

The Purpose of Enhanced Consultation

The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission's contract with the Department of Economic, Housing, and Community Development (Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development), and Vermont Statutes require the Commission to carry out consultation meetings with all of the towns in the region. The goals are to develop a more consistent and meaningful relationship between the RPC and the Municipality, and to improve the effectiveness of municipal and regional plans, and planning programs by achieving the goals of Title 24, §4302.

Outcome of Consultation

Through this consultation process we hope to better understand the needs of our communities and to have our communities understand how we can work together to advance better planning. Consultations will involve the discussion of important local and regional issues, local planning and training needs, new statutory requirements, planning programs and opportunities available through the TRORC, and importantly, consideration of how effectively the municipal plan addresses Vermont's statutory planning goals.

This consideration will include a qualitative review of the municipal plan, with suggestions as to how the plan might be improved to more effectively satisfy the statutory goals referenced above. Specific findings are reported on each of the following questions:

1. Which parts of the plan are particularly effective in implementing the statewide goals?
2. In which areas do we believe the plan falls short in advancing those statewide goals?
3. What specific opportunities exist to improve the town plan so that it more effectively addresses the statewide goals?

This consultation and plan review is separate and distinct from the formal municipal plan approval process carried out pursuant to 24 V.S.A. §4350, but it does contribute to the municipal confirmation action specified under that section of the Planning and Development Act.

Enhanced Consultation Agenda Items for Tuesday, September 25, 2012

- Important local & Regional issues
- Local planning and training needs
- New statutory requirements
- Planning programs and opportunities
- TRORC services
- Qualitative review of Municipal Plan

Royalton Town Plan Review

The Royalton Town Plan was adopted on March 2, 2010. It was drafted with assistance from the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission.

Required Elements

1. **Statement of Objectives, Policies, and Programs:** The Plan has goals, policies and recommendations. Recommendations for action are well thought out.
2. **Land Use Plan:** The Royalton Town Plan includes a solid Land Use Plan that does an excellent job identifying the location, amount and intensity of most types of development. The density of housing within the village should be addressed more obviously. However, the character of each land use area is not clearly described.
3. **Transportation Plan:** The Transportation chapter does not adequately address multi-modal transportation.
4. **Utility and Facility Plan:** The Utilities/Facilities plan does not contain any information relating to infrastructure improvements (should include priority of needs, costs of needed improvements and potential funding for improvements).
5. **Natural Areas, Scenic and Historic Features:** The Plan clearly identifies areas in the community that are significant for natural, scenic and historic reasons. Wetlands are not discussed.
6. **Educational Facilities Plan:** Educational facilities are minimally addressed.
7. **Implementation Plan:** Implementation is discussed in two short paragraphs with no specific guidance or program information included.
8. **Relationship to adjacent towns and the region:** The Plan's relationship to adjacent towns is minimally addressed.
9. **Energy Plan:** The Energy Plan does not contain sufficient information regarding the community's energy needs, scarcities or costs. The connection between land use patterns and energy use is not clearly identified.
10. **Housing Element:** Low and moderate housing is very minimally addressed.
11. **Economic Development Plan (new):** Economic development including the location, type and scale of development is well addressed throughout the Plan.

Statewide Planning Goals

1. **Land Use:** The Royalton Plan addresses land use in a strong fashion, particularly with the inclusion of the Exit 3 Interchange Study as part of the Plan. Language throughout the Plan is very clear with regard to avoiding sprawl. However, the South Royalton Village Area extends beyond the natural village boundaries to the west in such a fashion that, if village style commercial development is allowed, it would have the effect of creating a strip of commercial development. Additionally, the Land Use Plan does not clearly address high-density residential and where it should be located.

2. **Economic Development:** The Plan encourages a broad range of economic development opportunities throughout the community while working to discourage sprawl.
3. **Education:** The Plan includes information regarding vocational and adult education opportunities.
4. **Transportation:** Access management is adequately discussed, as is public transportation. The Plan does not include narrative of policy relating to multi-modal transportation. Rail should also be addressed.
5. **Natural, Scenic, and Historic Resources:** The Plan does identify most areas required by statute (excluding wetlands). There are limited policies established relating to these elements, but many recommendations for action that (if implemented) would lead to additional policies.
6. **Air, Water, Wildlife, and Land Resources:** The pattern of development proposed in the Plan appears to adequately maintain and improve the quality of these resources.
7. **Energy:** The efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources is addressed in a very vague and limited fashion.
8. **Recreation:** Recreation is adequately addressed.
9. **Agriculture and Forestry:** In general, the Plan discusses agriculture and forestry in such a fashion that it meets state planning goals, but more could be included with regard to the development of value-added products.
10. **Efficient use of natural resources/extraction and restoration of earth resources:** Earth resources are minimally addressed.
11. **Safe and affordable housing:** The location of high density multi-family housing is not discussed. Housing for the elderly is also not included in the Plan.
12. **Community Facilities and Services:** The Utilities and Facilities plan does not contain adequate information regarding the planning of public facilities or infrastructure improvements.
13. **Child Care:** Childcare is addressed.

Regional Plan

The primary area of concern with regard to consistency with the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan is related to the size of the South Royalton Village Area. The area along North Windsor St. that extends beyond the built-up village center area represents a strip of road that could easily (based on the types of uses allowed under the village areas) become representative of strip development, despite the Plan's clear direction to avoid this pattern of development. This area of conflict was highlighted as part of TRORC's approval of this plan.

In the area designated as the Foxville Hamlet in the Exit 3 Study (and incorporated into the plan's Land Use element). "Small-scale retail" is proposed as an appropriate use for this land use area. While other parts of the plan make it clear that primary retail is to be directed into Village Areas, and strip development is discouraged, the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes "small-scale retail" is cause for concern when compared to the 2012 Regional Plan. The Regional Plan designates this area as Rural and does not include a retail component.

Summary

Strengths

- The Royalton Plan addresses land use in a strong fashion, particularly with the inclusion of the Exit 3 Interchange Study as part of the Plan. Language throughout the Plan is very clear with regard to avoiding sprawl.
- The Plan clearly identifies areas in the community that are significant for natural, scenic and historic reasons.
- The Plan encourages a broad range of economic development opportunities throughout the community while working to discourage sprawl.

Weaknesses

- The Utilities/Facilities plan does not contain any information relating to infrastructure improvements (should include priority of needs, costs of needed improvements and potential funding for improvements).
- The Energy Plan does not contain sufficient information regarding the community's energy needs, scarcities or costs. The connection between land use patterns and energy use is not clearly identified.
- Wetlands are not addressed in the Natural Resources element.

Opportunities

- Work with the Selectboard/Town Administrator to determine what future infrastructure/facility investments are needed, what the priority for investment should be and what these investments might cost.
- Work with the Regional Planning Commission to update Energy Plan with TRORC model.
- Utilize a Municipal Planning Grant in 2013 to bring update of Town Plan with assistance from the Regional Planning Commission.

Other Notes

There are some areas of inconsistency between the Plan and parts of the Exit 3 Study. For example, the Land Use Plan indicates that the area along Route 107 (adjacent to the border with Bethel) is designated as Commercial/Industrial; while in the Exit 3 Study report this area is designated as Residential. This conflicting information might be an issue during an Act 250 proceeding.