

CHAPTER 3: LAND USE

BACKGROUND

The focus of the regional land use plan is to encourage and support development that maintains the region's historic settlement pattern of compact villages and town centers separated by rural countryside and forests, consistent with state land use law. The regional land use plan includes a Future Land Use Map and description of designated areas that creates a framework for decisions related to growth, development, and conservation throughout the region. The Land Use Management Techniques section of the plan provides specific tools and strategies for municipalities to consider when implementing regional land use policies at the local level.

Looking forward, there are a number of challenges the Windham Region faces as it works to accomplish its land use goals. These include providing necessary public infrastructure to support compact development patterns, creating conditions for housing that is affordable across income levels and different periods of life, responding to the impacts of climate change and increased flood risks, rising public infrastructure costs, protecting limited productive forest and agricultural lands, and changes in demographics, technology, and the local economy.

Vermont's traditional development model and statutory land use planning goals of compact centers surrounded by rural countryside has allowed for an efficient use of roads and infrastructure, protected working landscapes and critical natural resource areas, and contributed to a greater sense of community. To maintain this land use pattern, most of the region's future growth and development will need to occur within or near existing population centers. However, many of the region's villages have limited or no infrastructure to support this future residential and commercial growth. One of the biggest constraints to growth and higher densities is the lack of adequate public water and wastewater systems. This also puts the retention of existing uses at risk as ageing septic systems will be difficult and expensive to replace, and expansion of capacity will likely be impossible. Other public infrastructure and amenities, including sidewalks, streetscaping, public spaces, and a mix of commercial and civic uses, are also needed.

Directing growth to our existing centers will help the region become more resilient in the face of climate change. A spread-out development pattern leads to an increased use of vehicles by residents to get to work and access goods and services, increased energy use for heating and cooling buildings, and results in a loss of natural habitats that provide carbon sequestration benefits. In contrast, compact settlements allow for less driving, encourage smaller building footprints with less energy needs, and conserve the region's natural landscapes. As we encourage growth in these areas, we also need to consider how and where it occurs given flood and fluvial erosion hazards. Many of the region's settlements are located adjacent to streams and rivers and are prone to flooding. The region is expected

to see an increase in extreme rain events as the climate changes and this will increase the risk of structures and critical infrastructure being damaged or destroyed from flooding.

Municipalities are facing increased costs to maintain existing and invest in new infrastructure. Encouraging compact development that takes advantage of our existing social and civic community centers and their infrastructure supports economic resiliency for towns. Low-density development away from existing centers can result in the eventual expansion of costly public infrastructure, which adds to a municipality's long-term capital needs for maintenance and replacement.

Historically, the region's economy was centered around manufacturing and industrial activities in villages and downtowns, and agricultural and forestry industries in rural areas. Over the years, the economy has shifted more towards service-based industries like retail, food services, healthcare, hospitality, and tourism. This has implications for how land in the region is being used to support economic activity. With the expanded availability of broadband, the region has seen an increase in the number of remote workers, many whom have chosen to relocate here because of the quality of life it offers. Land use policies will need to be adapted to support existing legacy businesses and entrepreneurial growth, invest in public infrastructure and broadband, and strengthen town centers.

Forest and agricultural lands help define the character and history of the region and provide economic activity while also providing ecosystem services such as habitat, carbon sequestration, and stormwater and flood mitigation. Trends toward forest parcel subdivision and residential and recreational development continue to threaten timber production, hunting and fishing, outdoor recreation, and wildlife habitat and migration corridors. Over the last several decades, there has been a decrease in the number of total acres farmed in the region. However, we have been able to retain and grow a diversity of small-scale agricultural businesses supported by direct market opportunities. For both forest and agricultural industries, it is imperative to maintain an adequate amount of land in these uses to support these activities going forward.

As the composition of the population changes, the region will need to ensure land use policies are responding to the needs of current and future residents. Our population is ageing and it will be critical to provide diverse housing options and services in areas that are affordable and walkable for elderly residents. Local employers are also struggling to maintain and grow their workforce because of a lack of housing for workers. While many new residents are drawn to Vermont because of the rural lifestyle it offers, there are also those that prefer having a smaller footprint home and not having to drive to work or for shopping – opportunities that can be cultivated in our village and town centers. Finally, the region has welcomed refugees and asylum seekers in recent years and we will need to provide welcoming and inclusive communities that offer job opportunities, support services, and childcare that meet the needs of these new residents.

FUTURE LAND USE PLANNING AREAS

Act 181 passed in 2024 created 11 regional future land use planning areas that are required to be mapped consistently by each Regional Planning Commission in Vermont. These future land use areas are described below and delineated on the Regional Future Land Use Map. WRC uses the map as a regional planning tool and it creates a framework for decisions related to growth, development, and conservation throughout the region; it is not a regulatory map, such as a municipal zoning map. There may be cases where existing land uses are inconsistent with the future land use district they fall in, for example a school campus that is located in what is otherwise a rural area. In these instances, the Regional Plan policies that are more aligned with the existing land use will be used.

