

**RE: TOWN & VILLAGE OF WOODSTOCK, VERMONT
PLAN REVIEW
CASE # FY 20-3**

BACKGROUND

Pursuant to 24 V.S.A., Section 4350, the Town & Village of Woodstock, Vermont requested TRORC to review and approve the Woodstock Town and Village Master Plan adopted on September 17, 2019. The Plan encompasses all land in the Town & Village of Woodstock, and is referred to hereinafter as the Plan.

Section 4350 provides that prior to approving a Plan, the Regional Commission find that the Plan meets four tests. These tests are that the Plan is:

- A. Consistent with the planning goals in Section 4302 of Chapter 117;
- B. Compatible with the Regional Plan;
- C. Compatible with the approved plans of other municipalities within the Region; and
- D. Inclusive of all elements required of a plan as set forth in 24 V.S.A., Section 4382.

Staff reviewed this Plan and offers the following information to the Board. TRORC scheduled and held a Public Hearing on this review on October 30, 2019 at Woodstock, Vermont. This matter is now ready for decision.

This review is based upon the Town Plan as adopted. Plans stand on their own and this review is based on the Plan as adopted.

FINDINGS

A. Is the Plan consistent with the planning goals?

NOTE: "Consistent with the goals" requires substantial progress toward attainment of the goals, unless the planning body determines that a particular goal is not relevant or attainable. If such a determination is made, the planning body shall identify the goal in the plan and describe the situation, explain why the goal is not relevant or attainable, and indicate what measures should be taken to mitigate any adverse effects of not making substantial progress toward that goal.

General Goals

1. Are municipal decisions guided by a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework?

Yes. The 2019 Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan is a comprehensive planning document to guide municipal decision making that has been divided into fifteen distinct chapters, as required under V.S.A. Title 24, Ch. 117, §4382.

2. Is citizen participation encouraged at all levels of the planning process?

Yes, the “Woodstock Planning Commission has the primary responsibility for revisions to the Plan to reflect new conditions and needs. Public involvement and participation is, however, a key factor in ensuring that the Plan is reflective of the public interest” (Plan Purpose).

3. Is consideration being given to the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development?

Yes. One overarching goal of the Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan is to “encourage a rational pattern of development which underscores the importance of forests, agriculture, and the historical uniqueness of Woodstock, while balancing the needs and demands of residential, recreational, commercial and light industrial uses” (Preface).

4. Is the municipality working creatively together with other municipalities to develop and implement plans?

Yes. The Plan states “planning within adjacent municipalities needs to be recognized and coordinated with planning in Woodstock. This effort includes how neighboring land use development and conservation planning policies and activities affect Woodstock. Where plans are incompatible, it is important to identify them and to seek ways to mitigate conflicts” (p. 104).

Specific Goals

A plan for a municipality may be consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, which are:

- 1. Planning for development needs to be conducted so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.**
 - a. Is intensive residential development being encouraged primarily in areas that are identified as community centers, and is strip development along highways being discouraged?**

Yes, the Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan provides for multiple areas of higher density residential development, all of which are within or adjacent to existing community centers. Retail development, a key driver of strip development, is limited to Woodstock’s villages, hamlets and limited commercial/light industrial areas. (p. 23-29).

- b. Is economic growth being encouraged in locally designated growth areas or being employed to revitalize existing urban or village centers, or both?**

Woodstock values its Village and Hamlet areas. The Plan recognizes the need to encourage a broad range of mixed use development within these locations so as to keep the local economy vital.

- c. Are public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, being made so as to reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area?**

Yes, the action program included as part of the 'Community Facilities and Services' chapter shows that the community recognizes the need to balance infrastructure expansion with rural character.

- d. Is development being undertaken in accordance with smart growth principles?**

Yes, the action program included as part of the 'Community Facilities and Services' chapter shows that the community recognizes the need to balance infrastructure expansion with rural character.

- 2. Does the Plan provide for a strong and diverse economy; provide satisfying and rewarding job opportunities that maintain high environmental standards; and expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes?**

Yes. The Town's goal is to "support the Woodstock Economic Development Commission in its efforts to strengthen and grow a strong, dynamic, and diverse business base in Woodstock" (p.27).

- 3. Does the Plan broaden access to education and vocational training opportunities for residents identified in the Plan?**

Yes. The Plan extensively discusses its public schools and added a paragraph on the vocational and continuing education programs in the region that are available to its residents. In future revisions, the Plan should include goals, objections, and actions on ways to broaden this access.

