

**RE: TOWN OF SHARON, VERMONT
PLAN REVIEW
CASE # 24-1**

BACKGROUND

Pursuant to 24 V.S.A., Section 4350, the Town of Sharon, Vermont requested TRORC to review and approve the Sharon Town Plan adopted on 08/21/2023. The Plan encompasses all land in the Town of Sharon and is referred to hereinafter as the Plan.

Section 4350 provides that prior to approving a Plan, the Regional Commission find that the Plan meets four tests. These tests are that the Plan is:

- A. Consistent (as defined in 24 V.S.A. Section 4302(f)(1)) with the planning goals in Section 4302 of Chapter 117;
- B. Compatible (as defined in 24 V.S.A. Section 4302(f)(2)) with the Regional Plan;
- C. Compatible (as defined in 24 V.S.A. Section 4302(f)(2)) with the approved plans of other municipalities within the Region; and
- D. Inclusive of all elements required of a plan as set forth in 24 V.S.A., Section 4382.

Staff have reviewed this Plan and offer the following information and staff recommendations to the Board. TRORC held a Public Hearing on this review on Wednesday, September 27, 2023, in Woodstock, Vermont.

This review is based upon the Town Plan as adopted.

FINDINGS

A. Is the Plan consistent with the planning goals?

NOTE: "Consistent with the goals" requires substantial progress toward attainment of the goals, unless the planning body determines that a particular goal is not relevant or attainable. If such a determination is made, the planning body shall identify the goal in the plan and describe the situation, explain why the goal is not relevant or attainable, and indicate what measures should be taken to mitigate any adverse effects of not making substantial progress toward that goal. The municipal determination of relevancy of a goal is itself subject to regional review.

General Goals

1. Is a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework established to guide decisions?

Yes. The 2023 Sharon Town Plan is a comprehensive planning document to guide municipal decision making that has been divided into 10 distinct chapters that are required under V.S.A. Title 24, Ch. 117, §4382. Required goals of the Plan are under V.S.A. Title 24, Ch. 117. §4302.

2. **Is citizen participation encouraged at all levels of the planning process?**
Yes. The Plan incorporates findings from a 2020 survey which gathered public input in lieu of a public forum cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic (p. 4-5, 11) as well as sought resident opinions in-person at a booth as part of Old Home Day events in 2021.
3. **Is consideration being given to the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development to the municipality, region, and state?**
Yes. The Plan recognizes the implications of growth and development especially on municipal services and public facilities (p. 16, 18). Trends and development patterns were assessed so “the Plan can help the community make informed choices in directing the patterns of its future growth” (p. 3).
4. **Is the municipality working creatively together with other municipalities to develop and implement plans?**
Yes. It is a goal of the Plan to “work with neighboring towns and the region to encourage good land use practices and environmental policy that benefits the citizens of Sharon” (p. 12). As such, the Town has set policies that encourage continued communication, cooperation, and the exchange of planning information and development data with its neighboring communities, especially Royalton, Strafford, and Tunbridge.

Specific Goals

A plan for a municipality shall be found to be consistent with the goals established in 24 V.S.A. Section 4302, and consistent with the regional plan for regional approval.

1. **Is development planned to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside?**
 - a. **Is intensive residential development being encouraged primarily in areas that are identified as community centers, and is strip development along highways being discouraged?**
Yes. The Plan states that multi-family development will be allowed in the village and “density in the Rural Residential Area must be low” (p. 17). Regarding strip development, the Plan states that it “is emblematic of sprawl in communities nationwide and is inappropriate for any commercial areas in Sharon” (p. 18). This is reiterated in the Transportation, Economic Development, and Scenic Resources sections, where strip development is described as, “an unacceptable land use pattern in the town of Sharon” (p. 35, 83, 100).
 - b. **Is economic growth being encouraged in locally-designated and any state-designated growth areas, and/or employed to revitalize existing urban or village centers?**
Yes, growth is encouraged in locally-designated and state-designated growth areas (p. 15-16, 18). The Sharon Town Plan includes the Small Enterprise Area, which does not allow principal retail, as it is in the Regional Rural Area (p. 17-18).

