A. Background

The communities in our Region depend on a system of public, nonprofit, and private utilities, facilities, and services. These are needed to maintain the health and welfare of our citizens, as well as support a sound economy.

While TRORC currently does not have a direct role in maintaining these systems, it does have the ability to provide municipalities with guidance and technical assistance; to take a regional approach to prioritization of future investments, particularly investments by the State of Vermont; and to look forward at ways to improve our services. Compact regional land use patterns may generally improve the efficiency of such systems, such as identifying areas where future investments might have a regional benefit in these areas. Conversely, expansion of infrastructure and services to new areas may lead to unsustainable patterns of land use.

Nearly all services and facilities benefit from greater density and intensity of land development within a given area. More people can be served by fewer water lines, sewer mains, etc., if they are not spread out. Rural areas have many advantages, but they are inefficient for physical infrastructure.

Vermont’s land use goals seek “to maintain the historic pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside” (24 VSA §4302). While most would agree that this pattern is desirable, it is also challenging for communities to implement without the necessary infrastructure. Continued increases in density and development in many of our villages will eventually be unsustainable without water and wastewater facilities. In a number of our communities, space to develop new systems is limited due to geography.

Long-range planning for infrastructure investments and maintenance is essential to reduce fluctuation in annual tax rates. State statutes enable communities to create a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for the purposes of
planning and investing in long-range capital facilities. This is different from the Capital Budget and Program (24 VSA §4443), which is adopted annually following a hearing by the selectboard. The CIP is a schedule of capital investments over a number of years. Although most communities have some form of a capital savings account, many do not have a CIP. The CIP includes estimated costs and a proposed method of financing those costs. Also outlined in the program is an indication of priority and the order in which these investments will be made. Any CIP must be consistent with the Town Plan. An adopted CIP should be drafted with assistance from TRORC to ensure consistency with the Town Plan. The given town’s selectboard has the ultimate decision as to whether or not such a budget and program is adopted.

From a regional standpoint, investments in municipal infrastructure must be made based on the population they will serve and on the most pressing needs. For communities with existing infrastructure and stable population numbers, capacity is not a significant issue, therefore priority for future investments is in modernizing or replacing aging infrastructure. This will make these systems more sustainable and affordable and will protect against loss of service. In addition, any opportunities to make improvements to existing systems that increase their energy efficiency should be implemented.

Vermont’s population growth has flattened substantially over the past decade, and our Region is at a standstill. While population growth can influence the need for improved utilities, facilities, and services, so can changes to the makeup of a static population. An increased number of residents within a community can require additional roads, whereas an aging population can increase the need for health care. To ensure that essential systems are able to handle changes, long-range planning is needed.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: Overall Utilities, Facilities, and Services</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. The expansion, maintenance, or construction of new facilities and utilities will be financially sustainable for governments and taxpayers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Investments in utilities, facilities, and recreation enhance the desired pattern of development which is compact village and urban centers surrounded by open countryside.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Policies</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Public investments in governmental and public utility facilities, services, and lands should support existing and future development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The scale, type, and design of major public utilities and facilities shall be undertaken so as to complement the future land use settlement patterns recommended in this Plan and relevant municipal plans. Public investments in municipal, regional, and state facilities should be located within existing or planned Regional Growth, Industrial, and Mixed-Use Areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Public facilities such as solid waste disposal facilities, correctional facilities, and wastewater treatment facilities shall be situated in an area where they best serve their purpose while minimizing negative impacts on the surrounding area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. TRORC supports the acquisition of future public and quasi-public utility sites, properties, or interests, when they advance the goals and policies of this Plan and relevant local plans.</td>
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<td>5. The construction of primary educational facilities, health-care facilities, emergency facilities, post offices, libraries, and other public facilities should occur in or adjacent to existing or planned Regional Growth and Mixed-Use Areas, so as to maximize their convenience and accessibility to people, to minimize additional infrastructure improvement costs, and to contribute to the vitality of communities.</td>
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Goals, policies, and recommendations continued on next page
Goals, Policies, and Recommendation: Overall Utilities, Facilities, and Services

Policies (continued)

6. TRORC supports the development of innovative and stable sources of public facility funding to supplement traditional funding resources.

Recommendations

1. TRORC will foster partnerships between public investment planning and implementation activities and the private sector in a manner that advances the goals and policies set forth in this Plan.

2. TRORC should look into developing a capital budget for the Region.

B. Water Systems

The TRO Region is largely a rural region, with a majority of water supply handled through individual on-site wells. Only a fraction of municipalities have public water systems, and in those municipalities, the systems serve a limited area—generally downtown or village areas. Additional community systems may serve a large development or neighborhood.

For villages and downtowns, water supply systems are a vital piece of infrastructure. Water systems allow communities to create greater population density than would be possible without them. Well-maintained public drinking water infrastructure is critical for public health, strong businesses, and a clean environment. Municipalities are required by law to create Source Protection Area (SPA) plans, which ensure that drinking water supplies will remain safe and untainted.

There are 15 municipal water systems in 12 municipalities in the TRO Region. Most of the supply lines are in need of repairs or upgrades. Some systems suffer from inadequate storage or from poor line pressure. Many systems have poorly mapped lines due to their age (50 to 100 years old).

Potable water may be lost through leaking pipes due to age, damage from frost, or other causes. Losses can go undetected for years if the water gauges are not properly installed or functioning. Large leaks in water mains can and have caused damage to roads in our Region. During Tropical Storm Irene, several communities experienced damage to water lines that passed under the river, resulting in a loss of drinking water that was difficult to identify.

To increase the long-term sustainability of existing water system infrastructure, municipalities can implement water efficiency programs. These programs include installation of water meters, which can help identify areas of unusual loss or use, and water-saving devices. Water efficiency programs can reduce operating costs and reduce the need for additional sources of water or water storage facilities. Reductions in water usage can also lead to less energy usage to treat, heat, and dispose of water. Financial savings from these efficiency upgrades can be set aside to build cash reserves for future system investments.

C. Wastewater Treatment Systems

There are 12 wastewater treatment facilities in 9 communities in our Region. The bulk of these systems were originally built in the 1970s and 1980s, with periodic improvements being made in response to aging equipment or increasing demand. As time goes on, the cost of necessary upgrades for these facilities increases.

Wastewater treatment facilities suffer from sewer pipe leakage as well as older built connections that funnel stormwater from impervious surfaces such as rooftops, roadways, and parking lots into combined sewer and stormwater lines.
The majority of systems in our Region have at least 45 percent available capacity. Given that population growth rates have flattened substantially, it is likely that the design capacity of the systems in most communities will be sufficient, as long as they are maintained.

