

# 1 9 UTILITIES, FACILITIES, AND 2 SERVICES

## 3 A. Background

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

7 While TRORC does not have a direct role in maintaining these systems, it does  
8 have the ability to provide municipalities with guidance and technical assistance  
9 to achieve regional and local planning goals. Compact land use patterns generally  
10 improve the efficiency of wastewater and water supply systems, roads, transit,  
11 and emergency services. Conversely, sprawling development leads to an  
12 expansion of infrastructure and services to new areas and is generally inefficient.  
13 Nearly all services and facilities benefit from greater density and intensity of land  
14 development within a given area.

15 Achieving Vermont’s land use goal, [“to maintain the historic settlement pattern of](#)  
16 [compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside”](#) is challenging  
17 for communities to implement without public sewer and water. Continued  
18 increases in density and development in many of our villages will eventually be  
19 unsustainable without water and wastewater facilities.

20 Long-range planning for such infrastructure investments and their maintenance is  
21 essential to avoid jumps in annual tax rates. Therefore, state statutes enable  
22 communities to create a [Capital Improvement Plan \(CIP\)](#) for the purposes of

23 planning and investing in long-range capital facilities. From a regional standpoint,  
24 investments in municipal infrastructure must be made based on the population  
25 they will serve and on the most pressing needs. For communities with existing  
26 infrastructure and stable population numbers, capacity is not a significant issue,  
27 therefore priority for future investments is in modernizing or replacing aging  
28 infrastructure. This will make these systems more sustainable and affordable and  
29 will protect against loss of service.

30 **Goals, Policies, and Recommendation: Overall Utilities,**  
31 **Facilities, and Services**

32 **Goals**

- 33 1. The maintenance, expansion, or construction of new facilities and utilities is  
34 financially sustainable for governments and taxpayers.
- 35 2. Investments in utilities, facilities, and recreation enhance the desired  
36 pattern of development which is compact village and urban centers  
37 surrounded by open countryside.

38 **Policies**

- 39 1. Public investments in governmental and public utility facilities services  
40 should support existing and future development.
- 41 2. The scale, type, and design of major public utilities and facilities shall be  
42 consistent with the future land use settlement patterns recommended in  
43 this Plan and relevant municipal plans.

- 44        3. Public investments in municipal, regional, and state facilities should be  
45            located within existing or planned Regional Growth, Industrial, and Mixed-  
46            Use Areas.
- 47        4. Public facilities such as solid waste disposal facilities, correctional facilities,  
48            and wastewater treatment facilities shall be situated in an area where they  
49            best serve their purpose while minimizing negative impacts on the  
50            surrounding area.
- 51        5. TRORC supports the acquisition of future public and quasi-public utility  
52            sites, properties, or interests, when such acquisitions advance the goals and  
53            policies of this Plan and relevant local plans.
- 54        6. The construction of primary educational facilities, health-care facilities,  
55            emergency facilities, post offices, libraries, and other public facilities should  
56            occur in or adjacent to existing or planned Regional Growth and Mixed-Use  
57            Areas, so as to maximize their convenience to people (either locating  
58            facilities near transit stops or walking distance), to minimize additional  
59            infrastructure improvement costs, and to contribute to the vitality of  
60            communities.
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62            financially sustainable for governments and taxpayers.
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86 facilities near transit stops or walking distance), to minimize additional  
87 infrastructure improvement costs, and to contribute to the vitality of  
88 communities.

## 89 B. Water and Wastewater Systems

90 The TRO Region is largely a rural region, with most of the water supply handled  
91 through individual on-site wells and septic systems. Only a fraction of  
92 municipalities has public water systems, and in those municipalities, the systems  
93 serve a limited area—generally downtown or village areas (see map/figure X).  
94 Many of the supply and sewer lines need repairs or upgrades. Some systems suffer  
95 from inadequate storage or from poor line pressure. Many systems have poorly  
96 mapped lines due to their age (50 to 100 years old). Municipalities are required by  
97 law to create [Source Protection Area \(SPA\)](#) plans, which ensure that drinking water  
98 supplies will remain safe and untainted.

99 For villages and downtowns, water supply and septic systems are vital  
100 infrastructures, as they allow communities to create greater population density  
101 than would be possible without them. Well-maintained public drinking water  
102 infrastructure and septic systems are critical for public health, strong businesses,  
103 and a clean environment.

104 Currently, [there are 12 wastewater treatment facilities in 9 communities in our](#)  
105 [Region](#). The bulk of these systems were originally built in the 1970s and 1980s,  
106 with periodic improvements being made in response to aging equipment or  
107 increasing demand. As time goes on, the cost of necessary upgrades for these  
108 facilities increases.

109 Wastewater treatment facilities suffer from structural defects such as leaking  
110 sewers, as well as decrepit connections that funnel stormwater into combined

111 sewer and stormwater lines—which diminishes the efficacy of wastewater  
112 rehabilitation.