The Town takes part in the Vermont Downtown Program's Village Center Designation program and encourages new growth and vitality in that area (p. 81-82, 84).

c. Do plans for public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area?

Yes. "Major public investments" are "encouraged and endorsed only on finding that they will not unreasonably or unnecessarily jeopardize or endanger the unique and special character of the Village Area" (p. 16). The town "encourage(s) a pattern of development that complements the traditional settlement pattern clearly recognized and existing in the town" through "controlled and orderly growth" (p. 100).

d. Does the plan support development being undertaken in accordance with smart growth principles (as defined in 24 V.S.A. Section 2791(13))?

Yes, development policies throughout the Plan are in accordance with smart growth principles. The Town's goal is to "Respect the community's identity and maintain qualities of scale and form with existing development" (p. 12). The town's transportation policy "[embraces] smart growth that directs development into existing village centers" (p. 53).

2. Does the Plan support providing for a strong and diverse economy with satisfying and rewarding job opportunities that maintain high environmental standards; and expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes?

Yes. The Town, "strives to have its local economy grow at a pace that benefits the community, without straining municipal services" (p. 81). To do so, the Town is in support of building "a strong, diverse regional economy that provides satisfying and rewarding employment opportunities for residents while maintaining environmental standards and the rural character of Sharon," and encourages "new business development in locations where services such as roads, fire protection, power, and high-speed internet access are available or planned" (p. 83).

3. Does the Plan support broadened access to education and vocational training opportunities sufficient to realize the full potential of residents?

Yes. It is a goal of the Town to "provide safe and secure learning environments where high quality educational opportunities are provided to all students" (p. 45). Sharon's public school educates students through 6th grade, at which point students may choose to enroll in nearby schools. Further instruction is available through Hartford Area Career and Technology Center, which serves surrounding high schools, private schools, and home-study students with its 19 programs. Adult education is available through Seven Stars Arts Center in Sharon, Vermont Law School, Vermont Technical College, and Dartmouth, among others (p. 46-47). The Plan directs the school board to "identify career, vocational, and technical education needs by working with employers and the staff of the secondary schools (p. 48).

4. **Does the Plan support the provision of a safe, convenient, economic and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.**
- a. **Does the Plan provide that highways, air, rail, and other means of transportation be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated?**
 Yes. The Plan notes that the nearest small airport is in Lebanon, NH, larger ones are located in Burlington, VT, and Manchester, NH (p. 29). The nearest rail station is in White River Junction, VT (p. 29). The Plan seeks to support connection to these regional amenities through continued encouragement of bus use through Tri-Valley Transit and maintenance of roads under its jurisdiction (p. 34-35). The transportation chapter sets the goal of maintaining “a transportation system that is safe, energy efficient and meets the varying needs of Sharon residents while supporting the Town’s rural, environmental, historic, and scenic values” (p. 29, 34). The town supports additional infrastructure and improvements to make the town more hospitable for pedestrians and bicyclists (p. 35-36).
5. **Does the Plan identify and support the protection and preservation of important natural and historic features of the community’s landscape, including: significant natural and fragile areas; outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands; significant scenic roads, waterways, and views; and important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas?**
 Yes. The Plan recognizes natural and fragile areas including wetlands, riparian habitat and archeological sites. It is a goal of the Town to “to maintain Sharon's environmental integrity and to protect its unique and fragile natural features” (p. 115). Special resources including “historic sites, archeological sites (including ancient stone chambers), scenic areas, and wetlands must be evaluated and respected when developing projects in the Rural Residential Area” (p. 16).
6. **Does the Plan seek to maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources?**
- a. **Are air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources being planned for development and use under the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A section 6086(a) (Act 250)?**
 Yes. The Plan recognizes the adverse effect that remote development has on “wildlife, forestry, water quality, recreation, and the aesthetic character of the community” (p. 16). It is a policy of the Town that mineral resources be appropriately sited and managed as to “minimize any adverse effects on water quality, fish and wildlife habitats, viewsheds and adjacent land uses” (p. 97).
- b. **Is the maintenance and improvement of water quality supported in accordance with the policies and actions set forth in the basin plans?**
 Yes. It is a goal of the Town to “maintain and enhance the quality and quantity of ground and surface water resources” (p. 89). The Plan recognizes the value and vulnerability of

the White River, and seeks to protect and enhance its value, especially through the White River Conservation Area's policies (p. 22-23).

c. Are forestlands proposed to be managed so as to maintain and improve forest blocks and habitat connectors?