To map the new regional future land use planning areas, WRC considered a number of factors, including existing settlement patterns, the availability of existing and planned public infrastructure that can support development, and land use policies established in existing town plans. In addition, the mapping was done to conform with the definitions and criteria in 24 V.S.A. § 4348a of Vermont statute.

The regional future land use planning areas are:

- Downtown Centers
- Village Centers
- Planned Growth Areas
- Village Areas
- Hamlets
- Rural – General
- Rural – Forestry & Agriculture
- Rural – Conservation
- Resource-Based Recreation Area
- Transition/Infill Area
- Enterprise

DOWNTOWN CENTERS

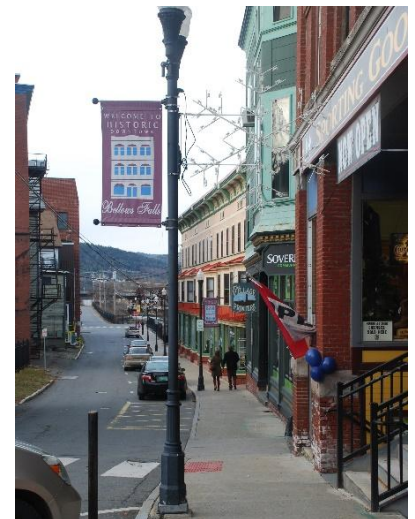


DOWNTOWN BRATTLEBORO

Downtown Centers are areas that include a core civic and business district. These areas provide services, shopping, housing, and employment opportunities to residents both within the Windham Region and in the surrounding regions and states. Multi-story buildings that mix retail uses with residential and professional offices are typical. They are served by public infrastructure, including public water and/or wastewater systems and multi-modal transportation systems, which support the highest population densities in the region. The regional future land use plan designates Brattleboro, Bellows Falls, and Wilmington as *Downtown Centers*.

Appropriate uses and activities in *Downtown Centers* include a mix of uses such as commercial, residential, institutional, civic, light industrial, and public gathering spaces. The highest development densities should occur in the core of the regional downtowns. A variety of different housing types should be available in *Downtown Centers*, with particular attention paid to housing that accommodates the region's aging population, young professionals, families, and low- and moderate-income households.

Public transportation services and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure are particularly important in *Downtown Centers*. Public realm design and amenities, including sidewalks, street plantings and lighting, and public gathering spaces, are critical to support the vitality of these areas. Buildings should be oriented to the street in order to create a functional and pleasant environment.



BELLOWS FALLS, ROCKINGHAM

VILLAGE CENTERS



JACKSONVILLE VILLAGE CENTER,
WHITINGHAM

Most of the Windham Region's towns have *Village Centers* that provide for a mix of residential, commercial, service, small industry, and community facilities. This plan recognizes *Village Centers* as future growth areas. The plan identifies 38 *Village Centers* in the Windham Region.

Village Centers offer many goods and services for local residents, present opportunities for local businesses and employment, and provide rural towns with

a sense of place. Many Village Centers are also important historically and culturally. The types of infrastructure available in Village Centers varies greatly across the region partially based on the size of the community. Most Village Centers provide a modest network of paved roads, and some have invested in wastewater treatment facilities, water systems, sidewalks, and recreational lands. The future provision of water and wastewater services is encouraged, and well-designed and maintained privately owned community water or wastewater systems may provide one avenue for achieving this goal. Village Centers that are not served by public water or wastewater services must limit densities to what soil conditions allow for on-site septic systems, as well as planning around existing wells and neighboring properties. However, Statute does not require public water or wastewater for an area to be mapped as a Village Center.



**SAXTONS RIVER VILLAGE CENTER,
ROCKINGHAM**

Development in Village Centers should include concentrated areas of moderate-density residential uses mixed with neighborhood commercial, institutional, and civic uses, such as general stores, restaurants, places of worship, professional offices, medical and care-giving facilities, recreational facilities, primary and secondary schools, and higher learning institutions. Safe and convenient modes of transportation to and within the villages need to be provided, including pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and automobile travel. Towns can better accommodate these different modes of travel and address potential conflicts through implementation of Complete Streets design principles and working with state partners.

In many Village Centers, there are limited opportunities for growth within historic settlement areas given already existing development, small lot sizes, and other constraints. Towns should regularly assess the growth potential of villages, determine whether suitable areas for development or expansion can be found in and around existing village districts, and evaluate the appropriateness and feasibility of developing or expanding the capacity or extent of public water, sewer, and road systems.

