

## 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 April 23, 2012

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

## Pomfret Town Plan Review

The Town of Pomfret has been actively involved in municipal planning since 1977 and has had zoning since 1973. The Plan reviewed for this enhanced consultation was adopted in November of 2007.

### Required Elements

1. **Statement of Objectives, Policies, and Programs:** The plan has a good selection of goals, policies and recommendations for action. Recommendations for action are particularly good because they identify the responsible Appropriate Municipal Panel (AMP).
2. **Land Use Plan:** Land use plan lacks details regarding location, amount and intensity of development. No land use areas established in land use plan, either in text or on the Future Land Use Map. This is required by statute.
3. **Transportation Plan:** Transportation Plan does a reasonably good job identifying areas that need improvement in general terms. Addresses public transit.
4. **Utility and Facility Plan:** While buildings and facilities listed in the Plan, there is no discussion of their condition, priority of need, costs of needs and/or how these needs would be financed if they exist, a requirement of statute.
5. **Natural Areas, Scenic and Historic Features:** Plan addresses natural areas in a very general way but does not address scenic resources. Historic resources are discussed.
6. **Educational Facilities Plan:** The Plan adequately addresses education.
7. **Implementation Plan:** The Plan contains a good implementation section that focuses on key areas that are important to the community.
8. **Relationship to adjacent towns and the region:** The Plan contains a very good assessment of regional planning and Pomfret's relationship to other plans.
9. **Energy Plan:** Energy plan does not contain an analysis of resources, needs, scarcities or potential costs of energy, as is required by statute. While the Plan does contain a statement on the conservation of energy, there is no program related to it that will implement that policy. Minimal discussion about how land use patterns and densities result in the conservation of energy.
10. **Housing Element:** Housing is adequately addressed in the Plan.
11. **Economic Development Plan (new):** The Plan contains an Economic Development element.

### Statewide Planning Goals

1. **Land Use:** The Pomfret Town Plan does not adequately address land use. The lack of defined land use areas makes it appear as though the plan supports a disperse mix of uses throughout the town, although language about the protection of the community's rural character would seem counter to that perception.

It is the intent of statute that communities "plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural-countryside."

While it is likely that Pomfret also seeks this pattern of development, the lack of information in the Land Use Plan and associated map makes it difficult to see how it could achieve this goal. Given that a municipal plan is intended to guide land use regulations, and that land use regulations must be consistent with state planning goals, more detail must be added to this section, and land use areas need to be delineated.

2. **Economic Development:** The Plan does not adequately address economic growth or where it should occur. In fact, the Plan indicates that it is “not the town’s intention to create commercial/industrial districts now or in the near future”. This implies that commercial and industrial uses are acceptable everywhere. The character and scale of economic activity can be discussed without having to create commercial/industrial districts.
3. **Education:** The education chapter lacks any discussion of adult educational opportunities.
4. **Transportation:** The Plan does not address the transportation system and its relationship with energy use – more roads = more energy use.
5. **Natural, Scenic, and Historic Resources:** The plan identifies natural areas in a minimal fashion, and none of them are included as a map. Floodplains are not specifically addressed. Scenic resources are not addressed in detail. Historic resources are well addressed. None of these items include a clear program indicating how these things would be protected or preserved.
6. **Air, Water, Wildlife, and Land Resources:** These are addressed minimally.
7. **Energy:** The Energy chapter of the Plan lacks detail, needing more content that addresses renewable resources and energy conservation.
8. **Recreation:** The relationship between growth and the availability of recreational opportunities is briefly discussed. Forestry is not well addressed.
9. **Agriculture and Forestry:** Agriculture appears important to Pomfret. Language in the Plan indicates a desire to allow for a diversity of agricultural uses including agritourism.
10. **Efficient use of natural resources/extraction and restoration of earth resources:** Earth extraction is addressed.
11. **Safe and affordable housing:** Affordable housing is discussed in the Plan, but there is no discussion about multi-family housing and no indication of where this type of development would be appropriate.
12. **Community Facilities and Services:** There is very limited discussion of how public investments should be made in order to reinforce the general character and growth patterns of the area. This should be expanded on within the utilities/facilities, education, emergency management and transportation chapters.
13. **Child Care:** Child Care is addressed in a limited fashion.

## Summary

### Strengths

- Plan contains well-guided recommendations for action
- The Plan contains a very good assessment of regional planning and Pomfret’s relationship to other plans.

## Weaknesses

- Utilities & Facilities chapter lacks specific detail to guide future investments in infrastructure.
- Energy chapter lacks specific detail required by statute.
- Land use chapter and map does not establish land use areas (required by statute), and does not provide any information with regard to what uses are appropriate in specific locations or how dense development should be.

## Opportunities

- Work with the Regional Commission to add information to Energy Plan.
- Work with Selectboard and Budget Committee to collect information for Utilities & Facilities chapter.
- Revise land use chapter to adequately reflect Pomfret's rural character – which would include the creation of village land (and possibly hamlet) land use areas.
- Establish locations for commercial development, or at least clarify what types of commercial development are acceptable in specific areas.

## Regional Plan

After review of the current Pomfret Town Plan, it would be difficult for TRORC staff to recommend this plan for approval. The establishments of land use areas are a requirement of §4382(a)(2). Without these land use areas, it appears that commercial or industrial development is allowed in every area of the community, regardless of how rural those areas might be. Such freedom in development has the potential to overburden roads and services. At the very least, these land use patterns are not consistent with the Regional Plan, which by law, must be consistent with state law.

Much of the text of this plan focuses on keeping Pomfret the way it is. It is in the best interest of the community to establish land use areas based on the way things have been developed. The villages are denser than the surrounding towns. There are hamlets with concentrated density. The Planning Commission should identify these areas in the plans. Create a framework that allows home businesses, agriculture and residential development outside of these areas – with clear restrictions on where commercial development that is not consistent with these areas should go (or exclude entirely).