

LAND USE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF WINDHAM, VERMONT

Prepared for the Vermont Land Use Review Board site visit — July 2026

The 2020 Town Plan is Windham's adopted plan of record; a comprehensive update is underway. Figures below are drawn from the 2020 Plan, the 2020 Census, and current town records.

WINDHAM AT A GLANCE

- **Organized:** 1796, from lands originally part of Londonderry
- **Land area:** 26.1 square miles — 16,751 acres
- **Working landscape:** 11,266 acres — two-thirds of the town — enrolled in Vermont's Current Use program for forestry and agriculture (2019)
- **Elevation:** all of Windham sits above 1,500 feet (Windham Town Plan, 2020); the 1802 Meeting House stands at roughly 1,800 feet, and local tradition holds its steeple is the highest above sea level in Vermont
- **Year-round population:** 469 (town records; the 2020 Census counted 449)
- **Part-time population:** an estimated 1,000 or more second-home owners and their families — part-timers outnumber year-round residents by more than two to one
- **Density:** approximately 18 people per square mile — about a quarter of the statewide average
- **Historic recognition:** Windham Village (National Register, 1984), the Windham Meetinghouse, and South Windham village are all on the National Register of Historic Places

THE SETTLEMENT PATTERN: A NECKLACE ON A HILL

Windham grew up as an isolated hill town, and its shape still shows it. The town has no single village center. Instead, its civic life is strung like beads along Windham Hill Road: South Windham, the Town Offices and former school, the Town Garage, the 1802 Meeting House, Lawrence Four Corners, and the Fire Station — all on the Windham Hill Road / Hitchcock Hill Road corridor, which climbs from Route 30 in West Townshend in the south toward Route 11, Londonderry in the northwest.

The 2020 Town Plan describes the geography plainly: settlement concentrated in a high valley running north and south, with still-higher forested land rising to the east and west. The National Register nomination saw the same thing in 1984, describing structures “positioned in a linear pattern” amid wooded and open hillsides. Every land use question Windham faces is shaped by this pattern — the necklace is the town's land use thesis.

THE SECOND-HOME EQUATION

Windham is an extreme case of the Vermont second-home town. Seasonal units have outnumbered owner-occupied homes here for at least thirty years — 224 seasonal to 155 owner-occupied at last full count — in a state that already ranks second in the nation for seasonal housing. Yet the trend runs toward permanence: the Town Plan attributes Windham's growth (28% from 2000 to 2010, the fastest of any neighboring town) almost entirely to seasonal homeowners converting to full-time residency and new owners building permanent homes. The town's land use future is, in large part, the story of that conversion.

A note* on the numbers behind the numbers: Windham completed a townwide reappraisal in 2024, bringing appraised values into alignment with market values — a discipline many Vermont towns have deferred.

Windham's zoning — five districts running from Forest (one unit per 27 acres, with development above 2,000 feet restricted) to the historic Hamlets — follows this same pattern; the full district structure is set out in the enclosed Town Plan.

*In the town of Windham, VT, the local Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) is 96.05%. A CLA under 100% means properties are assessed below current market value, which pushes the tax rate up. Windham's CLA of 96.05% means local assessed values are relatively close to fair market value.

WHAT IS SHAPING THE FUTURE: 2025–2026

The town invests in its center. In 2024 the Windham Meeting House was awarded a Paul Bruhn Grant for a new stone entrance and steps that had long been imagined but never built. Later that year the Meeting House received a MERP grant for a new heating and cooling system utilizing geo-thermal wells, with a supporting insulation improvement. In 2025 the Town purchased the former Windham Elementary School, adjacent to the Town Office, consolidating the civic core. Windham's map now shows a Village Center for this area — recognition of how the town is consolidating activity in this part of town.

Reclaiming the mine. The hills of Windham were once rich enough in talc to employ a good portion of the town. In 2025 the Town was given the 70-plus-acre former Imerys talc mine at 1376 White Road, including a 10-acre lake, and enrolled it in Vermont's BRELLA brownfields program to assess suspected contamination without assuming historic liability. A highest-and-best-use evaluation is underway; concepts include solar generation, recreational trails, water recreation, and even exploring the potential for housing or other unexplored uses. The land that once provisioned the town is now in the town's hands with an opportunity to be planned deliberately this time.

New life at Timber Ridge. In 2026, Windham's Zoning Board unanimously approved conditional use and site plan review for Banger Park, a free ski and snowboard airbag training center open May – November at the former Timber Ridge Ski Area, dormant since 1991. The approval caps daily capacity at 288 pre-booked clients — below the area's historic ski traffic — and attaches conditions on screening, dark-sky lighting, parking, and road maintenance costs, all borne by the applicant. It is the Recreation-Commercial district doing exactly what the Town Plan designed it to do: welcoming recreational economy investment while protecting the character that is Windham.

A new Town Plan. The 2020 Town Plan remains Windham's adopted plan of record, but a comprehensive update is about to begin. The events above — the school purchase, the Village Center request, the reinvigorated Meeting House, the mine acquisition, the return of activity at Timber Ridge — are precisely what the update must address and integrate into future planning.

WHAT MAKES WINDHAM UNUSUAL

Start with what the town does not have: no café, no store, no gas station, no restaurant, no bank, no post office, no traffic light, no town green, no sidewalks, no public water or sewer. The last general store survives as a window poster. By the usual measures of a village, Windham barely exists. And yet it enjoys a high percentage of resident participation and volunteerism.

The honest risk, and the town knows it, is drift — that a place this quiet and this beautiful could settle into being a collection of well-kept houses served by an excellent road crew, and nothing more. Everything on this page is the town declining that future. More than \$650,000 is being invested in the 1802 Meeting House. In the summer of 2026, geothermal wells are being drilled to heat the building from underground rather than puncturing its clapboard exterior with heat pumps. The repainting is almost completed and in late summer/fall the new stone front steps, new doors and a complete repainting will be completed. The former school with the town office is becoming the center of this linear town. A feasibility study has been completed and while the town waits for the BRELLA evaluation the building is already hosting yoga, Living Strong classes, library hours, game afternoons, and the Historical Society every week. The old mine is being assessed for its next century. The old ski hill is coming back to life under conditions the town wrote itself.

Windham is steering its own ship — mindful of the weather, honest about the waters, and clear about the destination: a town, not just a place where houses are.