113 The majority of the wastewater systems in our Region have sufficient capacity.  
114 Given that population growth rates have flattened, it is likely that the design  
115 capacity of the systems in most communities will be sufficient, as long as they are  
116 maintained.

117 However, new wastewater treatment facilities and/or public water supplies will  
118 eventually be necessary in all communities’ core areas if they desire to grow,  
119 create more housing, or attract businesses. Hartland and Norwich are the largest  
120 communities in the TRO Region without wastewater treatment facilities. Fairlee  
121 and Strafford both have viable village centers that would benefit, both  
122 economically and in overall health, from the ability to concentrate more  
123 development within those areas. Municipal plans, per Vermont statute, shall  
124 identify and prioritize future capital improvements and major repairs, as well as  
125 estimate costs and financing for maintenance and future capacity.

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

128 **Goals**

- 129 1. Municipal water and wastewater systems are secure, financially sustainable,  
130 well-maintained and energy efficient.
- 131 2. Municipal water supply areas maintain high quality of drinking water for  
132 public health.

133 **Policies**

- 134 1. Municipalities and private utilities should create capital budgets and reserve  
135 accounts for utilities and facilities management and operations.
- 136 2. TRORC supports proposals to install, upgrade, and improve existing public  
137 water supplies and wastewater treatment facilities that serve Regional  
138 Growth, Industrial, and Mixed-Use Areas as designated in this Plan, as well  
139 as affordable housing projects in Rural Areas.
- 140 3. Proposals for upgrades, improvements, or expansion of water and  
141 wastewater treatment infrastructure shall not promote sprawl, strip  
142 development, and scattered land uses.
- 143 4. New hookups must not promote sprawl or strip development.
- 144 5. TRORC encourages the location of community water supplies and  
145 wastewater treatment facilities primarily in Regional Growth, Industrial, and  
146 Mixed-Use Areas; however, systems designed specifically to supply  
147 appropriately scaled cluster housing projects in rural areas are consistent  
148 with this Plan.
- 149 6. Land development within existing or planned Source Protection Areas shall  
150 not pose a reasonable threat of contamination to public water supplies.
- 151 7. TRORC supports water conservation measures to reduce demand for water  
152 and to promote the life span and efficiency of water and wastewater  
153 facilities.
- 154 8. TRORC supports and encourages installation of community wastewater  
155 treatment facilities and/or water supply systems in areas of existing

156 concentrated settlement where conventional on-site septic systems and  
157 wells are inadequate for public health and development.

158 9. New water and wastewater systems should be designed to be energy  
159 efficient and secure.

160 10. The village areas of Norwich, Hartland, Sharon, Strafford, and Fairlee are  
161 the highest regional priorities for new wastewater treatment facilities.

## 162 **Recommendations**

163 1. TRORC will assist communities with the identification and prioritization of  
164 future capital improvements and repairs, grant writing, and project  
165 management.

166 2. TRORC will continue to offer capital budgeting services to the towns.

167 3. Water efficiency programs and codes should be adopted at the state or local  
168 level to reduce demand for municipal water systems.

169 4. TRORC shall seek grant opportunities to map water and wastewater systems  
170 throughout the Region.

171 5. When funding is available, municipal plans should inventory water and  
172 wastewater systems to identify current and projected capacity gaps.

173 6. Municipalities should conduct periodic auditing of all water and wastewater  
174 distribution systems to calculate infiltration and losses.

## 175 **C. Solid Waste**

176 All Vermont municipalities, either individually or as part of a solid waste district or  
177 an intermunicipal association, are required by Vermont law to adopt a [Solid](#)



178 [Waste Implementation Plan \(SWIP\)](#). The SWIP documents town or district waste  
179 management facilities and articulates how solid waste will be managed over the  
180 next five years. All solid waste districts and intermunicipal SWIPs must be in  
181 compliance with the goals outlined in the statewide 2019 [Materials Management](#)  
182 [Plan \(MMP\)](#). In addition to being in conformance with the state plan, all SWIPs  
183 must be in accordance with any Town or Regional Plan. The TRO Region is served  
184 by a total of [six waste management districts](#), as well as one intermunicipal  
185 association. [The Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste Management District](#) covers a  
186 ten-town area, which contains nearly half of the Region’s population. The second  
187 largest service area by population is within the town of Hartford, which operates  
188 the [Hartford Community Recycling Center](#). The third largest waste management  
189 district by population is the [White River Alliance](#), which covers eight of the  
190 Region’s towns.

191 As of 2023, there are 25 active solid waste facilities throughout our Region that  
192 have been certified by the State. Presently, the Region has 7 recycling facilities, 4  
193 composting facilities, and 11 transfer stations (see map). A third of the Region’s  
194 towns lack any waste management facility and are instead reliant on their  
195 neighboring municipalities for waste disposal. In some instances, these towns  
196 find themselves two to three towns removed from a landfill or transfer station.  
197 There are no operating landfills in the region.

