

Vershire Town Plan

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I. Introduction

A. Vision Statement

The Vershire Planning Commission hopes for a town where people respect and use the land well, where forestry and wild lands, agriculture, small businesses and commuters live comfortably together. We hope for a town that feels like a home to come back to, for both vacationers and year-rounders, where children are brought up to care about the town and land, and where all work together for the Town's betterment. We have written this plan to further this vision.

B. Why Have A Plan? – Purpose

At first glance, Vershire is a small, rural town that has remained relatively untouched by the changes that have occurred in surrounding towns. Vershire has not greatly suffered from the stresses that a growing population can put on public utilities and services.

However, work patterns are changing. It has become far more common for individuals to work outside of Vershire, some commuting as much as an hour to their jobs. Vershire is close to the Upper Valley, the fastest growing growth center in the State of Vermont. The ease of access and attractive cultural and aesthetic environment make the Town of Vershire prime consideration for growth. As a result, our population is growing. In the decades between 1980-1990 and 1990-2000 Vershire has experienced a 41% increase in population. Continued population expansion will greatly affect the character of our town. The influx of people will involve schools for their children, expanded and improved road systems and most certainly put a higher burden on our other town services. The face of Vermont is changing, as will the face of Vershire.

Change stimulates the need for our community to examine its current condition and to evaluate its prospects for the future. Change can be beneficial, but in order to ascertain this, people must understand the problems and opportunities facing the community and identify goals for the future.

Planning is the process of projection. A community imagines what the future should be, and then starts putting these ideas into action. Communities with little or no planning are more likely to experience problems of over development, high property taxes and increased demands for community services. We, like every town, have choices in the way we provide for orderly growth and in the way we balance our natural and built environments. Planning is done to meet the needs of the people who are here now in the face of change and for those in the future.

The Plan includes a comprehensive analysis of Vershire's residents, jobs, economy, schools, roads, housing, natural resources, and land use. This analysis of current conditions in the context of goals for our community, leads to policies and recommendations that can help our community make wise choices and provide direction for the patterns of its future growth.

Here are some specific reasons to have a Town Plan:

1. **A guide for our community** – Information in the plan can be used for developing the recommendations contained in a capital budget and program, for establishing a community development program, and for providing direction to the Selectboard for such things as community services, emergency services, recreation and municipal facility development to name a few.
2. **Support for grant applications and planning studies** – Many of the State run grant programs available to Vershire consider whether or not the town has stated a need for its grant request. Studies are often called for within a plan, and the funding for such projects can come from state sources as well.
3. **A guide for future development** – In towns with no zoning, a Town Plan can be the only tool for local control of development! The District Environmental Commission considers Town Plans during an Act 250 hearing, which is why the Plan should clearly explain to developers what types of development are preferred in our town.

C. Defining Our Rural Character

The District Environmental Commission will often look to a Town Plan for guidance with regard to the issue of “rural character.” Too often this concept is poorly defined and/or too vague to be useful in a legal proceeding under Act 250. Therefore, for the purposes of this document, it is necessary for the Planning Commission to attempt to define what residents view as the “rural character” of Vershire.

In past surveys of the town, the Planning Commission asked the residents of Vershire what they would like their town to be in the future. The most popular visions were for Vershire to either “stay the same as it is” or be a “rural agricultural town”. A new survey was conducted in 2004, and it received an excellent response. The new survey found that the answer to the question above was similar to past survey results. The implication in these opinions is that Vershire should remain much like it is, while encouraging the growth of agricultural ventures.

Vershire is a small, quiet, bedroom community. Interestingly enough, when asked if they would like to see Vershire become more of a bedroom community, most residents indicated that it was not their preference. Yet the reality is that many residents travel outside of town to work and utilize services that are unavailable in Vershire.

Vershire Town Plan

Development, which is primarily residential in nature, is generally clustered around roads. Most town roads are dirt roads that are more appropriate for the types of traffic common to residential development than large-scale commercial development.



Ward's Garage in Vershire

Residents have indicated that they prefer types of development that includes residences, small home based businesses, professional offices, bed and breakfasts and eco/agri tourism. In the village of Vershire, residents would prefer a denser form of development that could include any of the above, but also restaurants and small retail shops. It is felt that development of this nature would be compatible with the present rural character of Vershire.



Vershire Village Center

The unique natural environment of Vershire is part of what makes Vershire's rural character important to its citizens. It is marked by deep valleys and high hills. There is limited flat land in the Town and steep slopes and shallow soils predominate. Several streams rise from springs in the highlands, flowing into the White, Waits or Ompompanoosuc rivers. Some of these stream valleys are almost completely wild and feel very remote, though civilization is nearby. Many pockets where deep soils occur tend to be wet and poorly drained. There are many small wetlands and boggy areas in Vershire, in which grow bog plants ranging from orchids to white cedar. Largely untouched areas such as Hawkins and Patterson Mountain to the Southwest and Eagle Hollow to the Northeast are excellent examples of these valuable natural resources, and they are a great recreational asset to the Town. It is important to the residents of Vershire that the rural nature of these areas be protected.



Wetland on Patterson Mountain

D. General Goals

The following goals are important to our town:

1. Strive toward sensible development and orderly growth to maintain the rural characteristics of the town.
2. Maintain the continuance of agricultural activities in our town.
3. Maintain conservation and proper management of our natural resources.
4. Promote a healthful environment for our citizens and ensure adequate and clean waters and air.
5. Supply quality community facilities within an expressed plan at a minimum cost, i.e., roads, fire protection and police protection.
6. Provide recreational opportunities for townspeople to more fully enjoy their leisure time.
7. Help provide employment opportunities and affordable housing within the region.

II. Population

A. Population Patterns

Population, when considered in terms of past, present, and future statistics, represents an important factor in the overall development of our Town. Rapid and unanticipated population increases can compromise rural character, create a demand for new and expanded municipal services, and strain the financial ability of a town to provide public services economically.

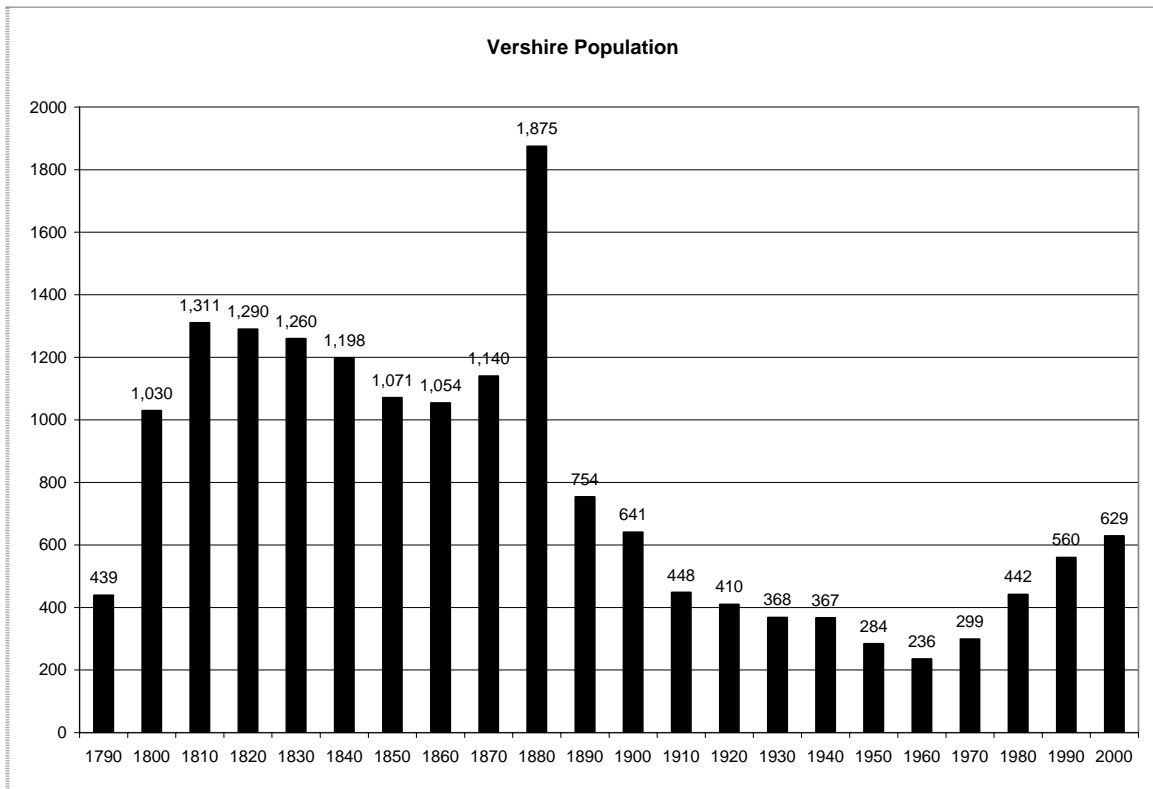


Figure 1 – Vershire Population - Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Figure 2 on the following page represents population growth statistics for Vershire and its neighboring towns taken from the U.S. Census Bureau. According to the US Census, Vershire's year 2000 population was 629, compared to a population of 560 in 1990, resulting in a 1990s growth rate of 12.3%. Vershire's growth rate of 12.3% was higher than the 8% rate of growth achieved by the State of Vermont and the Two Rivers–Ottauquechee Region. However, when compared to its neighbors, Vershire actually experienced a slower growth rate than three out of four towns. The primary factor influencing population growth was new residents moving into Vershire, rather than unusual rates of birth or death.

Population Growth, Vershire and Surrounding Area				
	1970	1980	1990	2000
Chelsea	983	1091	1166	1250
% Change	-4.1%	+10.9%	+6.8%	+7.2%
Corinth	683	904	1244	1461
% Change	-11.8%	+32.5%	+37.6%	+17.4%
Strafford	536	781	902	1045
% Change	-21.2%	+45.7%	+15.4%	+15.8%
Vershire	299	442	560	629
% Change	+26.6%	+47.8%	+26.6%	+12.3%
West Fairlee	337	427	633	726
% Change	+1.2%	+26.7%	+48.2%	+14.6%

Figure 2 – Population Growth, Vershire and Surrounding Area
Source: Center for Rural Studies, 2000 U.S. Census

B. Age of Population

Between 1990 and 2000, population increases have occurred primarily in the 44-54 year old range. To some extent, this reflects the ongoing effect of the baby boomers; however it is most likely that many of the new residents of Vershire are between the ages of 35 and 54. Particularly noticeable, is the dramatic increase of individuals age 45-54.

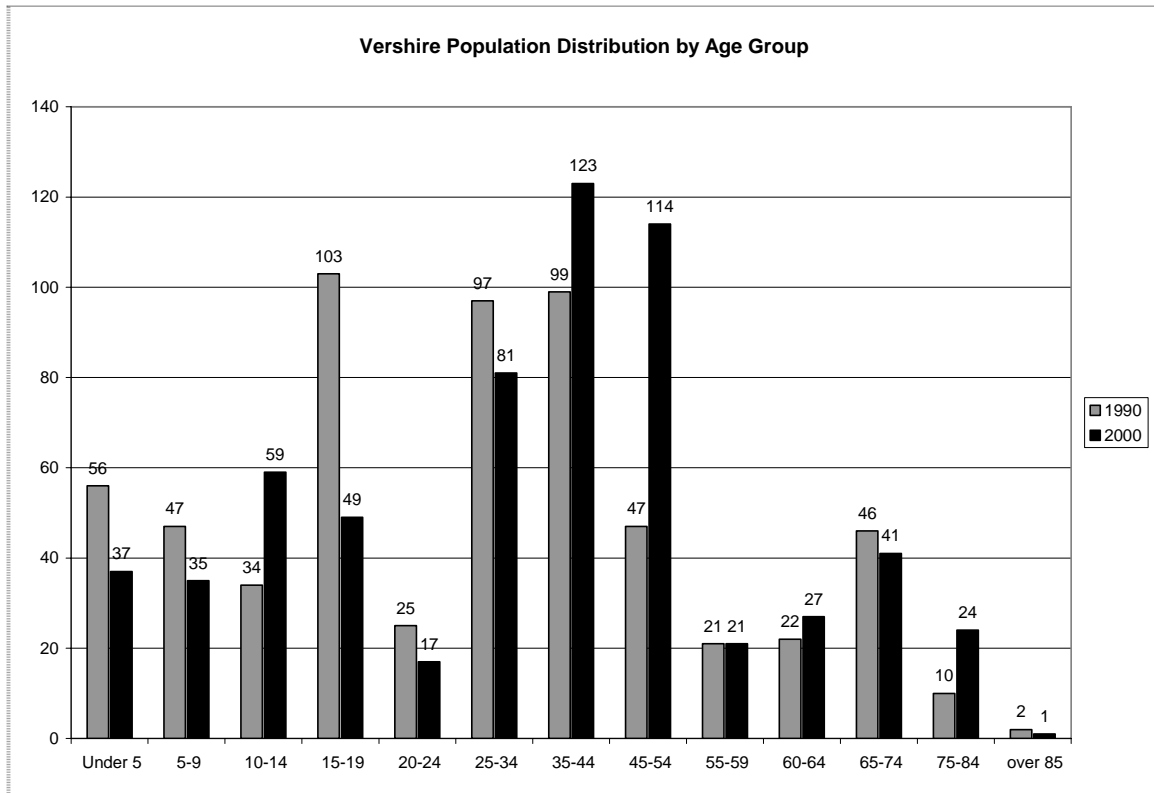


Figure 3 – Vershire Population Distribution by Age Group
Source: 2000 U.S. Census

The jump in population from 47 to 114 aged 45-54 represents a 142.5% increase in that age group. Overall for Vermont, the number of residents 45-54 years of age only increased 64% as baby boomers continued to move into their late 40's and early 50's. Clearly, the increase in this age group is due to new residents aged 45-54 moving to Vershire.