Wastewater treatment facilities and/or public water supplies will eventually be necessary in all communities’ core areas if they desire to grow, create more housing, or attract businesses. Currently, the towns of Norwich, Hartland, Sharon, Strafford, and Fairlee are the highest priority for wastewater treatment facilities to achieve the State’s goal of “densely populated villages and downtowns surrounded by open countryside.” Hartland and Norwich are the largest communities in the TRO Region without wastewater treatment facilities. Fairlee and Strafford both have viable village centers that would benefit, both economically and in overall health, from the ability to concentrate more development within those areas.

Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: **Water and Wastewater Systems**

**Goals**

1. Municipal water and wastewater systems are secure, financially sustainable, well-maintained and energy efficient.
2. Municipal water and wastewater systems take into account the water quality of drinking water and watersheds.

**Policies**

1. Municipalities should create capital budgets and reserve accounts for utilities and facilities management and operations.
2. TRORC will support proposals to install, upgrade, and improve existing public water supplies and wastewater treatment facilities that serve Regional Growth, Industrial, and Mixed-Use Areas as designated in this Plan, as well as affordable housing in Rural Areas.
3. Proposals for upgrades, improvements, or expansion of water and wastewater treatment infrastructure that promote sprawl, strip development, and scattered land uses are not compatible with this Plan.
4. When systems are extended to service a new development, careful consideration must be given to the impacts of additional hookups along the length of the extension. The allowance of new hookups must not promote sprawl or strip development.
5. TRORC will encourage the location of community water supplies and wastewater treatment facilities primarily in Regional Growth, Industrial, and Mixed-Use Areas; however, systems designed specifically to supply appropriately scaled cluster housing projects in rural areas may be consistent with this Plan.
6. Land development within existing or planned Source Protection Areas that poses a reasonable threat of contamination to public water supplies is not compatible with this Plan.
7. TRORC will support water conservation measures to reduce demand for water and to promote the life span and efficiency of water and wastewater facilities.
8. TRORC will encourage installation of community wastewater treatment facilities and/or water supply systems in areas of existing concentrated settlement where conventional on-site septic systems and wells are inadequate for public health and development.
9. New water and wastewater systems should be designed to be as energy efficient and secure as possible.

Goals, policies, and recommendations continued on next page
Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: Water and Wastewater Systems

Recommendations

1. Municipal plans, per Vermont statute, shall identify and prioritize future capital improvements and major repairs, as well as estimate costs and financing for maintenance and future capacity.
2. TRORC will assist communities with the identification and prioritization of future capital improvements and repairs.
3. TRORC will offer capital budgeting workshops throughout the Region.
4. Water efficiency programs and codes should be adopted at the state or local level to reduce demand on municipal water systems.
5. TRORC shall seek grant opportunities to map water and wastewater systems throughout the Region.
6. When funding is available, municipal plans should inventory water and wastewater systems to identify current and projected capacity gaps.
7. Municipalities should conduct periodic auditing of all water and wastewater distribution systems to calculate infiltration and losses.
8. Municipalities are encouraged to adopt regulations or amend current regulations to promote dense development in areas with public sewer and water.

D. Solid Waste

All Vermont municipalities, either individually or as part of a solid waste district or an inter-municipal association, are required by Vermont law to adopt a Solid Waste Implementation Plan (SWIP). The SWIP documents town or district waste management facilities and articulates how solid waste will be managed over the next five years. All solid waste districts and inter-municipal SWIPs must be in compliance or consistent with the goals outlined in the statewide Materials Management Plan (MMP), which came into effect in June 2014 (Act 148). All waste districts and inter-municipal associations must, therefore, revise or rewrite their existing SWIPs to conform to the new MMP, stemming from Act 148.

In addition to being in conformance with the state plan, all SWIPs must be in accordance with any Town or Regional Plan.

The TRO Region is served by a total of six waste management districts, as well as one inter-municipal association. The Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste Management District covers a ten-town area, which contains a third of the Region’s population, based on 2010 U.S. Census Bureau figures. The second largest service area is the Hartford Community Recycling Center, which covers 18 percent of the Region’s population. It currently operates a solid waste/recycling transfer center on a 19 acre site (the former town landfill). The third largest waste management district is the White River Alliance, which covers eight of the Region’s towns and roughly 17 percent of the regional population.

As of 2014, there are 25 active solid waste facilities throughout our Region that have been certified by the State. Presently, the Region has 7 recycling facilities, 4 composting facilities, and 11 transfer stations. A third of the Region’s towns lack any waste management facility, and are instead reliant on their neighboring municipalities for waste disposal. In some instances, these towns find themselves two to three towns removed from a landfill or transfer station.

While the Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste Management District has transfer stations and recycling centers within its region, it is currently reliant on a landfill outside its region, in neighboring Lebanon, New Hampshire.
Universal Recycling Law

According to the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR), the average Vermont resident generated 5.18 pounds of waste per person per day in 2014. In 2012, Vermont adopted Act 148, commonly known as the Universal Recycling Law, to promote the universal recycling of solid wastes and keep more waste out of landfills. The law works by phasing in a required separation of waste materials over six years, giving municipalities and waste management districts time to establish necessary collection services and accompanying waste processing facilities for residents. Following this, the Secretary of the ANR implemented rules in the form of the Vermont Materials Management Plan (MMP), which came into effect in June of 2014.

Four goals serve as the basis of the state Materials Management Plan (MMP) vision:

1. To prevent waste from being generated;
2. To promote sustainable materials management, with a preference for efficient and best uses;
3. To minimize reliance on waste disposal (landfilling and incineration); and
4. To conserve resources, minimize energy consumption, and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and other adverse environmental impacts.²

The biggest task ahead of solid waste management entities is providing residents, businesses, and municipal governments with education and guidance about their role in these new waste management requirements. Conducting this necessary outreach is a critical task to ensure proper compliance with the statewide MMP.

