

**RE: TOWN AND VILLAGE OF WOODSTOCK, VERMONT  
PLAN REVIEW  
CASE # FY 23-2**

**BACKGROUND**

Pursuant to 24 V.S.A., Section 4350, the Town and Village of Woodstock, Vermont requested TRORC to review and approve the Woodstock Town and Village Plan to be adopted on May 31, 2023. The Plan encompasses all land in the Town and Village of Woodstock, and is referred to hereinafter as the Plan.

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

- A. Consistent (as defined in 24 V.S.A. Section 4302(f)(1)) with the planning goals in Section 4302 of Chapter 117;
- B. Compatible (as defined in 24 V.S.A. Section 4302(f)(2)) with the Regional Plan;
- C. Compatible (as defined in 24 V.S.A. Section 4302(f)(2)) 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.

**This review is based upon the Town Plan as warned for final local hearing and is valid if that is the plan that is 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. The municipal determination of relevancy of a goal is itself subject to regional review.*

**General Goals**

- 1. Is a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework established to guide decisions?**  
Yes, the Plan has overall goals and purpose statements in the Preface and Plan Purpose.
- 2. Is citizen participation encouraged at all levels of the planning process?**  
Yes, this is discussed in the Preface.

**incomes?**

Yes, see Economic Development chapter.

3. **Does the Plan support broadened access to education and vocational training opportunities sufficient to realize the full potential of residents?**  
Yes, see Goal 4 on page 39.
4. **Does the Plan support the provision of a safe, convenient, economic and energy efficient transportation system that respects the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.**  
Yes, see Transportation chapter. Paths, trails, transit, and sidewalks are all discussed.
  - a. **Does the Plan provide that highways, air, rail, and other means of transportation be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated?**  
Yes, see Transportation chapter. As elsewhere in the Plan, text that reads as policies is in the background narrative at times, such as the desired direction around US 4 expressed on pages 102-3. Future Plan iterations should make policy language clearly policies so as Plan users are clear on Town intent.
5. **Does the Plan identify and support the protection and preservation of important natural and historic features of the community's landscape, 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, see the Natural Elements and Historic Preservation and Visual Environment chapters.
6. **Does the Plan seek 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 10 V.S.A section 6086(a) (Act 250)?**  
Yes. Air is addressed in the overall Goal 3 in the Preface. Air quality is generally not a concern in the area, but more can be added to this in future plans. Water and wildlife are addressed well in the Natural Elements chapter. Mineral resources are addressed on pages 80-1, with policies in the text. Future revision should create formal goals and policies.
  - b. **Is the maintenance and improvement of water quality supported in accordance with the policies and actions set forth in the basin plans?** Yes, see actions under Goal 1 on pages 85-88, which includes participating in the basin plan.
  - c. **Are forestlands proposed to be managed so as to maintain and improve forest blocks and habitat connectors?**  
Forests are addressed in the Agriculture chapter (page 5), and the issue of forest blocks

strengthened to more specifically address threats to conversion of ag lands. As in all future land use areas in the Land Use chapter, policies that are contained in the background text would be better listed as policies.

**a. Has the manufacture and marketing of value added agricultural and forest products been encouraged? (a simple policy to this effect suffices)**

Yes, this is addressed in Action 3.1.1 on page 8 and more generally under Goals 2-4 on pages 7-8.

**b. Is the use of locally grown food products encouraged?**

Yes, areas such as Action 2.1.3 on page 7 and Objective 4.1 on page 56 speak directly to the local production and use of food.

**c. Are sound forest and agricultural management practices encouraged?**

Yes, use of the AMPs for logging is called out in Action 1.1.13 on page 87 and AAPs for agriculture (now actually referred to as RAPs) is called out in Action 4.1.1 on page 8.

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

None are planned that would impact these areas.

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

Yes, pages 80-81 have recommendations on extraction and reclamation, however these would be better listed as policies rather than in the text.

**11. Does the Plan 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, the need for housing across income groups is directly called out on page 65 and several actions are called for under Goal 2 on page 68. As elsewhere in the Plan, actions would be better if responsible entities (the actors) were listed as doing the actions.

**b. 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, in particular Goals 1 and 4 on page 67-68 calls for more development in dense core areas and to consider expanding sewer/water service to serve more housing.

**c. Does the Plan support sites for multi-family and manufactured housing that are readily available in similar locations to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings?**

Yes, Goal 5 and its actions on pages 68-69 address this.

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

Yes, in that continued participation in the LEPC (now called REMC) is advised, however this language could be strengthened.