Yes. It is a policy of the Town to “discourage development in contiguous forest blocks and habitat connectors to protect wildlife” (p. 93). “Construction of new roads in Sharon’s forest blocks is strongly discouraged” and “Development shall be sited to avoid adverse impact on” resources such as forest blocks and connectivity blocks the Town encourages preservation of forest blocks to benefit Sharon’s wildlife (p. 95, 17). The goal of the Plan’s Forest Conservation Area is to “maintain the land in its undeveloped state, to benefit Sharon by providing a source of clean water to streams and the contiguous space necessary to support wildlife” and has eight policies aimed at achieving that goal (p. 20-21).

7. Does the plan support the development of renewable energy resources, efficient use of energy, and reduced emissions of greenhouse gases?

a. Does the plan list any general strategies for achieving these goals, such as: increasing energy efficiency of new and existing buildings; identifying areas suitable for renewable energy generation; encouraging the use and development of renewable or lower emission energy sources for electricity, heat, and transportation; and reducing transportation energy demand and single occupancy vehicle use?

Yes. It is a policy of the Town to “improve the energy efficiency of all town buildings when improvements are being made” and they recommend this be done through the “energy audit and CIP regarding energy efficiency improvements in town buildings” (p. 40). The Plan outlines acceptable areas to locate renewable energy (p. 61-64) and it is goal of the Town to promote development of renewable energy (p. 69).

b. Does the plan list any specific strategies and recommendations for achieving these goals, such as those identified in the State energy plan?

Yes. The Plan outlines the State’s energy goals as written in the Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan (CEP) (p. 49-50). It is a policy of the Town to “continue to work towards meeting the 2050 energy goals” by participating “in programs such as the Vermont Climate Pledge Coalition to commit to meeting Vermont’s energy and climate goals” (p. 69).

8. Does the Plan seek to maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for residents and visitors?

a. Is growth being planned so as not to significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities?

Yes. It is a policy of the Town to “protect and enhance recreational opportunities and the natural beauty and scenic characteristics of Sharon” by ensuring “that major developments or subdivisions are sited and designed to promote their recreational resource value” (p. 111).

- b. Has public access to non-commercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, been identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate?**

Yes. It is a policy of the Town to “foster a stronger relationship for the protection and maintenance of trails and other recreational activities” and to “maintain recreational access to the White River” (p. 110).

9. Does the Plan encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries?

- a. Does the Plan encourage strategies to protect long-term viability of agriculture and forestlands, including maintaining low overall density?**

Yes. It is a policy of the Town that “where contiguous areas of high-value farming or forestry exist, or have significant potential to exist, fragmentation of these areas into uses other than those related to agriculture or forestry is discouraged” (p. 116).

- b. Has the manufacture and marketing of value added agricultural and forest products been encouraged?**

Yes. It is a goal of the Town to “ensure the viability of working lands associated with a sustainable forest products economy” (p. 98).

- c. Is the use of locally-grown food products encouraged?**

Yes. It is a goal of the town to “support the development of local enterprises that create markets for locally produced goods and services” (p. 84).

- d. Are sound forest and agricultural management practices encouraged?**

Yes. It is a policy of the Town that “farmers, loggers, and foresters should use Accepted Management Practices (AMP) and are encouraged to implement Best Management Practices (BMP) in their operations” (p. 116).

