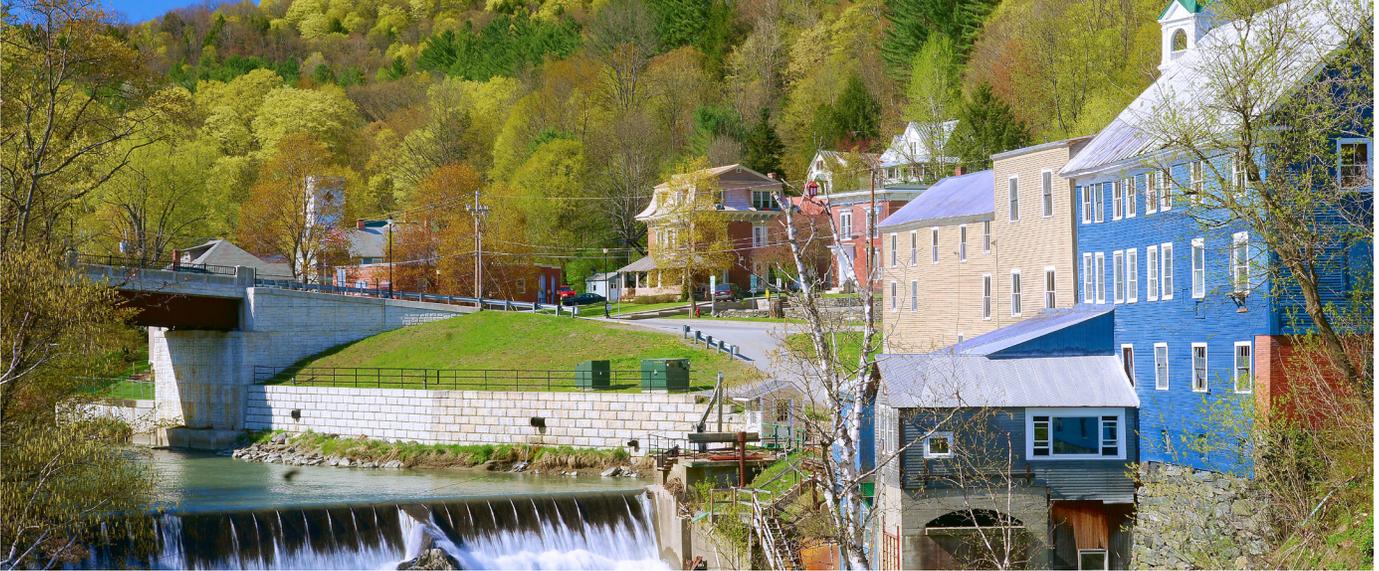


# INTRODUCTION



Bethel | © John Knox

## A. TRORC

The Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) is a compact of thirty municipalities in east-central Vermont. It was founded in 1970 by the acts of its constituent towns and is a political subdivision of state government. TRORC's programs are governed by representatives appointed by the selectboard from each of its member towns. TRORC exists to advocate for the needs of its members and to help bridge the opportunities and concerns that exist between towns and the State. TRORC's primary purposes are to provide technical services to town officials to act as a resource for local governments, and to conduct Regional planning and development activities.

## B. The Region

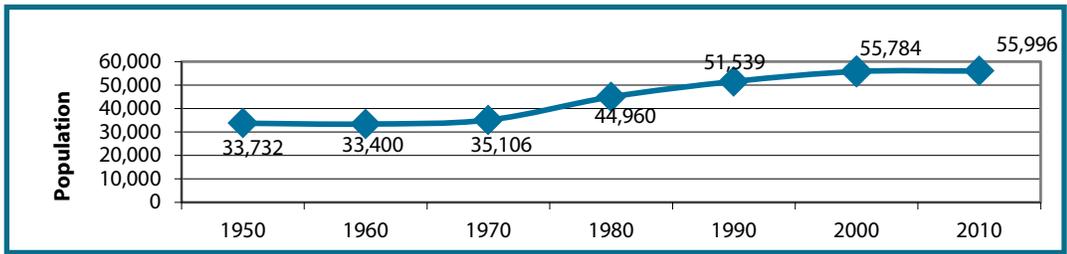
This section provides a historic perspective on demographic factors within the Region. The data presented is intended to provide the framework necessary for analysis of future development goals.