- 4. Planning needs to provide for safe, convenient, economic and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.**

- a. Has the need for public transit been addressed?**

Yes. The Plan states that although Woodstock does not provide public transportation, it needs to be addressed. There are no longer any public bus services and the Senior Citizens Center offers limited transportation services to its members.

- b. Does the Plan provide that highways, air, rail, and other means of transportation be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated?**

Yes. It is stated that there are nearby airports in West Lebanon, New Hampshire and that are designated helicopter landing areas for emergency services in Woodstock. Highways are discussed, but there is no mention of nearby rail services available to residents.

- 5. Planning needs to identify, protect, and preserve important natural and historic features of the community's landscape.**

- a. Have special areas been identified, including significant natural and fragile areas; outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands; significant scenic roads, waterways, and views; and important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas?**

Yes, the Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan includes an inventory (with maps) of a wide range of significant natural and fragile areas including wetlands and critical areas. Although it does not contain a specific inventory of historic sites, the Plan does have an extensive discussion about the importance of Woodstock's historic character.

- 6. Planning needs to maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.**

- a. Are air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources being planned for development and use under the principles set forth in Act 250?**

Yes, the Plan describes each of the natural resources that are subject to Act 250 [10 V.S.A., Section 6086(a)]. Included in the Plan are efforts to conserve resources and prevent adverse impacts from human development and use.

- 7. Planning needs to make efficient use of energy, provide for the development of renewable energy resources, and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.**

- a. Are general strategies included for achieving these goals to include increasing energy efficiency of new and existing buildings; identifying areas suitable for renewable energy generation; encouraging the use and development of renewable or lower emission energy sources for electricity, heat, and transportation; and reducing transportation energy demand and single occupancy vehicle use?**

Yes. The Plan has included the energy planning standards set forth by the Public Utility Commission and includes an in-depth discussion of meeting Vermont's energy goals. The action plan in this Plan includes general strategies on how to meet these goals in Woodstock.

b. Are specific strategies and recommendations for achieving these goals identified in the State energy plan included in the Plan?

Yes, as mentioned previously, this newly expanded Energy chapter has incorporated the State's energy plan and goals.

8. Planning needs to maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

a. Is growth being planned so as not to significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities?

Yes, the pattern of growth proposed in the Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan is designed to protect and preserve the availability of outdoor recreational activities. The Plan's recreation element seeks to "allow for more public use of natural areas including the Ottauquechee River and all Town Forests" (p. 92).

b. Has public access to non-commercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, been identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate?

The Plan's recreation element seeks to "allow for more public use of natural areas including the Ottauquechee River and all Town Forests." Additionally the Plan suggests the development of additional non-commercial public recreation locations. There are maps within the Plan that point out all public lands.

9. Planning needs to encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

a. Have strategies to protect long-term viability of agriculture and forestlands been encouraged, including maintaining low overall density?

Yes. The Plan includes an action plan to encourage agricultural and forestry opportunities. The pattern of development mentioned throughout this Plan will likely ensure continued agriculture and forestry industries in Woodstock.

b. Has the manufacture and marketing of value added agricultural and forest products been encouraged?

Yes. It is a goal of the Plan to "allow for and encourage greater farm related production, processing, and retailing operations" (p. 8). This includes value-added products.

c. Is the use of locally-grown food products encouraged?

Yes. The Plan's goal is to "create awareness, understanding, and support of farm, forestry and rural enterprise based within the Town" (p. 7).

b. Are sound forest and agricultural management practices encouraged?

Yes. The Plan encourages use of accepted agricultural and silvicultural practices as a way to protect groundwater and mitigate against other potentially negative environmental impacts. The Town supports “proper timber and wood lot management” (p. 4).

c. Are public investments planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land?

Yes. Public investments are directed in Woodstock’s more urban areas where agriculture and forestry are not practical.

10. Does the plan provide for the wise and efficient use of natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetics of the area?

Yes, the Plan adequately addresses the extraction of earth resources, “the removal of any material from land for commercial sale shall employ best management practices designed to prevent erosion, debris and other materials from flowing into or filling any drainage course, body of water, street or neighboring property” (p. 76).

11. Planning needs to ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing.

a. Is housing encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income?

Yes, it is state that “Woodstock needs additional affordable housing units for its current residents and employees in order to maintain a broad social-economic base” (p. 58).

b. Are sites for multi-family and manufactured housing readily available in similar locations to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings?

Yes, Woodstock encourages “higher density in certain areas, such as the villages and hamlets...” (p. 57).

c. Does the plan provide for new and rehabilitated housing to be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities?