Also of note, is the decrease in population within the 15-19 year-old age group. Between 1990 and 2000, Vershire has lost nearly 50% of its population in this group. This implies that when teenagers graduate from high school, they are unlikely to remain in Vershire.

III. Economic Base

A. Employment and Jobs

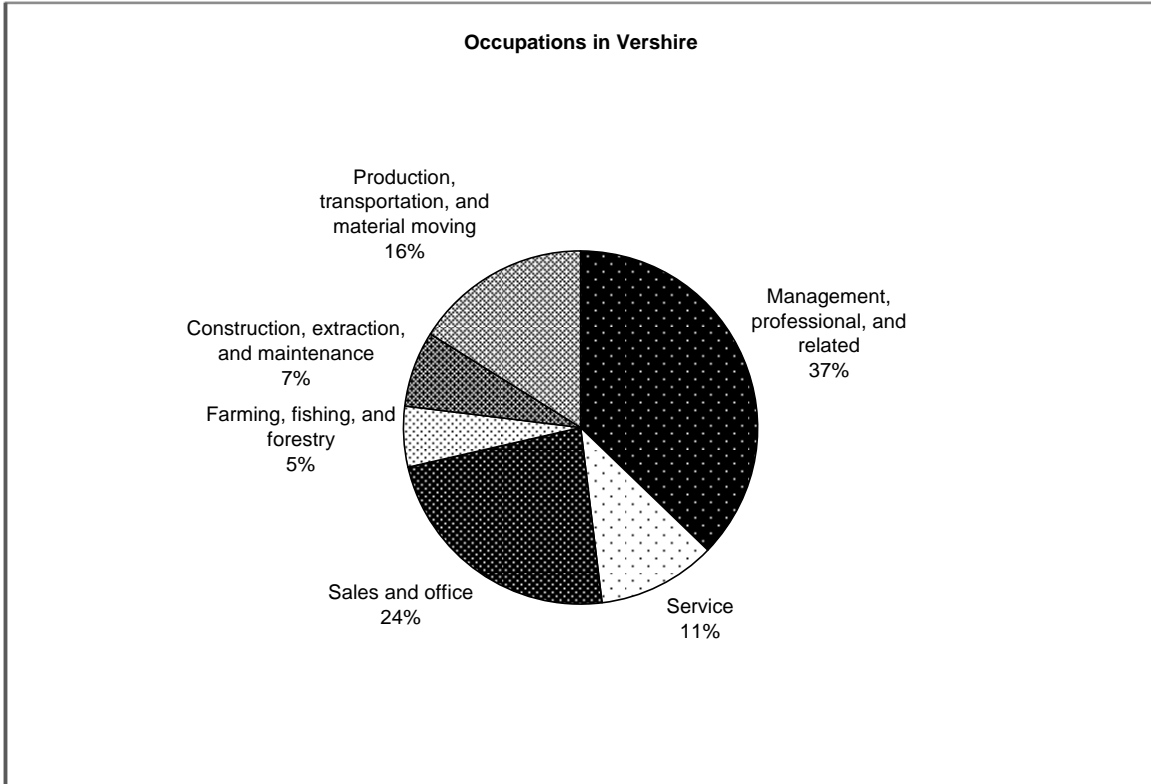


Figure 4 – Occupations in Vershire
Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Vershire’s historic economic base was centered on agriculture and logging. With the exception of the Ely Mine era, the town has not been home to large industrial developments, but rather small home-based businesses.

Presently, residents have a number of home occupations including, but not limited to:

- Artisans
- Farmers
- Bed & Breakfast
- Truckers
- Furniture & Cabinet making
- Wood products
- Construction

Vershire does not serve as an economic hub for commercial and industrial activity. Residents go to the towns of Chelsea, Randolph, Thetford, Norwich and Hanover for banking, professional and related services. Ninety-six percent (315) of Vershire’s

resident work force 16 years and older reported their occupations as part of the 2000 Census. Of the Vershire working population, 61% cited management, professional, sales and office as the type of job they have. Given that the availability of these types of professions is limited within Vershire, most residents have to commute.

According to 2000 U.S. Census data, 75% of the working population in Vershire works outside of Vershire. Data also indicates that 34% of individuals that commute to work are driving to either Hanover or Lebanon, NH, which represent the two largest employment hubs in the Upper Valley area. The average commute time of Vershire residents is approximately 30 minutes. Only 25% of individuals polled work in Vershire, a fact that continues to support the notion that Vershire is a bedroom community for the Upper Valley.

B. Income of Population

The average yearly wage of an individual in Vershire is \$21,712 as compared to \$32,090 for the State of Vermont on the whole. Of 2004 income tax filers in Vershire, 32% made less than the town average yearly wage. In Orange County, 47% of filers reported making less than \$20,000.

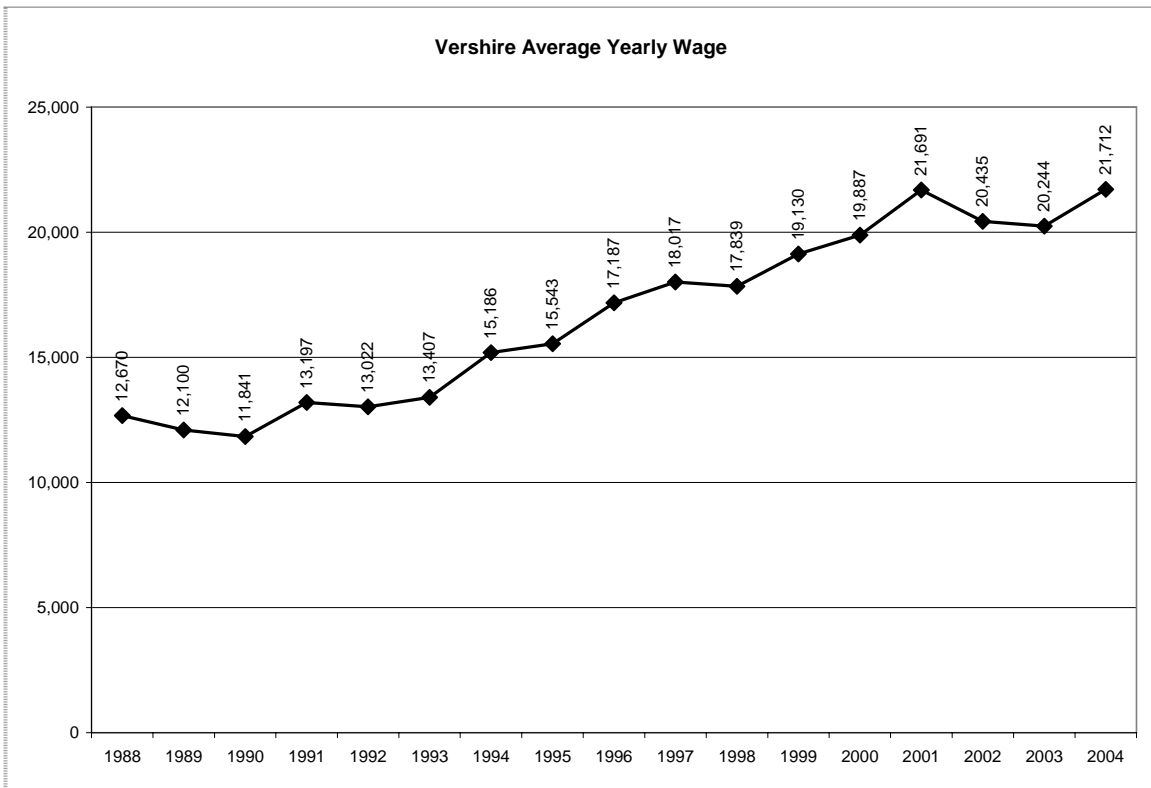


Figure 5 – Vershire Average Yearly Wage
 Source: Center for Rural Studies, 2000 U.S. Census

C. Taxes

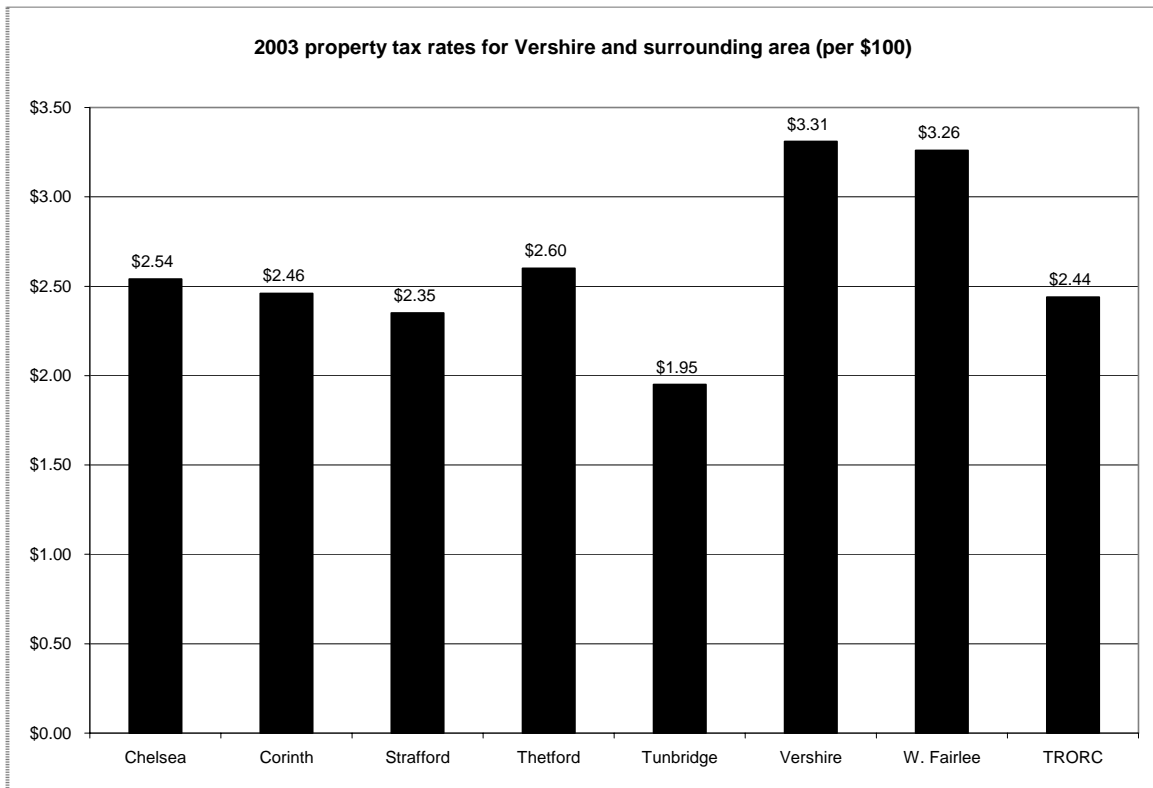


Figure 6 – 2003 Property Tax Rates for Vershire and Surrounding Area
 Source: Vermont State Department of Taxes

Vershire has the highest tax rate in its surrounding area. It is substantially higher than the average tax rate for the 30-town Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission’s area of coverage. In 2004, the municipal tax rate in Vershire was set at .83 cents (per \$100), a rate that is higher than many of the Towns in the TRORC Region. Additionally, the town is now part of the Rivendell School District. In 2002, Vershire joined with West Fairlee to build a new K-5 Elementary School in West Fairlee. As a result, Vershire’s share of the Act 68 Education tax has jumped dramatically. Vershire’s 2004 education tax rate of \$1.99 (per \$100) was one of the highest rates in the TRORC region.

D. Goals, Polices and Recommendations

Goal

1. Promote a healthy economy which provides jobs for Vershire residents and helps to support the town.

Policies

1. Encourage business growth that will enhance the rural environment that its residents so strongly value.

-
2. Consider ways to encourage the kinds of business that will support and enhance the life of the Town.

IV. Housing

A. Introduction

A major function of local housing planning is to meet two community objectives - first, safe and affordable housing for its present and future population and second, suitable density and distribution of housing throughout the community. Growth in housing affects the Town's capacity to provide facilities and services to our town and the character of the area. Housing built without adequate planning for schools, roads, and other public services can overburden the ability of the taxpayers to pay for these services, and also can lower adjacent property values and negatively affect the rural character of the town.

This section discusses the amount, type, location, and affordability of existing housing and the needs for future housing. Other sections of this Plan also include information on housing.