## Population

Population and rate of growth are major influences on the overall development of the Region. Increases or decreases in population relate directly to the design and capacity of this Region's infrastructure. The density and overall distribution pattern of population and population movements within the Region affect the type of public facilities necessary to provide an adequate level of service. Public investments can be more effectively prioritized and implemented when population characteristics and trends are understood.

The population of the Region in 2010 was 55,996, and in 2000 it was 55,784; this means the Region grew by 0.38% or 212 people between 2000 and 2010. However, this is a much slower growth rate for the Region than in decades past (see Figure 1-1). While just over half of the Region's towns saw a population increase, the other half saw population decreases (see Figure 1-2). During the same decade, Vermont's overall population

**Figure 1-1: Two Rivers-Ottauquechee (TRO) Region Population, 1950-2010**



Source: U.S. Census

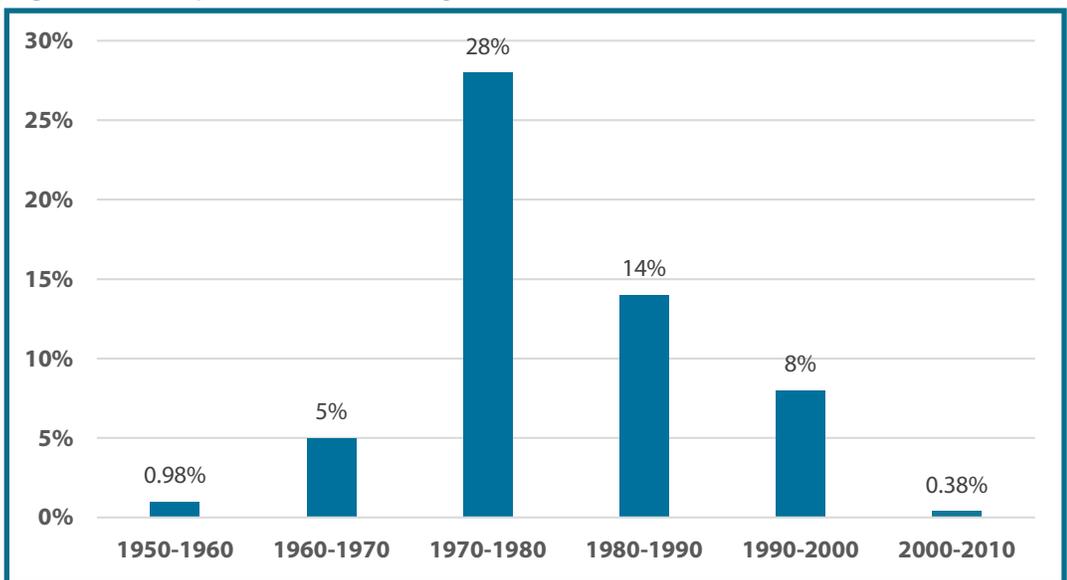
increased by 2.6%, or by 16,123 people, to a total of 625,741. The towns experiencing the highest growth in the Region were not the towns nearest the economic and employment centers (White River Junction, VT and Hanover and Lebanon, NH) but were some of the outlying towns as illustrated in Figure 3.

This may indicate that cost of land and housing affordability is pushing workers farther from the traditional centers of population and commerce to towns where affordable housing and land are available. Outlying towns (towns beyond the traditional centers of commerce) experienced a migration of younger families who sought to purchase homes or land for home construction. Some of the communities (Bethel, Royalton, Sharon, Stockbridge, Bradford, and Newbury)

that experienced increases in population are close to major roads.

The State saw a slight increase in the size of the child-aged population over the decade, but the Region saw a slight decrease. In 2010, the population of persons aged 19 years and younger constituted roughly 20.7% of the state and Regional populations, but the Region had a lower population of young adults (aged 20 to 24) than did the State, 5% for the Region and 7% for the state. The Region had a larger proportion of elderly persons (aged 65 years and over) than did the State, 16% for the Region and 15% for the State. The Region's growth was most driven by the in migration of people aged 45 through 70 looking for a high quality of life, secure real estate investments, and changes in lifestyle.

**Figure 1-2: Population in TRO Region**



Source: U.S. Census

## Future Population Projections

Future population projections are functions of two components: an estimate of natural changes in population that considers births and deaths, and estimates of migration. In 2013, the Vermont Department of Aging and Independent Living contracted with the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development to produce population projections for the state, counties, and municipalities in Vermont that was based on the 2010 Census and would project growth to 2030. The projections were based on the assumption that economic conditions throughout Vermont would remain stable.