- e. Are public investments planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land?**

Yes. Major public investments in the Village Area “should be encouraged and endorsed only on finding that they will not unreasonably or unnecessarily jeopardize or endanger the unique and special character of the Village Area” (p. 16). This goal could be strengthened in the next Plan, as minimizing public investment-related development pressure in agriculture and forest land is not otherwise mentioned in the Plan.

10. Does the Plan provide for the wise and efficient use of natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetics of the area?

Yes. Existing and proposed mineral extraction shall be planned and managed to not adversely impact uses around the site, not significantly interfere with the function and safety of roads, minimize adverse effects on water quality, fish and wildlife habitats, and adjacent land uses, reclaim and re-vegetate sites, minimize noise and maintain the rural character of the Town (p. 97).

11. Does the Plan ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing?

a. Is housing encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income?

Yes. “This Town Plan recognizes the need for housing that is affordable at all socio-economic levels” and it is a goal of the Town to “keep housing affordable by planning for appropriately sized lots, accessory apartments, and clustered developments” (p. 75-76).

b. Does the Plan provide for new and rehabilitated housing to be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities?

Yes, partly. It is a policy of the Town that “housing for special needs populations, such as the elderly and disabled, shall be located in close proximity to the village center” and that “safe, affordable, energy-efficient homes” be supported (p. 76). The Plan does not specifically mention that new and rehabilitated housing can both meet those qualifications.

c. Does the Plan support sites for multi-family and manufactured housing that are readily available in similar locations to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings?

Yes, partly. The Plan notes that uses in the Village Area “should continue to be mixed, allowing for the development of multi-family housing, commercial (primary retail establishments) and civic uses where feasible” (p. 15). The Plan recognizes that “multi-family housing tends to be in short supply and, while the cost of the manufactured home could be affordable, finding land on which to place the home can be a barrier for residents” (p. 75). The Plan implies but does not specifically state that it supports readily available sites for multi-family and manufactured housing that are in similar locations as those used for single-family conventional dwellings.

d. Does the Plan allow for accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences allowing close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons?

Yes, partly. It is a policy of the Plan to “keep housing affordable by planning for appropriately sized lots, accessory apartments, and clustered developments,” including by informing “Sharon homeowners of their right to develop an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) on their owner-occupied property with a single-family residence” (p. 76). The Plan separately recognizes the need for vulnerable populations to be close to public services available in the village center, but does not specifically mention “cost effective care and supervision for relatives, or disabled, or elderly persons,” or link accessory dwelling units to those populations and needs.

12. Does the Plan for the provision and financing of an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs?

a. Does the Plan include services as fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal in its planning

for facilities and services?

Yes. The Utilities, Facilities and Education section of the Plan discusses these needs (p. 37-48).

b. Does the planned rate of growth exceed the ability of the town and the area to provide facilities and services?

No. It is a policy of the Town that “growth and development must not exceed the capacities of local facilities and services” (p. 40).

13. Does the Plan work to ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and integrate child care issues into the planning process, including childcare financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development?

Yes. Sharon has two licensed childcare facilities in Town and it is a goal of the Town to ensure childcare facilities meet the needs of the 4-Town Region (Sharon, Royalton, Strafford, Tunbridge) (p. 47).

14. Does the Plan encourage flood resilient communities?

a. Is new development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas avoided? If new development is to be built in such areas, are polices in place to not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion?

Yes. It is a policy of the Town that “new fill, the construction of new buildings, and commercial, industrial, and residential uses in mapped flood zones and in the river corridor are prohibited” (p. 27). It is also a policy that “utilities shall be located away from... floodplains” (p. 100).

b. Is the protection and restoration of floodplains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion encouraged?

Yes. It is a policy of the Town that “upland forests and watersheds should be maintained predominately in forest use to preserve high quality streams and to ensure that runoff and flood flows are reduced (p. 28). The Plan recommends active restoration, passive restoration and/or conservation to address issues of stream channel instability and floodplain protection (p. 87, 89).

c. Are flood emergency preparedness and response planning encouraged?

Yes. It is a policy of the Town to encourage “emergency management planning for flood response, mitigation, and recovery” (p. 28, 41-45).