B. Number of Housing Units

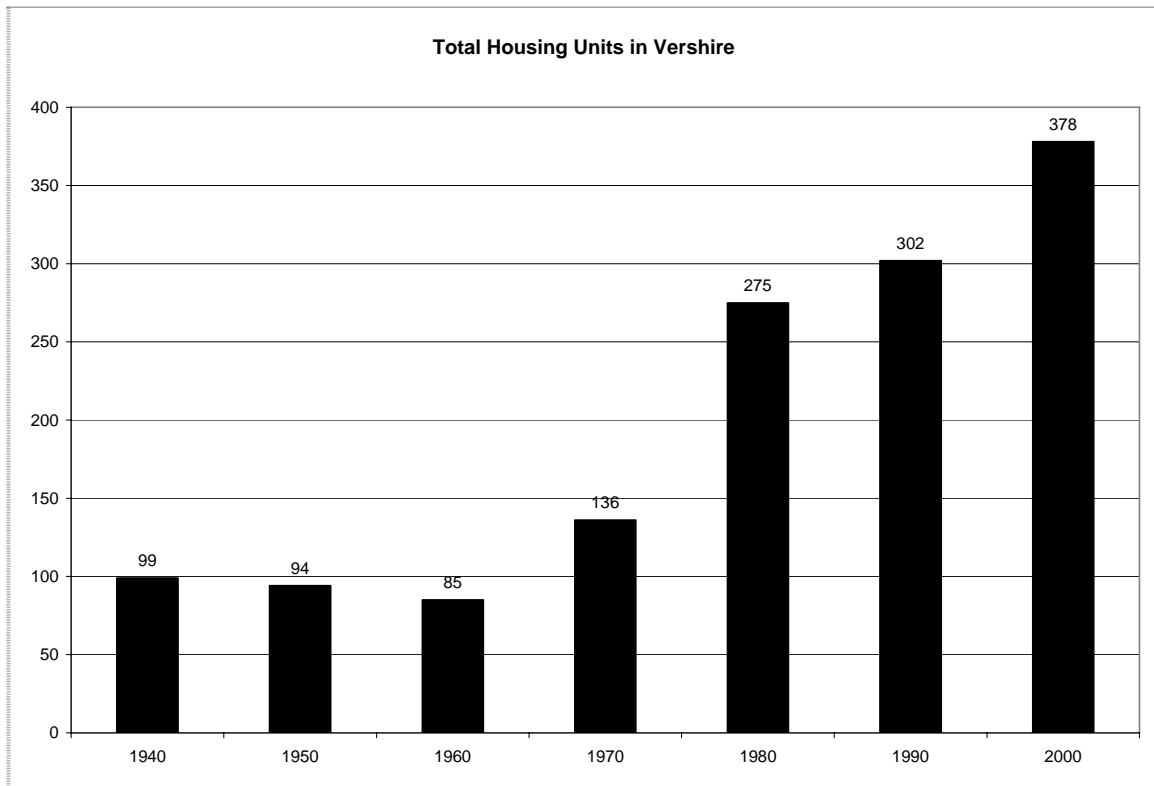


Figure 7 – Total Housing Units in Vershire
Source: Vermont Housing Data, 2005

Vershire's total number of housing units have been increasing since the 1970's, while growth in housing stock slowed some between 1980 and 1990 (9.8%), it jumped

substantially between 1990 and 2000 (25%). This is due in large part to an increase in the purchase of second homes, and from individuals from out of state moving from the city to the country.

C. Types of Housing and Ownership Characteristics

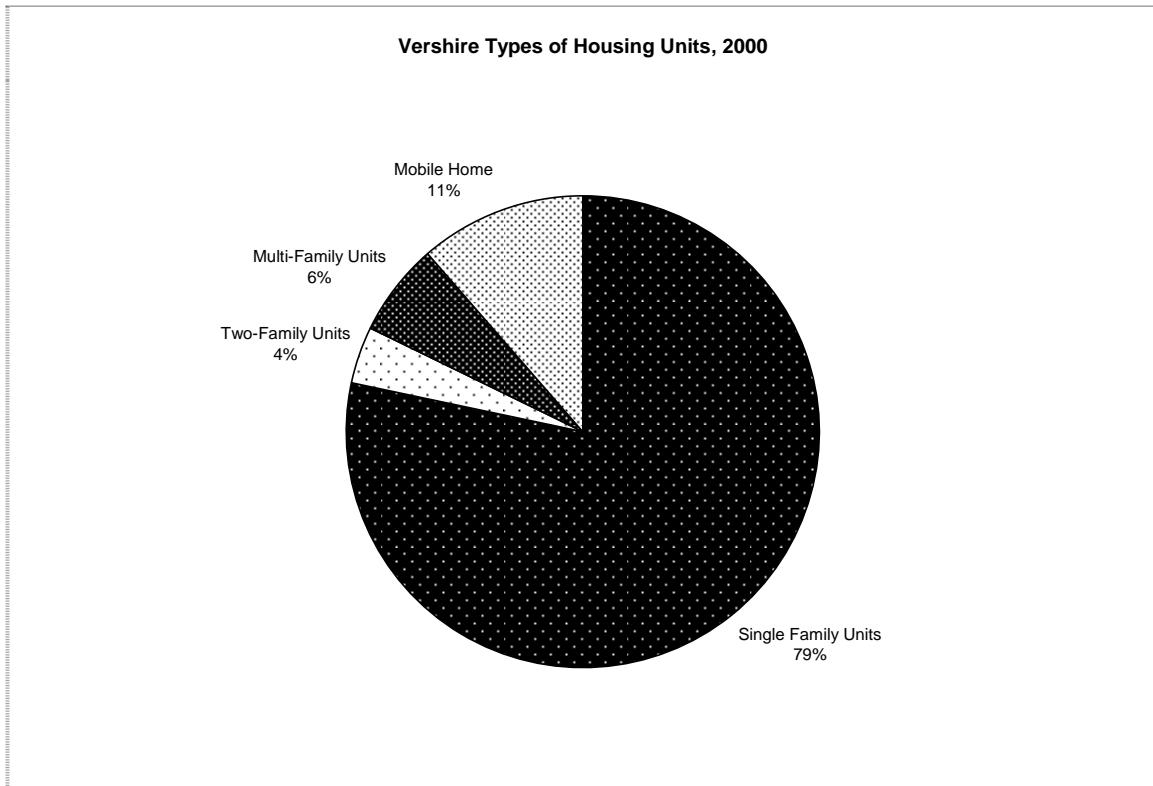


Figure 8 – Vershire Types of Housing Units
Source: Vermont Housing Data, 2005

The U.S. Census defines a “housing unit” to include: conventional houses, apartments, mobile homes, and rooms for occupancy. According to Vermont Housing Data, Vershire has a total of 378 housing units. Like most of the towns throughout Vermont, they are predominantly single-family homes, with mobile homes being a distant second.

As in figure 9, 56% of the housing stock in Vershire is owner occupied. An additional 24% of the housing is dedicated to seasonal, recreational or occasional use, making Vershire unique when compared to 13.8% in Orange County and 14.6% in Vermont as a whole. When a town has a large number of homes that are not occupied year-round, it can have unforeseen impacts on town services. For example Vershire, like many other Vermont towns, has a volunteer fire department. This department depends on full-time residents to staff its fire department and a lack of full-time residents can make acquiring staff difficult because the pool of candidates is reduced. Although Vershire’s percentage of seasonal housing stock is higher than much of the surrounding area, it should be noted that in the past decade the number increased by only a single home.

Vacation homes notwithstanding, Vershire had only 6% of its total housing stock vacant in 2000. Anything below 5% is functionally considered a zero, so in general, Vershire does not have much available housing stock to offer.

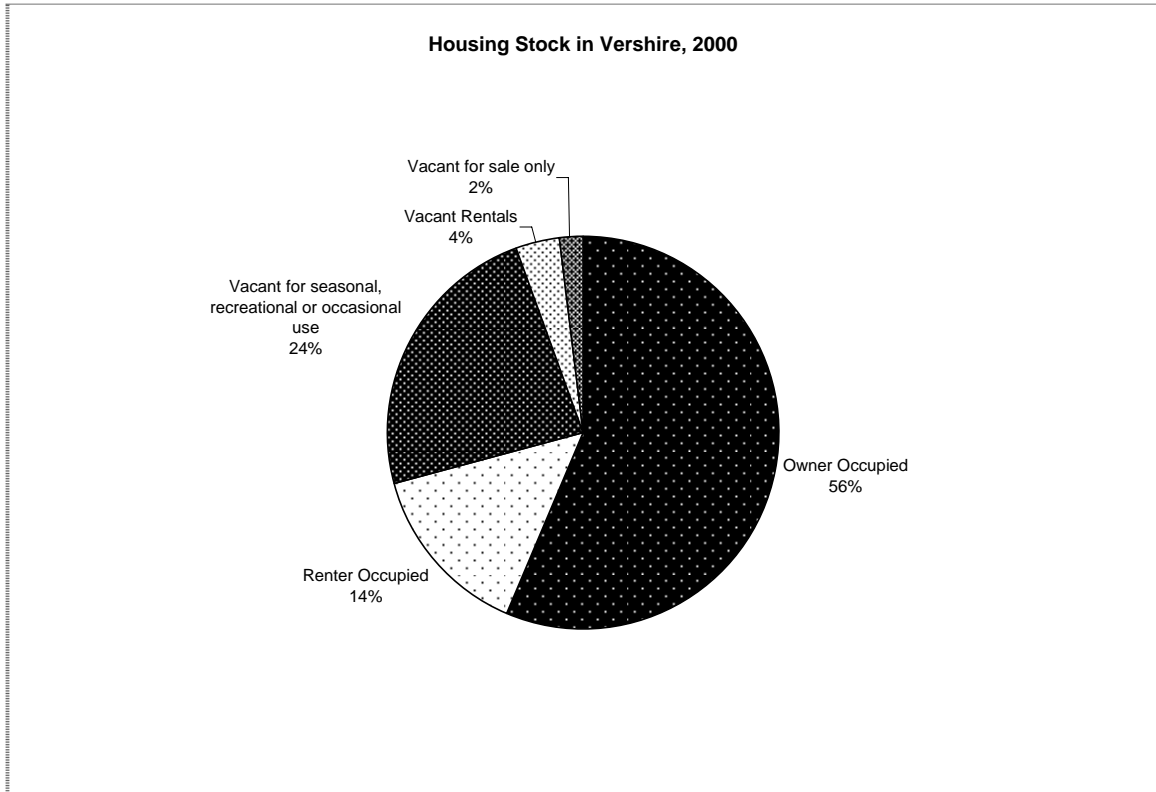


Figure 9 – Housing Stock in Vershire
Source: Vermont Housing Data, 2005

D. Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is defined as that which a household making the county's median income could afford if no more than 30% of its income were spent on housing costs. For homeowners, housing costs include payments for principal and interest on a mortgage, taxes, etc. For renters, housing costs include rent and utilities.

When asked if there is a need for affordable housing in Vershire, residents are split evenly in their opinion. In Vershire, the average price of primary residences sold in 2004 was \$130,300, which is less than the Orange County average of \$144,333 and the statewide average of \$184,553. In general, most homeowners in Vershire are paying about 19% of their income for homeowner costs, but according to information collected in 1999, there were 27 households paying more than 30% of their income for the same expenses.

The median gross rent in Vershire is \$575 per month, including utilities. When compared to Orange County (\$511) and the Vermont average (\$533), the rental rates in Vershire are a bit high. This means that on the average, Residents making the average income of \$21,712 are paying nearly 31% of their income for the median gross rental rate, which implies that rental properties in Vershire are expensive and there is a need for more affordable options.

E. Elderly Housing

According to the 2000 US Census, there are 66 individuals in Vershire who are 65 or older. 18% of homeowners in Vershire are 65 or older, but only 7% of renters in Vershire are in that age group. There are few options for elderly housing in Vershire, with only 7 beds dedicated to residential care (Level 3) in town. Given the aging population the need for such housing, both assisted and unassisted, will only increase.

F. Childcare

Vershire has few options for childcare. According to the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission inventory of childcare facilities, Vershire has a single registered childcare facility with six spaces. Most residents currently arrange for care with relatives, or take their children to childcare facilities beyond the borders of Vershire to neighboring towns like Chelsea and West Fairlee. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were 72 children under the age of 10 in Vershire; this seems to indicate that there is a need for additional childcare services in Vershire.

G. Goals, Policies and Recommendations

Goals

1. To provide the opportunity for Vershire residents to have access to quality affordable housing.
2. To encourage the retention of existing housing and construction of new housing which meets the natural population growth.
3. To encourage the preservation of historic structures in ways that appropriately serve the need for housing.
4. To encourage the creation of additional rental properties, especially in the village, provided that they do not put an undue burden on Town services and facilities and do not negatively impact the rural character of the village center.

5. To encourage the development of affordable senior housing within the Town.
6. To encourage the creation of affordable childcare facilities within Vershire.

Policies

1. It is the policy of the town to ensure that the timing and rate of new housing construction or rehabilitation does not exceed the community's ability to provide adequate public facilities (e.g. schools and municipal services).
2. It is the policy of the town to keep housing affordable by planning for:
 - Appropriately sized lots;
 - Accessory apartments; and
 - Clustered developments.
3. It is the policy of the town to encourage the location of future housing so as to complement existing or planned employment patterns, travel times, and energy requirements.
4. It is the policy of the town that the location of housing, related amenities and land uses should be planned with due regard to the physical limitations of the site and location to current or planned public and private services such as roads and commercial/service centers.

V. Utilities and Facilities

A. Town Center

The Town Center building is a converted church, obtained by the Vershire Historical Society, moved from South Vershire in 1978, and given to the Town. It provides space for town meetings, community events, and private functions.

Lead paint in the building was abated in the summer of 1996. The Historical Society retains an interest in a 12 by 14 foot space in the building for storage of their artifacts and exhibits. Discussion began at Town meeting in 1996 about the possibility of building an annex on the south side of the building which would serve as a permanent display area for the Historical Society as well as provide handicap access and bathrooms for the Town Center. In 1998 the Town voted \$25,000 toward construction of an annex to meet the above needs, and that annex was built in 2001.

In 2004 the original part of the building was integrated into the new wing, a new front entrance and ADA ramp were installed, the upstairs bathroom was completed, new doors and windows were installed in the basement level along with repairs to that side of the building, the area for a future lift was designated and repairs to the septic system were completed. A new heating system was also installed. The next phase of construction that includes a new stairwell, kitchen and downstairs bathrooms is currently under way.