PLANNED GROWTH AREAS

Planned Growth Areas include high-density existing settlement and future growth areas with high concentrations of population, housing, and employment located around a core Downtown Center or Village Center. They include a mix of historic and non-historic commercial, residential, and civic or cultural sites with active streetscapes, supported by municipal development regulations, public water and/or wastewater, and multimodal transportation systems. Statute includes specific criteria that must be met for an areas to be eligible for Planned Growth Area designation. The Regional Future Land Use Map identifies Planned Growth Areas in the communities of Brattleboro, Putney, and Rockingham. The size of Planned Growth Areas varies significantly from community to

community based on existing and planned infrastructure and municipal development regulations to support higher density development.

VILLAGE AREAS

Village Areas include the traditional settlement area or a proposed new settlement area around a Downtown or Village Center, and are typically composed of a cohesive mix of residential, civic, religious, commercial, and mixed-use buildings, arranged along a main street and intersecting streets that are within walking distance for residents who live within and around the core center. Statute also includes specific criteria for the Village Area designation, but these areas are only required to have suitable soils for on-site septic systems rather than a public water or wastewater system, and can support more moderate levels of density as compared to the Planned Growth Area designation. The Regional Future Land Use Map identifies Village Areas in the communities of Rockingham, Westminster, Putney, Newfane, Weston, and Winhall.

HAMLET

Though sometimes referred to as villages, *Hamlets* are a distinct land use that is primarily residential. A hamlet allows for a mixture of land uses that are consistent with the traditional settlement pattern and densities, and that do not unnecessarily duplicate services offered in the village or other commercial areas. Appropriate land uses include civic, educational, small-scale retail and service businesses, and home-based businesses mixed with the residential land uses. However, the principal land use for hamlet areas should be residential. Hamlets are not planned to have significant growth.

Some towns may want to consider establishing a new village area in addition to, or as an alternative to, further development of existing villages. For example, the town of Vernon is exploring the creation of a new Village Center in the vicinity of its town office and school. In some situations, it may be appropriate to encourage additional growth around existing hamlets. Prior to promoting village-type development in a rural area, towns should carefully consider factors such as proximity to existing neighborhoods, the adequacy of roadways in the vicinity, soil conditions, and water supply potential. This plan prioritizes most of the region's growth and development within Downtown Centers, Village Centers, Planned Growth Areas, and Village Areas, and not in Hamlets.

RURAL – GENERAL



RESIDENTIAL HOMES IN WILMINGTON

Rural – General areas include areas that promote the preservation of Vermont's traditional working landscapes and natural area features. These areas also allow for low-density residential uses and some limited commercial development that is compatible with productive lands and natural areas. They generally do not have access to municipal sewer or water infrastructure, and are easily accessible by the existing road networks. Despite more limited access and topography constraints, many *Rural – General* areas have attracted increasing residential development. Much of the peak residential growth experienced in the

region between 1960 – 2000 occurred in areas mapped as *Rural – General*.

While this plan encourages the majority of growth and development to occur in Downtown and Village Centers, Planned Growth Areas, and Village Areas, it is anticipated growth will also occur in *Rural – General* areas. As much as possible, new development should be encouraged in close proximity to existing centers and available public infrastructure. Areas with steep slopes, wetlands, adjacent to waterways, or with other environmental constraints should be avoided.

Residential development is an appropriate use at low densities, but this type of development will encourage rural sprawl if it continues to be the dominant settlement pattern. Low density development consumes significantly more land per residential unit than higher density development. As such, growth must be planned to avoid diminishing the region's rural character, degrading environmental quality, and creating excessive costs for municipalities in terms of long-term infrastructure costs. There is an opportunity to increase density in these areas incrementally by encouraging accessory dwelling units, two-family dwelling units, and small-scale multi-family dwellings where appropriate.

RURAL – AGRICULTURAL & FORESTRY



SUGARHOUSE

Rural – Agricultural & Forestry areas include blocks of forest or farmland that sustain resource industries, provide critical wildlife habitat and movement, outdoor recreation, flood storage, aquifer recharge, and scenic beauty, and contribute to economic well-being and quality of life.

Development in these areas should be carefully managed to promote the working landscape and rural economy while protecting the agricultural and forest resource value. For example, low density residential and mixed-use

development can be appropriate in Rural – Agricultural & Forestry areas, but it must be compatible with working land uses, in scale with its surroundings, and sensitive to the limitations of the land. Certain small-scale industries, especially those related to agricultural and forest activities (e.g., dairy production, small-scale food processing, saw mills), may be compatible with, and most appropriate in, these areas. These types of industries are often essential for supporting the viability of agricultural and forestry businesses.