## 198 **Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: Solid Waste**

### 199 **Goals**

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

202 **Policies**

203 1. Solid waste collection systems should be coordinated to lessen costs and  
204 increase efficiency.

205 2. Products that are fully recyclable are encouraged to be recycled.

206 **Recommendations**

207 1. TRORC will continue to assist member towns, alliances, and the Greater  
208 Upper Valley Solid Waste Management District in the update and  
209 implementation of municipal and regional solid waste plans.

210 2. TRORC will support and participate in any future discussions regarding the  
211 development of regional waste management services.

212 3. TRORC should assist towns in meeting the Universal Recycling Law  
213 requirements through outreach and education, with assistance from the  
214 Agency of Natural Resources.

215 4. All towns or districts of this Region are encouraged to contact TRORC offices  
216 regarding their current planning activities and determine if their SWIP  
217 revisions meet the overall goals and policies of this Plan.

218 **D. Educational Facilities and Services**

219 Access to quality education is required to achieve social and economic goals of  
220 the TRO Region. According to Vermont statute, the right to public education is key  
221 to guaranteeing political and civil rights to constituents. Indeed, [“to keep  
222 Vermont’s democracy competitive and thriving, Vermont students must be  
223 afforded substantially equal access to a quality basic education.”](#)

## 224 Elementary and Secondary Schools

225 All public schools in the Region are governed by a district school board elected by  
226 the voters of their respective municipalities, and administrative support to the  
227 district board is received from supervisory unions. Some school districts and  
228 municipalities accept, on a year-to-year basis, tuition-paying students from  
229 neighboring communities that do not provide elementary or secondary education,  
230 or that lack adequate facilities.

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

234 Sustained levels of decline may have adverse social and economic impacts for  
235 towns in the TRO Region, and are, therefore, an area of vigilance and concern for  
236 the future well-being of the Region. A table of schools in the Region and their  
237 average daily enrollment can be found on the [Vermont Department of Education](#)  
238 [website](#).

239 While homeschooled children do not require educational provisions from school  
240 districts, there are actions that towns and local organizations should consider for  
241 the wellbeing of these children.

## 242 Poverty and Education

243 The Region's school system provides a major avenue of support for children living  
244 in poverty, as it may be the main source of food for children in this condition.

245 Children who are homeless have the same right of access to a free public  
246 education that other children do. Many students may not be classified as

247 homeless but may be staying with friends and family members, or be housed in a  
248 motel. The summer, when school is out, is concerning for those that are homeless  
249 and living in poverty, as schools can be the main source of food for children who  
250 are homeless and living in poverty.

## 251 [Vocational Training and the Region's Youth](#)

252 Educational opportunities that support the acquisition of professional skillsets  
253 allow students to better understand and prepare for valuable local employment  
254 sector opportunities. Many trades are an integral part of our economy and can  
255 supply a good living wage. Providing opportunities for the Region's youth to see,  
256 experience, and learn about local jobs may serve as an incentive, convincing many  
257 youths to stay in our communities well beyond high school. In our region, there  
258 are currently three vocational schools:

- 259 • [River Bend Career and Technical Center in Bradford](#)
- 260 • [Randolph Technical Career Center](#)
- 261 • [Hartford Area Career & Technology Center](#)

262 Both students and prospective employers from local enterprises stand to benefit  
263 substantially from networks formed between students and the working world,  
264 both within and outside of the traditional classroom. These connections serve as  
265 an enriching supplement to traditional academic course offerings.

## 266 [Adult Education](#)

267 The availability of education services for [adult learners](#) is critical to the social  
268 and economic well-being of the Region and its residents. The adult learning

269 centers in the region offer classes free of cost to adults in basic skills, General  
270 Educational Development (GED) certification, English as a second language,  
271 college transition skills, and work readiness skills, including WorkKeys (ACT)  
272 certification. For instance, The Family Place is a family support center that offers  
273 courses to young mothers with the aim of helping them earn their GED and  
274 acquire basic employment skills.

275 The Agency of Education funds three adult learning centers in the region:the  
276 [Vermont Adult Learning Center](#) in Hartford and the two [Central Vermont Adult](#)  
277 [Basic Education Centers](#) in Randolph and Bradford. Both of the Community Action  
278 Agencies covering the TRO Region ([Southeastern Vermont Community Action](#) and  
279 [Capstone Community Action](#)) have adult education and job skills programs.  
280 Capstone Community Action has two locations in our Region: Bradford and  
281 Randolph. Southeastern Vermont Community Action’s physical location is in  
282 Westminster, with an additional office in White River Junction. Other than these  
283 options, participants are required to travel outside the Region for these  
284 educational opportunities. This is a limiting factor to the Region’s lower-income  
285 residents who wish to use these services.