Beside the building is a combination soccer-baseball-recreation field and picnic area which is used for recreation and community events. A playground was added to this area in 2005

B. Town Offices

The Town Office building, built 1978, contains the town records, office for the town clerk and treasurer, and meeting and work space for the Selectboard, listers, planning commission/board of adjustment, and other town officials. The building is in good shape; Selectmen and Town Clerk see to the maintenance of the space. An energy audit was conducted in 1998, and in light of the rising costs of fuel for heating, the town may want to conduct another one in the future. A new roof was put on the Town Office in 2003.

C. Town Garage

Located one-half mile up the Vershire Center Road from Vermont Route 113, the Town Garage provides garaging for town equipment and a stockpile area for sand/salt for winter operations. It is maintained by the Vershire Highway Department.

The State of Vermont has had concerns with the location of the Town Garage and the potential for causing pollution damage to a nearby stream. The Town has discussed the possibility of relocating the town garage, and may want to consider purchasing land for that purpose.

D. Eagle Hollow Park

In December 1986 John and Marie McArthur gave the town 108 acres of land on Eagle Ledges to be used as a town park. The land, donated in the name of Truman and Nettie Bixby Parshley, is called Eagle Hollow Park. The land must never be sold, no commercial activity will be allowed, and the land must be kept in its natural state. There is a management plan for this area.

The ledges are used by local rock climbers; some erosion has been noted on a number of informal paths leading to the climbing routes. It is unlikely that such use will lead to substantial degradation of the area, but this area should be monitored for any increase in use or damage.

E. Patterson Mountain Municipal Forest

In January 1985 Sarah Drew donated 26.5 acres on Patterson Mountain to be used as a municipal forest. Development rights on adjacent lands were donated to the Upper Valley Land Trust by the Ashley family in 1991. The donation includes a right of way from the Vershire Center Road. A trail has been cut following this right of way and is maintained by the Cross Rivendell Trail Project. An interpretive trail guide for this trail has been written and copies are provided at the trailhead. Two fields near the summit provide fine views and have been kept open by the Drew family using access from the south leading from Coburn Road. That access is also used by snowshoers and skiers in winter. There is a management plan in place for this property.

F. Solid Waste Services

Vershire belongs to the 10-town Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste Management District (GUV) at a cost per year of \$5.50 per capita, plus (since 1995) a charge of \$16.50 per ton of waste. The combined cost of membership in 1997 was \$3,459. As a part of the district, Vershire can send waste to the lined landfill in Lebanon, NH, and residents can take their household hazardous waste (HHW) to the special collection site at the Hartford landfill.

The Town operates its own trash pick up service. In 2005, the town purchased a used 1997 Ford packer truck for \$25,000 to replace their previous truck. On the first Saturday of each month a collection of recyclable materials occurs at the Town Center. Returnable bottles and cans are collected there to benefit the Westshire School. In addition there are periodic collections of metal and tires. The recycling program is run by one part-time employee and costs the town \$5,963 per year. In 2005, the total cost of solid waste collection was \$38,164, not including the price of the packer truck. The trash service is paid by taxes spread over the 471 parcels of land, averaging \$105 per parcel per year.

The Town Survey question on this issue asked whether the town should do more to encourage recycling and if so, what. A majority (68%) said the town should do more to encourage recycling. There was strong sentiment that the most cost-effective method should be the one used. Several people commented that there is still a lot of recyclable material that is just going to the dump, and that a fee for trash pickup should be considered.

G. Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment Facilities

The town has no public water or sewer system. Individual wells supply water, and septic systems handle sewage disposal. Design and construction of on-site sewage systems requires a permit issued by the Town Health Officer.

H. Telecommunications and Internet

Verizon covers most of the land-line telecommunications services for a majority of the town, and all but a few homes have telephone service. There is little in the way of cell phone coverage in Vershire. When surveyed, most residents seem to favor allowing cell phone towers to be placed in the town and would prefer that the Town's Development Ordinance do little to regulate them.

High-speed internet is not available to residents via DSL or Cable. Orange County on the whole is poorly served by high-speed internet providers with only 42 percent of the population having access to either form of broadband service. The best option for residents at this time is high-speed internet access via satellite, but those services are more expensive than DSL or Cable and they require an unobstructed view of the southern sky. A recent agreement between cable company Comcast and the State of Vermont will require them to complete line extensions promised by Adelphia, whom Comcast recently purchased. It is hoped that these extensions will improve broadband access in Vershire. Another growing option is wireless broadband. Although not currently available in Vershire, there are several broadband initiatives in the nearby towns of Thetford and Fairlee, and there is a growing discussion about it along the route 110 corridor in Chelsea and Tunbridge.

VI. Emergency Services

A. Ambulance

Emergency medical transportation is provided by Upper Valley Ambulance, Inc. (UVA), based at the Fairlee Fire Station. UVA serves an eight-town region; each town is represented by a director appointed by that town's Selectboard. In addition to emergency transport at the paramedic level, UVA serves as the focal point for training fire departments and FAST squads from the eight-town region. UVA provides its services on a fee-per-capita basis; in 1996 the fee was \$15. UVA is dispatched through Hanover Dispatch.

B. Vershire Fast Squad and Fire Department

The Vershire FAST Squad is an all volunteer group of 8 members providing emergency medical assistance for Vershire and part of West Fairlee. Calls are received and dispatched by Hanover Dispatch. Upper Valley Ambulance responds to all dispatch calls. The FAST Squad responded to over 30 calls in 2005. In the 2005 survey, eighty-eight percent of Town Survey respondents answering the question rated the FAST squad services as 4 or above on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (great.) All members of the FAST squad are EMT's.

Training: FAST Squad members meet and train monthly. Training is also available through Upper Valley Ambulance and area hospitals. An annual joint training session is held with area FAST squads, fire departments and Upper Valley Ambulance. Of the 8 members of the Vershire FAST Squad four are members of the Vershire Fire Department as well.

Equipment: In 1994, the FAST Squad purchased a four-wheel-drive rescue vehicle. The Vershire Rescue vehicle is equipped with oxygen, medical supplies and rescue equipment, and is used by both the Vershire FAST Squad and Vershire Volunteer Fire Department. This vehicle gives the FAST Squad the ability to respond quickly to emergencies in all kinds of weather and in places with difficult access. FAST Squad member carries a limited amount of equipment and supplies.

Finances: The FAST Squad has been supported by fund raising and donations for most of its 14 years. In 2006 the Town has allocated \$2,500 for the support of the Fast Squad. West Fairlee contributes a donation annually. Additional revenue comes from donations, often from those served. FAST Squad expenses include rescue unit loan payments and maintenance, medical supplies, training, pagers, radios, and rescue equipment.

The fire department serves Vershire and is also part of the mutual aid network. The fire department also responds to all Fast Squad calls. In 2005, the Fire department responded

to over 90 calls. Fire department services were rated as 4 or better by 85% of those responding to the question in the 2005 Town Survey.

Personnel: The fire department has an average of 15 members at this writing. There is always a need for volunteers to serve as firefighters, to help raise money, and to help care for the equipment. All firefighters have taken the basic firefighters course, and additional trainings are being conducted on a regular basis to ensure that all volunteers are well-trained.

Equipment: The town's fire equipment consists of two fire trucks, a forest fire truck and all equipment necessary for firefighting. In the past several years, the Vershire Fire department has applied for grants to purchase much needed equipment such as “jaws of life,” a gas meter and several portable defibrulators. All equipment is generally in excellent condition and no major purchases are anticipated. All of this equipment except forest fire equipment is housed at the Fire Station.

Building: The Vershire Fire Station is small and lacks the space for firefighters to work during an extended emergency. There is no running water available, and thus no bathroom or kitchen. A permit is in place to install a septic system. It is likely that the Fire Station will require some expansion in the next few years to handle the increasing number of calls in Vershire.

Finances: The 2005 Town meeting voted \$23,072 toward total fire department expenses of \$34,602. The balance of these funds comes from donations and fundraising. The fire department conducts several events a year to raise funds. Expenses include equipment maintenance and amortization, training, utilities, and insurance.

The Town has a fire warden, who is appointed by the state. His equipment includes fire rakes, back pumps, and related gear. Permission for open burning is by permit from the fire warden.

C. Police

For the past several years the position of town constable has been vacant, on recommendation of the Selectboard. They are concerned that as an elected official s/he would have broad ability to interpret his duties, which could open the town to legal troubles. The Orange County Sheriff's Office in Chelsea and the State Police barracks in Bradford work together to provide police coverage.

As was the case in 1997, the 2005 survey reveals that there is some unhappiness with the level of police service provided, but a strong resistance to increasing taxes to pay for better service. Forty-seven percent of those answering the question in the 2005 town survey described police service as poor or just slightly better than poor. However, when asked if they would favor improving police services if it meant a rise in taxes, seventy-two percent of respondents were opposed to such a plan.

D. Goals, Policies and Recommendations

Goal

1. To provide suitable emergency services for town residents.

Policies

1. Encourage interested residents, particularly those who work in town, to volunteer with the Fire Department or Fast Squad and become certified members of those departments.
2. Ensure that town Emergency Locator maps are kept current.
3. Ensure that the Vershire Rapid Response Plan is kept up-to-date.

Recommendations

1. Complete revisions of/additions to existing road signs to make the Emergency Locator maps useful and effective.
2. Develop an emergency shelter at the Town Center with backup power, beds, shower, and basic foodstuffs.
3. Review and develop the disaster plan, including chain of command, command center, and relationship to county and state services.

VII. Education

A. Introduction

In 1998, Voters in Vershire agreed to join the towns of West Fairlee, Fairlee and Orford, NH, in the creation of the Rivendell Interstate School District; the first bi-state K-12 program in the United States.

The decision to join the Rivendell district was motivated primarily by rising school maintenance costs; and rising costs for students who were tuitioning out to junior and senior high schools throughout the area. Students in grades K-6 now attend Westshire Elementary School in West Fairlee. Students in grades 7-12 attend Rivendell Academy in Orford, NH.

B. Educational Facilities

Westshire Elementary School

The K-6 Westshire Elementary School is located on route 113 in West Fairlee, VT. The 25,000 square-foot school was built in 2000 to meet the needs of West Fairlee and Vershire students.

Rivendell Academy

The 7-12 Rivendell campus is located on Route 25A in Orford, NH. Rivendell Academy, the High School is an 89,000 square foot educational facility that was built in 2002. The attached Rivendell Middle School is the only building in the Rivendell district that is not new, parts of it being built in the 1950's.

Both new School facilities were built with unique energy saving features including: daylighting, rigid foam insulation panels on the building envelope, and energy recovery ventilation. Additional energy savings come from advanced mechanical systems (energy recovery for all of the classroom ventilation air, CO2 controlled ventilation for the gym and auditorium, and an efficient boiler plant).

Because these facilities are so new, they have few pressing maintenance needs aside from the day-to-day upkeep required from any educational facility. The Middle School, on the other hand is in need of major repairs including the replacement of new boilers for heating, as well as new roofing, siding and painting.

C. Student Enrollment

Enrollments of Vershire Students in the Rivendell Interstate School System are reported annually to the Vermont Department of Education. Based upon annual student resident

counts from the Department, average daily membership (ADM) at the school for grades (K-8) in recent years has been as follows:

Year	Westshire	Rivendell
2005	62	49
2004	60	45
2003	61	47
2002	55	45

Figure 10 – Yearly Enrollment
Source, Vermont Department of Education

While enrollments from Vershire have remained relatively stable, the Vermont educational system on the whole has been experiencing a decline in student enrollments. The Rivendell School district has been struggling to find a way to maintain the high-quality of education that they offer in the face of increasing costs of special education and declining enrollment. All of the towns in this district are continuing to have a dialogue about this.

At the Westshire facility, there is an 8.2 student to teacher ratio, which is slightly less than the statewide average of 11.6. The student to teacher ratio at Rivendell Academy is 9.8.

D. Goals, Policies and Recommendations

Goals

1. To provide a safe and secure learning environment where quality educational opportunities are provided to all students.
2. To enable the best opportunity to educate our students at the most equitable cost to the Town's taxpayers.

Policies

1. Land development that is likely to result in large numbers of school children should be phased or planned as to not place an undue financial burden on the capacity of town to provide educational services.
2. It is the policy of the town to provide sufficient and appropriate physical space to meet current and projected enrollments.

VIII. Transportation

A. Introduction

The Vermont Agency of Transportation and the Vershire Board of Selectmen jointly determine our road classification. There are four road classifications used by the State of Vermont. The classification determines the rate of State financial aid in the repair and maintenance of Town roads (there is no State aid for class four roads). The classes are:

- Class 1: town highways which form the extension of a state highway route and which carry a state highway route number.
- Class 2: important town highways, often paved, with the primary purpose of linking towns and high traffic areas such as village settlements and state highways.
- Class 3: all traveled town highways other than Class 1 or Class 2 highways that are negotiable under normal conditions, all seasons of the year by a standard manufactured pleasure car.
- Class 4: all other town highways on which public use is limited.

B. Town Roads and Road Maintenance

Vershire has a total of 60.08 miles of Town roads, consisting mostly of Class 3 roads. This does not include the 7.73 miles of Vermont Route 113 that runs through Vershire and is maintained by the State.

Class	Mileage
1	0
2	4.96
3	26.79
4	20.6

Figure 11 – Total Road Mileage
Source: VT Dept. of Transportation

Vershire has a Town Road Policy on file in the Town Offices that specifies the requirements for maintenance, improvement, discontinuance, laying out and acceptance of Town Highways. With rising costs, only a limited amount of maintenance on little-used roads and some upgrading of other roads can be expected. A wide variation in quality of Class 3 roads represents a balance between limited Town resources and demands for services.

Most of Vershire's residential properties are on Class 2 and Class 3 roads. There are about 53 residential properties on Class 4 roads in Vershire. Many of these are summer homes and camps. Rowell Road, with five residences, is the Class 4 road with the most residential parcels on it.