The MMP sets out eight implementation objectives:

1. Expanded education and outreach to schools, businesses, and the general public.
2. Extended producer responsibility and product stewardship.
3. Reduction in the statewide disposal rate (pounds per person per year).
4. The reuse, recycling, and composting of materials to reduce the amount landfilled.
5. Reduction of toxicity in the waste stream.
6. Improved availability of statewide infrastructure and services for waste reduction and diversion through convenient, consistent, and cost-effective services.
7. Improved measurement and progress of performance standards.
8. Development of sustainable financial structures to manage materials.³

The most obvious role for TRORC regarding solid waste is to provide outreach and education to our communities. As the ANR continues to implement the requirements of the Vermont MMP, TRORC can help guide our communities through those requirements, ensuring that the plan is implemented. Additionally, TRORC can continue to support our Region’s solid waste districts when seeking permits through Act 250 or when renewing solid waste plans. Towns can consider consolidating solid waste services to cut costs; TRORC is able to assist communities with writing agreements.

© Agency of Natural Resources
Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: **Solid Waste**

**Goals**

1. Solid and hazardous waste generation in the TRO Region is reduced.
2. Reuse, recycling, and composting in the TRO Region is increased.

**Policies**

1. Solid waste collection systems should be coordinated to lessen costs and increase efficiency.
2. Products that are fully recyclable are encouraged.

**Recommendations**

1. TRORC will continue to assist member towns, alliances, and the Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste Management District in the update and implementation of municipal and regional solid waste plans.
2. TRORC will support and participate in any future discussions regarding the development of regional waste management services.
3. TRORC should assist towns in meeting the Universal Recycling Law requirements through outreach and education, with assistance from the Agency of Natural Resources.
4. All towns or districts of this Region are encouraged to contact TRORC offices regarding their current planning activities and determine if their SWIP revisions meet the overall goals and policies of this Plan.
5. TRORC should study the affordability of solid waste services in the Region.

**E. Educational Facilities and Services**

Access to a system of quality education is required to achieve social and economic goals throughout the TRO Region. According to Vermont statute, the right to public education is key to guaranteeing political and civil rights to constituents. Indeed, “to keep Vermont’s democracy competitive and thriving, Vermont students must be afforded substantially equal access to a quality basic education.”

Sustained regional and economic development will be impossible in the Region unless financial and geographic access to education is affordable and convenient. Without a well-educated workforce, the Region’s residents, like the rest of Vermont residents, will be unable to compete with other states for well-paying jobs. Further, education and child care are necessary to community vitality.

**Elementary and Secondary Schools**

Sound planning for educational facilities and programs is necessary to support the social, economic, and cultural welfare of a community. Increased levels of higher education correlate with higher earnings, lower unemployment and poverty rates, decreased reliance on social welfare programs, and higher levels of civic engagement. Furthermore, higher levels of education positively correlate with improved health, well-being, and lower crime rates. A quality education provides the foundation for a child’s productive future, enabling the child to make positive contributions to business, civic affairs, and family life.

All public schools are governed by a district school board elected by the voters of their respective municipalities, and administrative support to the district board is received from supervisory unions. In the 2016–2017 school year, there were a total of 44 public and private educational facilities within, or serving,
the Region. Total enrollments amounted to approximately 8,372, covering grades K through 12 and special programs. Some school districts and municipalities accept, on a year-to-year basis, tuition-paying students from neighboring communities that do not provide elementary or secondary education, or that lack adequate facilities.

Declining enrollments have brought staffing, programmatic, and financial planning challenges to schools throughout the Region, resulting in the closure of several schools.

In the years 2003-2016, schools in the TRO Region saw a 3.14 percent decline in the number of enrolled students. There were 8,650 students for academic year 2003–2004 and 47 educational facilities, and then just over 8,372 enrolled students in 2016, with a loss of three schools. The decline in student enrollment was most pronounced in Windsor County, which has seen student numbers fall by over 12 percent since 2003. The largest gains and declines in individual school enrollment numbers were seen in Orange County schools. The student body at Vermont Academy of Science and Technology in Randolph, a school that provides specialized and advanced courses for students from other area schools, increased by 862 percent. Meanwhile, enrollment at Potter’s House in Hartford declined by 87.5 percent. In Windsor County, Barnard Central School enrollment numbers increased by over 22 percent, and the Rochester School’s student numbers declined by nearly 43 percent. Sustained levels of decline may have untold social and economic impacts for towns in the TRO Region, and are, therefore, an area of vigilance and concern for the future well-being of the Region.

A table of schools in the Region and their average daily membership can be seen in previous versions of the Regional Plan or on the Vermont Department of Education website.

**Homeschooling**

Not all children in the Region attend public or private schools; some are homeschooled. As of the 2014 school year, 5 percent of students in the Region were homeschooled. More recent numbers on this are not available. While homeschooled children do not require educational provisions from school districts, there are still considerations that towns and

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**Figure 9-1:** School Enrollment Figures for the TRO Region, 2003-2016

![Graph showing school enrollment figures for the TRO Region, 2003-2016.](image)

*Source: Vermont Department of Education*
local organizations should make for the well-being of these children. For instance, there are several organizations and programs in the Region, such as Artistree in Pomfret, that provide extracurricular activities to supplement class learning.

Quality educational facilities are expensive investments to construct and maintain, and per pupil tuition rates are increasingly steep. As a result, schools require careful and diligent long-range planning by school officials, administrators, and citizens.

**Poverty and Education**

It is important to note that the Region’s school system provides the main avenue of support for children living in poverty. In Orange County, 17.5 percent of children under 18 live in poverty, and in Windsor County, 13.3 percent of children under 18 live in poverty, according to the 2016 American Community Survey. Children who are homeless have the same access to a free public education that other children do. In the 2013–2014 school year, 1,145 homeless children in Vermont were enrolled in school.9 (There is no regionally specific data available.) It is important to realize that many students may not be classified as homeless but may be staying with friends and other family or be housed in a motel. The summer, when school is off, is concerning for those that are homeless and living in poverty, as schools can be the main source of food for children in these conditions.

**Vocational Training and the Region’s Youth**

In recent years, promoting educational opportunities that support the acquisition of professional skillsets allowed students to better understand local employment sector opportunities. Act 77, more commonly known as the Flexible Pathways Initiative, was passed by the Vermont Legislature in 2013 with the intention of expanding educational opportunities, including more work-based learning and access to career and technical education.10 This initiative is intended, in part, to help students align their interests and abilities with professional prospects within the context of their academic curriculum. Many trades are an integral part of our economy and can supply a good living wage.

Both students and prospective employers from local enterprises stand to benefit substantially from the formal connections between students and the working world, both within and outside of the traditional classroom. These connections serve as an enriching supplement to traditional academic course offerings. Providing opportunities for the Region’s youth to see, experience, and learn about local jobs may serve as an incentive, convincing many youth to stay in our communities well beyond high school.