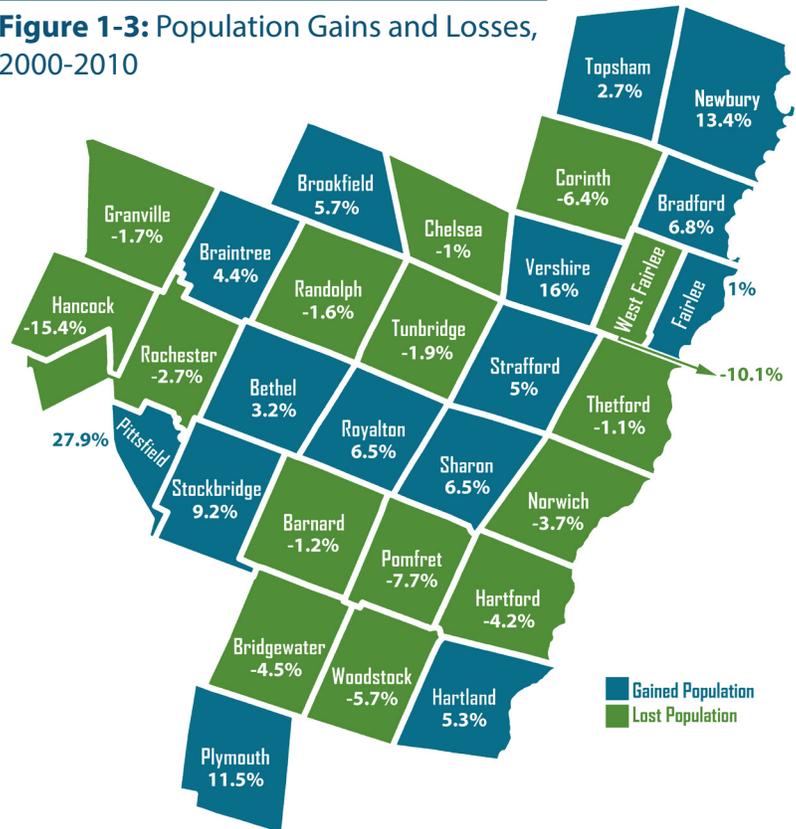
Sharon, Vershire, and Thetford had the three highest rates of growth over the past sixty years (see Figure 1-3).

Looking at the towns that experienced moderate or slow growth over the past sixty years, the town of Stockbridge is projected to be the fastest growing town from 2020 to 2030. Vershire, Bethel, Plymouth, Pittsfield, Royalton, and Sharon are projected to grow faster than the Regional, county, and state averages; the remaining towns will experience growth near the Regional and state averages. Finally, the projections indicate that seven towns (Chelsea, Granville, Hancock, Randolph, Thetford, West Fairlee, and Woodstock) will lose population as they approach 2030.

## Brief History of the Region : 1760 to Present

The dominant land use pattern we see in the Region today began with European settlement in the 1760s, following the end of the French and Indian War. Immigration into the Region came largely from southern New England and continued into the early 1800s. With the opening of private turnpikes, military roads, and bridges, young people seeking new opportunities in