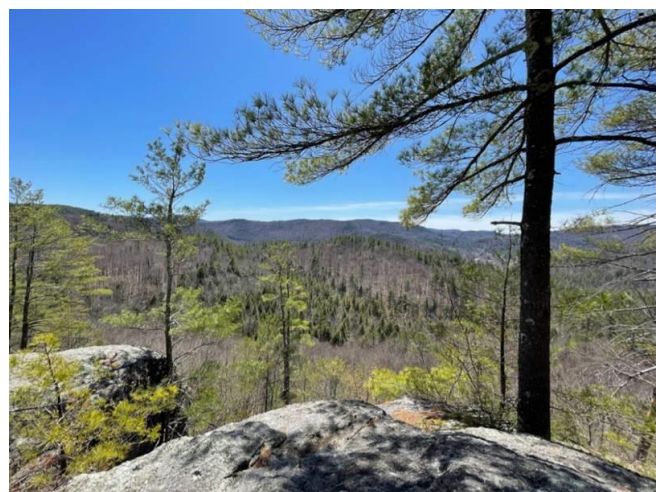
This plan also recognizes that Rural – Agricultural & Forestry areas may provide an opportunity for utility-scale renewable energy facilities where there is the raw potential for energy production, availability of adequate utility lines and facilities, and no environmental constraints, as further defined in the Energy Chapter of this plan. Renewable energy facilities in Rural – Agricultural & Forestry areas must be designed to allow for the productive use of land for agricultural and forestry to the greatest extent possible.

RURAL - CONSERVATION

Rural – Conservation areas require special protection or consideration due to their uniqueness, irreplaceable or fragile nature, or important ecological function. Generally, these areas have not been impacted by any significant development other than very low-density residential uses or forestry activities and have limited access to local road networks. The mapping of these areas and the accompanying policies in this plan are intended to help meet the requirements of 10 V.S.A. Chapter 89. It is important to note that if an area is mapped as Rural – Conservation, it does not mean those lands are subject to additional Act 250 jurisdiction under the new Tier 3 designation, as discussed further below.

WRC considered the following factors to map Rural – Conservation areas: :

- Lands that are conserved within the Green Mountain National Forest, State Parks and Natural Areas, Town Forests, and by conservation easement.
- Over 2,500 feet in elevation
- Identified bear travel corridor
- Area hosting significant plants, animals and ecological communities as designated by Vermont's Nongame and Natural Heritage Program



JAMAICA STATE PARK

- Area hosting federally identified endangered and threatened species or unique and fragile natural areas
- Riparian areas and their buffers
- Wetlands, floodplains, shore lands
- High Priority Forest Block or Habitat Connectivity Block as designated by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources
- Steep slopes over 25 percent
- Significant natural resource area or scenic corridors or vistas as identified in town plans.

Rural - Conservation lands must be preserved and protected to the greatest extent possible. Any development or land use in these areas should be designed to have a minimal impact on natural resources and should include effective mitigation measures that will protect natural resource values. The most appropriate uses for Rural - Conservation lands are conservation and management of natural resources and limited, low impact, very low-density rural uses.

TRANSITION OR INFILL AREAS

Transition or Infill Areas include areas of existing or planned commercial, office, mixed-use development, or residential uses either adjacent to a Planned Growth Area or Village Area, or a new stand-alone Transition or Infill Area. These areas are required to be served by, or planned for, public water or wastewater, or both. The Regional Plan identifies Transition or Infill Areas in Brattleboro, Dover, and Wilmington.

The intent of this land use category is to transform these areas into higher-density, mixed-use settlements, or residential neighborhoods through infill and redevelopment or new development. By utilizing proper land use planning and growth management techniques, including site plan review regulations and transportation corridor planning, the negative impacts of existing strip development can be mitigated. New commercial linear strip development is not allowed as to prevent it negatively impacting the economic vitality of commercial areas in the adjacent or nearby Planned Growth or Village Areas.



COMMERCIAL BUSINESSES ON VT 100 IN WEST DOVER

ENTERPRISE AREAS

Enterprise Areas include locations of high economic activity and employment. These include industrial parks, areas of natural resource extraction, or other commercial uses that involve larger land areas. Enterprise areas typically have ready access to water supply, sewage disposal, electricity, and freight transportation networks. Thoughtful planning for growth in these areas should be encouraged in order to provide jobs for residents, help retain existing businesses, and increase municipal tax bases.

This plan recognizes that large-scale industrial development has a high potential for conflict with surrounding land uses and it is appropriate to direct these businesses to the identified Enterprise areas and provide mitigation for off-site impacts such as noise, traffic, and light/glare when appropriate. Landscaping or other visual and auditory screening should be provided between industrial uses and abutting incompatible land uses and major roadways. Environmental impacts of developments within this designation need to be thoroughly reviewed and adequately addressed in the early stages of project development.