**Higher Education**

There are several higher education options located in the Region that include the following:

1. Vermont Technical College – Randolph
2. Vermont Law School – South Royalton
3. Center for Cartoon Studies – White River Junction
4. Community College of Vermont – Wilder

Nationally, Vermont is ranked lowest in higher education funding.11 This can drive up the costs for students seeking degrees.

**Adult Education**

The availability of adult education services is critical to the social and economic well-being of the Region and its residents. The Vermont Agency of Education defines adult learners as “persons 16 years of age and older, who may or may not be enrolled in school, and lacking essential skills or a credential equivalent to high school completion.” The Agency funds adult and continuing education through its Adult Education and Literacy Program. The Agency of Education funds three adult learning centers in the Region: the Vermont Adult Learning Center in Hartford and the two Central Vermont Adult Basic Education Centers in Randolph and Bradford.
These centers offer classes free of cost to adults in basic skills, General Educational Development (GED) certification, English as a second language, college transition skills, and work readiness skills, including WorkKeys (ACT) certification. Additionally, The Family Place, a family support center, offers courses to young mothers with the aim of helping them earn their GED and acquire basic employment skills.

Both of the Community Action Agencies covering the TRO Region (Southeastern Vermont Community Action and Capstone Community Action) have adult education and job skills programs. Capstone Community Action has two locations in our Region: Bradford and Randolph. Southeastern Vermont Community Action’s physical location is in Westminster, with an additional office in White River Junction. Other than these options, participants are required to travel outside the Region for these educational opportunities. This is a limiting factor to the Region’s lower-income residents who wish to use these services.

Continuing Education
As Vermont’s senior population significantly increases, and adults of all ages continue to seek learning opportunities for economic or personal reasons, the State will be confronted with the need for both new educational and recreational activities. There are a number of continuing education programs for seniors throughout the Region; however, the distance, lack of safe and reliable transportation, lack of access to high-speed Internet, and a lack of understanding of the basic facets of information technology may prevent them from enjoying the opportunities available. Currently, with respect to in-person instructional classes, residents can participate in classes at the following institutions:

- Artistree in Pomfret
- Vermont Technical College in Randolph
- Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH
- Riverbend Career and Technical and Oxbow High School in Bradford
- Bethel University in Bethel
- Community College of Vermont in Wilder

The Future of Education in the Region
Many of our Region’s communities have a school. Schools are often seen as the center of a community, or at the very least, a location that brings the townspeople together. Unfortunately, declining enrollments and an aging population are making the traditional model of “one school in every town” less sustainable. The cost of publicly educating children places a significant financial strain on many municipalities. Surveys in many of our communities show a growing frustration with the cost of education in Vermont. As a result, many communities continue to work on ways that they can collaborate together to decrease costs and maintain the quality of education desired by everyone.

Ensuring all students have access to high-speed Internet will extend our students’ academic offerings beyond the brick-and-mortar classroom setting and put students on an equal footing with those from more developed regions of the nation. Lack of access to high-speed Internet in portions of the Region can hinder access to education materials.

Apple Orchard at Vermont Technical College | © First Light Studios
With the adoption of Act 46 in 2015, many schools in the Region have begun consolidating with other districts, considering closing several schools, or reducing the number of grades.

Some communities (Hancock, Granville, Bridgewater, Rochester, Stockbridge, Chelsea, Tunbridge, and Plymouth) have opted to close their schools or to merge schools with other communities. If the trend toward smaller classes and fewer children in many towns continues, more communities will need to engage in these consolidation discussions. However, the closing or merging of schools is not a simple decision. For towns with no defined community center, a school often acts as the central focal point for the community. In many communities, the academic institutions are the largest employer(s) and the metaphorical center of the community. Downsizing or closing of schools also means, in many instances, laying off neighbors and friends.

Considering the cost of repairs is also important when determining whether schools ought to be consolidated. In the event that communities choose to close or merge schools, how to manage the vacated infrastructure should be part of the discussion.

For many communities, the closure of a school can present new opportunities. Because schools are often located within villages or town centers, they can become prime locations for reuse in areas that are otherwise built up. Possible options for reuse of existing school buildings could include:

- Town offices and other municipal services
- Inclusive, mixed age and income housing opportunities
- Senior centers
- Light industrial development
- Business incubators or office parks

In addition to the existing school building, facilities that had land for athletic purposes may now be available for new development.

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**Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: Educational Facilities and Services**

**Goals**

1. Accessible and affordable educational facilities and services are available throughout the Region that meet or exceed statewide standards, including life-long learning opportunities.
2. Students have access to quality vocational and workforce training opportunities to prepare them for future careers.

**Policies**

1. The construction of primary educational facilities should occur in or within close proximity to existing or planned Regional Growth and Mixed-Use Areas, so as to maximize their accessibility to people and infrastructure, as well as contribute to the vitality of communities.
2. Expansion of continuing education and vocational education opportunities is encouraged.
3. Adaptive reuse of vacant school facilities that occurs in a manner that enhances villages and downtowns and stimulates the local economy is supported.

*Goals, policies, and recommendations continued on next page*
Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: **Educational Facilities and Services**

**Recommendations**

1. Town and school authorities should create and maintain safe pedestrian access and transit opportunities to educational facilities, in line with Safe Routes to School efforts.
2. Towns must assess and incorporate the needs of disabled children and staff into educational facility and budgetary planning efforts to ensure the provision of free and appropriate education for all children.

**F. Child Care Services**

The availability of high-quality and affordable child care is an important factor in the appeal and sustainability of our Region. Child care fulfills many roles within the Region. For example, the child care industry contributes to the regional economy as a business and employer in its own right. It also functions as a service industry that provides crucial support to employers and employees. Without access to affordable, high-quality child care, one parent would likely leave the labor force to care for young children. Good quality child care helps prepare children for schooling or may even supplement a child’s school curriculum, and it provides them with opportunities for socialization.

There are long-term benefits of high-quality child care as well. Research conducted by a regional economic analyst demonstrated that investment in early childhood development programs brings a real (adjusted for inflation) public return of 12 percent and a real total return, public and private, of 16 percent. The State of Vermont invests in making high-quality child care affordable through its child care subsidy, available to working families on a sliding scale, and through offering prekindergarten programs to all three- to five-year-olds for 10 hours per week.

