



# 07 | Historical, Archaeological, and Scenic Resources

*Covered bridge coming down and iron bridge going up over the White River, 1902 (the covered bridge was built in 1848; the iron bridge was built between 1901-1902) | Source: Royalton Historical Society*

## A. Introduction

There are many examples of desirable development that have adapted very well to our historical landscapes and existing settlement patterns. Vermonters have a strong desire to conserve the Vermont landscape while accommodating growth. Growth provides significant advantages for Vermont and the TRO Region, particularly in the creation of employment opportunities and housing.

## B. Historic Structures and Sites

### Advantages of Historic Preservation

Historic preservation is a means to curb the decay of our traditional village centers. It is also a means to celebrating, appreciating, understanding, and protecting our heritage and built environment.

Preservation of historic buildings can increase the market value of property and increase tax revenues to towns. Buildings of architectural merit help shape community identity. In numerous settings throughout the Region, preservation of important landmarks such as the Strafford Meeting House,

Bridgewater Woolen Mill, Bethel Town Hall, and Fairlee Town Hall, have contributed to sense of place and community pride. Once such work has begun in a community, other efforts follow, often heightening community betterment and identity. The combination of rural scenery and the attractive built environment is a key reason why thousands come to the Region and contribute millions of dollars to our economy.

Beyond the practical and aesthetic, preservation is part of our ethic—do not throw something away if it is still useful. Instead, common sense and tradition seek to conserve, use, and improve what already exists.



And lastly, as eloquently stated by former Governor Hoff: “There’s no way you can understand the present unless you have a firm grounding in the past.”

### The National Register and Programs for Historic Preservation

More than 30,000 of the Region’s historic structures have been documented by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development’s Historic Division under their program, the [Vermont Architectural Resource Inventory \(VARI\)](#)<sup>1</sup>. VARI is a collection of survey information regarding properties of historic or architectural significance throughout Vermont.

To aid in the preservation of the most notable historic resources, Congress in 1966 created [The National Register](#)<sup>2</sup>, which is a federally maintained list of culturally important districts, sites, buildings, and structures worthy of preservation. Historic districts are geographic locations that contain historically or architecturally significant buildings, properties, or sites. Such structures or sites are considered to be contributing components, but an historic district may also contain non-contributing (non-historically or architecturally significant) buildings, structures, objects, or sites.

Inclusion in the Register offers a measure of protection against federally licensed or funded construction projects because federal agencies are required to consider the impact of their projects on properties included in or eligible for inclusion in the Register. Many of the buildings and structures included in the State Survey are eligible for the National Register.

Under the provisions of [Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act](#)<sup>3</sup>, prior to proceeding with a federally funded project affecting a historic structure, the federal agency and the State Historic Preservation Officer must attempt to identify ways to avoid or minimize adverse effects. One successful example in the Region was the replacement of the Elm Street Bridge in Woodstock Village, which is listed on the Register. In this case, the Vermont Agency of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration were forced to waive national bridge design standards and to downsize the project to retain many of the elements and components of the historic smaller and narrower bridge.

Another advantage of the National Register of Historic Places is that owners of income producing buildings are eligible for tax credits on rehabilitation work, provided such work meets certain prescribed standards.

Several state organizations and agencies have been actively involved in historic preservation and community development:

- [Preservation Trust of Vermont](#)<sup>4</sup>
- [Division for Historic Preservation](#)<sup>5</sup>
- [Vermont Agency of Transportation](#)<sup>6</sup>
- [Vermont Downtown Program](#)<sup>7</sup>
- [Vermont Barn Preservation Grant Program](#)<sup>8</sup>
- [Vermont Historic Preservation Grant Program](#)<sup>9</sup>

### Local Historic Preservation Methods

Under the provisions of the Vermont Municipal Planning and Development Act (24 VSA §4414), municipalities can protect areas of [historical sites](#)<sup>10</sup> by designating [historic overlay districts](#)<sup>11</sup> as part of local zoning bylaws. Within such overlay districts, prior to exterior modifications to a structure or the erection of a new one, the local planning commission must first grant approval. In determining whether to grant approval, the commission must evaluate whether the proposed changes would not impair the special character or significance of its surroundings.

For projects that fall under the jurisdiction of Act 250, [Criterion 8](#)<sup>12</sup> protects historic sites along with other rare and irreplaceable natural resources. See the [Historical Preservation project review flowchart](#)<sup>13</sup> for more information. Before granting a permit, the District Commission or Environmental Court needs to find that a subdivision or development will not have an undue adverse effect on historic sites. Historic sites are defined as those included in the National Register of Historic Places, the State Register, or other properties deemed historically significant by the Division for Historic Preservation (10 VSA §6001(4)). In approaching such a determination, the Act 250 review process can evaluate local and Regional Plans to determine whether the proposed project complies with or violates a community standard intended to preserve the historic qualities of the site.