Industrial activities will also take place in other parts of the region as directed by town plans, which can address the town's needs with more specificity. Industrial uses have evolved away from higher impact heavy manufacturing uses to high-tech manufacturing and small-scale operations. These types of uses tend to have lower off-site impacts and can often be accommodated within existing village and downtown centers.

RESOURCE-BASED RECREATION AREAS



CARINTHIA BASE LODGE, MOUNT SNOW

Resource-Based Recreation Areas include large-scale resource-based recreational facilities, often concentrated around ski resorts, lakeshores, or concentrated trail networks, that may provide infrastructure, jobs, or housing to support recreational activities. This plan recognizes four Resource-Based Recreation Areas: Mount Snow, Stratton Mountain, Magic Mountain, and The Hermitage Club at Haystack Mountain. Development in these areas includes seasonal homes, lodging, restaurants, retail businesses, and recreational equipment rentals. Ski resorts have also increasingly focused on providing year-round recreational activities for

residents and visitors. Some secondary development around resorts has occurred in areas that have waste water systems and are located along major roads, and as a result have been able to support higher intensity uses. However, other development is located greater distances from resorts with lower residential densities. Over time it is possible that properties currently used for temporary lodging may become primary residences as remote work has become more common and high speed internet becomes more available and reliable.

All four Resource-Based Recreation Areas in the Windham Region are located adjacent to Rural – Conservation areas where soils are often shallow and slopes are steep. Many streams and rivers originate from these lands, and some are productive forests and have valuable wildlife habitat. Because of these fragile natural conditions, any expansion or redevelopment must be conducted in a planned and orderly manner, take into consideration the cumulative impact of development, follow careful environmental management practices, and improve stormwater management, water quality and quantity. Expansion of commercial, retail, and residential areas must be contained, and infill development should occur as an alternative wherever possible.

Given the remote locations of the resorts and the need for an extensive seasonal workforce, provision of affordable workforce housing is critical. High-value resort and second-home properties increase surrounding property values, reducing the availability of affordable housing. To that end, there must be a balance of housing options to enhance the overall viability of a resort community. The responsibility of providing affordable workforce housing cannot fall solely on the towns and region, but instead must be a joint responsibility with resort owners and companies. Similarly, public facilities and services must not be overburdened as a result of resort development.

REGIONAL FUTURE LAND USE PLAN & ACT 250

Act 250 is Vermont’s statewide land use and development law that was enacted in 1970 in response to increased growth and development pressures in the state. An Act 250 permit is required for certain commercial and residential developments depending on the scale of the project, whether the local municipality has zoning and subdivision bylaws in place, and other factors. WRC reviews and comments on the compatibility of projects requiring an Act 250 permit with the Regional Plan policies, as described in the Implementation section of this plan.

With the passage of Act 181 in 2024, Act 250 has transitioned to have more location-based jurisdiction. This change is intended to recognize that some areas of Vermont are planned for growth, contain necessary infrastructure (e.g. water, wastewater), and have sufficient local land use controls in place to adequately regulate development. Act 181 established three “Tiers” with different jurisdiction requirements under Act 250. The Regional Future Land Use Map has a role in determining eligibility for areas that may be exempted from Act 250 permitting (Tier 1) as described below:

- Tier 1A: Full exemption from Act 250 permitting requirements. Areas mapped as Downtown Center, Village Center, or Planned Growth Area are eligible for Tier 1A status. Municipalities must also meet the Tier 1A requirements in 10 V.S.A. § 6034(b). Municipalities that would like to request Tier 1A status need to apply separately with the Land Use Review Board.

- Tier 1B: Act 250 permitting exemption for residential projects with 50 dwelling units or less on 10 acres of land or less. Areas mapped as Downtown Center, Village Center, Planned Growth Area, or Village Area are eligible for Tier 1B status. Towns that are eligible for Tier 1B status can request that WRC identify these areas on the Regional Future Land Use Map and, upon approval of the map, will receive Tier 1B status.
- Tier 2: Areas not designated as Tier 1A, 1B, or 3 will be within Tier 2. Proposed projects in Tier 2 will generally need to follow the same permitting requirements under the current Act 250 program.
- Tier 3: The purpose of the Tier 3 designation is to ensure protection of critical natural resources and jurisdiction under Act 250 will increase for these areas. Act 181 tasks the Land Use Review Board with mapping Tier 3 areas and developing rules for proposed development in Tier 3. Tier 3 designation is not based on WRC's Regional Future Land Use Map.

