	9	Increases transportation access/mobility
4-8	Policy	12	Increases transportation access/mobility
4-9	Policy	13	Increases transportation access/mobility
4-9	Policy	20	Increases transportation access/mobility
4-10	Recommendation	10	Increases transportation access/mobility
5-10	Policy	4	Enables workforce participation



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5-10	Recommendation	1	Enables workforce participation
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5-11	Recommendation	15	Enables workforce participation
6-16	Policy	1	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
6-17	Recommendation	5	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
6-18	Policy	3	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
6-18	Recommendation	5	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
6-21	Policy	5	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
6-21	Recommendation	2	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
6-24	Policy	8	Removes barriers to accessibility
8-15	Goal	3	Removes barriers to accessibility
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8-16	Policy	11	Increases affordable housing options
8-16	Policy	13	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
8-16	Policy	14	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
8-16	Policy	17	Reduces poverty/Increases income
8-16	Recommendation	1	Increases affordable housing options
8-16	Recommendation	3	Increases affordable housing options

Page	Type	Number	Effect
8-17	Recommendation	12	Increases affordable housing options
8-17	Recommendation	17	Reduces poverty/Increases income
8-17	Recommendation	18	Reduces poverty/Increases income
8-17	Recommendation	19	Increases affordable housing options
9-5	Goal	2	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards
9-9	Goal	1	Increases educational opportunity
9-9	Goal	2	Increases educational opportunity
9-9	Recommendation	2	Increases educational opportunity
9-11	Goal	1	Removes barriers to accessibility
9-11	Goal	2	Removes barriers to accessibility
9-11	Recommendation	2	Removes barriers to accessibility
9-18	Goal	1	Improves physical/mental health
10-16	Policy	1	Increases affordable housing options
10-17	Recommendation	12	Reduces exposure to pollution/hazards