## C. Archeological Resources

### Background

Archeological evidence found throughout the State depicts a history of human occupation that dates back 9,000 years. Most Native American populations in the Northeast lived in small groups that subsisted by following a seasonal cycle of resource availability. Rivers provided an important transportation network, water supply, and fishing grounds.

The archeological record provides the only physical remnants of pre-European human occupation. In addition, the record can provide information about past environments, climate, and landscape changes. Although only a few archeological sites in the Region have been designated on the Vermont Archeological Inventory, there are many areas whose topography and proximity to natural resources indicate a likelihood of pre-European habitation. Most prehistoric sites are located within 300 to 500 feet of an existing or relic water source, on slopes of eight percent or less, and often have a southern exposure. Criterion 8 of the Act 250 requires that a development “[will not have an undue adverse effect](#)” on historic sites and sites of archeological importance; however, Act 250 only covers larger developments, and many archeological sites may be located on private land. For areas of potential archeological significance, private landowners need to know how best to preserve important resources on their land. Since many archeological resources are located in areas such as river corridors and prime agricultural land, preservation and conscientious management will

serve multiple purposes.

Public awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the Region’s archeological resources is limited. This is due partly to incomplete documentation of the resources, and partly to a narrow perception of what constitutes archeological resources. Lack of recognition and appreciation can result in missed opportunities for stewardship. These resources are not easily identified and are often subject to accidental destruction. Additionally, there is a perception by landowners that the protection of archeological resources invariably means more restriction on the use of their property without much benefit.

## D. Scenic Resources

### Background

In Vermont, the economic value of scenic resources to tourism cannot be overstated. The landscape of the Region is an economic asset. It represents some of the finest examples of townscapes and rural scenic character in the world, and it has tangible economic value. Tourists spend money in the Region because they are attracted to the scenery, values, and quality of rural life. Tourism is a significant industry in Vermont’s economy. The public’s commitment to the preservation of our visual resources can be traced to the late 1960s with the passage of Vermont’s anti-billboard legislation. All municipal plans prepared and adopted by member towns in the Region consistently stress the goal of maintenance of rural character.



*Bradford Academy | © John Knox*

### Patterns for Development: A Community Standard

The inherent beauty of the Region is tied to the visual relationship between buildings, the working landscape, and mountains and river valleys. Over the past fifty years, development patterns have emerged that propagate highway strip development. Certain areas immediately adjacent to major highways are examples of development sprawl. In some instances, these areas adversely affect the value of scenic resources for travelers. Such a land use pattern will serve, amongst other factors, to destroy the transition between town village centers and the countryside.

The Region’s landscape is also changing due to a gradual reforestation and loss of fields and meadows due to a reduction in agriculture. The resultant land use pattern is a product of economic forces that can permanently alter or pressure that landscape.



Determining scenic significance of resources and evaluating the probable impacts of land development or subdivision on the resource and the recommended measures that may be desirable to mitigate visual impacts is a complex matter.

### Prominent Scenic Landscapes

The following areas are likely to be areas of scenic significance:

1. Shorelands immediate to public lakes, rivers, or ponds;
2. Areas immediately adjacent to scenic corridors;
3. Prominent ridgelines, mountaintops, or excessively steep slopes that can be readily viewed from public corridors;
4. Exceptional agricultural and historic areas;
5. Areas within or immediately adjacent to natural areas (i.e., wetlands) designated by the State; and
6. Areas of high scenic quality that are publicly recognized as exceptionally unique or are noted examples of the dominant characteristics of an area in the Region.

7. Examples of prominent scenic areas within the TRO Region include designated byways.
  - Connecticut River Byway (a National Scenic Byway): Route 5, Hartland to Newbury
  - Crossroads of Vermont Byway: Route 4, Bridgewater to Hartford
  - Scenic Route 100 Byway: Plymouth to Granville

## E. Outdoor Lighting Design and Management

### Issues and Opportunities

Increased development in recent decades brings a corresponding increase in the use of outdoor lighting in our Region. However, such lighting does not need to lead to adverse impacts. Improper lighting contributes to light pollution, limiting our ability to view the night landscape, and has adverse impact on the character of our historic villages.

In May 1996, the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission published [Outdoor Lighting Manual for Vermont Municipalities](#)<sup>14</sup>. The

suggestions and recommendations contained in the Manual form the basis of many of the design principles and issues reflected in this section of the Plan.