**Figure 1-3: Population Gains and Losses, 2000-2010**



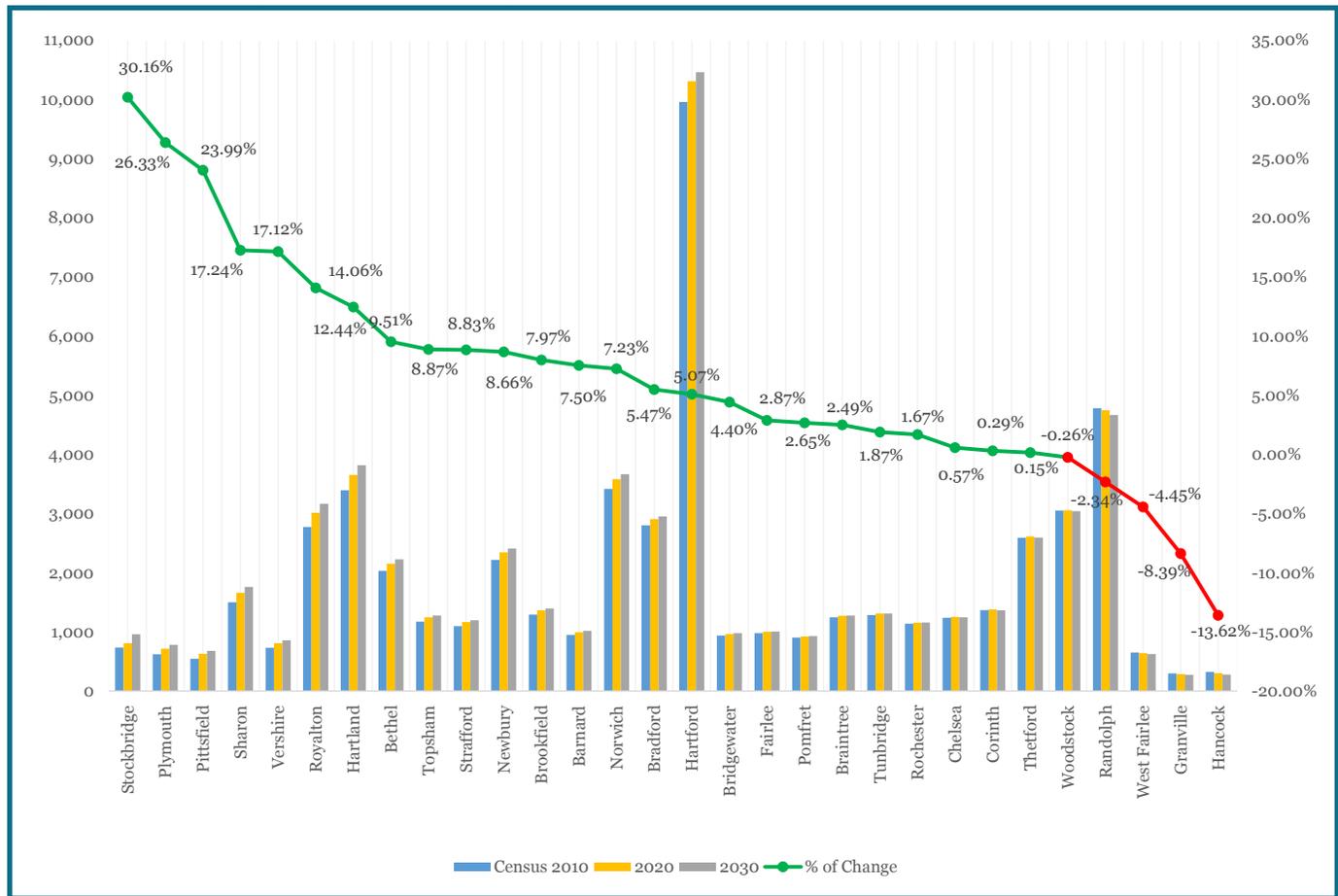
Source: U.S. Census

farming flowed into to the Connecticut River Valley towns. In the early 1800s, the Region's population reached an all-time high.

While transportation improvements were being advanced in the Region, others were being made outside the Region. The resulting transportation system enabled locally grown produce and raw materials to reach outside markets.

With the improvements to transportation to the west, including the famous Erie Canal, Vermont's farmers lost some of their goods market to New York and Ohio. Additionally, improved access to other areas set the stage for westward migration out of the Region, a movement that continued into the early part of the twentieth century. Much has been written about the drift of the Region's farmers to the west. Not all of the Region's residents chose to leave the area however. Many sought an enterprise in sheep farming, which put to use the rocky uplands and also resulted in loss

**Figure 1-4: TRO Region Population Projections**



Source: VT Department of Aging and Independent Living; analysis by VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development, 2013

of soil on hillsides and the lowest levels of forest in our history. The sheep industry flourished with Orange and Windsor counties being two of the leading production areas in the 1850s. The sheep era brought in the woolen industry. This was the first major move of employment toward non-agricultural pursuits. The number of mills increased dramatically. Factories began to emerge, as most towns in the Region give evidence to today, with dams and mills situated on major rivers.