**Child Care Services in the Region**

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, approximately 56,000 people live in the TRO Region. The number of children aged 0-14 is a relatively small percentage of the Region’s population: just over 16 percent, or 9,015 individuals. There are 154 regulated child care and early education programs (47 in Orange County and 107 in Windsor County), comprised of after-school child care programs (ACCPs), center-based child care and preschool programs (CBCCPPs), and family child care homes (FCCHs). Comparatively, there are 1,269 regulated child care and early education programs in the State of Vermont.

Hartford has the highest number of regulated child care programs in our Region. Otherwise, child care providers are, for the most part, reasonably spread across the Region. Five towns are without any type of licensed or registered child care: Bridgewater, Granville, Pittsfield, Pomfret, and Vershire. It is important to note that the number of private (unregulated), in-home child care providers in our Region is unknown, but it is likely that this type of provider makes up a significant portion of the child care providers.

There are a few larger employers in the broader Region that offer child care for their employees. These employers have sliding fee scales, but costs still remain high. Such employers include Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center and Dartmouth College. The Gifford Medical Center in Randolph has a child care center that provides child care to Gifford Medical Center employees and the public. There are also some employers in the area who offer child care to their employees at a reduced rate, but also have slots open to the public. Regardless, it is critical for the quantity and quality of child care providers to meet the needs and expectations of parents and guardians living and/or working in the Region. With several of our regional centers of jobs in manufacturing and hospitals, it is especially important to have child care outside of the traditional work-day hours for those who work weekends and nights.
Other Forms of Child Care and Early Learning Programming

After-school programs and summer camps provide child care options for parents with children old enough to attend public or private school full time. Both help to keep children engaged in enriching activities, while also allowing parents to feel comfortable that their children are safe if they are working past school hours or during summer vacation. There are approximately 20,000 children in after-school programs in Vermont. However, the number of children attending after-school programs in the TRO Region is unknown. There is no data on after-school program attendance outside of the K–12 system, yet the State of Vermont recognizes this and has commissioned a study to determine how many children are in this type of care.

There are many varieties of summer camps that parents may choose to send their children to, from adventure camps to nature camps, summer camps at local recreational centers, and art or music camps. Depending on the program, children may only attend camp during the day for a specific number of days, or they may remain at the camp for an extended period of time.

There are a few vocational schools in the Region that have training programs to teach interested high school students to care for infants and preschool-age children. One vocational school to offer such a program is the River Bend Career and Technical Center in Bradford in their “Education and Human Development” curriculum. The Randolph Technical Career Center and the Hartford Area Career and Technology Center both have similar programs in their “Human Services/Teacher Preparation” curriculum and “Human Services” curriculum, respectively. CCV offers a degree in Early Education, along with several other related degrees, and an option to obtain a certificate. In addition, there is ongoing professional development offered through Northern Lights at CCV for those who are in the field and seek training or additional qualifications.

Barriers to Child Care Services: Cost, Affordability, and Family Structure

Barriers associated with child care in Vermont include an inadequate amount of infant/toddler care available and insufficient financial assistance to cover the cost of high-quality services (despite the financial help from some child care providers). Searching for child care is often difficult for parents in the Region, as the availability of child care providers, especially for infant and school-age children, is limited.

Over the past decade, the cost of child care in Vermont has risen substantially. The market rate for preschool-age children in regulated child care facilities rose from $200 a week in 2012 to $250 a week in 2017. In Windsor County, parents can expect to pay $165 to $250 a week. Comparatively, in Orange County, parents can expect to pay $150 to $225 a week. It is more expensive to place an infant or toddler in a regulated child care facility. In conjunction with high costs for child care, workers often receive wages below Vermont’s livable wage, and early childhood educators (child care workers, preschool teachers, and preschool educators) do not have pay parity with positions of similar skills and educational requirements in the public education systems. It is also expensive to provide quality child care, as young children need a high staff-to-child ratio.

To help families pay for child care, the State of Vermont provides financial assistance through the Vermont Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP). Vermont’s CCFAP helps families who meet certain work, education, and income requirements afford child care. The program also provides child care financial assistance for children in foster care and children and families who meet certain health criteria.

CCFAP makes payments directly to a child care provider on behalf of a family. The amount of the payment is determined by the age of the child, the income and size of the family, the type of child care program, the child care program’s quality...
designation in STARS (STep Ahead Recognition System, Vermont’s quality recognition and improvement system for regulated child care and early learning programs), and the number of hours of care needed. Assistance is provided on a sliding scale fee that gradually reduces the assistance as family income rises. Families pay a co-payment directly to providers to make up the difference between what the State pays and what the provider charges. Due to chronic underfunding, the program’s reimbursement rates have not kept pace with how much providers charge for quality care, leaving a gap that creates economic challenges for families and providers.

According to the 2016 American Community Survey, families living in poverty with children comprise 13.6 percent of the Region’s population. Let’s Grow Kids is a statewide campaign looking for more high-quality, affordable child care in Vermont to better support our children, families, women, communities, and economy. More than 70 percent of Vermont children under age 6 have all of their parents in the labor force, meaning they’re likely to need care. Yet half of those infants and toddlers don’t have access to any regulated care, and nearly 80 percent don’t have access to high-quality programs. Vermont’s child care shortage disproportionately impacts women, who are three times more likely to leave their careers than men when families can’t find child care. It also has a negative ripple effect on our businesses, schools, communities, health-care system, and economy as a whole.

In our Region, there have been two major reports that focus on child care. The Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing Child Care, published in 2016, looked into the real cost of child care and found that “the estimated cost of high quality early care and learning is currently unaffordable for almost 90% of Vermont families.” The second report was Stalled at the Start, published in 2018 and produced by Let’s Grow Kids, which analyzed the supply and demand of child care.

One available program that could benefit families is the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP). This is a government program that helps eligible families cover some of the cost of child care. There is also a federal scholarship program for child care center teachers that are trying to earn credentials/degrees. Through the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Vermont program, up to 80 percent of tuition can be covered, along with other benefits.

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Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: Child Care Services

Goals

1. An adequate supply of safe and affordable child care services and facilities is available.
2. A regional network of high-quality child care programs fulfills the needs of families and employers.
3. Major employers (employing more than 35 employees) provide child care services on site or create a partnership with a local child care service.

Policies

1. TRORC supports initiatives to develop child care facilities where a need has been proven and the location conforms to this Regional Plan.
2. TRORC should work collaboratively with child care providers and towns to help them locate into convenient and safe areas.