Choosing appropriate light sources and intensity makes good economic and environmental sense. By selecting a lighting design that enhances nighttime comfort, our town centers and other areas planned for concentrated mixed use will be better served.

Using a large quantity of light does not guarantee good visibility. Overlighting can cause problems that hinder good vision. Using the minimal amount of light necessary to allow adequate visibility for a site decreases sky glow and avoids escalation of light levels. Glare is another lighting issue facing growing communities in the Region. Sky glow, or reflected light from surfaces, is visible in the night sky over towns or large commercial or industrial complexes and is a form of light pollution that contributes to a loss of our ability to see stars.



Cover of *Outdoor Lighting Manual for Vermont Municipalities (1996)* | Source: Chittenden County Regional Commission



## Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: **Historic Structures and Sites**

### **Goals**

1. Historic structures and sites, where the public interest is clearly benefited, are enhanced and preserved.
2. The renovation of existing or construction of new structures is consistent and compatible with the historic character of the site or area.
3. Sensitive economic development is promoted in areas of historic value (such as in town centers, villages, and hamlets).
4. Improvements to historical transportation facilities, instead of replacement, are promoted.

### **Policies**

1. Land development or subdivision within or immediately adjacent to areas or sites of historic significance should take reasonable steps to ensure that the design of the project fits the historic context.
2. Restoration or rehabilitation of historic sites should not destroy or significantly alter their character and immediate environment.
3. Destruction of a historic site is discouraged.
4. Public improvements or structures such as bridge rehabilitation or replacement, street widening, roadway reconstruction, signage, utility distribution systems, and lighting must be designed to avoid unnecessary degradation of recognized historic sites or areas.
5. Public investments of regional or statewide significance must be planned in consultation with local and state officials and the Division for Historic Preservation.
6. Improvements to historical transportation facilities, instead of replacement, are promoted.

### **Recommendations**

1. TRORC will continue to support efforts to designate National Historic Register Districts and Sites. In so doing, TRORC will coordinate with the State and affected municipalities.
2. TRORC will work with the Agency of Transportation, town officials, its Transportation Advisory Committee, and other groups and organizations to ensure that design standards and plans for proposed transportation projects are reasonably compatible with historic resource needs and values.
3. Towns are encouraged to outline in their town plans historic resources deemed worthy of protection. Town officials can then use this to participate in the Act 250 process, thus influencing decisions affecting historic sites in their community. Local historical societies should continue research, documentation, education, and advocacy efforts.
4. Developers should incorporate historic structures and important architectural details into their project planning.



## Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: **Archaeological Resources**

### *Goals*

1. Archeological resources within the Region are preserved, and an appreciation of their value as a vital aspect of the Region’s historic and cultural past is promoted.
2. Comprehensive planning and land use development are better integrated with archeological resource protection at the federal, state, regional, and local levels.

### *Policies*

1. Existing archeological resources must be protected where public interest is demonstrated. No land development should be permitted when it results in unnecessary loss of an archeological resource at the state or federal level.
2. Within archeologically sensitive areas, planning should consider the impacts a project may have on the resource. If warranted, a site inventory should be conducted as part of project planning. Projects that have undue adverse impacts on these resources must be discouraged or redesigned to mitigate the impact. Project planners are encouraged to contact the state archeologist for further information.
3. To preserve significant archeological sites, purchase of land or development rights is encouraged when such actions are compatible with local plans and this Plan. Because these sites are often farmland, floodplains, wetland margins, and other similar low-lying land, priority should be given to projects that serve multiple preservation purposes.

### *Recommendations*

1. To increase public awareness of archeological resources, TRORC encourages archeologists, local and regional groups, towns, and landowners to organize educational programs focused on Vermont’s history. Such a program could be made a part of an overall cultural heritage program through public schools.
2. Local planning commissions, conservation commissions, historical societies, and other interested groups are encouraged to incorporate an archeological plan for their community in their town plan. Such a plan could be an important step in planning future development in identified areas.