Yes, high density housing is specifically encouraged within the Village and Hamlet areas, many of which are served by community utilities. “Woodstock should guide and encourage any new residential construction to areas that are contiguous to existing development and within easy access to existing services” (p. 57-58).

d. Does the plan provide for accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences allowing close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for

relatives or disabled or elderly persons?

Woodstock encourages two dwellings per unit including accessory dwelling units, “zoning should allow for cluster housing units and other high-density forms of housing including accessory dwellings” (p. 58).

12. Planning needs to plan for, finance, and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

- a. Do public facilities and services address plans for such services as fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal?**

Yes. The Plan has now added more detail on town owned utilities and facilities by including capital improvements and a priority rating for those improvements.

- b. Does the rate of growth exceed the ability of the town and the area to provide facilities and services?**

No, the Plan recognizes the need to balance growth with the provision of quality and affordable facilities and services to the community.

13. Does the plan ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and integrate child care issues into the planning process, including childcare financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development?

Yes, childcare is adequately addressed. The Plan provides resources for locating childcare centers in Town and in neighboring communities.

14. Planning needs to encourage flood resilient communities.

- a. Is new development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas avoided? If new development is to be built in such areas, it should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.**

Yes, the flood resilience element of the Plan prohibits development in most of these areas. If development is approved, then flood proofing measures are required.

- b. Is the protection and restoration of floodplains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion encouraged?**

Yes, this is laid out in the action plan.

- c. Are flood emergency preparedness and response planning encouraged?**

Yes, flood emergency preparedness and response planning are encouraged in multiple sections of the Plan.

B. Is the Municipal Plan Compatible with the Regional Plan?

The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan was adopted on July 26, 2017 and it will remain in effect until August 31, 2025.

The Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan is found to be compatible with the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan. As used in this review, the term "compatible with" has been defined (in Section 4302) as meaning: that the Plan in question, as implemented, will not significantly reduce the desired effect of the implementation of the other plan (emphasis added). If a Plan, as implemented, will significantly reduce the desired effect of the other Plan (in this case, the Regional Plan), the Plan may be considered compatible if it includes the following:

- (a) a statement that identifies the ways that it will significantly reduce the desired effect of the other Plan;
- (b) an explanation of why any incompatible portion of the Plan in question is essential to the desired effect of the Plan as a whole;
- (c) an explanation of why, with respect to any incompatible portion of the Plan in question, there is no reasonable alternative way to achieve the desired effect of the Plan; and
- (d) an explanation of how any incompatible portion of the Plan in question has been structured to mitigate its detrimental effects on the implementation of the other Plan.

C. Is the Plan Compatible with Approved Plans of other Municipalities in the Region?

At the time of review of this Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan, the following municipalities have Plans approved by the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission that are in effect:

Barnard, Bradford, Braintree, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Chelsea, Hartford, Hartland, Newbury, Norwich, Pittsfield, Pomfret, Randolph, Rochester, Royalton, Sharon, Stockbridge, Strafford, Tunbridge, Vershire, West Fairlee, and Woodstock.

These approval decisions and Plans have been reviewed in the context of the above question. Based on this, we find the Woodstock Town Plan to be compatible with these Plans.

D. Municipal Plan Elements - Are They Included?

A plan for a municipality shall include the following required elements. These elements or components are, in summary:

- (a) a statement of overall objectives and policies;
- (b) a land use plan;
- (c) a transportation plan;

- (d) a utility and facility plan;
- (e) a statement of policies for "special resources";
- (f) an education plan;
- (g) an implementation program;
- (h) a statement on relationship of plan to trends and plans for adjacent towns and the region;
- (i) an energy plan; and
- (j) a housing plan.
- (k) an economic development plan
- (l) a flood resiliency plan

1. A statement of objectives, policies and programs of the municipality, to guide the future growth and development of land, public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

This Plan includes an 'action plan' for all chapters.

2. A land use plan, consisting of a map and statement present and prospective land use, indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, (using 6 VSA Section 8), residence, commerce, industry, public and semi-public uses and open spaces reserved for flood plain, wetland protection, or other conservation purposes; set forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services; and indicates those areas that are important as forest blocks and habitat connectors and plans for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation and promote the health, viability, and ecological function of forests.

The Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan includes a current and future land use map. An addition to this version of the Plan included a new action plan for the land use chapter.

3. A transportation plan, consisting of a map and a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities showing existing and proposed highways and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses, with indications of priority of need.

Yes, the Transportation chapter serves as the transportation plan.

4. A utility and facility plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective community facilities and public utilities showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for community facilities and services, with indications of priority of need, costs and methods of financing.

The Plan contains an inventory and analysis of costs and priorities for town owned utilities and facilities.