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

The current Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Plan became effective August 19, 2020.

The Woodstock Town and Village Plan is found to be compatible with the Two Rivers-Ottawquechee 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.

Of particular importance in compatibility is whether future land use areas and their policies run counter to those of the Regional Plan. Both the local and regional plans have many advisory policies, but where these plans are specific and mandatory bears careful scrutiny to ensure compatibility. The Regional Plan has a prohibition on 'principal retail' outside of limited areas. The local plan matches this prohibition and area coverage with the exception of a limited area on the eastern edge of the village. However, given the current development on these few sites, we do not anticipate additional projects that would trigger Act 250 in that area, and should they arise we do not anticipate that TRORC would oppose them. TRORC areas should be reviewed in the next Regional Plan update.

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

At the time of review of this Woodstock Town and Village Plan, the following municipalities have plans approved by the Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Commission that are in effect:

Barnard, Bethel, Bradford, Braintree, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Chelsea, Corinth, Fairlee, Granville, Hancock, Hartford, Hartland, Newbury, Norwich, Pittsfield, Plymouth, Pomfret, Randolph, Rochester, Royalton, Stockbridge, Strafford, Thetford, Tunbridge, Vershire, West Fairlee, and Woodstock.

Given the Linking Lands effort that is called out, the Forest Reserve area is a minimal attempt at creating functional habitat and connections. Future plans should consider if the R5 land use area and policies contained throughout the Plan meet conservation goals. The state Habitat Block maps are called out, but a link to this and forest block maps should be included in the Plan if the data is not.

- A. sets 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?**  
Yes, the Plan has language for the future land use areas on uses and intensity and they match current services.

- B. identifies those areas, if any, proposed for designation under chapter 76A of Title 24, together with, for each area proposed for designation, an explanation of how the designation would further the plan's goals and the goals of 24 V.S. A. section 4302, and how the areas sought meets the requirements?**  
The Plan discusses the current designated village areas in Woodstock Village and has a map of that area on page 147. The Plan also calls for an additional state designated area for Taftsville Village.

- C. 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?**  
Yes, the Plan has two areas identified for the Forest Reserve future land use area that support forest blocks and connectors. The plan also has various policies in the Natural Elements, Agriculture and Land Use chapters that address forest fragmentation. However, the proposed limits to the FR land use area are weak in terms of actual forested areas.

- 3. Does the Plan include 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, no new transportation facilities are planned and the current ones are shown on the Town Roads and Village Roads mapped. These should be relabeled to show they are both current and future facilities. Transportation is discussed well across modes in the Transportation chapter (pages 102-113). Specific concerns for US 4 are listed, the lack of transit called out, the scenic nature of backroads is a concern, and projects such as bike lanes from Woodstock to Bridgewater called out. The issue of parking in the CBD is called out in the Community Facilities and Services chapter. Actions need actors assigned to them in future plans to make these more likely to occur.

- 4. Does the Plan include a utility and facility plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective community facilities and public utilities showing existing and**

relatively detailed actions for the town to take on buildings. The plan does include regionally supplied energy data, which includes projected needs. The plan minimally covers energy costs and scarcity issues.

**10. Does the Plan include 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, including the permitting of accessory dwelling units?**

The Plan's Housing chapter (pages 64-69) covers the problems faced around housing and puts forward actions to try to address these. These are not limited to regulatory reform, but also see the need for direct town action. TRORC has not generated local housing needs data. Woodstock's EDC's efforts on housing could be detailed better, and the data from the 2018 housing study at least mentioned.

**11. Does the Plan include 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.**

Yes. The Plan has a good Economic Development chapter (pages 23-32) that discusses the various parts of the local economy and actions to support it. Other chapters, such as Agriculture, contain goals or actions that relate to the local economy's place-based nature and the need to retain recreational assets and improve the ag and forestry sectors.

**12. Does the Plan include a flood resilience plan that:**

**identifies flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas based on river corridor maps provided by VT ANR or other maps recommended by the Secretary of Natural Resources, 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?**

The Plan does not have a river corridor map, but does show mapped flood areas. The Plan contains a Flood Resilience chapter (pages 121-129) that calls for prohibiting development in river corridors outside of the village areas and for no building in floodways. The plan has several policy statements on avoiding building in the flood zones, but does not have a mandatory no-build policy. However, the plan's language on river corridors effectively bans development in flood zones as those are largely within corridors. The plan does call for stream setbacks, and upland forest and wetlands protection that help reduce flood flows. The chapter does address infrastructure sizing to pass flood flows, river restoration, and locating critical facilities outside of flood areas.