LAND USE MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

The regional land use plan is implemented primarily through town plans, local land use regulations, investment in public infrastructure, and private development. In developing this plan, WRC incorporated current local land use planning goals and also considered regional goals and the compatibility of proposed land uses between towns. This section provides an overview of different approaches that municipalities can consider when implementing their town plans or making local policy decisions. WRC can support towns in deciding which strategies are the most appropriate for their communities. This section also addresses regional planning efforts WRC has identified as beneficial for the region and member towns, and community reinvestment programs available to towns.

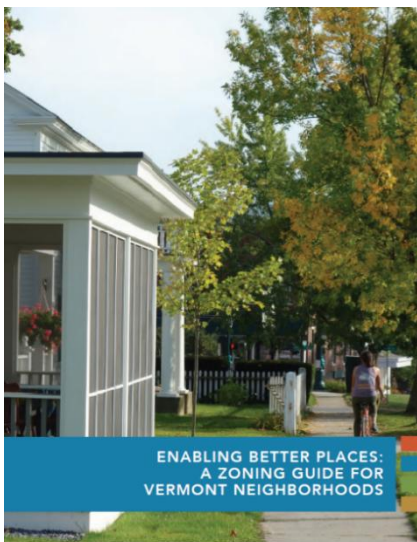
LOCAL REGULATORY APPROACHES

Because regional plan policy only has regulatory bearing in Act 250 proceedings, it is up to towns to direct growth to appropriate areas within their borders. Effective zoning and zoning administration are the tools that can be used for this purpose. The proposed future land use categories in this plan can be considered in local level planning efforts. Towns are encouraged to use these designations and definitions as a way to improve consistency and coordination among municipal plans, and to manage the region's lands more effectively so that local and regional goals may be achieved.

Much of the vibrancy of our Downtown Centers, Village Centers, Planned Growth Areas, and Village Areas is due to the variety of residential, commercial, and civic uses that are found in close proximity to one another. Zoning bylaws should be written to support this mix of uses and discourage large footprint retail or commercial establishments that may conflict with existing land use patterns. It is also important to support a variety of residential uses including

single-family, two-family, and multi-family buildings, which are already present in these areas. This can be accomplished by allowing more types of multi-family residential uses as permitted uses in zoning bylaws rather than a conditional use, which require additional town approvals.

Land use regulations are sometimes not in line with how villages have developed historically, even though this is the type of development pattern that residents often want to see replicated in their towns. In Downtown Centers, Village Centers, Planned Growth Areas, and Village Areas towns should consider zoning bylaws that establish minimum lot size and building setback requirements more consistent with existing settlement patterns, such as smaller lot sizes and buildings situated towards the street, and recognize that wastewater and water infrastructure will be necessary to achieve this consistency. For towns with municipal water and sewer, it is common for lots to be as small as 4,000 square feet. In areas with public wastewater, higher residential densities should also be encouraged through increasing density limits or removing maximums.



ENABLING BETTER PLACES

The Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development (ACCD) partnered with Congress for New Urbanism to develop the Enabling Better Places zoning guide for Vermont neighborhoods in 2020. The guide focuses on incremental, small changes that communities can make to their zoning bylaws which have the biggest impact on creating vibrant and livable places. ACCD offered funding through the Bylaw Modernization Grant program for towns to implement these recommendations. In the Windham Region, Brattleboro, Wilmington, Rockingham, and Newfane received funding through this program to update their bylaws.

The form of existing neighborhoods can be encouraged by adopting site plan review or design review regulations as part of zoning bylaws. These regulations can address things like the location of parking, access control, landscaping, screening, and exterior lighting, and can also include requirements on architectural design for buildings. Site plan and design review regulations can help a community mitigate potential impacts associated with development and provide property owners and developers a clear understanding of what is expected.

VISUALIZING DENSITY



VISUALIZING DENSITY PROJECT PUTNEY

The Windham Regional Commission has assisted towns with density visualization projects to address concerns about the impact of development on infrastructure and the existing character of the community. For the Putney Visualizing Density Project completed in 2005, three sites were chosen that represented different types of development potential in the town's village.

During a community charette, participants were asked to consider how to accommodate growth at these sites consistent with the existing small-scale rural village character

of Putney. The image on the left is an excerpt from the report showing a design for a vacant site adjacent to the Putney Food Co-op that accommodates a mix of commercial, residential, and public activities. These projects can help towns develop zoning bylaws that require new development to be done consistent with the community's vision.

Residential subdivisions in Rural – General and Rural – Agricultural & Forestry areas should incorporate design characteristics such as walkable layouts, community identity, public open spaces, and preservation of important resources, such as agricultural soils and wildlife habitat. Many of these objectives can be achieved by clustering lots to create a hamlet-type character around homes, while setting a significant percentage of the project area aside as open space reserved for agriculture, forestry, or public recreation. This development approach is commonly referred to as conservation subdivision and it is economically efficient because road and other infrastructure requirements are less extensive and costly to construct and maintain.