## 286 [Continuing Education](#)

287 As Vermont’s senior population significantly increases, and adults of all ages  
288 continue to seek learning opportunities for economic or personal reasons, the  
289 State will be confronted with the need for both new educational and recreational  
290 activities. Currently, residents can enroll in the following institutions:

- 291 • [Artistree in Pomfret](#)
- 292 • [Vermont Law and Graduate School in South Royalton](#)

- 293 • [Vermont State University in Randolph](#)
- 294 • [Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH](#)
- 295 • [Riverbend Career and Technical and Oxbow High School in Bradford](#)
- 296 • [Bethel University in Bethel](#)
- 297 • [Community College of Vermont in Wilder](#)

## 298 The Future of Education in the Region

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

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

312 With the adoption of [Act 46](#) in 2015, many schools in the Region began  
313 consolidating with other districts.. Several communities have either closed or  
314 merged their schools with other communities. If the trend toward smaller classes  
315 and fewer children in many towns continues, more communities will need to  
316 engage in these consolidation discussions.

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

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

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

## 330 **Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: Educational Facilities** 331 **and Services**

### 332 **Goals**

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

### 338 **Policies**

- 339 1. The construction of primary educational facilities should occur in or within  
340 close proximity to existing or planned Regional Growth and Mixed-Use  
341 Areas, so as to maximize their accessibility to people and infrastructure.
- 342 2. Expansion of continuing education and vocational education opportunities  
343 is encouraged.

344 **Recommendations**

- 345 1. Town and school authorities should create and maintain safe pedestrian  
346 access and transit opportunities to educational facilities, in line with Safe  
347 Routes to School efforts.
- 348 2. Towns must assess and incorporate the needs of disabled children and staff  
349 into educational facility and budgetary planning efforts to ensure the  
350 provision of free and appropriate education for all children.
- 351 3. Towns should consider adaptive reuse of vacant school facilities that occurs  
352 in a manner that enhances villages and downtowns and stimulates the local  
353 economy.
- 354 4. Towns should consider applying for funding opportunities enhancing  
355 educational facilities as early as possible (i.e., a year in advance) in order to  
356 request help from TRORC, if needed.

357 **E. Childcare Services**

358 The availability of high-quality and affordable childcare is an important factor in  
359 the appeal and sustainability of our Region. For example, the childcare industry  
360 contributes to the regional economy as a business and employer in its own right.



361 It also functions as a service industry that provides crucial support to employers  
362 and employees. Without access to affordable, high-quality childcare, one parent  
363 would likely leave the labor force to care for young children. Good quality  
364 childcare helps prepare children for schooling or may even supplement a child's  
365 school curriculum, and it provides them with opportunities for socialization.

366 According to the 2020 U.S. Census, approximately 53,000 people live in the TRO  
367 Region. The number of children aged 0-14 is a relatively small percentage of the  
368 Region's population: just over 15 percent, or 12,445 individuals. As of 2020, there  
369 are 101 registered and licensed childcare providers; to see the locations of  
370 providers and the types of programs they provide, please visit [Bright Future's](#)  
371 [Childcare Information System](#).

372 Afterschool programs and summer camps provide childcare options for parents  
373 with children old enough to attend public or private school full time. Both help to  
374 keep children engaged in enriching activities, while also allowing parents to feel  
375 comfortable that their children are safe if they are working past school hours or  
376 during summer vacation. According to the [2020 VermontAfter 3 PM study](#),  
377 statewide there are approximately 19,000 children who are participating in  
378 afterschool programs and 26,000 children who are not because of financial  
379 constraints and lack of available programs in their communities.

380 Barriers associated with childcare in Vermont include inadequate amount of  
381 infant/ toddler care available, complicated application forms, and insufficient  
382 financial assistance to cover the cost of high-quality services (despite receiving  
383 financial help from some childcare providers). Searching for childcare is often  
384 difficult for parents in the Region, as the availability of childcare providers,

385 especially for infant and school-age children, is limited. To learn more about  
386 other obstacles to childcare services that caretakers commonly experience,  
387 visit [Vermont's Early Childhood Systems Needs Assessment 2020](#).

388 To address the workforce needs of childcare providers, there are a few vocational  
389 schools in the Region that have training programs that teach students to care for  
390 infants and preschool-age children. One vocational school to offer such a program  
391 is the River Bend Career and Technical Center in Bradford in their "[Teacher](#)  
392 [Education](#)" curriculum. The Randolph Technical Career Center has a similar  
393 program in their "[Education Services](#)" curriculum. CCV offers [a degree in](#)  
394 [Education](#), along with several other related degrees, and an option to obtain a  
395 certificate. In addition, there is ongoing professional development offered  
396 through Northern Lights at CCV for those who are in the field and seek training or  
397 additional qualifications.