The quality of Town roads and their level of maintenance affect not only the Town tax rate but also the type and rate of Town development. Road improvements may make Vershire a more attractive place of residence and increase the commuter population. This, in turn, may increase demand for Town services, as well as expanded school facilities, and thus additionally raise the tax rate.

Overall the condition of the roads in Vershire is good. When asked to rate the quality of road maintenance in Vershire, 72% of survey respondents indicated that the condition of the roads was very good to excellent.

In 2003, a culvert inventory was conducted by the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission for the Vershire Highway Department. The information collected during this inventory is used to plan improvements and repairs to culverts throughout Vershire.

Vershire buys gravel for its roads from either Bradford, Chelsea, or Thetford. The gravel is delivered to Vershire because it is cheaper than the overhead cost of owning large trucks to bring it. The cost is approximately \$9.75 to \$10 a yard, delivered. Vershire uses approximately 2500 yards of sand a year and pays about \$5,000 per year for road salt.

The Town owns several trucks that are used in the maintenance of the roads:

- 2005 International Dumper
- 1998 Ford Dumper/plow/sander
- 2003 One-ton Ford F550 for sanding & plowing
- 2003 John Deere 672 Grader
- 2000 342 John Deere Backhoe

Vershire's vehicles are insured through a mutual insurance pool that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns provides as a service to its member towns at more favorable rates than an insurance company has been able to provide.

The highway budget has consistently been one of the largest parts of the Town's budget. In 2005, the actual money spent on highways was \$219,200. The highway budget is not entirely funded by Town revenues. State Aid contributed \$59,376 or 27% of the total for 2005. Vershire Highway Fund does not receive Federal Revenue Sharing funds.

There is no bus, train or air service in Vershire nor a likelihood of any in the future. Essentially all transportation in Vershire is by privately owned automobile, excluding a very few hardy souls who use foot power of varying sorts.

A strong majority of town survey respondents indicated they wanted Vershire to stay largely the same, including issues relating to roads and transportation. 49% of residents have indicated that they do not see a need to increase the level of road maintenance if it means an increase in town taxes. Vershire has a strong desire to maintain our beautiful rural roads and provide adequate accessibility.

On road parking is an issue that can be a nuisance to all concerned, but one that can be readily avoided through planning. Requiring all new development to provide adequate off-road parking avoids congestion and provides a safe place for all residents to park and allows everyone to enjoy our beautiful country roads safely.

According to the 2000 US Census, 91% of the working population in Vershire commutes to work. The mean commute time to work is 30 minutes. Although there is not currently a strong show of interest in carpooling this is a practice that saves individuals and taxpayers significant money, substantially reduces pollution and can be implemented without taxpayer cost.

C. Goals and Policies

Goals

1. To maintain a safe, efficient transportation system that complements the other goals and policies of this Plan.
2. To ensure that future development does not unnecessarily or unreasonably endanger the public investment in town and regional transportation systems or facilities, including highways, bikeways, trails and rail.
3. To support local, regional and statewide efforts to provide transportation systems that meet the needs of all population segments and not just those who use automobiles.
4. To minimize transportation energy consumption by encouraging carpooling.
5. To provide pedestrians with safe areas to travel within the Village of Vershire.
6. To provide regular maintenance and upgrades to transportation equipment and facilities provided that the costs of which do not put an undo burden on the people of Vershire.
7. Provide appropriate, adequate parking where needed.

Policies

1. Prior to a final decision to proceed with a major capital transportation project, policy makers should first analyze the project against reasonable alternatives. In examining the alternatives, investigation should focus on the environmental, energy, social and investment costs and the extent to which each meets the goals and policies of this Plan.
2. Any new access, new construction, change of use, and any development of a land parcel that would create impacts on Vershire's road system shall be reviewed by the Town. Where such development requires improvements to Town highways, such costs shall be borne by the developer, in consultation with the Selectmen, and the Selectmen shall have sole power to change the classification of the road.
3. Any new residential or commercial development or changes of existing use must provide adequate off-road parking.
4. The Town shall seek public input in any decision to substantially change the maintenance level or surface treatment of any town road.
5. It is in the public interest to maintain the town's current highways, bridges, and related facilities, as it is necessary to ensure the current level of service.
6. The Town, as written in V.S.A. Title 19 Section 310 does not maintain Class IV Highways, excepting bridges and culverts. The policy of the Selectboard is that before the town would consider adopting a new road or upgrading an existing highway, the abutting property owners shall be responsible for the cost of improving and/or building the road to town specifications. Final decision regarding the nature of the improvement rests with the Selectboard.
7. Given the interest in and benefits from biking, hiking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and similar outdoor recreational activities, the town should, as an alternative to complete discontinuance of a highway, give full consideration to preserving Class 4 roads for recreational use by downgrading their status to a legal trail and thus retaining the public's interest in them.
8. An integral scenic element of the rural countryside is the network of back roads comprising the town's highway system. These byways are both visually and economically important to the town. If improvements are needed to accommodate increased traffic, it is important to consider the relationship of the road to the surrounding features of the landscape.
9. Strip development is not encouraged as a land use pattern. Such development occurs in a linear path along a right-of-way which often restricts visual and physical access to interior lands.

10. It is the policy of the town to minimize curb cuts to insure the proper function and performance of a town highway.
11. It is the policy of the town that the design of access roads and related facilities provide for proper alignment of new or relocated driveways along a roadway.
12. The health of trees along town roads shall be periodically reviewed. Trees that are unhealthy or otherwise pose a substantial risk to travelers shall be removed.

IX. Current and Future Land Uses

A. Introduction

Since the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001, there has been an increase in the number of families from out-of-state who have moved to Vermont. This trend, coupled with the population boom and housing shortage in the Upper Valley, will inevitably cause an increase in the population of Vershire. These changes underscore the need to identify and develop effective growth and land use development policies that will serve the long-term interests of our community and help Vershire remain a small rural Vermont town.

As discussed in chapter one, section C of this document, the “rural character” of Vershire is reflected in the unique natural environment of the Town. It is marked by deep valleys and high hills. There is limited flat land in the Town and steep slopes and shallow soils predominate. Vershire is not adverse to changes that might occur in town, but it is the hope that we can maintain the quiet, country lifestyle that has been the norm for decades. Efforts to maintain the rural character of Vershire should not keep residents from making a living, provided that their occupation does not create great change to or overburden the Town.

Strip development, large-scale commercial development and such endeavors that would dramatically increase traffic flow or use up valuable agricultural land with no regard for the natural appearance of Vershire are generally unwanted in Town. However, small industries, businesses and developments that can coexist within an area as rural and remote as Vershire, are not only welcome, but encouraged.

B. Overall Land Use Goals

As Citizens consider the current and future use of land in Vershire, a land use pattern of settlement in the village area, surrounded by low-density rural and agricultural areas needs to be considered. This type of land use pattern is considered to be attractive, desired, and understood by the residents of Vershire. This is the style and character of land use that the community-at-large wishes to promote in the future.

Respondents to the 2005 survey strongly indicated that they would like the Town to maintain its rural/agricultural environment or stay much the same as it is presently. Residents would encourage businesses that are consistent with their definition of “rural character,” such as home-based businesses, small retail shops, small restaurants, professional offices, eco/agri-tourism and inns or bed and breakfasts.

76% of citizens who responded to the Town Survey favored the idea of keeping development in the village area and discouraging it in outlying areas. The overall interest in concentrating development in the Village Area seems to outweigh the desire for a

separate area for certain businesses. This suggested pattern of development is consistent with the overall definition of rural character discussed in chapter one of this Plan.

Goals:

1. To channel the growth of Vershire so as to enhance its rural character, wildlife habitats, historic resources, and scenery.
2. To respect the community's identity and share qualities of scale and form with existing development.
3. To be adaptable to change which inevitably must occur if the community is to be vital.
4. To not deprive a landowner from realizing a reasonable and customary return from his or her land.
5. To balance the rights of landowners against the overall vision of the town.
6. To focus development so as to minimize the expansion of Town services, specifically roads, and maximize open space.
7. To refine existing land use regulations to support the foregoing goals.

C. Current Land Use

With the decline in population that began in the late 1800s, most of Vershire's separate villages disappeared. The only concentrated settlement in Vershire is the village which stretches approximately a mile along both sides of Vermont Route 113, the major route that crosses the Town from east to west. Most of the public buildings are also located on this strip of highway. The post office, fire station, the Town Office and the Town Center are all located within walking distance of each other. The Town Garage is about one-half mile up the Vershire Center Road at the westerly end of Town.

Outside of the village area are the few remaining farms, a number of year-round and seasonal houses, and many large areas of forest. Few farms are maintained on a strictly commercial basis. Some are used for subsistence farming, tree farming, or for educational purposes. Most are reverting to overgrown meadows or forest land. Year-round residences are generally along the major roads; seasonal vacation homes and camps are generally located in more remote areas. Approximately eight square miles of the southwestern corner of the Town and four square miles of the northeastern corner, although crisscrossed by old roads and trails, are now all but uninhabited.

D. Proposed Land Use

The Town Plan recognizes that not all land is equally suited for all types and intensities of development. It is the basic premise of this Plan that future land uses be sensitive to the physical limitations of a site and that in planning for the development of a parcel, more than market value of property be recognized. Accordingly, separate geographical areas have been defined in this section and the physical boundaries of each are defined on a proposed Land Use Map.

For each area below, the purpose is stated and policies are offered in terms of the compatible types of development, intensity of use, and the conservation of natural resources.

Furthermore, while it is recognized that existing use of land and structures may not be entirely consistent with these proposals, it is the goal of this Plan that all future land development be in conformance with these policies and that Vershire's Development Ordinance be consistent with the intent of this document per V.S.A. Title 24, Ch. 117 § 4410.

E. Village Center Area

Background and Purpose

Many towns in Vermont no longer have functional villages due to changes in highways, establishment of competing commercial centers or poorly conceived community planning. Our town cannot consider itself immune to these types of influences. It is a fundamental premise of the Plan to make every reasonable effort to ensure the continued use and enjoyment of the Village Center as a dynamic community center.

Community activity in Vershire revolves around our village center. It is the recognized place for civic, economic and social interaction. Two limitations to the further development of this area are the Ompompanoosuc River and the limited available land.

Nonetheless it is hoped that future development of retail and commercial uses, offices and community facilities will occur in this area along Vermont Route 113. A key recommendation of this plan is to relax setback rules in the Village area, which will allow houses to be built closer to the road and to each other, which are important features of the existing village.

F. Goals, Policies and Recommendations

Goals

1. This area is intended for community facilities, small businesses, residences; planned to protect streambanks, scenic quality, Village feel, and to harmonize with the River.
2. It is a goal of the town to maintain a viable village center through proper planning and responsible development.

Policies

1. The density and location of development in this area should reflect existing settlement patterns, land capability, and the availability of utilities for expansion.
2. Shops and services, small businesses, professional offices and public facilities, at a scale and design appropriate to the existing characteristics, are encouraged.
3. Conversion of structures and older buildings of historic merit is encouraged to enable new and more economical uses of property and to avoid obsolescence.
4. Where new development is being planned, efforts should be directed to ensure that such development is reasonably complementary and compatible to the configuration of existing buildings and streetscape, and respects traditional scales, proportions, and shapes of the surrounding neighborhoods.
5. Major public investments should be encouraged and endorsed only on finding that they will not unreasonably or unnecessarily jeopardize or endanger the character of the Village center. Planners are encouraged, prior to the commencement of plans, to consult with the town and affected property owners regarding these types of activities.
6. The Plan supports pedestrian enhancements that will promote safety, provided that they do not put an undo financial burden on the town.

Recommendation

1. A Village Center Area should be designated within the Vershire Development Ordinance. The Village Center area should have setbacks that are consistent with the historical development patterns that exist in the village.

G. Open Space Area

Background and Purpose

History, geography, economics and far-sighted land management have all come together to give Vershire some special gifts, in the form of some unusually large areas of nearly uninhabited land. The town is fortunate to own Eagle Hollow Park and Patterson Mountain Municipal Forest, both located in those areas. These large areas are excellent

for wildlife, especially bear, bobcat and moose, but have marked benefits for Vershire's people as well and also benefit our neighbors in other towns.

These areas provide opportunities for hiking, hunting, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and horseback riding. The fact that these areas remain largely undeveloped has greatly reduced the demand for expensive Town services. Since the land is generally held in large pieces and has good soils for forests, it should be able to serve as a working forest for a long time to come.

The policies for the Rural Residential Area should do a good job of protecting the bulk of the town from unwise large-scale development. However, it is understood that those policies will still allow building of residences and camps at low densities throughout much of that area. It is the reality of Vermont that it is just such bit-by-bit development, rather than large-scale tract developments, that eats up open space and habitat. The creation of conservation areas with specific, restrictive policies recognizes that a line must be drawn around certain areas if they are to be protected. This is a tradeoff: allowing slow development in most of the Town to continue much as it has, while setting aside specific areas where development will be closely reviewed.

The areas in the northeastern and southwestern corners were designated as open space areas because they have been seen over the years to be special; they connect to large undisturbed areas in adjoining towns, are largely uninhabited, are known to be favorable wildlife habitat, contain substantial wetlands and ridge tops in public view, and have large areas with steep slopes, all of which are things which townspeople wish to protect. Greater than 65% of citizens who responded to the 2005 survey indicated that these areas should be conserved. Revising the Development Ordinance to require that any non-forestry development in these areas be reviewed and approved by the Town Board of Adjustment would increase the protection of this area.