As in the earlier years, transportation improvements were major factors in regional change, setting off the decline in the sheep industry. Improved access to growing competition in the west, combined with comparatively higher annual costs for sheep

farming in the Region, made Vermont less competitive. Concurrently came the emergence of the railroad as an attractive alternative to the fragmented system of roads and trails. Low population and few industries along the rail lines limited the ability of the railroads to operate successfully at first. To be successful, railroads had to rely on additional traffic from out of state. Formed in the 1840s, the Central Vermont Railroad extended lines through the White River Valley to be followed shortly thereafter by the Connecticut and Passumpsic River line (currently the Boston and Maine) along the eastern side of

**The sheep industry flourished with Orange and Windsor counties being two of the leading production areas in the 1850s.**

the Region. Following the development of these and other main lines throughout the Region and Vermont during the late 1870s, a number of short rail lines emerged. These included the White River Railroad, a twenty-mile line extending from Bethel to Rochester, the Woodstock Railroad, a fifteen-mile line extending from White River Junction to Woodstock, and the Montpelier and Wells River Railroad, extending from Wells River and New Hampshire to Montpelier. All of these lines reflected the need to transport goods, raw materials and people to and from some of the interior communities located away from major rail centers and lines. By the middle of this century these lines fell into financial decline, and they were eventually discontinued and liquidated.

### Railroads need to be recognized as key factors for the development and maturity of the State's tourism and recreation business today, a vital and growing part of the Region's economy.

Railroads can be credited as a contributor to the economic development of the Region. Railroads need to be recognized as key factors for the development and maturity of the State's tourism and recreation business today, a vital and growing part of the Region's economy. The implications resulting from rail line development heavily influence the land use patterns and cultural values of our villages and countryside today. Also, it should come as no revelation that most of the Region's primary highways follow closely the course of existing or former railroad lines.

The Region saw a decline in population between 1860 and 1960. The die off of sheep and dairy farming, paired with cheaper and richer agricultural land out west, led to decline. During this time, the clear cut land slowly became reforested.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Region entered into an evolution of yet another transportation

network imposed upon the landscape- the superhighway. Interstates 91 and 89 were completed throughout the Region and Vermont, bypassing most of the Region's villages and tending to siphon off traffic from the older parallel truck roads such as Routes 5, 12, and 14, spelling economic hardships for some of the downtowns and villages.

The Region has thirteen Interchange Areas on I-91 and I-89. Some of these Interchange Areas have proven to be prime targets for roadside commercial development. Since land access to other points along the Interstates has been prohibited, land around the interchanges has become sought after and highly valuable. While not yet prevalent within this Region, the Interchange Area throughout Vermont is becoming somewhat of a center for certain uses historically kept to within the town center. These include retail shops in large complexes such as shopping centers, automobile service and sales, trucking terminals, and other non-residential vehicular oriented uses. For the Region, the core of the retail marketplace still remains within village centers and along roads leading to and from them. In some cases, such as in Bethel, Randolph, and Bradford, some downtown area merchants have felt that they have become an economic casualty of major road building and the development that has followed. Now the same source of funding that built or rebuilt major highways (the federal government) is being used to resuscitate life into these areas (through funding for sidewalks, bikeways, road improvements, historic preservation, parking areas, etc.).

The identity of the Region today is a composite of its landscape, people, institutions, and history. All these factors contribute to its character. The case has been made in numerous forums that Vermont, hence the Region, exhibits some of the finest landscapes and environments in the United States and elsewhere. The Region's rural character and traditions are heavily influenced by its pattern of development and the sense of

community that comes from people living and working here. When looked at over time, this pattern of settlement and its scale have worked for the sociological, psychological, and aesthetic benefit of the Region.

### C. Plan Purpose and Design

The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan is a policy statement on growth and development of the Region. Its purpose is to give guidance to municipalities and other political subdivisions in the Region, and the State of Vermont on appropriate development, improvement and conservation of the Region's physical and human resources. In regulatory proceedings, the policies contained in this Plan are advisory unless stated as mandatory.

This Plan is an expression of regional values and a vision for growth and management for the next eight years. It is not a static or inflexible document. TRORC, with the involvement and participation of the public, will periodically review and update this Plan to reflect new conditions and needs.

In addition, the specific purposes of the Plan are as follows:

1. Analyze data about existing conditions within the Region;
2. Determine current and future land use needs for the citizens of the Region;
3. Determine areas most desirable and suitable for development while encouraging appropriate and efficient expenditures of public and private funds in the process of that development; and
4. Serve as the guide for the Region, towns, and individuals to use in meeting needs for land use development, through delineation of policies and specific implementation procedures.



