

# Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission

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## Flood Regulations Revisited

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Due to current revisions in FEMA's flood maps in Windsor and Windham counties, as well as several changes over the last decade, now is a good time to consider updating your community's flood hazard regulations. For towns in Windsor County, TRORC will be reviewing existing regulations and offering suggested language over the next few months. Towns in the remainder of the region should be thinking of floodplain management in any town plan or zoning efforts they have underway.

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As you may know, minimum federal flood regulations were not intended to keep development out of flood prone areas, but rather to make sure that such development was done in a manner that reduced flood damage. Unfortunately, this meant filling in floodplains, creating levees, and armoring riverbanks. All of these actions are now acknowledged to increase the threat of flooding to other areas, and can create a false sense of protection. For these reasons, TRORC is advising communities to seriously consider going beyond the minimum requirements. Specifically we suggest:

- 1. No floodway development, except properly designed bridges.** The floodway is the section of riverbed that carries the bulk and force of floods and is a very dangerous place to put anything.
- 2. No net fill in the floodplain.** Any fill in the floodplain takes up space that would otherwise store floodwaters, pushing this water to other areas and raising the overall flood depth. A no net fill policy keeps the amount of flood storage the same.
- 3. Elevating new construction at least one foot above the base flood elevation.** Most flood studies and maps are old and imprecise, so an additional foot of elevation is prudent.
- 4. Limiting development in the floodplain.** Minimum regulations do not preclude development, but only require that the lowest floor in new development in the floodplain be above the base flood elevation. Limiting development further to only agriculture, open space, parking, or recreation reduces the potential damage from a flood and helps floodplains to perform their natural function.
- 5. Keeping vegetated streambank buffers.** Most of the flood damage in Vermont over the past decade has happened outside of mapped flood hazard areas, and much of this has been due to lateral erosion of streams. The best protection for streambanks from excessive erosion is keeping at least 35 feet of largely undisturbed shrubs and trees along them.

For assistance with floodplain regulation contact Kevin Geiger at 802-457-3188.

## The Green Mountain Loan Fund

The NeighborWorks Homeownership Center at the Central Vermont Community Land Trust (CVCLT) has received a grant from the The Vermont Community Development Program that will be used to create the Green Mountain Loan Fund. This loan fund will help low and moderate income homeowners in Washington, Lamoille and Orange Counties perform critical health and safety upgrades such as weatherization, lead abatement, access modification and the correction of code violations. For more information, please contact Garrath Gorton at (802) 476-4493 ext. 215 or [ggorton@cvcvt.org](mailto:ggorton@cvcvt.org).



# A Guide to Putting Your Town on the Web, Part II

In our last newsletter, we focused on some of the basic questions of building your town's web site: Who will build it? Creating vs. Managing, Time and Cost. In this issue, we take an in-depth look at the issues surrounding design.

## **Web Site Design Rules**

In his book "Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity", author Jakob Nielsen (a former web guru for Sun Microsystems), explains that there are essentially two schools of thought when it comes to designing a web site, the artistic approach and the engineering approach. The artistic, he explains is the ideal of "expressing yourself" and the engineering is the ideal of "solving a problem for a customer".

Ask yourself why you are creating this web site. It is unlikely that you're creating a web site for your town as a way to show attractive pictures of the landscape or to "sell" your town to the viewer. It is far more likely that you want to use the web as a way to make information available to your citizens. Essentially, you are solving a problem that exists – Town information isn't always easily found.

Four rules to remember when you're designing a web site:

- Keep it simple and fast.
- Make it easy to navigate.
- It's all about the content.
- Always design to the lowest common denominator.

## **Simple and Fast**

One of the most common mistakes made by new web designers is over design. They want to make a very pretty, high-tech and fancy web site. The bottom line with designs is – the fancier it is, the slower it is. The more images, fancy graphic effects and other gizmos you add, the larger your pages become. The larger your pages are, the slower they can be downloaded – particularly with a dial-up connection (more about dealing with dial-up later). So, keep it simple.

Remember that although the appearance of your web site is important, the most important element of your design is in the content.

## **Navigation**

We've established that web users are impatient. They won't wait for long load times for your web pages. Neither will they be willing to hunt for content. The ability for your users to easily navigate through your web site should be one of your most important considerations. You'll want the navigation links on your site to be painfully obvious. For example, if you intend to post your town ordinances and plans on your site, then there should be a link on your home page labeled "Ordinances and Plans" or something to that effect.



## **Content**

Before you even begin to build your web site, you should know what's going to be on it. Are you going to post minutes from your committees? Are you going to have town documents available for download in .pdf format? Will you have a section for local events? Knowing what you're trying to offer to your viewers will make the job of web design much easier.

Remember, too, that whatever information is available on your web site, it should be kept up-to-date. A web site can be a wonderful tool for the distribution of information, but if the information is old, then it is of little use to your user. Be sure to decide who will be updating your site and how often it can be done.

## **Always Design to the Lowest Common Denominator**

Most PCs are shipped to us with Internet Explorer as their web browser. But, it's not the only browser that may be looking at your site. At any given time, you might have someone surfing your site using the popular Firefox browser. Or, perhaps, you might have a Mac user looking at your site using the Safari browser. Why should this matter? Unfortunately, the manufacturers of these browsers don't use the same exact technology to run their web sites. What works in one browser may not work well in another. When you're designing your site, it is always in your best interest to repeatedly view your work in multiple browsers – Internet Explorer and Firefox at the very least.