## Goal, Policies, and Recommendation: **Scenic Resources**

### *Goal*

1. The natural and scenic resources of the Region are protected and preserved.

### *Policies*

1. Where development is proposed in areas of scenic value (examples listed under “Prominent Scenic Landscapes”), design plans must:
  - a. Maintain the prominent natural feature of the developed area;



## Goal, Policies, and Recommendation: **Scenic Resources**

### *Policies (continued)*

- b. Work toward enhancing or retaining views;
  - c. Minimize adverse impact on views and areas of historic significance;
  - d. Minimize contrasts with areas of historic significance; and
  - e. Reflect traditional settlement patterns.
2. Projects must minimize the adverse effects of strip development on existing scenic resources through the following design principles:
- a. Integrate landscaping into parking areas;
  - b. Encourage compact and densely developed projects;
  - c. Place street trees as buffers between traffic arteries and internal drives;
  - d. Use unobtrusive signage;
  - e. Vary the pattern, number, size, and location of structures within the site;
  - f. Employ screening plans for visually objectionable features on the site; and
  - g. Minimize access roads or curb cuts onto public highways and use of common access drives.
3. Roads with scenic and cultural values, and determined to be of local or state significance, must be constructed or improved with due concern for the special scenic qualities inherent to the roadway and roadway fringe. Substantial modifications or off-alignment options that unnecessarily destroy the special characteristics of such roadways are not consistent with this Plan.

### *Recommendation*

1. TRORC should employ a process for evaluating impacts to scenic resources in the development proposals.

## Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: **Outdoor Lighting Design and Management**

### *Goals*

1. Lighting provides for safety and convenience in ways that enhances qualities of streets, architecture, and public spaces, while preserving dark skies and avoiding light pollution.
2. Outdoor lighting systems designed to conserve energy and minimize life cycle costs are used.



## Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: **Outdoor Lighting Design and Management**

### *Policies*

1. Lighting plans will be compatible with the character of the neighborhood. New lighting installations shall be designed to minimize glare from nearby surfaces, to not directly light beyond the boundaries of the area to be illuminated or onto adjacent properties, and to not result in excessive lighting levels.
2. For larger projects, lighting professionals should follow lighting design guidelines and other technical information established by the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA). Additionally, project planners should give due consideration to the guidelines set forth in the Outdoor Lighting Manual for Vermont Municipalities.
3. Light sources shall use cut-off or shielded fixtures to direct light downward and prevent the light source from being seen on an adjacent property.
4. Excessively high lighting levels for uses in rural or very low residential areas are inappropriate.
5. Lighting levels shall use the minimum necessary to achieve safety and security concerns.
6. Lighting schemes that serve as advertising or to attract attention are discouraged.
7. Illuminated signs that are excessively bright, causing glare and illuminating surrounding areas, are prohibited.
8. Lighting designs shall avoid sky glow through lighting plans that direct luminaries downwards and turn off unneeded lights after hours.

### *Recommendations*

1. TRORC should provide technical guidance and support to municipalities and others on lighting trends, needs, and opportunities
2. TRORC should assist local and state policymakers in evaluating lighting options. TRORC will consider sponsorship of educational workshops for planning commissions, design professionals, and others to acquaint them with the principles of good lighting design.
3. Towns interested in planning for outdoor lighting in their communities should consider using their municipal plans to establish goals and objectives for lighting. Additionally, consideration should be given to incorporating a lighting section into a town's zoning ordinance or a separate ordinance to cover lighting installations in all or parts of the town.
4. TRORC staff should continue to work with Vermont's public utilities and design professionals to evaluate lighting technologies and efficiencies.





## Historical, Archaeological, and Scenic Resources Endnotes

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- 1 <https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation/identifying-resources/VARI>
- 2 <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>
- 3 <https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/historic-preservation/historic-preservation-policy-tools/legislation-policy-and-reports/section-106-of-the-national-historic-preservation-act>
- 4 <https://www.ptvermont.org/>
- 5 <https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation/funding/historic-preservation-grants>
- 6 <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/maps/historic>
- 7 [https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD\\_Web\\_Docs/CD/CPR/State-Designation-Programs/CPR-DT-Annual-Report.pdf](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/State-Designation-Programs/CPR-DT-Annual-Report.pdf)
- 8 <https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation/funding/barn-grants>
- 9 <https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation/funding/historic-preservation-grants>
- 10 <https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/10/151/06001>
- 11 <https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/24/117/04414>
- 12 <https://nrb.vermont.gov/sites/nrb/files/documents/8aestheticsfinal.pdf>
- 13 [https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD\\_Web\\_Docs/HP/Review\\_%26\\_Compliance/2018\\_Permitting\\_Flow\\_Chart-v1-2-WEB.pdf](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/HP/Review_%26_Compliance/2018_Permitting_Flow_Chart-v1-2-WEB.pdf)
- 14 [https://studiesandreports.crcpcvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/vt\\_outdoor\\_lighting\\_manual\\_1996.pdf](https://studiesandreports.crcpcvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/vt_outdoor_lighting_manual_1996.pdf)