5. A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

The Natural Elements and Open Space chapter serves as their irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources plan.

6. An educational facilities plan consisting of a map and a statement of present and projected uses and the local public school system.

The Education chapter serves as Woodstock's education plan.

7. A recommended program for the implementation of the objectives of the development plan.

The Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan has utilized an "action plan" which clearly connects goals to policies to action items, creating a solid implementation program.

8. A statement indicating how the plan relates to development trends and plans for adjacent municipalities, areas and the region developed under Title 24.

The "Plan Compatibility with Abutting Municipalities" contains details on how this Plan relates to plans of abutting Towns. The Plan very thoroughly analyzes the land use patterns and plans of neighboring communities for potential conflict points. These conflict points are highlighted and recommendations for action are made in the narrative.

9. An energy plan, including an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs and problems within the municipality, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy, including programs, such as thermal integrity standards for buildings, to implement that policy, a statement of policy on the development of renewable energy resources, a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use likely to result in conservation of energy.

The Energy chapter of the Plan was greatly expanded in this iteration. It includes all of the standards for an enhanced energy plan with an analysis of resources, needs, scarcities, and problems within Woodstock. In this chapter, it mentions the need for the Town & Village to develop a capital improvement plan for potential expenses of energy efficiency improvements. In the capital improvements section of the plan, there is mention of a weatherization project for the Town Hall. These descriptions are adequate to meet the statute, but in future revisions there should be an expansion of this cost analysis to other municipally owned buildings.

10. A housing element that shall include a recommended program for addressing low and moderate income persons' housing needs as identified by the regional planning

commission pursuant to Section 4348a (a) (9) of Title 24.

The Housing chapter addresses the community's needs for low to moderate income housing.

11. An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

The Economic Development element contained in the Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan effectively discusses economic conditions as well as economic needs. Location, type and scale of economic development are also addressed.

12. A flood resilience plan that identifies flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas and designates those areas to be protected, including floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property; and recommends policies and strategies to protect the areas identified and designated and to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.

This version of the Plan included the addition of a "Flood Resilience" chapter. This serves as the flood resilience plan for the Town.

CONCLUSION

Based upon the above findings, it is the conclusion of TRORC that the Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan be approved. This approval shall remain in effect until the date that the Plan expires, or until it is amended or readopted and reviewed pursuant to these provisions, whichever occurs first.

DISCUSSION

TRORC appreciates the opportunity to formally evaluate the Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan. The Plan is all-inclusive, reflecting the community's planning capabilities and the import that they assign to issues around development.

Prior to issuing a Permit under Act 250, the District Environmental Commission or Environmental Court must find that the project is in conformance with the duly adopted Town Plan. This Plan includes clear, unambiguous language regarding current and proposed land use that can be reviewed by these bodies as part of an Act 250 project application. It is important that future Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan maintain their currency as Plans that have been found to be vague, unclear, or ambiguous do not carry much weight in Act 250 permit proceedings.

The 2004 Vermont State Legislature passed Act 115 that made significant amendments to the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act. The most notable changes, in

the context of this review, are that Town Plan and Zoning Bylaws are now held to a higher standard of consistency. From 24 V.S.A. §4303 Definitions:

“**Conformance with the Plan**’ means a proposed implementation tool, including a bylaw or bylaw amendment that is in accord with the municipal plan in effect at the time of adoption, when the bylaw or bylaw amendment includes all the following:

- (a) Makes progress toward attaining, or at least does not interfere with, the goals and policies contained in the municipal plan.
- (b) Provides for proposed future land uses, densities, and intensities of development contained in the municipal plan.
- (c) Carries out, as applicable, any specific proposals for community facilities, or other proposed actions contained in the municipal plan.”

This 2019 Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan is an improvement from the 2016 Master Plan. The Plan now includes a much expanded energy chapter, language on forest blocks and habitat connectors, a new land use action plan, and a capital improvement section that lays out the costs and priorities for capital improvements in Woodstock, to name a few.

In future revisions of the Woodstock Town & Village Master Plan;

1. There should be the inclusion of action plan items for continuing and vocational training to broaden access to residents. The 2016 Master Plan did not mention these items previously, but it now does.
2. Additionally, it would be in the best interest of the Town & Village to look into capital improvement planning for energy efficiency projects on municipally owned buildings. The current 2019 Master Plan mentions projects that are currently in the works, but it also deems that more work of this type needs to be planned for and completed.

Dated this 30th day of October, 2019 at Woodstock, Vermont.

By: Peter G. Gregory
Peter G. Gregory, AICP, Executive Director