398 To help families pay for childcare, the State of Vermont provides financial  
399 assistance through the [Vermont Childcare Financial Assistance Program \(CCFAP\)](#).  
400 Vermont's CCFAP helps families who meet certain work, education, and income  
401 requirements afford childcare. The program also provides childcare financial  
402 assistance for children in foster care and children and families who meet certain  
403 health criteria.

404 Given the high costs of childcare, it can be difficult for low- to moderate income  
405 families to afford placing their children in childcare. As a consequence of this  
406 situation, a family member may decide to provide care for the child or children  
407 instead of working and supplementing the family income.

408 Out of approximately 32,000 households in the TRO Region, 1,704 of them are  
409 classified as “single head-of-household” with children 18 years old or younger. It is  
410 very important for single parents to find childcare so that they are able to work  
411 and provide for their families. The parent may have another family member or  
412 trusted adult care for their child or children while at work, or they may seek out a  
413 childcare provider. Women are often the ones filling the role of the primary  
414 caregiver for young children. A national statistic states that [out of all women  
415 between the ages of 25-44 who are not participating in the workforce, about a  
416 third are not working due to childcare \(compared to 12% of men for the same  
417 reason\).](#)

418 [Let’s Grow Kids](#) is a statewide campaign looking for more high-quality, affordable  
419 childcare in Vermont to better support our children, families, women,  
420 communities, and economy. [More than 70 percent of Vermont children under age  
421 6 have both of their parents in the labor force](#), meaning they’re likely to need  
422 care. Yet half of those infants and toddlers don’t have access to any regulated  
423 care, and [nearly 80 percent don’t have access to high-quality programs](#). This has  
424 a negative ripple effect on our businesses, schools, communities, health-care  
425 system, and economy as a whole.

426 In our Region, there have been two major reports that focus on childcare. [The  
427 Blue-Ribbon Commission on Financing Childcare](#), published in 2016, looked into  
428 the real cost of childcare and found that “the estimated cost of high-quality early  
429 care and learning is currently unaffordable for almost 90% of Vermont families.”  
430 The second report was [Stalled at the Start](#), published in 2022 and produced by  
431 Let’s Grow Kids, which analyzed the supply and demand of childcare.

432 One available program that could benefit families is the [Childcare Financial](#)  
433 [Assistance Program \(CCFAP\)](#). This is a government program that helps eligible  
434 families cover some of the cost of childcare. There is also a federal scholarship  
435 program for childcare center teachers that are trying to earn  
436 credentials/degrees. Through the [T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Vermont program](#),  
437 up to 80 percent of tuition can be covered, along with other benefits.

## 438 **Goals, Policies, and Recommendation: Childcare Services**

### 439 **Goals**

- 440 1. An adequate supply of safe and affordable childcare services and facilities is  
441 available.
- 442 2. A regional network of high-quality childcare programs fulfills the needs of  
443 families and employers.

### 444 **Policy**

- 445 1. TRORC supports initiatives to develop childcare facilities where a need has  
446 been proven and the location conforms to this Regional Plan.

### 447 **Recommendations**

- 448 1. TRORC should encourage major employers (employing more than 35  
449 employees) to provide childcare services and create a partnership with a  
450 local childcare service.
- 451 2. TRORC should work collaboratively with childcare providers and towns to  
452 help them locate childcare services in convenient and safe areas.

- 453 3. TRORC should work with towns to address identified needs for childcare  
454 facilities or services by:
- 455 a. Identifying publicly owned buildings throughout the Region; and
  - 456 b. Evaluating and prioritizing their suitability to serve as childcare  
457 facilities after considering Vermont regulations.
- 458 4. Towns should review their zoning regulations (if adopted) to determine the  
459 ability of the regulations to allow childcare providers to be located in the  
460 town.

## 461 F. Telecommunications

462 Information technology (such as broadband Internet and wired/wireless  
463 telecommunications) has become essential to residents and businesses in the  
464 Region. Our economy, educational systems, and functionality of our homes rely  
465 on ubiquitous availability of data and communications for our Region.