Recommendations

1. TRORC should work with towns to address identified needs for child care facilities or services by:
   • Identifying publicly owned buildings throughout the Region; and
   • Evaluating and prioritizing their suitability to serve as child care facilities after considering Vermont regulations.
2. Towns should review their zoning regulations (if adopted) to determine the ability of the regulations to allow child care providers to be located in the town.
3. Develop business “how-to” guides for providers to navigate local permitting.
4. Conduct a child care needs assessment in the Region.

G. Telecommunications

Information technology (such as broadband Internet and wired/wireless telecommunications) has become essential to residents and businesses in the Region. Our economy now relies on ubiquitous availability of data and communications for our Region to remain economically competitive with more urban areas of the State.

In the 2014 Vermont Telecommunications Plan, the Public Utilities Commission set the following goals:

• Every address in Vermont should have available broadband Internet access with the minimum technical requirements of 4 megabits per second (Mbps) download and 1 Mbps upload. By year end 2020, a majority of addresses in Vermont should have access to the Internet at speeds of at least 100 Mbps symmetrical (download/upload), and every address should have access at speeds of at least 10 Mbps download.
• Every address in Vermont should have access to wired and wireless broadband Internet access service.
• Broadband service should be affordable to all members of every customer class.
• Universal adoption and use of broadband service at home and at work.
• Universal availability of mobile service along roadways and near universal availability statewide.
• Reliable, economical telephone service in all areas of the State, including rural areas. All residents, regardless of income or location, should have access to basic telephone service.
In the TRO Region, access to broadband is provided via a number of mediums, including cable, DSL (digital subscriber line), fiber-optic cable, cellular, wireless, and satellite. This access varies from town to town, with the highest concentration of availability generally being in villages and downtowns. Broadband providers tend to locate their infrastructure in areas with high population density to maximize the subscriber-to-infrastructure ratio. The farther away from a community center, the fewer options for broadband connectivity; this makes the “last mile” homes and businesses the least likely to have access.

Efforts to improve broadband coverage in the TRO Region are ongoing. Between 2000 and 2012, the State of Vermont invested a substantial amount of funding in an effort to bring broadband to all Vermonters. One such project was the Vermont Digital Economy Project (VDEP), which developed as part of the State’s goal to create more resilient communities after the damages caused by Tropical Storm Irene in 2011. In an effort to speed disaster recovery, spur economic and job growth, and improve community resilience after disasters, the VDEP project was tasked with building digital infrastructure in communities that had been hardest hit by the storm.

VDEP built free village Wi-Fi zones in the communities of Bethel, Royalton, and Rochester. These investments provide residents who lack access in their homes with a reliable place to connect to the Internet. In East Barnard, there is also a community-funded Wi-Fi zone for residents. Village-wide access is a boon to businesses who can take advantage of the additional customers who are drawn to the village for Internet access.

The East Central Vermont Fiber-Optic Network (EC Fiber) is a consortium of 24 towns (including 21 TRO Region towns) that is working to expand access to high-speed Internet. The list of towns EC Fiber is working with can be viewed here: https://www.ecfiber.net/member-towns/.

Major cellular providers are continually working to expand coverage, particularly along major transportation corridors, such as Interstates 89 and 91.

Use of cellular phones in day-to-day activities has skyrocketed over the past decade. The availability of broadband cellular data has increased the use of cellular phones to the point that they are essential to businesses and citizens alike. In a 2014 Vermont Telecommunications survey, 57 percent of businesses reported that they subscribed to cell phone services for their organization. The average number of cell phones

Importance to the Economy

On average, Vermont businesses report that 74 percent of their workforce utilizes email and seventy percent utilize web sites. Fifty-seven percent of businesses statewide indicate using mobile telecommunications. Broadband and mobile telecommunications and data access are essential to the Region’s businesses.

Hospitals utilize broadband for “telemedicine,” which is considered extremely important in rural areas such as ours. More accessible health information, products, and services provide real economic benefits in rural communities. Rural businesses with strong access to broadband can use the Internet to expand market reach. Farms, for example, can utilize the Internet to sell products online that would otherwise be sold only to local residents, expanding their market.
per household in Vermont is 2.39, further supporting that these devices have become common. Many U.S. households no longer have a “landline” phone, but Vermont is the state with the lowest percent of households that have gone wireless.\(^8\) The lack of cell coverage is a major deterrent to both attracting businesses and younger families.

Cellular access is determined in great part by a region’s topography in relation to the placement of cellular transmission towers. While coverage in the TRO Region is reasonably good along main travel corridors, it is spotty in more rural areas. In some instances, there are entire communities (such as Barnard) that have virtually no access. In most cases, residents support improved cell phone access, but are less supportive of having the necessary facilities located in their communities. When residents object to proposed facilities, it is almost always due to the potential for aesthetic impacts.

Wireless telecommunications facilities (primarily cell towers) are permitted under one of two state options—Section 248a or Act 250—depending on the facility. Projects may also be subject to local permitting. The 248a process was created to enable a faster permitting process in order to achieve greater wireless coverage, and it specifically exempts projects that achieve this wireless coverage from local zoning or Act 250. It is limited to facilities that are part of a network, and this permitting authority currently expires in 2020.

Under the Section 248a permitting process, the Public Utility Commission must review the environmental, economic, and social impacts associated with a particular project prior to issuing a Certificate of Public Good. The project is reviewed against the Act 250 criteria and both Regional and Town Plans, and even relevant parts of zoning that would otherwise apply, are accorded “substantial deference” in such reviews, “unless there is good cause to find otherwise” (30 VSA section 248a(c)(2)). Even when substantial deference is not granted, the 248a process must give due consideration to the recommendations of municipal planning commissions, selectboards, and regional planning commissions based on their respective plans. Accordingly, it is appropriate that this Plan address these land uses and provide guidance to town officials, regulators, and providers.

Wireless telecommunications towers over 50 feet tall, or more than 20 feet tall if placed on an existing structure, are regulated by Act 250 if not exempted through the 248a process. If such a tower is regulated, then the ancillary developments such as roads and structures that go with it are also regulated. Towers subject to Act 250 are also able to be regulated by municipalities, as are towers and facilities under the height limits. Towns cannot regulate telecommunications facilities in such a manner as to have the effect of excluding them and cannot regulate emissions of electromagnetic radiation.

Separately from state and local permitting, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) retains jurisdiction over public airwaves and the telecommunications industry in general. Additionally, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) exercises control over the location and height of towers and similar structures to prevent interference with airport operations.