B. Is the Municipal Plan Compatible with the Regional Plan?

The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan was adopted on July 15, 2020, and it will remain in effect until July 15, 2028.

The Sharon Town Plan is found to be currently compatible with the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan. As used in this review, the term "compatible with" has been

defined (in Section 4302) as meaning: that the Plan in question, as implemented, will not significantly reduce the desired effect of the implementation of the other plan (emphasis added). If a Plan, as implemented, will significantly reduce the desired effect of the other Plan (in this case, the Regional Plan), the Plan may be considered compatible if it includes the following:

- (a) a statement that identifies the ways that it will significantly reduce the desired effect of the other Plan;
- (b) an explanation of why any incompatible portion of the Plan in question is essential to the desired effect of the Plan as a whole;
- (c) an explanation of why, with respect to any incompatible portion of the Plan in question, there is no reasonable alternative way to achieve the desired effect of the Plan; and
- (d) an explanation of how any incompatible portion of the Plan in question has been structured to mitigate its detrimental effects on the implementation of the other Plan.

C. Is the Plan Compatible with Approved Plans of other Municipalities in the Region?

At the time of review of this Sharon Town Plan, the following municipalities have Plans approved by the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission that are in effect:

Barnard, Bethel, Bradford, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Chelsea, Corinth, Fairlee, Granville, Hancock, Hartford, Hartland, Norwich, Pittsfield, Plymouth, Pomfret, Randolph, Rochester, Royalton, Strafford, Thetford, Tunbridge, Vershire, West Fairlee, and Woodstock.

These approval decisions and Plans have been reviewed in the context of the above question. Based on this, we find the Sharon Town Plan to be compatible with these Plans.

D. Municipal Plan Elements - Are They Included?

A plan for a municipality shall include the following required elements. These elements or components are, in summary:

- (a) a statement of overall objectives and policies;
- (b) a current and future land use plan and maps;
- (c) a current and future transportation plan and maps;
- (d) a current and future utility and facility plan and maps;
- (e) a statement of policies for "special resources";
- (f) a current and future education plan and maps;
- (g) an implementation program;
- (h) a statement on relationship of plan to trends and plans for adjacent towns and the region;
- (i) an energy plan; and
- (j) a housing plan.
- (k) an economic development plan
- (l) a flood resiliency plan

1. Does the Plan include a statement of objectives, policies and programs of the municipality, to guide the future growth and development of land, public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Yes. Each section of the Plan includes goals, planning principles and recommendations to guide the future growth and development of land, public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

2. Does the Plan include a land use plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective land use, that:

A. Indicates those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, (using 6 VSA Section 8), residence, commerce, industry, public and semi-public uses and open spaces; areas reserved for flood plain; and areas identified by the State, the regional planning commission, or the town that require special consideration for aquifer protections, for wetland protection, for the maintenance of forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and habitat connectors, or for other conservation purposes?

Yes. The Sharon Town Plan includes several maps, among those are: (1) a Current Land Use Map, and (2) a Future Land Use Map.

In addition, Chapter 2- Land Use (p. 12-28), contains extensive general and specific goals, policies, and recommendations that clearly outline their intentions for future land use that is in keeping with the goals of the State and Region. The Plan's goals consider current and future land uses that support the desired forms of development and look to the future. The Plan has specific goals and policies for several of its land uses: Village Area, Rural Residential Area, Small Enterprise Area, Sharon Commerce Park, Forest Conservation Area, and White River Conservation Area. This chapter also includes sections on Flood Resilience, and Flood Hazard and River Corridors in Town, with goals and policies to maintain floodplain, protect wetland, and otherwise decrease flood risk and promote conservation. The Land Use chapter does not discuss aquifers.

B. sets forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services?

Chapter 2- Land Use (p. 12-28) describes the location, amount, intensity, and character of land uses, as well as the relationship between such development and the provision of necessary community facilities and services.

