

## **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 Monday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013**

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

## Topsham Town Plan Review

The Topsham Town Plan was adopted on [date]. 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 goals, planning principles (policies) and recommendations for action. Planning principles are general in nature and could be more specific.
2. **Land Use Plan:** The Plan seeks to maintain the existing pattern of development, referencing consistency with existing development patterns as the rule-of-thumb for allowed densities and scale. Greater specificity with regard to densities is desirable. Types of development appropriate for land use areas are indicated.
3. **Transportation Plan:** The present-day road system is discussed. Multi-modal transportation is not discussed.
4. **Utility and Facility Plan:** The Utilities and Facilities plan contains information regarding future needs of facilities, but does not address potential costs of maintenance or upgrades and potential financing methods as is required by statute.
5. **Natural Areas, Scenic and Historic Features:** The Plan discusses natural areas, including planning principles that seek to maintain and enhance them, but provides no detail with regard to how the resources might be protected. Historic features briefly mentioned but not actually identified. Scenic features are not identified and are vaguely discussed.
6. **Educational Facilities Plan:** Education is adequately addressed.
7. **Implementation Plan:** The Plan contains a generalized implementation plan, but includes few specifics with regard to whom or how policy will be implemented.
8. **Relationship to adjacent towns and the region:** The Plan addresses its relationship to other plans in very general terms.
9. **Energy Plan:** The energy element outlines the energy needs of the community, as well as available resources. Costs of energy are not directly addressed. Policy statements regarding conservation and renewable energy are present.
10. **Housing Element:** Housing is discussed, but in very general terms. The need for elderly housing is barely addressed.
11. **Economic Development Plan (new):** The Plan contains a short Economic Development Plan. The Plan does not adequately address the location, type and scale of commercial development.

### Statewide Planning Goals

1. **Land Use:** The Plan seeks to maintain the existing pattern of development which generally identifies a preferred pattern of land use intent on attaining those goals of Section 4302.
2. **Economic Development:** Topsham's economy is somewhat limited because of its location and topography, but home businesses are strongly supported.

3. **Education:** Adult education and vocational education are not 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.
6. **Air, Water, Wildlife, and Land Resources:** Policy which indicates how Topsham would effectively preserve or protect any of these resources is limited.
7. **Energy:** The Plan encourages energy efficiency and renewable energy resources. It does not mention the State's Residential Building Energy Code.
8. **Recreation:** The pattern of development proposed in Topsham does not appear to negatively impact the availability of recreational resources. The Plan could expand substantially on what types of recreation (and where they are located) are available in the community.
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.
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

There do not appear to be any conflicts between the Topsham Town Plan and the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan.

## Summary

### **Strengths**

- The Plan seeks to maintain the existing pattern of development which generally identifies a preferred pattern of land use intent on attaining those goals of Section 4302.
- The Utilities and Facilities plan contains information regarding future needs of facilities.
- The Plan encourages energy efficiency and renewable energy resources.

### **Weaknesses**

- The Utilities and Facilities Plan does not address potential costs of maintenance or upgrades and potential financing methods as is required by statute.
- The need for elderly housing is barely addressed.
- The Plan does not identify rare or endangered species.
- There is no mention of where multi-family housing would be appropriate.

## **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.
- Utilize Habitat Block Data to better address rare and endangered species.