Transmission towers are necessary telecommunications facilities, but as land uses, these towers have emerged as planning concerns, primarily for aesthetic reasons. To ensure adequate transmission of signals in mountainous areas such as ours, towers and related facilities need to be located on hilltops or high elevation points. One of the Region’s principal scenic qualities is its ridgelines and mountainsides. These areas are significant contributors to the rural character of the Region. The ridges are predominately undeveloped and provide an unbroken skyline viewed from the valley floor. The use of the Region’s ridges for telecommunication towers and related facilities
needs to be undertaken in a manner that will not unduly detract from, nor adversely affect, these scenic values. Protection of these areas from insensitive developments is a matter of public good. Thus, due to transmission towers’ higher visibility from multiple vantage points, conflict with scenic landscapes has become an issue.

While broadband and cellular service expansion was not in TRORC’s traditional purview, it is an essential public service. It can support opportunities for free access such as the village Wi-Fi zones developed through the Vermont Digital Economy Project.

### Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: Telecommunications

#### Goals

1. Universal broadband access using fiber is available throughout developed areas in the TRO Region.
2. Universal availability of mobile cellular service is available throughout developed areas in the TRO Region.
3. Speeds and pricing for residential broadband are on par with national urban areas.
4. The enhancement of telecommunications networks is supported, when such facilities do not have significant adverse environmental, health, or aesthetic impacts.

#### Policies

1. Public and private efforts to expand telecommunications access is supported, when done in a manner that does not have an undue adverse impact on the rural character of our communities.
2. Efforts to provide free public broadband access in places such as village centers and public buildings is supported.
3. Telecommunications facility development shall be excluded from the following areas:
   - Floodways shown on FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps.
   - Wetlands as indicated on Vermont State Wetlands Inventory maps or identified through site analysis.
   - Rare, threatened, or endangered species habitat or communities.
4. All new telecommunications facilities and related infrastructure must be sited and designed to avoid or, if no other reasonable alternative exists, to otherwise minimize and mitigate adverse impacts to the following:
   - Historic districts, landmarks, and sites.
   - State or federally designated scenic byways and municipally designated scenic roads and viewsheds.
   - Special flood hazard areas identified by National Flood Insurance Program maps.
   - Necessary wildlife habitat identified by the State or through analysis, including core habitat areas, migration, and travel corridors.
5. New telecommunications facilities and related infrastructure (this includes access roads, site clearing, on-site power lines, lighting, and off-site power lines) must be sited to avoid the fragmentation of large priority and high priority forest blocks.
6. Telecommunications facilities development shall minimize site clearing and highly visible roadways.

Goals, policies, and recommendations continued on next page
Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: **Telecommunications**

### Policies (continued)

7. The developer shall make reasonable efforts to minimize the aesthetic impact of the telecommunications facility or infrastructure on the surrounding landscape. This includes options such as the utilization of “stealth towers,” camouflage through paint scheme, or designs that blend into the surroundings, such as asymmetrical mono-poles disguised as pine trees.

8. Telecommunications facilities shall be designed to be the minimum height necessary to achieve coverage.

9. All new facilities shall incorporate reasonable options for sharing space on proposed towers. Applicants for new towers must demonstrate that there is no reasonable opportunity for co-location on existing towers.

10. To support resiliency, applicants shall make space available on towers for municipal communication systems to enhance or expand road and emergency service communication networks.

11. To minimize conflict with scenic values, facility design and construction shall employ the following principles:
   - In rural locations, be located in forested areas or be sufficiently landscaped to screen the lower sections of towers and related ground fixtures from public vantage points, such as trails, roads, or water bodies;
   - In more developed areas, utilize materials, architectural styles, color schemes, lighting fixtures, size, and other design elements to promote aesthetic compatibility with surrounding uses and to avoid adverse visual impacts; and
   - Be located downgrade of the ridge so as not to exceed the elevation of the tree line as seen from public highways.

12. Consideration shall be given to the environmental limitations of any given site. Impacts on wildlife habitats, soil erosion, forestry and agricultural lands, and similar resources should be carefully addressed. Projects that materially impact these resources are discouraged.

13. The clearing of land associated with site development for tower and facility construction should not negatively impact the scenic views present.

14. Towers or facilities that are designed to resemble trees or natural features shall not be placed conspicuously higher than the tree line.

15. Permits must require removal of facilities that are no longer used.

### Recommendations

1. TRORC should continue to participate actively in the Section 248a permitting process.

2. Communities should seek out funding to implement new or sustain existing Wi-Fi zones in villages and downtowns.

3. The State should continue to support programs that achieve universal broadband and cellular communication access.
H. Municipal Buildings and Properties

Towns own a variety of public buildings. Every town has a town office building. Nearly every town has a town hall where they hold town meetings and other events. Sometimes the town offices are also located in this building. Towns with their own road crews also own town garages and a site for salt and sand storage. Some towns own their own sand and gravel pit, but most contract this function out. Nearly all of the town halls and offices are in older structures, many of which need substantial maintenance or improvements, but several have been renovated to create better working space and improve energy efficiency. Town offices, like other civic functions, help to create a sense of community and give energy and importance to town and village centers. Town garages are usually not located right in developed areas, as they are noisy, semi-industrial areas by their nature, but they still must be somewhat central in the town to efficiently maintain roads. Several town garages have been replaced with much more spacious and useful buildings, but some are still woefully inadequate for their function.

Public libraries play an important role in providing materials to inform, challenge, and inspire the Region’s residents. In some towns, public libraries are privately owned entities that still provide an essential public service to residents.

The services they provide are changing, partly to meet the changing needs of users and also because of developments in technology and the availability of information. Statewide use of national online databases and the Internet has increased dramatically for libraries in the past few years. According to the Vermont Department of Libraries, the demand for electronic information services has come from rural and remote areas of the State. This presents a challenge to the Region’s libraries to find ways to ensure that all citizens have access to books, information, and worldwide resources, similar to the access opportunities at urban libraries. The onslaught of information technology and the number of new formats, coupled with the vast number of books available, will promote increased resource sharing among the Region’s libraries.

Goal, Policies, and Recommendations: Municipal Buildings and Properties

Goal

1. The Region has adequate municipal buildings to serve town needs.

Policies

1. Town buildings should be carefully sited and designed to meet the future energy efficiency needs of the town and built with both construction and operating costs in mind.
2. Towns are encouraged to rehabilitate historic buildings that are located in existing developed areas for their offices.
3. The State should only construct new office buildings in Regional Growth Areas.