466 In the 2021 [Vermont Ten-Year Telecommunications Plan](#), the Public Utilities  
467 Commission set the following goals:

- 468 • Bringing every currently unserved and underserved on-grid Vermont  
469 home access to 100/100 megabits per second (Mbps) broadband that can  
470 be scalable to faster speeds as demand warrants
- 471 • Leveraging residential fiber deployments into better mobile voice  
472 coverage along key roadways and in small communities
- 473 • Ensuring that telecommunications systems are resilient, redundant,  
474 secure, and futureproof for commercial, consumer, and public safety  
475 needs

- 476 • Facilitating competition and choice of multiple internet service providers  
477 at the majority of premises in the state
- 478 • Promoting local input and oversight in the direction of future use for  
479 publicly funded broadband infrastructure through empowered regional  
480 Communication Union Districts
- 481 • Leveraging fiber broadband expansion to ensure public safety has access  
482 to reliable and redundant communications capacity

483 In the TRO Region, access to broadband is provided via a number of mediums,  
484 including cable, DSL (digital subscriber line), fiber-optic cable, cellular, wireless,  
485 and satellite. This access varies from town to town, with the highest  
486 concentration of availability being in villages and downtowns. Broadband  
487 providers tend to locate their infrastructure in areas with high population  
488 density to maximize the subscriber-to-infrastructure ratio. The farther away  
489 from a community center, the fewer options for broadband connectivity; this  
490 makes the “last mile” homes and businesses the least likely to have access.

491 Efforts to improve broadband coverage in the TRO Region are ongoing. Between  
492 2000 and 2012, the State of Vermont invested a substantial amount of funding  
493 in an effort to bring broadband to all Vermonters. One such project was the  
494 [Vermont Digital Economy Project \(VDEP\)](#), which was developed as part of the  
495 State’s goal to create more resilient communities after Tropical Storm Irene in  
496 2011 by delivering 26 free Wi-Fi zones/hotspots and pursuing other prominent  
497 projects that expanded digital literacy in rural towns. Similar in scope, the [VT](#)  
498 [Community Broadband Board \(VCBB\)](#), was established in 2021 in order to

499 “accelerate the development and implementation of universal community  
500 broadband solutions” all throughout Vermont.

501 In our Region, VDEP has built free village Wi-Fi zones in the communities of  
502 Bethel, Royalton, and Rochester. These investments provide residents who lack  
503 access in their homes with a reliable place to connect to the Internet. In East  
504 Barnard, there is also a community-funded Wi-Fi zone for residents. Village-  
505 wide access is a boon to businesses who can take advantage of the additional  
506 customers who are drawn to the village for Internet access. To see Wi-Fi  
507 coverage across our Region and Vermont, visit [Vermont Department of Public  
508 Service’s interactive map showing Wi-Fi hotspots](#).

509 The [East Central Vermont Fiber-Optic Network \(EC Fiber\)](#) is a consortium of 24  
510 towns (including 21 TRO Region towns) that is working to expand access to  
511 high-speed Internet. Major cellular providers are continually working to expand  
512 coverage, particularly along major transportation corridors, such as Interstates  
513 89 and 91.

514 Use of cellular phones in day-to-day activities has skyrocketed over the past  
515 decade. The availability of broadband cellular data has increased the use of  
516 cellular phones to the point that they are essential to businesses and  
517 individuals alike. In fact, [most U.S. households no longer have a “landline”  
518 phone](#). The lack of cell coverage is a major deterrent to both attracting  
519 businesses and younger families.

520 Cellular access is determined in great part by topography in relation to the  
521 placement of cellular transmission towers. While coverage in the TRO Region is  
522 reasonably good along main travel corridors, it is spotty in more rural areas. In

523 some instances, there are entire communities (such as Barnard) that have [virtually](#)  
524 [no cellular access](#). In many cases, residents support improved cell phone access,  
525 but are less supportive of having the necessary facilities located in their  
526 communities. When residents object to proposed facilities, it is almost always due  
527 to the potential for aesthetic impacts.

528 Wireless telecommunications facilities are primarily permitted under [Section](#)  
529 [248a](#). The 248a process was created to enable a faster permitting process in order  
530 to achieve greater wireless coverage, and it specifically exempts projects that  
531 achieve this wireless coverage from local zoning or Act 250.

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

543 Transmission towers are necessary telecommunications facilities, but as land  
544 uses, these towers have planning concerns, primarily for aesthetic reasons. To  
545 ensure adequate transmission of signals in mountainous areas such as ours,  
546 towers and related facilities need to be located on hilltops or high elevation



547 points. These areas are also significant contributors to the scenic and rural  
548 character of the Region. Protection of these areas from insensitive  
549 developments is a matter of public good. Thus, due to transmission towers'  
550 higher visibility from multiple vantage points, conflict with scenic landscapes  
551 has become an issue.

## 552 **Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: Telecommunications**

### 553 **Goals**

- 554 1. Universal broadband access using fiber is available throughout developed  
555 areas in the TRO Region.
- 556 2. Universal availability of mobile cellular service is available throughout  
557 developed areas in the TRO Region.

### 558 **Policies**

- 559 1. Public and private efforts to expand telecommunications access are  
560 supported, when done in a manner that does not have an undue adverse  
561 impact on the rural character of our communities.
- 562 2. Efforts to provide free public broadband access in places such as village  
563 centers and public buildings are supported.
- 564 3. Telecommunications facility development shall be excluded from the  
565 following areas:
  - 566 a. Floodways shown on FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps.
  - 567 b. Wetlands as indicated on Vermont State Wetlands Inventory maps or  
568 identified through site analysis.