C. identifies those areas, if any, proposed for designation under chapter 76A of Title 24, together with, for each areas proposed for designation, an explanation of how the designation would further the plan's goals and the goals of 24 V.S. A. section 4302, and how the areas sought meets the requirements?

Yes. The Sharon Town Plan identifies Sharon's State Designated Village Area in the Current Land Use Map. Policy I of Chapter 7- Economic Development states that the town will "Maintain the town's participation in the Vermont State Designated Village Program for Sharon Village" (p. 84). Sharon does not have any areas proposed for designation under Title 24, Chapter 76A.

D. and indicates those areas that are important as forest blocks and habitat connectors and plans for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation and promote the health, viability, and ecological function of forests?

Yes. The Sharon Town Plan indicates areas important as forest blocks on its Future Land Use map, as well as discusses relevant goals and policies for the areas in Chapter 2- Land Use (p. 12-28). Policies include Policy 2 of the Forest Conservation Area: “Timber and wildlife management shall be the primary or dominant uses in this Area,” Policy 5: “Potential development must not present substantial risk of adverse environmental effects” and Policy 8, which provides guidance and principles for limited residential development in the Area (p. 21).

3. Does the Plan include a transportation plan, consisting of a map and a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities showing existing and proposed highways and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses, with indications of priority of need.

Yes. The Sharon Town Plan includes a (3) Transportation Map. Chapter 3- Transportation has goals and policies related to transportation (p. 29-36). Goals 2 and 3 and planning principles 1, 2 and 4.

4. Does the Plan include a utility and facility plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective community facilities and public utilities showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for community facilities and services, with indications of priority of need, costs and methods of financing.

Yes. Chapter 4- Utilities and Facilities (p. 37-48) includes a list of all town-owned buildings and land. The Plan also includes a (4) Utilities and Facilities map. Current and future needs are discussed in this chapter, including potential financing sources when relevant. The Plan does not specifically address recreation facilities, cemeteries, or telephone and internet providers.

5. Does the Plan include a statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Yes. It is a goal of the Plan to, “Protect forests, soils, water, air, and other natural resources” (p. 1). Specific policies on the preservation of natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources are found throughout the plan, including in Chapter 8- Resources, but also in Chapter 2- Land Use, and Chapter 5- Energy.

6. Does the Plan include an educational facilities plan consisting of a map and a statement of present and projected uses and the local public school system.

Yes. The Plan addresses education and educational facilities in the Education section of Chapter 4- Utilities and Facilities (p. 45-48). Educational facilities are noted on the (4)

Utilities and Facilities map.

7. Does the Plan include a recommended program for the implementation of the objectives of the development plan?

Yes, the Plan includes Chapter 10: Implementing the Plan, which gathers all recommendations from the Plan's other chapters, notes the responsible party or parties, priority, timeline and anticipated cost.

8. Does the Plan include a statement indicating how the plan relates to development trends and plans for adjacent municipalities, areas and the region developed under Title 24?

Partly, Chapter 1- Shaping Sharon's Future: Creating a Long-Term Vision, addresses the Plan's relationship to other plans in "Our 4-Town Future" and "Relationship to Other Plans." The Relationship to Other Plans section focuses mainly on current land uses and regulations along borders shared with Hartford, Norwich, Pomfret, Royalton, and Strafford (p. 10). The section does not address how the Plan interacts with these towns regarding shared forest blocks, water bodies, schools, or highways.

9. Does the Plan include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs and problems within the municipality, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy (including programs, such as thermal integrity standards for buildings, to implement that policy), a statement of policy on the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use likely to result in conservation of energy.

The Plan includes Chapter 5- Energy, which includes discussion of energy use and sources (p. 49-71). It also includes policies to promote energy conservation in private and public structures, "Policy J: Promote statewide programs designed to make energy efficiency improvements affordable and therefore more likely to be implemented," "Policy K: Promote energy efficient design residential and commercial buildings for all new construction," "Policy L: The Town will work towards more energy efficient measures in municipal buildings" (p. 70). Policies on the development of renewable energy resources include: "Policy A: Participate in the Public Utility Commission's Section 248 Certificate of Public Good application process to ensure that local energy, resource conservation, and development objectives are identified and considered in future utility development," among others (p. 69). Finally, the Energy Chapter has a goal "to encourage a continued pattern of development and land use that is energy efficient" which is supported by policies on patterns and densities of land use resulting in energy conservation (p. 70).