Recommendations

1. Towns should assess expected maintenance and upgrades for town buildings and create reserve funds to cover these so that these buildings remain in good condition.
2. TRORC should assist towns with planning, public dialogue, and grant writing, if requested, when considering constructing new buildings so that they meet community needs and are located wisely.
3. The State must consider effects on the Region and our towns if they are considering siting new buildings so they fit well with the Region’s needs.
I. Recreational Facilities

Many recreational opportunities are available to the Region’s residents and visitors. These range from organized, structured prospects at state and federal parks to more informal opportunities in municipal parks and forests. Recreational opportunities attract new residents, tourists, second homeowners, and retirees to the Region and contribute to the quality of life of current residents. The Region’s recreational resources include elements of the built and natural environment. Many of our outdoor recreational opportunities are on public lands, but access to private lands is also important and available through agreements brokered by groups such as the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) and other local groups. As large landholdings are subdivided and become less available for public uses, the need for publicly owned land for recreation is critical.

Public Recreational Opportunities

The Region has one national park—the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park in Woodstock. Associated with the Park is the privately owned Billings Farm and Museum, which offers farm educational programs. The western part of our Region is also home to a portion of the Green Mountain National Forest and the Long Trail corridor. The Appalachian Trail corridor goes through the central part of the Region. Additionally, outdoor recreation opportunities are available at the Suicide Six ski area, many rivers and lakes, public and private forests, and Class 4 roads. Indoor recreational opportunities include ice rinks, the Upper Valley Aquatic Center, and the Montshire Museum of Science.

Several state parks can be found in the Region, including the Calvin Coolidge Historic Site in Plymouth, the Quechee Gorge State Park, and several other historical sites. The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s several state forests, wildlife management areas, and lake or river access points offer additional outdoor recreational opportunities.

Many towns throughout the Region also have town forests that are available for recreation; these forests also offer unique educational opportunities for local school children and residents about forestry and landscape practices. Twenty-three towns in the Region have town forests: Barnard, Bethel, Bradford, Brookfield, Chelsea, Fairlee, Hancock, Hartford, Hartland, Newbury, Norwich, Plymouth, Pomfret, Randolph, Rochester, Royalton, Sharon, Strafford, Thetford, Tunbridge, Vershire, West Fairlee, and Woodstock. Currently, there are public and private statewide initiatives studying and encouraging town forest development and use.
Several towns also offer town recreation programs through their recreation departments. These may include ski programs in conjunction with local schools in the winter, camps and track and field programs in the summer, and various events year round. These recreation departments may also manage a modest network of town parks.

Many towns also have excellent trail networks linked to their road networks, and portions of these networks include Class 4 roads. Town selectboards have the authority to develop a policy that regulates use and maintenance of town trails and Class 4 roads, and several towns have developed policies for these public rights-of-way (ROWs) based on the users’ needs.

The Region’s rivers and lakes offer opportunities for swimming, fishing, and boating, all of which require public access areas for parking or boat launching. Scenic waterfalls, cascades, and gorges are also destinations for tourists and residents. There is a need for access areas to water resources in the Region.

Only 15 percent of all land in Vermont is publicly owned, which means many of the outdoor recreational resources in the Region rely on the willingness of landowners to allow access to private land.

Several large private landowners allow access to their land. Notable examples include the owners of the Wilder Dam facility in Hartford and its associated Kilowatt Park, the Montshire Museum lands in Norwich, and lands owned by the Vermont Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy. Other private facilities such as local ski areas and golf courses provide recreation opportunities. Facilities in the Region include the ski centers of Bear Creek, Middlebury Bowl, Northeast Slopes, Nordic Centers, Quechee, and Suicide Six; the Quechee Club; golf courses; and exercise/fitness clubs.

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**Goal, Policies, and Recommendations: Recreational Opportunities**

**Goal**

1. The Region is home to a variety of indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities.

**Policies**

1. The maintenance and development of recreation trail networks (e.g., Appalachian and Long Trails, Cross Vermont and Cross Rivendell Trails, regional and state snowmobile networks, and cross-country ski trails) is encouraged.
2. New development and land subdivisions that have an undue adverse impact on the enjoyment or continued use of recreational uses are inconsistent with this Plan.
3. Consistent with property rights, ownership and management practices that maintain or enhance public access to and uses of recreational amenities on privately held land are encouraged.
4. Where development interacts with the Appalachian or Long Trails and other related side trails, design plans and construction must maintain the predominant scenic character and the primitive qualities of the trail corridor.
5. TRORC supports the development of multipurpose trails using abandoned railroad beds and other public rights-of-way.
6. TRORC encourages federal, state, and local acquisition of land and facilities well-suited for outdoor recreation, provided that adequate financial and management plans and arrangements are made with involved local governments.

*Goals, policies, and recommendations continued on next page*
### Goal, Policies, and Recommendations: **Recreational Opportunities**

#### Recommendations

1. TRORC will assist communities with the establishment of Conservation Commissions and will support existing Conservation Commissions when possible.
2. TRORC should help towns develop highway policies that address recreation needs and should encourage the adoption of walkable communities programs within the Region.
3. TRORC should assist towns with establishing and managing town forests.
4. TRORC should work with the State, White River Partnership, and the Vermont River Conservancy on increased river access.

#### J. Opportunities for Shared Services/Infrastructure

As is the case in much of Vermont, our Region is generally low-density with a limited population as compared to more urban locations.

While they may not be so readily apparent, opportunities exist in our rural communities, as well as in our more urban downtowns, for inter-municipal cooperation. State statute enables communities to join into inter-local contracts or union municipal districts for the purposes of performing “any governmental service, activity, or undertaking which each municipality entering into the contract is authorized by law to perform.” TRORC also now can provide a mechanism for shared services; common existing examples among communities include shared police services and municipal aid agreements. Communities may also share staff or equipment. Under certain forms of cooperative agreements, they may purchase property together. Engaging in well-planned and well-organized cooperative efforts can ensure that services are provided more efficiently and more effectively.

### Goal, Policy, and Recommendation: **Shared Services/Infrastructure**

#### Goal

1. Services are provided efficiently and effectively.

#### Policy

1. TRORC encourages communities to seek opportunities for shared staffing, services, and infrastructure with other municipalities in an effort to reduce costs and improve quality of service.

#### Recommendation

1. TRORC will assist communities with the development of inter-local agreements, union municipal districts, and other cooperative agreements whenever possible.
Utilities, Facilities, and Services Endnotes


3. Ibid., 8.

4. 16 VSA § 1


19. 24 VSA § 4861-4902.