When you're creating the design of your site, you need to remember that most of us in Vermont do not have high-speed internet access. When the TRORC web site was designed, it was done so under the assumption that most users were connecting at no faster than 56K.

In our next issue, we'll wrap this article up with an overview of web hosting, naming your site and the resources available to make this whole process easier for your town.

# Regional Petroleum Brownfields Update

Drilling and soil and water sampling is complete at the Tip Top Tire site on Route 5 in Wilder. The results show that ground water has no petroleum compounds that are unsafe for humans or the environment. There was some contamination noted in the soils at the site, but the TRORC consultant is recommending targeted soil removal to address this problem prior to redevelopment. The site was used historically for vehicle and equipment storage, an automotive service station, gasoline sales, and livery stables. The site's new owner is planning to redevelop the land as housing this year.



*Groundwater Monitoring Wells going in at the Tip Top Tire site*

TRORC is funding this work through a petroleum Brownfields grant received from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Similar funding is available for assessments at hazardous waste sites. TRORC grant funds allow us to help public or private property owners who suspect their property may be contaminated by hazardous waste or petroleum products. The grant funds are used to gauge whether contamination exists on a property and, if so, to determine what can be done to return the property to active use. TRORC staff can also help property owners seek funds to undertake the cleanup.

The TRORC Brownfields programs aim to stimulate economic development by returning Brownfield properties to active reuse for public benefit.

For information on assessments at petroleum sites, contact Sally Mansur at 457-3188 x 17 or [smansur@trorc.org](mailto:smansur@trorc.org). Contact Kevin Geiger at 457-3188 x 24 or [kgeiger@trorc.org](mailto:kgeiger@trorc.org) for information on potential hazardous waste site assessments.



*Pete Fellows collecting culvert data*

## Blood Brook Watershed Assessment

TRORC staff recently completed a bridge and culvert survey in the Blood Brook watershed in Norwich. This work is part of a Phase 1 Stream Geomorphic Assessment that TRORC is doing with funding from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. A total of 45 structures were measured for their size and capacity to accommodate high flow events that typically occur semi-annually. Data was also collected on the brook's topography, bedrock and surface geology, and land use in the watershed. We anticipate completing a report on this project to share with the state and the Town of Norwich during the summer.



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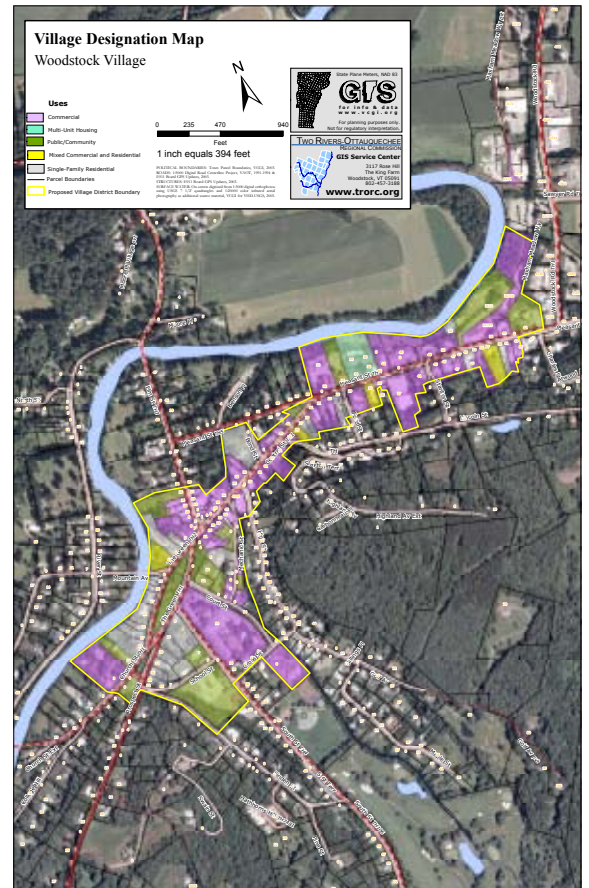
## Basic Land Use Primer

Vermont's communities can affect the ways in which land in their town is used through a variety of methods. TRORC has developed a document titled "Local Land Use Regulations: a Vermont Primer" to help towns without Zoning understand their options. This fact sheet is intended to briefly describe the various traditional land use regulatory methods, and why a town's citizens might choose to adopt any one, or several of them. Land use planning and regulation is a choice, and is not required in Vermont. Please contact TRORC for a copy or to schedule a presentation.

## Vermont Downtown Program News

On May 22, 2006, Woodstock was awarded Village Center Designation by the Vermont Downtown Board. Woodstock became the 17<sup>th</sup> Designated Village in the TRORC region. At the same meeting, White River Junction became the TRORC region's third Designated Downtown.

Beginning July 1<sup>st</sup>, as part of the recently passed "Growth Centers" bill, Designated Villages will have access to the same tax credits as Designated Downtowns. The full bill (S. 142) can be found at the State of Vermont Legislative website (<http://www.leg.state.vt.us>).



*Woodstock Village Designation Map*