*Oxen on Chelsea Street in South Royalton, 1915*  
Source: Royalton Historical Society

Adoption of the Plan does not change the structure or role of local or state government. The Plan intends to strengthen local governments by providing information and guidance on growth management. It seeks to facilitate cooperation among these governments. Adoption of this Plan means that TRORC commits its staff and program resources to achieving the Region's goals and to fulfilling the Plan's program recommendations. Adoption of this Plan documents the support of the Region's towns for the principles contained within its chapters.

This Regional Plan replaces the Plan that was adopted July 26, 2017 and effective August 31, 2017. Much of the background information goals, policies, and recommendations contained in this Plan are based upon the work reflected in the earlier version of the Regional Plan.

### D. Legal Authority and Use of the Plan

TRORC is authorized pursuant to the provisions of the Vermont Municipal Planning and Development Act (24 VSA Chapter 117 §4345a). The Act sets forth the duties of TRORC, including the following:

1. promote the mutual cooperation of municipalities and advise towns on the

development and conservation of town resources;

2. advise towns with respect to public finance;
3. provide technical assistance to towns in the preparation and maintenance of plans, bylaws and related implementation activities;
4. cooperate with planning, legislative, or executive authorities of neighboring states, regions, counties, or municipalities to promote coordination of planning;
5. prepare a Regional Plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in §4302 and that are compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans;
6. develop strategies specifically designed to assist municipalities in managing growth and development;
7. review proposed state capital expenditures for compatibility with the regional plans; and
8. appear before district environmental commissions to aid them making a determination as to conformance of proposed developments or subdivisions to the ten criteria set forth in Act 250 (10 VSA §6086).

The Act requires that TRORC prepare and adopt a Regional Plan (24 VSA §4348). Adoption of the Plan requires a 60 percent majority vote of the Regional commissioners following at least two public hearings with notice. Any regional plan, including prior amendments, expires eight years from its effective date unless readopted or extended by the Regional commission following a public hearing and a vote of Regional commissioners.

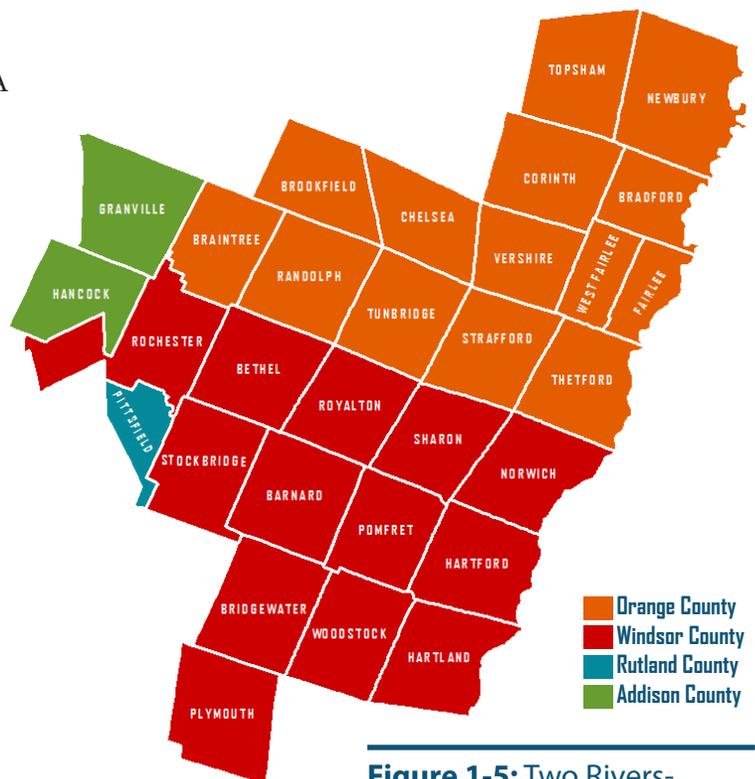
All regional plans are required to be consistent with the goals of the Act (24 VSA §4302) and are to contain at a minimum certain elements (24 VSA §4348a) or sections dealing with land use, transportation, housing, economic development, energy, utilities and facilities, natural resources, flood resiliency and implementation measures.

Furthermore, any plan must address how it relates to the development trends, needs, plans and regional plans of adjacent municipalities and Regions.

This Plan is to be used by TRORC, municipal planning commissions, selectboards, state agencies, landowners, and citizens in a number of ways:

1. To provide a framework for planning and development initiatives at the local level;
2. To guide basic decisions for planning programs at TRORC;
3. To serve as a basis for evaluation and review of developments and subdivisions proposed under Act 250;
4. For section 248 proceedings;
5. For state highway access permits; and
6. In federal projects.