Towns can also consider developing more than one zoning district for rural areas to distinguish between different levels of development the community envisions for these areas. For example, it may be appropriate to have a district immediately adjacent to a Village Center that allows for moderate density of development and acts as a transition between the Village Center and more rural areas.. This is commonly referred to as a “transect” approach to land use planning that encourages development on a continuum from a town center to rural settings.



TRANSECT CATEGORIES

Source: Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development

Zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations can be used to help protect forest and agricultural lands in Rural – Agricultural & Forestry and Rural – Conservation areas. To discourage the fragmentation of large forest blocks and protect natural resources, towns can adopt large minimum lot size requirements. Local regulations can also include specific requirements on the siting of new dwellings and driveways to minimize impacts and restrict development in areas with steep slopes, high elevations, or natural resources, such as wetlands, significant natural communities, and rare, threatened, and endangered species. Overlay zoning districts are also a useful tool to protect the most critical natural resources areas or productive agricultural lands. An overlay zoning district includes more specific regulations that are in addition to the underlying zoning district. Examples of overlay districts in the Windham Region include the sensitive wildlife resource overlay district adopted by the town of Dover and the prime agricultural soils overlay district adopted by the town of Westminster.

REGIONAL PLANNING

The Windham Regional Commission has a role in implementing the goals of the future land use plan when it comes to addressing issues that cross municipal boundaries. WRC has identified regional planning projects that would be beneficial for the region and its member towns and it will seek to complete these projects as funding and staff availability allow.

LAND CONSERVATION PLANNING

This plan recognizes that land conservation planning can be more effective at the regional level with a focus on linking together parcels of land that span town boundaries and that form contiguous forest blocks and provide

wildlife travel corridors. WRC will continue the work initiated under the Windham Connectivity Collaborative to map priority conservation areas in the region, meet with stakeholder groups and local partners, and assist towns with strategies for implementation at the local level.

VILLAGE WATER AND WASTEWATER ASSESSMENT

The cost of building and maintaining centralized water and wastewater systems can be high, but infrastructure planning is an integral part of encouraging infill development and compact settlement patterns. This plan recognizes that gaining a better understanding of existing infrastructure capacity and potential areas for new systems is critical to answering if, where, and how growth will occur in the region's existing Downtown and Village Centers. WRC will seek to complete a regional assessment of existing public water and wastewater systems that looks at capacity, condition, and operational issues and challenges. This study would assess the feasibility of new public wastewater systems in villages in the region where there is town interest in pursuing this infrastructure.

COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

Reinvestment in regional centers, villages, and neighborhoods can promote compact settlement and add to the vibrancy of communities. Revitalization can happen through investment in infrastructure and public improvements, retaining local business and public services, and redeveloping brownfields and other underutilized properties.

VERMONT COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION DESIGNATION PROGRAM

The Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development manages the State Designation Program, which provides incentives and offers towns assistances for encouraging new development and redevelopment in compact settlement areas. Act 181 of 2024 reformed the State Designation Program reducing the number of designated areas from 5 to 2: Centers and Neighborhoods. Existing Designated Downtowns and Village Centers in the Windham Region will automatically transition to the new "Center" designation. Existing Neighborhood Development Areas will transition to the "Neighborhood" designation.

The Windham Regional Future Land Use Map identifies areas that are eligible for Center or Neighborhood designation. Areas mapped as a Downtown Center or Village Center are eligible for the Center designation, and areas mapped as a Planned Growth Area or Village Area are eligible for Neighborhood designation. Once the Regional Plan is approved by the Land Use Review Board, these designations automatically go into effect.

The new Center and Neighborhood designations will be overseen by the Community Investment Board. The Board is staffed by the Department of Housing and Community Development and is responsible for overall management of the program, making certain funding decisions, and approving applications for Centers to move up "steps." The table

below summarizes the requirements and benefits of the State Designation Program:

Future Land Use Area	State Designation	Intent & Benefits
Downtown Center, Village Center	Center	Supports revitalization efforts through financial incentives, trainings, and technical assistance . Incentives and programs support efforts to restore historic buildings, improve housing, design walkable communities, and encourage economic development. Step 1: Beginner Center (small village) Step 2: Intermediate Center (growing village/town center) Step 3: Advanced Center (downtown, Main Street America Program member)
Planned Growth Area, Village Area	Neighborhood	Supports the creation of new housing by providing tax, regulatory, and funding incentives for housing projects in Planned Growth Areas and Village Areas

BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT



**BRATTLEBORO HOUSING AUTHORITY
RED CLOVER APARTMENTS**

Brownfield redevelopment is another important revitalization tool. Historically, the region hosted a range of industries, including organ manufacturers, print shops, paper mills, lumber mills and marble works, that left sites with contamination. Even properties with small businesses like gas stations or dry cleaners can require extensive cleanup. As a result, many of these sites, which tend to be located in village centers and downtowns, have been left vacant or underutilized.