H. Goals, Policies and Recommendations

Goal

1. This area is intended as open space, for forestry, recreation and wildlife. Strive to keep the area open and wild.

Policies

1. Forestry operations are encouraged. Seasonal camps, other small-scale recreational facilities, and single-family homes are suitable for this area, provided that they do not unduly alter the rural and undeveloped character of these outlying areas. All other development is discouraged.

2. Impact on wildlife shall be considered prior to development. Monitoring and identification of necessary and significant wildlife habitat should be continued.

Recommendation

1. Consider revising the Development Ordinance to require Board of Adjustment review of any non-forestry development in this area.

I. Rural Residential Area

Background and Purpose

In this area, as in all locations in Vershire, future development will depend heavily on the availability of land to support on-site wastewater disposal systems and private water supply systems. Despite these technical limitations, as demand for new building sites increases, new technologies for innovative systems will emerge, making rural land once considered undevelopable desirable for residential subdivision.

Much of the forested land in this area is used only for timber production. Other areas are so steep that they are limited even for forestry. Because of these limitations, steep slope areas have very low suitability for residential development, except at low densities. In addition to being steep, the soils in these areas are generally very shallow and prone to erosion once disturbed. The cost of siting buildings, driveways and septic systems in these areas is generally high, and the cost of public services such as road maintenance to these areas can be very high. For these reasons, development on slopes greater than 20% should be reviewed by the Town.

Areas relatively free from site limitations (such as poor soils, steep slopes, and high elevations) are more often used for residential and agricultural uses. The less desirable areas have remained as or reverted to forests. Land adjacent to town and state highways has been subjected to more active land use changes due to the relative ease of access. The more remote areas, being those distant from the town's primary services and main roads, have developed more slowly due to the relatively higher cost of development (e.g. power, telephone and driveways).

We believe that favorable conditions for construction of buildings and wastewater disposal facilities should not be the sole determinant for development in Rural Residential Areas. New development needs to occur at a reasonable rate of growth so as not to unduly burden the ability of the Town to provide services. Special or unique resources, including critical wildlife habitats (e.g. deer wintering areas), historic sites, archeological sites and wetlands should be evaluated and planned for when developing projects in the Rural Residential Area.

J. Goals and Policies

Goal

1. This area is intended for housing and camps, agriculture and forestry, home-based and small businesses.
2. To ensure that the development of housing does not adversely affect the rural character of our town.

Policies

1. Sites should be planned so as to concentrate development and maximize open space, while providing for privacy.
2. Maintenance of a rural living environment is the primary goal for the Rural Residential Area. Projects which adversely affect the rural setting and conflict with existing rural land uses should not be located in this area.
3. Residential and agricultural uses are to be the primary and dominant land uses in the Rural Residential Area. Commercial or industrial projects are considered less desirable in this area.
4. The establishment and operation of small entrepreneurial enterprises are consistent with the general purpose of this area.
5. Residents are free to conduct an occupation in their homes provided that the nature of the occupation is customary or appropriate in rural residential areas.
6. Any home business, commercial development or light industry - defined as a business which manufactures or processes materials or finished goods - shall be sited on a lot large enough and screened such that there is no significant odor or visual or audible effect of the project at the property boundary, and comply with state pollution laws. These enterprises should not cause an undue burden on the ability of the town to provide services, such as highways and fire protection.
7. Year-round operations/dwellings are encouraged to locate with frontage on class 1, 2, and 3 roads, not on Class 4 roads.

K. Flood Hazard Area

The Flood Hazard area runs from the Ompompanoosuc River Crossing at bridge 20 to the border of Vershire and West Fairlee along the Ompompanoosuc River.

Floodplains are often excellent agricultural land due to the thick layers of river-borne

soil deposited there. Floodplains also provide natural storage of floodwaters resulting from snowmelt or severe or prolonged rainstorms. Floodplains are poorly suited for structural development. "One-hundred-year" flooding in Vermont has now become nearly an annual event, and it seems only a matter of time before the Ompompanoosuc has its turn. It is prudent Town policy from a public safety standpoint to discourage structural development in floodplain areas.

L. Goals, Policies and Recommendations

Goal

1. Intended for agricultural use on the high-quality soils of the floodplain.

Policies

1. Agriculture is encouraged in this area.
2. New development within the limits of the 100-year floodplain are discouraged. Improvements to existing structures in the floodplain are acceptable, provided that careful planning is done to insure against unnecessary loss of property or public endangerment.

Recommendations

1. Consider revising the Development Ordinance to require Board of Adjustment review of any development other than agriculture in this Area.
2. Adopt a stand-alone Flood Hazard ordinance.

M. Transportation and Land Use Planning

Vermont planning law provides a mechanism to address the inherent problems posed by transportation in relation to land use. Public investment priorities for state and town roads can be managed to minimize land use impacts that are not in accord with policies set forth in this plan. The Town of Vershire is rural, with a compact village, whose residents value and cherish its small-town appeal.

Goals

1. Support land use policies and development projects which complement existing transportation investments.

2. Only projects of a size and scale which do not materially interfere with the function, safety, and efficiency of town and state highways should be permitted.
3. Increases in traffic should not create unreasonable congestion or unsafe conditions; developments which generate considerable round-trip truck or automobile travel should be limited.
4. Developments which would increase traffic through the villages merit special scrutiny.

X. Natural Resources

A. Wetlands

Background

Wetlands are ecologically fragile areas and how these lands are managed have a direct bearing on the quality and quantity of water resources.

The Vermont Water Resources Board estimates that wetlands comprise less than 5 percent of the surface area of Vermont. In addition to being Vermont's most productive ecosystem, wetlands serve a wide variety of functions beneficial to the health, safety and welfare of the general public, including the following:

- Retaining storm water run-off, reducing flood peaks and thereby reducing flooding;
- Improving surface water quality through storage of organic materials, chemical decomposition and filtration of sediments and other matter from surface water;
- Providing spawning, feeding and general habitat for fish;
- Providing habitat for a wide diversity of wildlife and rare, threatened or endangered plants; and
- Contributing to the open space character and the overall beauty of the rural landscape.

In 1986, Vermont adopted legislation for the protection and management of wetlands (10 V.S.A., Chapter 37). Determination of whether a wetland merits protection is based on an evaluation of the extent to which it serves the general functions outlined in the bulleted list above.

Under the Rules, if land development can be expected to impact a protected wetland, such activity cannot commence unless the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources first grants a Conditional Use Determination (CUD). A CUD will be granted when it is determined that the proposed use will not have an undue adverse impact on the function of the wetland. In many cases, such approvals are granted with conditions to mitigate impacts and to more readily serve the purposes of wetlands protection.

For Vershire, as well as the State, the most significant wetlands have been mapped and are included as part of the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These wetlands have been delineated on USGS topographic maps, and by reference are made a part of this Plan. Other smaller wetlands often do not show

on these maps, so a field determination by a qualified biologist is needed for most activities that involve state permits.

In those towns that have zoning or subdivision regulations, final approvals cannot be granted for projects involving wetlands unless the Agency of Natural Resources first has had an opportunity to evaluate the effect of the project on the wetland (24 V.S.A., Section 4413). It is important to note that future investigations of wetlands within Vershire may result in additional areas being determined as significant or important for conservation.

Goals

1. To identify and encourage land use development practices that avoid or mitigate adverse impacts on significant wetlands.

Policies

1. Structural development or intensive land uses are discouraged from locating in significant wetlands or within buffer zones to significant wetlands.
2. Developments adjacent to wetlands should be planned so as not to result in undue disturbance to wetland areas or their function. Mitigating measures to protect the function of a wetland are an acceptable measure.

B. Flood Hazard Areas and Floodplains

Background

Floods are inevitable and uncontrollable natural events which occur sporadically and affect lands adjacent to watercourses. It is therefore in the public interest to plan for floods, and to implement land use strategies which will protect these areas and minimize the risks to public health, safety, and property.

Floodplains, lands adjacent to watercourses, are periodically inundated by heavy rains or during spring thaws. They are porous and can absorb considerable water before reaching flood stage. Floodplains make excellent agricultural land but are poorly suited for development, both because of their propensity for flooding and because of their proximity to watercourses, which creates the potential for pollution.

Vermont has experienced thirteen statewide and regional floods since 1973. All but one of these were declared federal disasters, and economic losses were significant. Damage was not limited to designated floodplains, but often occurred along unstable river systems and steep streams. In some cases, recovery costs to the public sector alone amounted to several million dollars per flooding event. Public interest dictates that every reasonable attempt should be made to avoid or reduce exposure to flood damage.

National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)

Under the provisions of the National Flood Insurance Act (1968), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has conducted a series of evaluations and hydrologic engineering studies to determine the limits of flood hazard areas along streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds expected to be inundated during the 100-year base flood, meaning that the flood level has a 1% chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year. The calculations do not take into account the impact of ice dams or debris, and may, therefore, actually underestimate the areas which are subject to flooding damage.

FEMA has prepared a Flood Hazard Boundary Map (FHBM) for the Town of Vershire, which includes flood hazard areas for the Ompompanoosuc and for major streams and ponds. This map is on file at the Town Office and at the Regional Commission. The Topography of Vershire is such that there are few areas low enough to be in the FEMA Flood Hazard Area. The designated area runs from “Mill Village” to the border of Vershire and West Fairlee along the Ompompanoosuc River.

FEMA also administers the National Flood Insurance Program, which provides flood hazard insurance at subsidized rates for property owners in affected areas. In order to qualify for federal insurance, towns must adopt and retain a by-law to control land development within these areas. Minimum standards must be included and approved by FEMA.

The Town of Vershire has not adopted a Flood Hazard Bylaw, and as a result it is not recognized as a participating community in the National Flood Insurance Program. Coverage is only available to landowners in town if the Town elects to participate in the program. Were the Town to adopt a Flood Hazard Bylaw, a permit from the town would be required prior to any substantial improvement to an existing structure, or to any new construction in the designated floodplain. In granting approval, the Town would find that the proposal meets or exceeds minimum development standards for flood hazard areas.

Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission has determined that approximately eleven buildings in Vershire are presently located within the mapped flood hazard areas. Mortgage lending institutions now require as a prerequisite to financing that flood insurance be purchased on property subject to flooding.

The town recognizes that it should adopt a Flood Hazard Bylaw and be participating in the NFIP. By adopting a Flood Hazard Bylaw flood losses will be reduced, the natural functions of the watercourses will be protected, and costly flood recovery programs will be minimized.

C. Goals, Policies and Recommendations

Goals

1. To create and adopt a Flood Hazard Bylaw for Vershire, thus ensuring the town’s eligibility for and participation in the National Flood Insurance Program.

2. To enhance and maintain wise use of flood hazard areas as open space, greenways, non-commercial recreation and/or agricultural land.
3. To ensure no net loss of flood storage capacity in order to minimize the loss of life and property, disruption of commerce, and demand for extraordinary public services and expenditures which result from flood damage.
4. To maintain maps which reflect as accurately as possible the flood hazard areas, to assist in appropriate land use decisions.
5. To recognize that upland areas adjacent to unstable rivers and to steep streams may be at risk of erosion during floods.

Policies

1. It is the policy of the town that the preferred uses for flood hazard areas shall be for open space, greenbelts, and non-commercial recreational or agricultural uses.
2. Any land use activity (filling, or removal of earth or rock) within flood hazard areas which would result in net loss of flood storage or increased or diverted flood levels or increased risk to adjacent areas should be prohibited.
3. Utilities or facilities serving existing development (e.g. water lines, electrical service, waste disposal systems, roads, and bridges) may be located within these areas only when off-site options are not feasible and provided that their placement is deemed to be relatively protected from flooding damage.
4. Flood hazard regulations should be extended to areas identified as at risk to flood erosion.

Recommendation

1. The Planning Commission should work with planners at the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission to create a Flood Hazard Bylaw for the Town.

D. Water Resources

Background

Vershire's water resources include aquifers (groundwater) and surface waters. Sustainable yields of quality water is necessary for the lives and livelihood of citizens of Vershire.

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, in cooperation with federal and other state agencies, has evaluated aquifer recharge areas serving systems involving 10 or more

connections or 25 or more people. These recharge areas are acknowledged and are recognized as important for protection. Land developments that are potential threats to water quality and significant aquifers are discouraged from locating in these areas.

In recent years, underground fuel storage tanks have been identified as major threats to water quality. Studies conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have shown that the average fuel tank is likely to leak within 15 years from installation. To lessen the risk of contamination, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources has promulgated rules to monitor underground tanks with a capacity of 1,100 gallons or more. Tanks in excess of this capacity must be registered with the town. In addition, replacement of underground tanks are subject to rigid standards.

E. Goals, Policies and Recommendations

Goals

1. To maintain or enhance the quality and quantity of drinking quality groundwater resources.
2. To allow use of groundwater resources by new development in such a manner to protect the public right to adequate quality and quantity of the resource.
3. To consider surface water and groundwater impacts and effects related to proposed or existing uses of land.
4. To maintain or improve surface water quality and quantity.

Policies

1. Water withdrawal from underground sources should ensure that existing groundwater users are not adversely affected.
2. Aquifers and surface waters should not be significantly depleted and water should be properly allocated between actual and potential uses.
3. Land use activities which potentially threaten groundwater quality should be carefully reviewed and monitored to prevent undue loss of quality to groundwater.
4. Maintenance or enhancement of water resources for recreation, fisheries, necessary wildlife habitats and quality aesthetics are high priorities. Water resource policy and practices should protect these uses.
5. The location, sizing and density of on-site sewage disposal facilities should be determined by the capacity of the soil, the natural limitations of the site, and underlying substrata conditions, such as depth to bedrock and seasonal high water

tables.