The goals and policies of this Plan shall be reasonably and uniformly applied and shall not be contrary to the public interest. No specific



**Figure 1-5: Two Rivers-Ottauquechee (TRO) Region**

goal in the Plan shall be construed or applied in isolation from the other goals of the Plan. Also, it should be recognized that there can be both redundancy and contradictions between goals. This does not reflect a failure to consider the full implications of each, but simply acknowledges the fact that the articulation of Regional goals inevitably involves competing interests and compromise. Policies of the Plan and descriptions of future land use areas are generally *permissive*. For example, if the Plan states that warehouses are appropriate in an area, one can, but does not have to, build warehouses. Many policies simply encourage, but do not mandate, activities by using the word “should”. Where this Plan intends to be *prescriptive*, creating a mandatory limitation, it strives to be very clear on what is required by using words such as “shall” or “must”. All goals, policies and recommendations of the Plan are clearly titled as such, while background materials lay the foundation for these but are not meant to be construed as policies.

## E. Ongoing Planning Activities

The basic assumption made in establishing the goals and policies of the Plan is that growth in the Region will continue. The reason for this is clear – the Region offers a quality of life that is unparalleled in many parts of the nation. Despite continued pressures from urbanized areas, central Vermont contains natural resources of high quality within easy access for most of New England’s urban dwellers. Finally, the urbanization of the Lebanon, Hanover and Hartford area, with its availability of goods and services, makes the Region a major market and population center in Vermont.

As a result of this growth, the Plan will have to be refined on an ongoing basis, although the majority of policies contained in this Plan are directives for action will continue to apply indefinitely. An example of a policy with timeless applicability is found in the Land Use chapter, regarding compact development patterns and maintenance of the rural character. Until all

The Region offers a quality of life that is unparalleled in many parts of the nation.



*Braintree Snowfall* | © First Light Studios

land development or redevelopment activity ceases, this policy will determine the suitability of proposed development. This is not to suggest however that the Plan is a fixed and unchangeable document. The Plan itself must be continually updated and revised to serve as a relevant and practical guide for the physical, economic and social development of the Region.

This is a comprehensive plan for the Region, as specified by state statute. The effect of the Plan will not be limited to a specific agency, such as TRORC or to a single topic area, such as land use. Given the scope of the Plan, many entities should be involved in achieving the Plan’s goals and policies. The more detailed programmatic steps necessary to actualize policies are left for the agencies involved to determine. This was done for three principal reasons. First, agencies specializing in areas outside the traditional purview of TRORC have the appropriate

Plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

~24 VSA § 4302

technical personnel and resources to develop detailed implementation strategies. Second, because this Plan is not binding on the majority of organizations necessary for its implementation, the participation of many key organizations cannot be mandated or guaranteed. Third, financial resources and constraints of the various organizations will play a major role in determining the manner and extent of each organization's participation.

A final topic is raised in each chapter of the Plan is funding for implementation. Rough priorities, times, and costs for all actions are in the implementation matrix. Additional funding for implementing plan policies for all areas of the Plan is necessary.

Within each Plan section, additional activities necessary to complete that specific area of the Plan are identified. Such additional activities may include the collection of data on topics where information currently does not exist. In addition, short-term, long-term and ongoing recommendations are discussed in relation to possible implementing agencies. Finally, a general monitoring methodology is proposed. In some instances, the activities identified can be accomplished by TRORC acting as a forum for addressing the identified needs and concerns or through providing technical assistance to agencies involved. In other instances, the ongoing planning activities identified require that agencies and organizations historically involved with addressing the issue be responsible for

implementation and monitoring.

## F. Use of the Plan in Regulatory Proceedings

### Act 250

The Land Use and Development Act (10 VSA Chapter 151) establishes a review and approval process for all major subdivision and development projects in Vermont. The process enables various parties, including town selectboards and planning commissions, the State of Vermont, and TRORC, to participate in the review of projects and to provide testimony with regard to the project's effect on human and natural resources. Prior to granting approval, a district environmental commission, consisting of three members appointed by the Governor, must find that the proposed subdivision or development satisfies certain criteria or thresholds including water and air quality, erosion control, public services, wildlife habitats, aesthetics, public investments and town and regional plans.