- 569           c. Rare, threatened, or endangered species habitat or communities.
- 570           4. All new telecommunications facilities and related infrastructure must be  
571           sited and designed to avoid or, if no other reasonable alternative exists, to  
572           otherwise minimize and mitigate adverse impacts to the following:
- 573               a. Historic districts, landmarks, and sites.
- 574               b. State or federally designated scenic byways and municipally  
575               designated scenic roads and viewsheds.
- 576               c. Special flood hazard areas identified by National Flood Insurance  
577               Program maps.
- 578               d. Necessary wildlife habitat identified by the State or through analysis,  
579               including core habitat areas, migration, and travel corridors.
- 580           5. New telecommunications facilities and related infrastructure (including  
581           access roads, site clearing, on-site power lines, lighting, and off-site power  
582           lines) must be sited to avoid the fragmentation of large priority and high  
583           priority forest blocks.
- 584           6. Telecommunications facilities development shall minimize site clearing and  
585           highly visible roadways.
- 586           7. The developer shall make reasonable efforts to minimize the aesthetic  
587           impact of the telecommunications facility or infrastructure on the  
588           surrounding landscape. This includes options such as the utilization of  
589           “stealth towers,” camouflage through paint scheme, or designs that blend  
590           into the surroundings, such as asymmetrical monopoles disguised as pine  
591           trees.

- 592 8. Telecommunications facilities shall be designed to be the minimum height  
593 necessary to achieve coverage.
- 594 9. All new facilities shall incorporate reasonable options for sharing space on  
595 the proposed towers. Applicants for new towers must demonstrate that  
596 there is no reasonable opportunity for colocation on existing towers.
- 597 10. To support resiliency, applicants shall make space available on towers for  
598 municipal communication systems to enhance or expand road and  
599 emergency service communication networks.
- 600 11. To minimize conflict with scenic values, facility design and construction shall  
601 employ the following principles:
- 602 a. In rural locations, be located in forested areas or be sufficiently  
603 landscaped to screen the lower sections of towers and related ground  
604 fixtures from public vantage points, such as trails, roads, or water  
605 bodies.
  - 606 b. In more developed areas, utilize materials, architectural styles, color  
607 schemes, lighting fixtures, size, and other design elements to  
608 promote aesthetic compatibility with surrounding uses and to avoid  
609 adverse visual impacts; and
  - 610 c. Be located downgrade of the ridge so as not to exceed the elevation  
611 of the tree line as seen from public highways.
- 612 12. Consideration shall be given to the environmental limitations of any given  
613 site. Impacts on wildlife habitats, soil erosion, forestry and agricultural

614 lands, and similar resources should be carefully addressed. Projects that  
615 materially impact these resources are discouraged.

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

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

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

## 621 **Recommendations**

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

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

626 3. The State should continue to support programs that achieve universal  
627 broadband and cellular communication access.

## 628 **G. Municipal Buildings and Properties**

629 Towns own a variety of public buildings, and every town has a town office  
630 building. Nearly every town has a town hall where they hold town meetings and  
631 other events. Sometimes, town offices are also located in this building. Towns  
632 with their own road crews also own town garages, some of which are woefully  
633 inadequate for their function, and are sites for salt and sand storage. Some towns  
634 own their own sand and gravel pit, but most contract this function out. Nearly all  
635 of the town halls and offices are in older structures, many of which need

636 substantial maintenance or improvements, but several have been renovated to  
637 create better working space and improve energy efficiency. Town offices, like  
638 other civic functions, help to create a sense of community and give energy and  
639 importance to town and village centers.

640 Public libraries play an important role in providing materials to inform,  
641 challenge, and inspire the Region’s residents, as well as Wi-Fi hotspots and  
642 computer access. In some towns, public libraries are privately owned  
643 entities that still provide an essential public service to residents.

644 **Goal, Policies, and Recommendations: Municipal Buildings and**  
645 **Properties**

646 **Goal**

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

648 **Policies**

- 649 2. Town buildings must be carefully sited and designed to meet the future  
650 energy efficiency needs of the town and built with both construction and  
651 operating costs in mind.

- 652 3. Towns are encouraged to rehabilitate historic buildings that are located in  
653 existing developed areas for their offices.

- 654 4. The State shall only construct new office buildings in Regional Growth  
655 Areas.

656 **Recommendations**

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

## 665 H. Recreational Facilities

666 Many recreational opportunities are available to the Region’s residents and  
667 visitors. These range from organized, structured prospects at state and federal  
668 parks to more informal opportunities in municipal parks and forests.