6. Preservation of the natural state of streams should be encouraged by:
 - Protection of adjacent wetlands and natural areas;
 - Protection of natural scenic qualities; and
 - Maintenance of existing stream bank and buffer vegetation including trees, together with wildlife habitat.
7. Municipal buildings should be situated as to avoid potential contamination of the water supply.

Recommendations

1. Encourage a community water quality monitoring program for the Ompompanoosuc River.
2. Investigate maintaining and improving public access to the river for recreational use.
3. Consider revising the Development Ordinance to include a suitable setback and buffer from the top of the banks of any perennial stream.
4. Support efforts to map aquifer recharge areas.

F. Wildlife Resources

Background

Wildlife is one of the primary attractions to the area and provides many citizens of Vershire with direct and indirect livelihoods from sports, tourism and direct harvest of wildlife.

Wildlife management requires management of human activities around animals as much as management of animals around human activities. Managing for specific species is not as desirable as managing for the entire ecosystem supporting the species

Nearly all open space provides habitat for game and non-game species. There are, however, some areas in Vershire which provide critical habitat that should remain intact. These areas include wetlands, deer wintering areas, bear mast stands, and edge (the transition zone between two cover types, such as field and forest). Development or logging in or adjacent to these areas should consider wildlife implications during the planning process.

Wintering areas are an important habitat requirement for deer during the critical winter months when snow depth and climate are limiting factors to survival. Typically these areas consist of mature softwood stands, at low elevations or along stream beds, which provide cover and limit snow depths. Southerly facing slopes are also beneficial due to good sun exposure and may be utilized even in areas of limited softwood cover. More specific factors, such as percent canopy closure, species of softwoods, and stand age, also figure into the quality of the wintering area.

G. Goals, Policies and Recommendations

Goals

1. To maintain or enhance the natural diversity and population of wildlife, including natural predators in proper balance.
2. To restore stable populations of endangered or threatened wildlife in appropriate habitat areas.
3. To maintain or improve the natural diversity, population, and migratory routes of fish.
4. To allow sport and subsistence hunting of ecologically sound intensities to provide continued success of the species.

Policies

1. Wildlife populations and natural diversity should be maintained or enhanced.
2. Long-term protection of major habitats through conservation easements, land purchases, leases and other incentives is encouraged.
3. It is the policy of the town to protect deer wintering areas from developments and other uses that adversely impact the resources.
4. Development other than isolated houses and camps shall be designed so as to preserve continuous areas of wildlife habitat. Fragmentation of wildlife habitat is discouraged. Effort shall be made to maintain connecting links between such areas.
5. Preference shall be given to development that utilizes existing roads and field lines.

Recommendation

1. Consider revising the Development Ordinance to include a suitable setback from all state-defined wetlands, and state-defined necessary wildlife habitat for endangered species.
2. Owners of necessary habitat for threatened species are encouraged to contact the state for assistance in developing a management plan for these sites.

H. Mineral Resources

Background

The use and management of Vershire's earth and mineral resources are matters of public good. Maintenance of sustainable quantities of gravel, sand, crushed rock, and other materials are essential for the development industry as well as state and local highways. In spite of this, public and private interests are oftentimes in conflict over utilization of the resource. It is in the interest of the Vershire business owners and residents to enable utilization of these resources when such uses do not significantly inhibit or conflict with other existing or planned land uses, or are in conflict with other stated goals in this plan.

I. Goals and Policies

Goals

1. To enable appropriate utilization of mineral resources.
2. To encourage extraction and processing of the resource where such activities are appropriately managed and the public interest is clearly benefited thereby.

Policies

1. Existing and proposed mineral extraction and processing facilities should be planned, constructed, and managed:
 - So as not to adversely impact existing or planned uses within the vicinity of the project site;
 - To not significantly interfere with the function and safety of existing road systems serving the project site; and
 - To minimize any adverse effects on water quality, fish and wildlife habitats, and adjacent land uses.
 - To reclaim and re-vegetate sites after their useful life.

XI. Energy

Background

In the past 5 years, America has seen an increasing concern over our energy consumption. As prices of oil-related fuels continues to rise, everyday activities such as home heating and travel by car become increasingly more burdensome for the average citizen.

Practical energy planning and implementation results in positive environmental and economic returns to the community and energy providers. Conservation of energy lessens the demand for expensive new sources. Utilities are able to postpone capital investments necessary to provide for additional capacity. This has benefits for residents, businesses, and ratepayers.

While it is recognized that energy supply and demand are directed largely by economic forces at the state, federal, and international levels, the manner in which the town plans for future growth can have an impact on energy. For example, a highly dispersed and unplanned pattern of land use can waste both land and energy resources. By planning the location of jobs, public services and housing in close proximity to growth centers, the consumption of fuel and needs for additional roads can be reduced. The siting and design of buildings and the selection of energy systems can influence the efficiency and conservation of energy.

A. Energy Demands

Vermont currently gets about one-third of its energy from the nuclear power generated at the Vermont Yankee plant. Another third of the power used in Vermont comes from Hydro-Quebec, a large-scale hydro-power facility in Canada. About 7-10% of state power comes from renewable generating plants. Statewide energy consumption has been increasing progressively over the past decade.

According to the 2000 US Census, the major fuels consumed in Vermont are oil (58%), electric (5%), wood (9%) and LPG and gas (14%). Across the U.S., per capita energy consumption for residential and transportation purposes is about the same as in the northeast. About 76% of all energy used is for these purposes. Almost 80% of residential energy is dedicated to space heating and domestic hot water. State energy officials estimate that simple conservation measures incorporated in new housing can result in a 20% to 30% reduction of energy usage.

About half of all energy used in Vermont is for transportation. Over 50% of this is for residential users who drive private cars. Public transportation in Vershire is nearly non-existent and as a result there are few alternatives, if any, to the automobile.

B. Renewable Energy

Nearly 82% of Vershire residents responding to the 2005 survey indicated that the town should promote the development of renewable energy resources.

Energy Efficiency

One of the best ways to address our use of energy is simply to reduce that use. 76% of Vershire survey respondents supported the creation of energy conservation standards for all Town-owned buildings.

The most significant ways to reduce energy use in the home are:

- Insulate homes with modern insulations
- Use modern, high efficiency windows
- Install energy efficient appliances like refrigerators, freezers, front loading washing machines, gas heated clothes driers and heating systems without blowers.
- Use high efficiency compact fluorescent lighting
- Use Gas and/or solar hot water heaters

Solar Power (Photovoltaics)

Solar power is a viable source of energy in Vermont, provided that panels can be located facing south with a good view of the sun. It is generally considered reliable and after the initial investment of installation, it will save the user money.

According to the EPA, a 5kw photovoltaic system in Vermont can avoid 18,583 pounds of CO₂, or about 9 tons of CO₂ per year. A study conducted at the University of Vermont indicates that this is the equivalent to the emissions from driving approximately 23, 229 in a vehicle that gets 24 mpg, equal to driving across the United States almost eight times.

Photovoltaic systems are most cost effective for remote off the grid sites, energy efficient buildings with the PV systems integrated as part of the building designs and when net metering is available. Net metering is method of crediting customers for electricity that they generate on site in excess of their own electricity consumption. Customers with their own generation offset the electricity they would have purchased from their utility. If such customers generate more than they use in a billing period, their electric meter turns backwards to indicate their net excess generation.

Although solar power does not receive much in the way of federal or state support when compared to fossil fuels, Vermont does offer the Solar and Small Wind Incentive Program to encourage businesses and homeowners to buy small-scale solar and wind energy systems by offering direct cash incentives to reduce the initial costs of installation.

Wind Power

In the past five years, the most commonly debated renewable energy option has been wind towers. The primary disadvantages to wind energy are environmental and aesthetic, which explains the heated debates surrounding proposed wind power projects in Vermont. Residents want the renewable electricity, but are often unwilling to accept the aesthetic impact of wind towers on the rural character of their town. Much like the Vermont towns who have been embroiled in these discussions due to proposed wind tower developments, Vershire residents seem to be equally split with regard to the regulation of size, placement and design of wind towers.

According to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Vermont's best winds for wind energy development are found along its mountains and ridgelines between 2500 feet and 3500 feet in elevation. Approximately 20% of the potential sites for wind development in Vermont are located on state land under the jurisdiction of ANR. Much of that land is restricted from development due to various legal restrictions on the land.

Similar to hydropower, wind energy is an intermittent resource and its generation fluctuates in response to environmental conditions. However, most modern wind turbines are able to generate electricity 95% of the time.

Biomass

The Vermont Department of Public Service reports that Vermont is a national leader in the research, development and commercialization of wood energy. This focuses primarily on using wood chips for heat and electricity productions. Wood is an abundant renewable energy resource in Vermont and virtually all of Vermont's wood chip usage comes from mill wastes or chips from low-quality trees.

Generally, use of biomass for heating purposes is only practical on the large scale. For example, the creation of a biomass energy district, common in Europe is under consideration in Burlington. The state has several active biomass district energy systems, one in Waterbury and one in Montpelier.

On a smaller scale, the 2000 Census reports that 83% of Vershire's households use wood as a fuel source for heating, 51.5% use fuel oil, and 16.5% use LP gas. The Vermont Department of Public Service estimates that the average household burns between 3 to 4 cords of wood each year during the heating season. Given that the total number of homes in Vershire heating with wood was 83, it is estimated that between 249 and 332 cords of wood were burned in 2000.

Increased reliance on wood as a heating source can offset some demand for expensive alternative sources. The downside to this is, however, that significant use of wood could contribute to increased air pollution. Modern catalytic converters installed on wood burning stoves could be a partial solution.

In addition to using biomass for heating, the use of biofuels, particularly Biodiesel is becoming an increasingly popular option for municipalities attempting to cut costs and reduce the environmental impact of vehicle emissions.

According to the Vermont BioFuels Association, Biodiesel is a clean burning alternative fuel, produced from domestic, renewable resources such as soybeans, sunflowers, canola, waste cooking oil, or animal fats. Biodiesel contains no petroleum, but it can be blended at any level with petroleum diesel to create a Biodiesel blend. It can be used in compression-ignition (diesel) engines or oil-fired boilers or furnaces with little or no modifications. Biodiesel is simple to use, biodegradable, nontoxic, and essentially free of sulfur and aromatics.

From an environmental standpoint, Biodiesel is the only alternative fuel to have fully completed the health effects testing requirements of the Clean Air Act.

The largest user of Biodiesel in the United States is the U.S. Department of Defense who are reported to have purchased more than 5.2 million gallons during the 2003-2004 contract year. Interestingly, some forms of Biodiesel are available at retail pumps in many locations throughout the Midwest.

Cow Power

Another alternative energy source that is emerging in Vermont is “Cow Power”. This system capitalizes on Vermont’s farming industry by utilizing “biogas” (methane) that is created using cow manure. An anaerobic digester is built on a farm where the manure is collected. The digester holds the farm waste at roughly 100 degrees for more than 20 days. In the process gas is produced by the bacteria in the digester which is delivered to a modified natural gas engine. The gas is then burned to generate electricity.

One of the key advantages to this system is the reduction of Methane released into the environment. Methane is approximately 20 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

C. Goals and Policies

Goals

1. To encourage a pattern of settlement and land use that uses energy efficiently.
2. To promote the design and construction of buildings and structures that are energy efficient and postpone the need for costly sources of energy.

3. To encourage the development of local renewable energy sources and to reduce dependence on outside foreign energy sources.
4. To increase public awareness and use of energy conservation practices through educational efforts.

Policies

1. Major public investments, such as schools, public recreational areas, and municipal facilities need to be situated within or in close proximity to the villages of Vershire.
2. The rehabilitation or the development of new buildings and equipment should use proven design principles and practices with the lowest life cycle costs.
 - a. Where land development or subdivisions are proposed, design plans should work towards the goal of locating structures and buildings on the site which reflect sound energy conservation principles, such as solar and slope orientation and protective wind barriers. Use of the cluster planning concept, where buildings are concentrated in one area of a site with a complementing off-set of open space, is an approach that encourages energy conservation and efficiency; and
 - b. Visual effects of electrical generation, transmission, and distribution facilities should be minimized whenever feasible.
3. Where generation, transmission, and distribution facilities or service areas are proposed, such facilities or areas should be encouraged only when they complement the recommended land use patterns set forth in this plan.
4. To promote alternatives to the automobile, the acquisition of land or rights to land by the Town or other qualified entities for the future development of bikeways and footpaths is encouraged in the village areas or other areas of concentrated settlement, provided that they do not put an undue financial burden on the Town.
5. To reduce the demand for commuter transportation facilities and energy, the development of broadband services, energy efficient home occupations and small-scale home business is encouraged.
6. To promote energy efficient commuting, the community supports state and regional transportation programs serving Vershire.

XII. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS

Vershire is bounded by Chelsea, Corinth, Strafford, and West Fairlee. All of these towns have planning programs and planning commissions. All of these towns have plans in effect; Chelsea 2002, Corinth 2001, Strafford 2003, and West Fairlee in 2005.

These towns have land use regulations as follows:

- Chelsea: Has zoning bylaws with districts, including a historic design and review overlay district in the Village Area. These bylaws were revised in 2005.
- Corinth: Has no zoning ordinance or districts but adopted subdivision regulations in 1995.
- Strafford: Has had multi-district zoning bylaw for at least 15 years, and was one of the first towns in the area to have zoning. Strafford also has a subdivision bylaw. They are currently revising their zoning bylaws.
- West Fairlee: West Fairlee does not have land use regulations but are considering. The Town adopted a comprehensive Town Plan, that utilizes very stringent and specific language in an effort to protect the town during an Act 250 proceeding.

Vershire shares numerous activities and services with surrounding towns, including school services, rescue squad and fire protection. The town is also a member of the Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Commission (TRORC).