In all cases, the district commission is required to make findings that the proposed development is in conformance with the goals and policies of the Plan before such a development can move forward.

While the intent of this Plan is to be coordinated and reasonably consistent with local plans and vice versa, situations may arise where relevant goals or policies of the Regional Plan and a town plan are in conflict. In Act 250 proceedings, the environmental court or district commission is faced with determining which

*Act 250: The Land Use and Development Act establishes a review and approval process for all major subdivision and development projects in Vermont.*

~10 VSA Chapter 151

plan or which portions of a local or Regional Plan apply. Projects defined or found by the district commission as having “substantial Regional impact” must be in accord with the Regional Plan. The burden to demonstrate conformity by law rests with the applicant (10 VSA §6088a).

### Section 248

The Vermont Public Service Board has been granted judicial power to entertain proceedings and to determine facts upon which it may issue a Certificate of Public Good for new electrical or gas transmission or generation facilities in the State (30 VSA §248) as well as communication facilities. Under this section, no utility may

**TRORC intends, where necessary or appropriate, to appear as a party in a proceeding affecting the Region and provide evidence concerning matters relevant to the Regional Plan.**

commence construction of such facilities without first obtaining such a Certificate. Prior to granting the Certificate, the Board must find that the project meets with specific criteria. One criterion establishes that the facility must be planned to not unduly interfere with the “orderly development of the Region” (30 VSA §248b). These criteria also require that the Board give due consideration to the recommendations of both municipal and Regional planning commissions and related plans.

It is the intent of TRORC, where necessary or appropriate, to appear as a party in a proceeding affecting the Region and provide evidence concerning matters relevant to the Regional Plan. Furthermore, it is the intent of TRORC to coordinate its review of proposed facilities with local officials and to evaluate municipal plans, as necessary, for compatibility with this section.

Since proposals under Section 248 are exempt from municipal zoning bylaws, it is important to reflect in municipal plans the interests of

the municipality concerning electrical or gas transmission or generation facilities.

## G. Developments of Regional Impact

Complete and objective analyses and deliberation on all elements of a particular development are required prior to concluding whether a development results in a substantial Regional impact. In considering a development, TRORC shall evaluate the probable direct and indirect costs and benefits associated with the project and the existing and potential capacity of the Region to accommodate new growth. Information generally included in an applicant’s Act 250 application should be relied upon as primary evidence in determining substantial Regional impact. Additional data and analysis may be required to assist TRORC in making its determination.

This Plan includes eight criteria, developed by TRORC’s Act 250 Committee that qualify a development as resulting in substantial Regional impact. These criteria are not exclusive but should be considered the principal indicators of Regional impact. If a proposal under review affects more than the immediate area or municipality where the project is to be located (through application of any or all of these criteria) it shall be concluded that a development of substantial Regional impact exists. The specific criteria are outlined in Chapter 13: Plan Implementation.

## H. Definitions of Goal, Policy and Recommendation

**Goal:** A goal represents the state of affairs that this plan is intended to achieve.

**Policy:** A policy is an expression of how to meet a goal.

**Recommendation:** A recommendation is a means by which to implement a policy, through an action by a person or group.

## I. Structure of the Plan

The format of this Plan is intended to include all plan elements as required by law (24 VSA §4348a). The statute establishes that a regional plan is to include basic policies on land use, housing, transportation, and natural resources. Each chapter of the Plan focuses on a particular issue area of Regional or statewide interest. Background issues, goals, policies, and recommendations are contained in each chapter. The final chapter of the Plan discusses the various means and methods available to TRORC to implement these goals and policies. In addition, the Plan states TRORC's determination of:

1. Whether the Plan contains the elements as required by law;
2. Whether the Plan is compatible with plans of adjoining Regions; and,
3. Whether the Plan meets with the goals of Chapter 117 § 4302 and § 4382.

## J. Plan Amendment

As stated above, the Plan is a dynamic document

and represents a process just as much as it does a product. The nature of growth and change in the Region will require this Plan to be re-evaluated, as necessary. As member towns in the Region refine their plans and as new data or trends are identified, it will be necessary for TRORC to incorporate relevant goals and policies into its planning process. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that while TRORC is legally responsible for the preparation and adoption of the Plan, any individual or organization may request that TRORC modify or amend the Plan.



*Pittsfield Town Office | © John Knox*



Placey Farm, Newbury | ©John Knox