

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, February 5, 2013

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

Corinth Town Plan Review

The Corinth Town Plan was adopted on May 14, 2012. The Plan has not been approved by the Regional Planning Commission due to the potential for conflicts outlined below.

Required Elements

1. **Statement of Objectives, Policies, and Programs:** The Plan contains objectives and recommendations for action, but does not include any policy statements as is required under state statute.
2. **Land Use Plan:** The Plan does not effectively identify land use areas and the Land Use Plan does not discuss the location, amount, intensity and character of proposed land uses as is required under §4382. The Land Use Map identifies a number of villages, with all other areas identified as rural, but the narrative in the Plan does not include Village Areas or Rural Area specifically. Additionally, the boundaries used to identify the Villages are not clear.
3. **Transportation Plan:** The present-day road system is discussed, as well as an acknowledgement that future reclassification of Class 4 Roads may be required. Multi-modal transportation is not discussed.
4. **Utility and Facility Plan:** The Utilities and Facilities plan is only a general inventory. It does not contain any information regarding future needs of facilities, potential costs of maintenance or upgrades and potential financing methods as is required by statute.
5. **Natural Areas, Scenic and Historic Features:** The Plan vaguely discusses natural areas, but provides no detail with regard to how these resources might be protected. Historic features briefly mentioned but not actually identified except to mention that State has identified sites in town that are historically or architecturally significant. Scenic features are not identified or adequately discussed.
6. **Educational Facilities Plan:** Education is briefly addressed.
7. **Implementation Plan:** The Plan contains an inventory of potential implementation methods, but the lack of policy in the document makes it unclear how local officials would implement this plan as policies are essential to guide decision-making.
8. **Relationship to adjacent towns and the region:** The Plan does not adequately evaluate compatibility with neighboring plans, and incorrectly indicates that the Plan is consistent with the Regional Plan. The lack of information provided in terms of land use patterns makes consistency with the Regional Plan impossible to determine.
9. **Energy Plan:** The Plan contains a very brief section on energy resources. It does not discuss the energy needs of the community, scarcities or costs of energy. Additionally, there are no policy statements regarding conservation.
10. **Housing Element:** The Plan effectively recognizes that it does not have enough data to determine housing needs and proposes actions to be taken by the community to determine needs.
11. **Economic Development Plan (new):** The Plan contains a short Economic Development Plan. The Plan does not address the location, type and scale of development and contains no policies

related to economic growth. The Plan does propose a program to have private citizens encourage economic development.

Statewide Planning Goals

1. **Land Use:** A lack of required information in the Land Use chapter makes it impossible to determine consistency with State Planning Goals. The Plan indicates that maintaining the historic pattern of compact village centers surrounded by open countryside, but provides no specific guidance as to how that pattern would be maintained. The Land Use Plan does seem to indicate support for commercial development including retail, high-tech and industrial businesses, but does not identify whether these uses are appropriate everywhere or in specified locations. Allowing uses such as these (particularly retail) outside of villages would encourage strip development and therefore would be inconsistent with State Planning Goals.
2. **Economic Development:** The Plan appears to allow all forms of economic development everywhere, which is inconsistent with the historic pattern of development it seeks to preserve.
3. **Education:** Adult education and vocational education are addressed.
4. **Transportation:** The Plan minimally discusses transportation without mentioning multi-modal transportation in an effective manner.
5. **Natural, Scenic, and Historic Resources:** The Plan identifies some natural areas, and includes a natural resources map. However, the Plan does not identify rare or endangered species. The Plan does propose to conduct inventories related to areas important to wildlife, particularly endangered species.
6. **Air, Water, Wildlife, and Land Resources:** The Plan does it include any narrative or policy which indicates how it would effective preserve or protect any of these resources.
7. **Energy:** The Plan has no policies that encourage energy efficiency or renewable energy resources. It does mention the State's Residential Building Energy Code.
8. **Recreation:** The lack of detail in the Land Use chapter make it challenging to determine whether or not growth would significantly diminish the value or availability of outdoor resources as is required by statute.
9. **Agriculture and Forestry:** Agriculture and Forestry are not discussed in sufficient detail.
10. **Efficient use of natural resources/extraction and restoration of earth resources:** Mineral resources are minimally addressed.
11. **Safe and affordable housing:** While the Housing element does discuss affordable housing, there is no mention of where multi-family housing would be appropriate. Accessory dwelling units are not discussed.
12. **Community Facilities and Services:** The Plan seeks to maintain a pattern of growth that does not exceed the community's ability to provide services.
13. **Child Care:** Child care is minimally addressed.

Regional Plan

The lack of information with regard to land use, and the apparent encouragement of commercial development (including retail) in all areas of town, would lead staff to recommend that the TRORC board decline to approve the Corinth Town Plan. The poorly defined village areas (which appear only as indistinct circles) are not appropriate for a land use area map. Additionally, insufficient detail in nearly all chapters as well as a complete lack of Plan policy renders it impossible to make a recommendation for approval.

It should be noted that there are many recommendations that could be converted to policies by simply rewording them. For example, “The town should encourage the development of local renewable energy sources at an appropriate scale to reduce dependence on outside foreign energy sources” could be reworded to say “it is the policy of the town to encourage the development....”

Summary

Strengths

- The Plan effectively recognizes that it does not have enough data to determine housing needs and proposes actions to be taken by the community to determine needs.

Weaknesses

- The Plan does not effectively identify land use areas and the Land Use Plan does not discuss the location, amount, intensity and character of proposed land uses as is required under §4382.
- The Plan does not include any policy statements as is required under state statute.
- The Plan contains a very brief section on energy resources. It does not discuss the energy needs of the community, scarcities or costs of energy.
- The Plan does not contain any information regarding future needs of facilities, potential costs of maintenance or upgrades and potential financing methods as is required by statute.

Opportunities

- Work with the Regional Planning Commission to meet the requirements of state statute.
- Collect information regarding community facilities from the Selectboard to provide further detail to Utilities/Facilities chapter.
- Utilize TRORC energy chapter template to draft an energy chapter that meets state planning requirements.