TRORC's regional plan covers 30 towns including Vershire. Since the preparation of the Vershire Town Plan was done with the assistance of the Regional Commission, no conflicts between the two have arisen. In fact, the two plans have similar policy statements regarding the need for development that does not overburden services. In addition, no specific development goals in this plan conflict with any regional goals.

The neighboring plans have been read in the context of the proposed Vershire Town Plan. Once again, no conflicts exist in either general philosophy or specific development proposals along town borders.

Recommendations

1. To encourage continued communication and cooperation between Vershire and it's neighboring towns.
2. To continue participation in the Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Commission.
3. To exchange planning information and development data with neighboring communities.

XIII. Implementation

A. Putting the Plan Into Action

The character of Vershire, its people, and landscape has been created over the years through the individual and collective decisions of its citizens and public officials. The efficiency, attractiveness, and well-being of the community is determined, in part, by the ability of the town to plan for its needs and to find a mechanism to put planning goals into action.

Previous elements of this Plan have been centered on existing conditions, probable trends and policy development which, when combined, represent a vision for the kind of town Vershire desires for the future. One thing is certain - the community will change. The opportunity is that citizens and town officials together can direct this change consistent with their desires, using a variety of mechanisms.

The following sections describe the tools and techniques that could be used to implement the Vershire Town Plan.

B. Adoption of the Plan

Adoption of the Vershire Town Plan by the Selectboard, in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Vermont Planning and Development Act (24 V.S.A., Chapter 117), is the first step in putting this Plan into action. Through its adoption, the town accepts the principles and policies as set forth in this Plan as in the public interest and as a guide for the future growth and development decision affecting Vershire.

C. Ongoing Planning

Planning for change is a continual process for the town and will require the involvement of the Planning Commission and the public to ensure that the goals and policies of the Plan are integrated into the decisions affecting land use, taxation, and public investments in Vershire.

The Vershire Town Plan is not a permanent document on community desires or values. Its life is limited to 5 years by statute (24 V.S.A., Section 4387). The Planning Commission is responsible for the maintenance and amendment of the plan. Within the next five years following adoption of the plan, the Planning Commission will need to evaluate the plan in light of new conditions and needs. Re-adoption of an updated plan will require notice to the townspeople and finally action by the Selectboard.

At any time following adoption of the plan, the Selectboard may request the Regional Commission to approve the Plan or amendments to a plan. Before approving a plan, the

Regional Commission shall find that the plan meets four basic tests [24 V.S.A., Section 4350(b)].

Approval of the plan provides an improved legal standing for the town to influence and integrate its planning policies with State agency planning affecting land use. After January 1991, State agency plans will need to be adjusted to the policies and priorities of this plan to the extent feasible.

D. Implementation Tools

Vermont law enables the town to implement the adopted Vershire Town Plan through a variety of ways. Regulation of land use and development through rules adopted by the voters is one possible method. Because these regulations are susceptible to legal challenge and must clearly benefit the public, discretion must be used. Well-recognized and utilized means include zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations. Examples of potential implementation tools include:

Zoning Bylaws - Zoning bylaws are a commonly used method for guiding development at the local level. Zoning may regulate:

- Uses of land
- The placement of buildings on lots
- The relationship of buildings to open space, and
- The provision of parking, signs, landscaping and open space

Zoning generally involves partitioning the town into districts or zones that have a different set of uses, densities, and other standards for development. Zoning districts must be reasonably consistent with the Town Plan. As an alternative to conventional methods, the town may opt to implement a set of measurable performance standards for specific uses as opposed to dividing the Town into districts. This technique, referred to as "performance zoning", is designed to be more flexible and to recognize the specific conditions of each site proposed for development.

Subdivision Regulations - The town does have subdivision regulations, which were adopted in the 1990's. These regulations are administered by the Planning Commission. Such regulations govern the division of parcels of land and the creation of roads and other public improvements. Furthermore, subdivision regulations can ensure that land development reflects land capability, that critical open spaces and resources are protected from poor design or layout.

Flood Hazard Bylaws - Under Vermont law (24 V.S.A., Section 4424), the Town of Vershire may regulate the use of land in a defined flood hazard area adjacent to

streams and ponds. These bylaws can be established to ensure that design and construction activities within the limits of the 100 Year Flood Plain are designed so as to minimize potential for flood damage and to maintain use of agricultural land in flood-prone areas. As noted in the Natural Resources section of this Plan, property owners are eligible for federal flood insurance on buildings and structures at relatively low federally subsidized premium rates. However, such insurance cannot be obtained for properties in Vershire unless the Town has in effect a Flood Hazard Bylaw.

Sewage Ordinance - In addition to zoning, subdivision, and flood hazard bylaws, the Town may, through its Selectboard, adopt an ordinance to regulate the design and installation of on-site sewage systems. Under this ordinance, prior to the installation or replacement of a system, the landowner would first need a permit from the Vershire Board of Health (Select Board and Town Health Officer). However, this ordinance may be redundant as the state will regulate all new septic installations.

Highway Ordinances - The town has in effect a Highway Ordinance setting forth the standards and conditions for the maintenance, improvement, discontinuance, laying out and acceptance of Town highways. In addition, the ordinance includes provisions related to the reclassification of town highways (Classes 2, 3 and 4).

Lastly, the town does have, through its Selectboard, the ability to regulate private access to municipal roads through the issuance of "curb cut" permits to landowners. "Curb cuts" are places where a private driveway or road connects to a town highway. In granting a cut onto town roads, the Selectboard can give consideration to safety issues such as adequacy of sight distance and proximity to intersections as well as conformance with this plan.

Capital Budget – A capital budget and program is a financing approach that benefits the town greatly in the selection, prioritization and costing of capital projects. Under the capital budget, a project is selected (i.e. bridge refurbishment), a funding source determined (i.e. general taxes, and general obligation bond) and priority year given for each activity (i.e. construction in 2006). Collectively these capital projects make clear when public facilities will be placed to accommodate projected growth. When used in conjunction with the Town Plan and local bylaws, it can be a powerful mechanism for limiting the rate of growth in accordance with the fiscal capacity of taxpayers and other funding sources.

In addition, it is noted that under Vermont's Act 250 law, in granting a Land Use Permit for a major development or subdivision, the District Environmental Commission must first find that the project is in conformance with the town's capital budget. [See 10 V.S.A., Section 6086(a)(10).] Accordingly, this mechanism gives the town an indirect method of implementing its policies and priorities as set forth in the plan.

While both the town and school district have an informal system of capital programming, it is recommended that a Capital Budget Committee be established to work with the

Select Board and School Directors in the development of a list of capital needs and expenditures and to formally present a Capital Budget and Program for adoption.

Vermont Community Development Program - Since the mid-1970's, the Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) has made grant funds available to towns for community projects. Historically, the major focus of the program has been on housing rehabilitation and affordable housing projects benefiting low and moderate-income families.

The town should investigate the Vermont Community Development Program and its potential to assist the community in addressing its housing needs. The Regional Commission and the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development are resources available to assist. (PH: 802-828-3217).

Act 250 - Since 1970, Vermont has had in place a statewide review system for major developments and subdivisions of land. Exactly what constitutes a "development" or "subdivision" is subject to a rather large and involved set of definitions. However, generally, commercial and industrial projects on more than one acre of land; construction of 10 or more units of housing; subdivision of land into 6 or more lots; construction of a telecommunication tower over 20 feet in height; and development over 2,500 feet in elevation qualifies.

Prior to these activities being commenced, a permit must first be granted by the District Environmental Commission. In determining whether or not to grant a permit, the Commission shall evaluate the project in relation to ten specific review criteria.

These criteria relate to the environmental, economic, and social impacts of the proposed project on the community and region. Parties to Act 250 proceedings include the town, through the Planning Commission and Selectboard, the State, and the Regional Commission. One criterion that needs to be addressed is whether the project is in conformance with the Vershire Town Plan. If a project were determined not to be in conformance with the plan, the District Environmental Commission would have a basis to deny a permit. As such, Act 250 reviews can take into consideration protection of those types of resources considered important to the well-being of the community. Accordingly, it is in the interest of the town to evaluate Act 250 projects affecting Vershire and to offer testimony, as appropriate.

Coordination of Private Actions - Citizens and private enterprise have a vested interest in the well being of the town. The actions of the private sector being the construction of homes and businesses, land conservation, and the use of land for recreation and agriculture should relate positively to the goals and policies as set forth in this Plan.

1. It is in the interest of the town, through the Planning Commission and Selectboard, to develop a cooperative relationship with private investment activities that may have a significant impact on the community values and policies

set forth in the plan. By working together in a cooperative venture early in the process of planning for a project, an adversarial relationship can be avoided.

Contacts that should be maintained include:

- Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation
- Vermont Land Trust and Upper Valley Land Trust
- Twin State Housing Trust
- Owners of significant properties of high resource or development value, and
- Major employers in Vershire

Conservation Activities - Conservation programs are an effective means of securing protection of valuable farm and forestland or significant natural resources. The community-wide survey conducted as part of this Plan update requested public input regarding the appropriateness of private conservation efforts. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

Techniques available involve voluntary direct work between non-profit conservation organizations and affected landowners such as donation of conservation easements, bargain-sales of land, and limited development schemes.

The land trust movement has grown immensely during the past twenty years, particularly in Vermont. Land trusts offer viable means of bringing together the needs of property owners with the community interests. The Vermont Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy are particularly well-recognized organizations. Several organizations are also involved in water quality protection. It is the intent of this plan to implement its policies through coordination and the involvement of these organizations and others dedicated to public purposes.

E. Guidelines for Growth

The following guidelines are intended to help town officials, residents and developers work together to plan and design developments consistent with the goals and policies of this plan. These guidelines are suggested ways to implement the plan. They are not mandatory and are not intended to be strictly adhered to in every case. They are offered to give landowners and officials a common, but flexible framework for preparing plans and making decisions.

Siting New Development - New development should be sited to:

1. Be compatible with the historic settlement pattern;
2. Maintain functional integrity of deer wintering areas;

3. Be cost efficient for municipal services; and
4. Conserve the agricultural potential of primary agricultural soils by:
 - Keeping primary agricultural soils available for agricultural production unless the only economically viable use of the land would be from incompatible uses;
 - And utilizing creative planning and design to minimize the reduction of agricultural potential.

Designing New Development - Landowners should design and phase new development, particularly large residential development to:

1. Avoid overloading public facilities and services;
2. Protect and promote the harmonious balance between buildings and useful, well-defined open space, and a human-scaled character of structures and settlements;
3. Be compatible with desired habitat conditions, public outdoor recreation;
4. Take advantage of opportunities to enhance and/or restore habitats by establishing native vegetative diversity or provide other wildlife benefits;
5. Mitigate the effects of proposed actions on identified archeological sites;
6. Be compatible with the qualities that make historic areas, structures or sites significant;
7. Protect the community trail system from activities which would unduly compromise desired trail experiences and uses; and
8. Incorporate the following visual elements:
 - Unobtrusive heights of buildings;
 - Vegetative screening;
 - Preservation of native vegetation;
 - Unobtrusive location of utilities; and
 - Minimal alterations to topography.

Public Facilities and Services - Major new developments should pay a proportionate fair share of the increased cost of providing public facilities or services to the development.

Roads - New roads, private or public, should be designed and constructed to:

- Minimize impacts to large woodlands and wildlife corridors (if roads and trails are desired, locate them along the outer edge of the areas and limit trail use to low-impact activities compatible with the habitat objectives);
- Meet town road standards; and
- Minimize impacts on desired habitat conditions, water quality and other ecological functions.

Landowners requesting upgrades of Class 4 roads to Class 3 should pay the costs of the necessary improvements. (19 V.S.A., Section 711).

New private development roads should remain the responsibility of the residents. If stream crossings are necessary for new development, efforts should be made to minimize their impacts on aquatic life.

Water and Sewer Systems - Prospective developers should demonstrate the ability to provide an adequate supply of potable water for their developments without impairing the quality or quantity of existing water supplies.

Developers should protect the quality and yield of groundwater by limiting land use activities within recharge areas.

Vegetation Management - Timber harvesting should be consistent with the Vermont Forest, Parks and Recreation's Acceptable Management Practices.

Deer wintering areas should be managed according to the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife's *Management Guide for Deer Wintering Areas in Vermont*, (1990).

When managing timber along streams designated as important wildlife corridors, avoid harvesting trees within 100 feet of a stream.

Energy - New development should reduce energy used for transportation by:

- Minimizing unnecessary lengths and widths of new roads in order to reduce energy used for trips, materials, construction, and maintenance;
- Laying out new roads to allow clustering of structures, unit orientation for optimum solar gain, and location of structures in wind shadows;
- Locating development to facilitate creation of public and pooled transportation and promote pedestrian access to activities and facilities within and among settlements;
- Using local materials and labor in construction to reduce transportation energy costs; and

- Providing appropriate opportunities for jobs, retail goods and services within villages and neighborhoods in order to reduce the need for travel.

Involvement with the Regional Economy - Ideally, a new or expanding business affecting Vershire should:

- Create community pride and have a positive effect on the community's image;
- Strengthen and preserve the community's assets, particularly those identified in the Town Plan as important;
- Provide fiscal revenues that exceed direct and indirect costs;
- Invest in the community (e.g., sponsor groups and activities, allow community use of land and buildings, build affordable housing, provide day care);
- Help keep money circulating in the community (e.g., be owned by local residents; hire local people; use local resources or products; provide services or products presently obtained from outside community);
- Produce products or services that meet community needs and will benefit the community;
- Add value to a local renewable resource or product (e.g., dairy, cheese factory, furniture manufacturer);
- Be committed to reducing negative environmental impacts; and
- Minimize traffic impacts.