

## 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 19th, 2013

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

## Plymouth Town Plan Review

The Plymouth Town Plan was adopted on June 13, 2012. The Plan was drafted with assistance from the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission which was funded by a Municipal Planning Grant from the Department of Economic, Housing and Community Affairs.

### Required Elements

1. **Statement of Objectives, Policies, and Programs:** The Plan contains goals, policies and recommendations. A number of policies are written with strong language so as to ensure that they are clear in their intent.
2. **Land Use Plan:** The Plan contains land use areas which address the location of development and the character of the area successfully. However, density and types of uses are not clearly discussed. While the title of each land use area appears to suggest a proposed acreage within the land use area (2 Acre Rural Areas, for example), neither narrative nor policy actually states the proposed density for each land use area.
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 and transit 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 identifies natural, scenic and historic areas very clearly, but there is little policy on the protection of these features.
6. **Educational Facilities Plan:** Education is briefly addressed.
7. **Implementation Plan:** The Plan contains a minimal inventory of potential implementation methods, but does not provide specific guidance as to how or who shall be responsible for implementation.
8. **Relationship to adjacent towns and the region:** The Plan does not adequately evaluate compatibility with neighboring plans or the Regional Plan.
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 renewable resources.
10. **Housing Element:** Housing is minimally addressed and contains little guidance on how affordable housing needs might be met by the community.
11. **Economic Development Plan (new):** The Plan does not contain an economic development chapter. It was adopted prior to this requirement.

### Statewide Planning Goals

1. **Land Use:** The Land Use Plan lacks detail with regard to commercial uses that is necessary to determine consistency with state planning goals. In general, the proposed pattern of

development is consistent with the goals of “compact village and urban centers surrounded by open countryside” and discouraging strip development along highways. However, in areas like the Vacation Resort Area and the Mountain Resort Area, vague terms like “limited commercial uses” make it challenging to determine if these uses would encourage sprawl or strip development.

2. **Economic Development:** Economic development is discussed in general terms throughout the document.
3. **Transportation:** The Plan addresses transportation minimally.
4. **Natural, Scenic, and Historic Resources:** The Plan does a good job identifying these areas, but does not contain much in the way of policy that would protect them.
5. **Air, Water, Wildlife, and Land Resources:** The Plan does not include specific policies which would indicate how it would effectively preserve or protect any of these resources.
6. **Energy:** The Plan has no policies that encourage renewable energy resources.
7. **Recreation:** Recreation is adequately addressed.
8. **Agriculture and Forestry:** Agriculture and Forestry are addressed generally. Accepted agricultural and silvicultural practices are not discussed.
9. **Efficient use of natural resources/extraction and restoration of earth resources:** Mineral resources are minimally addressed.
10. **Safe and affordable housing:** The Housing chapter clearly identifies locations for multi-unit housing. Accessory dwelling units are also discussed briefly.
11. **Community Facilities and Services:** The Plan seeks to maintain a pattern of growth that does not exceed the community’s ability to provide services.
12. **Child Care:** Child care is minimally addressed.

## Regional Plan

The Regional Plan has very specific language relating to retail development, the Plan states that *“principal retail establishments must be located in Town Centers, Designated Downtowns, or Designated Growth Centers to minimize the blighting effects of sprawl and strip development along major highways and maintain rural character.”* Because “limited commercial uses” could include retail and are located in the Vacation Resort Area and Mountain Recreation Area, there is the potential for conflicts to exist. It is essential that these uses be clarified before a determination of consistency between the local and regional plan can be made.

## Summary

### **Strengths**

- A number of policies are written with strong language so as to ensure that they are clear in their intent.
- The Plan identifies natural, scenic and historic areas very clearly.

## **Weaknesses**

- Density and types of uses are not clearly discussed. While the title of each land use area appears to suggest a proposed acreage within the land use area (2 Acre Rural Areas, for example), neither narrative nor policy actually states the proposed density for each land use area.
- 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.
- 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.

## **Opportunities**

- Work with the Regional Planning Commission to meet the requirements of state statute.
- Clarify general terms for uses and add specific language regarding densities.
- 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.