10. Does the Plan include a housing element that shall include a recommended program for public and private actions to address housing needs as identified by the regional planning commission pursuant to Section 4348a (a)(9) of Title 24. The program should use data on year-round and seasonal dwellings and include specific actions to address the housing needs of persons with low income and persons with moderate income and account for permitted residential development as described in section 4412 of this title.

Yes, in Chapter 6- Housing (p. 7-76). Sharon already allows ADUs and the Plan notes that they may "help reduce the housing shortage in Sharon and in the immediate region" (p. 75).

Chapter 6 includes the goal that “Sharon residents should have access to safe and affordable housing for all income levels,” which has three policies and a number of implementation actions, constituting a recommended program for addressing low- and moderate-income persons’ housing needs (p. 76).

11. Does the Plan include an economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Yes, in Chapter 7- Economic Development (p. 77-84). The Plan describes present conditions, the location, type, and scale of economic development, and identifies policies necessary to foster further growth.

12. Does the Plan include a flood resilience plan that:

- a. Identifies flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas based on river corridor maps provided by VT ANR or other maps recommended by the Secretary of Natural Resources, and designates those areas to be protected, including floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property?**

Yes, Chapter 2- Land Use includes a Flood Resilience section (p. 23-28) which identifies flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas. This section includes a policy which prohibits “new fill, the construction of new buildings, and commercial, industrial, and residential uses in mapped flood zones and in the river corridor” (p. 27).

- b. And recommends policies and strategies to protect the areas identified and designated and to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments?**

Yes, partly. A goal of the Flood Resilience section of Chapter 2 is to “Use sound planning practices that enable Sharon to recover from flooding quickly and in a manner that improves flood resilience, protects infrastructure and buildings from the potential of flood damage, and reduces cost to town taxpayers due to flood damage” (p. 27). This goal is supported by policies and implementation actions which would have the effect of protecting and mitigating risk to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments. Public safety and historic structures are not specifically mentioned in the goal or its supporting policies and implementation actions.

CONCLUSION

Based upon the above findings, it is the conclusion of TRORC that the Sharon Town Plan be approved. This approval shall remain in effect until the date that the Plan expires, or until it is amended or readopted and reviewed pursuant to these provisions, whichever occurs first.

DISCUSSION

Prior to issuing a Permit under Act 250, the District Environmental Commission or Environmental Court must find that the project is in conformance with the duly adopted Town Plan, where this Plan includes clear, unambiguous mandatory language regarding development that can be reviewed by these bodies as part of an Act 250 project application.

Comments and suggested improvements for the next iteration of the Sharon Town Plan:

1. While it is a policy of the Town that “housing for special needs populations, such as the elderly and disabled, shall be located in close proximity to the village center” and that “safe, affordable, energy-efficient homes” be supported (p. 76). The Plan does not specifically mention that new and rehabilitated housing can both meet those qualifications or that the housing should be coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
2. The Plan implies but does not specifically state that it supports readily available sites for multi-family and manufactured housing that are in similar locations as those used for single-family conventional dwellings.
3. The Plan separately recognizes the need for vulnerable populations to be close to public services available in the village center, but does not specifically mention “cost effective care and supervision for relatives, or disabled, or elderly persons,” or link accessory dwelling units to those populations and needs.
4. The Relationship to Other Plans section focuses mainly on current land uses and regulations along borders shared with Hartford, Norwich, Pomfret, Royalton, and Strafford (p. 10). The section does not address how the Plan interacts with these towns regarding shared forest blocks, water bodies, schools, or highways.

Dated this 27th day of September, 2023 at Woodstock, Vermont.

By: Peter G. Gregory
Peter G. Gregory, AICP, Executive Director