The WRC established the Windham Region Brownfields Reuse Initiative (WRBRI), funded through the EPA, to help communities redevelop these challenging sites. The program conducts site assessments, cleanups, and related activities at brownfield sites. The WRBRI also provides landowners with a better understanding of the funding sources, benefits, and tax incentives available to redevelop such sites. WRC has been able to assist with numerous brownfield redevelopment projects using this program. One example shown above is the Brattleboro Housing Authority Red Clover Commons housing development in Brattleboro.

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING



POP UP ART EVENT, BRATTLEBORO

Creative placemaking refers to a wide range of arts, cultural, and, design activities meant to strengthen communities. Examples of creative placemaking including using vacant buildings for community events or art shows, testing out potential small-scale public infrastructure projects, and creating pop-up pocket parks and public gathering spaces. The overarching goal of these activities is to bring new energy and attention to village centers and downtown areas, connect people and communities, and envision ideas to build better communities. Ultimately these projects can help improve the economy and quality of life in village and regional centers and support growth in these areas.

LAND USE POLICIES

1. Direct new growth, including housing, commerce, public infrastructure, industry, and community facilities, into appropriate land use designation areas, such as Downtown Centers, Village Centers, Planned Growth Areas, Village Areas, Enterprise Areas, and Infill and Transition Areas.
2. New growth, in-fill development, and redevelopment in Downtown Centers, Village Centers, Planned Growth Areas, Village Areas, and Hamlets shall give attention to the type and scale of the existing development forms and patterns in these areas in order to keep these centers culturally, socially, and economically viable.
3. Increase the energy efficiency of new and existing development from a regional land use perspective, including projected transportation, heating/cooling, and electricity needs.
4. In order to support climate resilient communities, new development and redevelopment in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas should be avoided. If new development or redevelopment occurs in these areas, it shall not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.
5. Efforts to conserve lands for the purpose of stormwater and floodwater attenuation, as well as for aquifer recharge, shall be supported by the Commission.
6. Preserve the historic and architectural character of the region through the reuse and repurposing of viable existing structures and retaining historic development patterns, densities, and characteristics.
7. Maintain and grow an adequate housing stock that satisfies a diversity of needs and income levels for all residents throughout their life stages and situations. Encourage the siting of a substantial majority of new

housing in Downtown Centers, Village Centers, Planned Growth Areas, and Village Areas.

8. Support the transformation of Transition and Infill Areas into areas that provide a greater mix of uses, increased density (when water and/or wastewater infrastructure is available), improved traffic circulation and pedestrian safety, and improved architectural and site design.
9. Concentrate multi-year or phased development growth to minimize the trend toward dispersed and sprawl development. All ski resort development shall be reviewed as part of a development master plan that has received positive findings on critical natural resource and other cumulative growth issues before any individual development projects are approved in order to assess and address cumulative impacts of the development.
10. Develop, maintain, and expand public infrastructure, including water and sewer systems and pedestrian and bicycle facilities, to promote and enable greater densities in development centers, including Downtown Centers, Village Centers, Planned Growth Areas, Village Areas, Resource-Based Recreation Areas, Enterprise Areas, and growth areas as identified by town plans. Support the development of new Village Centers where appropriate.
11. Develop and expand Hamlets in a form that maintains traditional density and residential settlement patterns.
12. Ensure the continued viability of industrial and commercial enterprises by supporting growth and expansion in Enterprise Areas while reducing and mitigating potential land use conflicts and external impacts of industrial activities.
13. Development in Rural – General and Rural – Agricultural & Forestry areas shall be sited and designed to minimize conversion and fragmentation of forest and agricultural lands and protect the existing rural character. Proposed subdivisions adjacent to Village Centers, Downtown Centers, Planned Growth Areas, and Village Areas shall extend traditional neighborhood development patterns to the greatest extent feasible.
14. Strongly discourage all development in Rural – Conservation areas for purposes other than forestry and agriculture. Any land development in Rural – Conservation areas shall be sited and designed to minimize the fragmentation of Priority Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors, and minimize adverse impacts on the natural resources and ecological services they provide, including wetlands, flood plains, river corridors, rare, threatened, and endangered species, significant natural communities, elevations above 2,500 feet, and slopes steeper than 25 percent.
15. Require that the benefits of any mitigation associated with projects in the Windham Region and being

reviewed under Act 250, be directed to the Windham Region.

- 16.** All development shall conform with the land use designation within which it falls as shown on the Future Land Use Map and described in the narrative section of this plan. Permit applications, including Acts 250 and Section 248, shall demonstrate conformity with the regional future land use designation.