669 The Region has one national park—the [Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic](#)  
670 [Park](#) in Woodstock. Associated with the Park is the privately owned [Billings Farm](#)  
671 [and Museum](#), which offers farm educational programs. The western part of our  
672 Region is also home to a portion of the [Green Mountain National Forest](#) and the  
673 [Long Trail corridor](#). [The Appalachian Trail corridor](#) goes through the central part of  
674 the Region. Additionally, outdoor recreation opportunities are available at the  
675 [Saskadena Six ski area](#), many rivers and lakes, public and private forests, and Class  
676 4 roads. Indoor recreational opportunities include ice rinks, [the Upper Valley](#)  
677 [Aquatic Center](#), and the [Montshire Museum of Science](#).

678 Several state parks can be found in the Region, including the [Calvin Coolidge](#)  
679 [Historic Site](#) in Plymouth, the [Quechee Gorge State Park](#), and several other

680 historical sites. The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, and the  
681 Department of Fish and Wildlife also have several state forests, wildlife  
682 management areas, and lake or river access points that offer additional outdoor  
683 recreational opportunities.

684 Several towns also offer town recreation programs through their recreation  
685 departments. These may include ski programs in conjunction with local schools in  
686 the winter, camps and track and field programs in the summer, and various events  
687 year-round. These recreation departments may also manage a modest network of  
688 town parks.

689 Many towns also have excellent trail networks linked to their road networks, and  
690 portions of these networks include Class 4 roads and trails.

691 The Region's rivers and lakes offer opportunities for [swimming, and boating](#), and  
692 [fishing](#), all of which require public access areas for parking or boat launching.

693 Scenic waterfalls, cascades, and gorges are also destinations for tourists and  
694 residents. There is a need for access areas to water resources in the Region.

695 Only [13 percent of all land in Vermont is owned by state or federal agencies](#),  
696 which means many of the outdoor recreational resources in the Region rely on the  
697 willingness of landowners to allow access to private land. Several large private  
698 landowners allow access to their land.

## 699 **Goal, Policies, and Recommendations: Recreational Facilities**

### 700 **Goal**

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

703 **Policies**

- 704 1. The maintenance and development of recreation trail networks (e.g.,  
705 Appalachian and Long Trails, Cross Vermont and Cross Rivendell Trails,  
706 regional and state snowmobile networks, and cross-country ski trails) is  
707 encouraged.
- 708 2. New development and land subdivisions that have an undue adverse  
709 impact on the enjoyment or continued use of recreational uses should be  
710 discouraged.
- 711 3. Consistent with private property rights, maintenance and enhancement of  
712 public access to and use of recreational amenities on privately held land are  
713 encouraged.
- 714 4. Where development interacts with the Appalachian or Long Trails and other  
715 related side trails, design plans and construction must maintain the  
716 predominant scenic character and the primitive qualities of the trail  
717 corridor.
- 718 5. TRORC supports the development of multipurpose trails using abandoned  
719 railroad beds and other public rights-of-way.
- 720 6. TRORC encourages federal, state, and local acquisition of land and facilities  
721 well-suited for outdoor recreation, provided that adequate financial and  
722 management plans and arrangements are made with involved local  
723 governments.

724 **Recommendations**



- 725 1. TRORC will assist communities with the establishment of Conservation  
726 Commissions and will support existing Conservation Commissions when  
727 possible.
- 728 2. TRORC will help towns develop highway policies that address recreation  
729 needs and should encourage the adoption of walkable communities  
730 programs within the Region.
- 731 3. TRORC will assist towns with establishing and managing town forests.
- 732 4. TRORC should work with the State, White River Partnership, the Vermont  
733 River Conservancy, and other groups on increased river access.
- 734 5. TRORC will continue to assist towns with their efforts to improve public  
735 access to outdoor recreational opportunities, while ensuring consistency  
736 with local and regional land use plans.

## 737 I. Opportunities for Shared Services/Infrastructure

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

740 Opportunities exist in our rural communities, as well as in our more urban  
741 downtowns, for inter-municipal cooperation. State statute enables communities  
742 to join into inter-local contracts or union municipal districts for the purposes of  
743 performing “any governmental service, activity, or undertaking which each  
744 municipality entering into the contract is authorized by law to perform.” TRORC  
745 also now can provide a mechanism for shared services; common existing  
746 examples among communities include shared police services and municipal aid

747 agreements. Communities may also share staff or equipment. Under certain forms  
748 of cooperative agreements, they may purchase property together. Engaging in  
749 well-planned and well-organized cooperative efforts can ensure that services are  
750 provided more efficiently and more effectively.

751 **Goal, Policy, and Recommendation: Shared Services and**  
752 **Infrastructure**

753 **Goal**

754 1. Shared services and infrastructure are provided efficiently and effectively.

755 **Policy**

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

759 **Recommendation**

760 1. TRORC will assist communities with the development of inter-local  
761 agreements, union municipal districts, and other cooperative agreements  
762 whenever possible.