

Bolton Planning Commission Report
2012 BOLTON TOWN PLAN
Planning Commission Hearing April 2012

This report concerns the re-adoption of the 2007 Bolton Town Plan, which is proposed for re-adoption without amendment in anticipation of a substantial update of the town plan, to be completed in 2013. This report is submitted by the Bolton Planning Commission for public review, as required under the Vermont Planning and Development Act (24 V.S.A. §4384).

The Bolton Town Plan, last adopted in 2007, must be updated and readopted every five years, as required by the state, to remain current and to address the changing needs of the Bolton community. The plan is intended to guide the town's growth and development, public investments, and resource conservation and protection programs over the next five years. If the plan is not updated and readopted, it affects the town's ability to adopt and amend its local land use regulations, apply for state grants, and participate in state permitting processes such as Act 250.

The Planning Commission is required to report on how the plan will be consistent with the following state planning goals.

General Goals:

- 1. To establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework to guide decisions by municipalities, regional planning commissions, and state agencies.**

The Bolton Town Plan represents the most recent step in a continuous, coordinated and comprehensive twenty-year local planning process. The plan – intended for use by Bolton residents and landowners, and local, regional and state officials – provides the policy framework to guide future growth and development, public investments and resource conservation efforts in the Town of Bolton.

- 2. To encourage citizen participation at all levels of the planning process, and to assure that decisions shall be made at the most local level possible commensurate with their impact.**

Citizen input was previously collected through discussions at Town Meeting, an initial public forum held in March 2006, and reported updates in the Bolton Gazette, the town report, and on Bolton's website. The Planning Commission has also invited public participation in the update process by holding open work sessions, and consulting and meeting with local boards, officials and interested groups, including Bolton Valley Resort. The results of the 2011 Bolton Community Survey will be incorporated in the draft plan presented for consideration in 2013.

- 3. To consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development for the region and state, as well as the community in which it takes place.**

Section 11 of the plan addresses the compatibility of the Bolton Town Plan with the adopted plans of our neighboring communities, and with the 2006 Chittenden County Regional Plan. The plan incorporates regional plan recommendations for addressing regional housing, transportation and conservation needs that are specific to the Town of Bolton.

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4. To encourage and assist municipalities to work creatively together to develop and implement plans.

The Planning Commission depended largely on the knowledge and expertise of regional planning commission staff with regard to information about the status of the planning efforts of other communities. The Commission contacted other planning commissions as needed for information and to discuss issues of shared interest or concern. The plan identifies and recommends continued local participation in joint planning efforts through the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission and Metropolitan Planning Organization.

The plan recommends continued local participation, through the Bolton Conservation Commission, in the Chittenden County Uplands Conservation Project (CCUCP) – a collaborative effort of several neighboring towns, nonprofit groups and state agencies to conserve the ecological integrity, rural character and working landscape of the northeastern uplands of Chittenden County. Bolton’s role in this endeavor could be critical given its central location between two preserved areas, Mount Mansfield State Forest and Camel’s Hump State Park. This effort presents an excellent opportunity and challenge.

Specific Goals:

1. To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

Land use (zoning) districts are described in Section 2 and depicted on the “Future Land Use Map.” These districts were last updated in 2005 in association with the adoption of updated zoning regulations. District standards are intended to concentrate higher density residential and commercial development in Bolton’s historic village center (Village District), and at Bolton Valley (Resort Village, Resort Residential Districts). The Rural Residential, Forest and Conservation Districts are intended to preserve Bolton’s rural character and conserve natural resources outside of these compact village and resort centers. No change in zoning district designations is proposed.

2. To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.

Economic goals and policies, representing the "economic element" now required under Chapter 117, are presented in Section 1.3, including the stated policy that “The Town of Bolton is committed to working in collaboration with all businesses located in town to support local economic vitality.” The plan recognizes the historical and continued significance of farming and forestry to our predominantly rural community, as well as the importance of Bolton Valley Resort – the town’s largest employer. It also identifies the need for economic diversification, including sustainable use of the town’s natural resources, and responsible commercial development in designated zoning districts in a manner that avoids adverse environmental impacts or environmental degradation.

3. To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Education is addressed in Section 6. Bolton’s limited educational resources have been used to provide adequate facilities and quality educational programs for the town’s school-aged (pK-12) population. Bolton residents have indicated a strong interest in maintaining current class size – the challenge for the town will be to achieve its educational goals while also balancing the need for adequate state funding assistance, issued on a per pupil basis. There is no capacity for school expansion at the current site. The plan recommends that all development be reviewed as necessary to limit overcrowding beyond the building’s current capacity.

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

The town's transportation network – including the condition and capacity of town and state highways and regional rail lines – is addressed in Section 4 and depicted on the plan's "Transportation Map." A primary recommendation is to preserve the existing capacity of town roads and to maintain adequate traffic flows and safety. It is recommended that all new roads – including private roads – be designed to state standards. The plan also calls for more effective management of stormwater runoff from local roads.

Several recreational trails of regional and statewide significance that run through Bolton are identified, including the Long Trail (hiking), Catamount Trail (back country skiing), Cross Vermont Trail (bicycling), VAST Trails (snowmobiling) and local multi-use trails. Recommendations include preserving existing trail networks through voluntary, negotiated agreements with local landowners and the purchase or dedication of trail easements – e.g., through the Vermont Land Trust and the Bolton Conservation Fund.

5. To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including: significant natural and fragile areas; outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands; significant scenic roads, waterways and views; important historic structures, sites or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Bolton's significant natural, historic and scenic features – as inventoried and mapped to date – are addressed in Section 3, and other related sections regarding land use and development. They are also shown on accompanying "Conserved Lands," "Natural Features" and "Water Source Protection" maps. The plan includes an extensive list of policies and recommendations for protecting identified resources from incompatible development. It also recommends that the Bolton Conservation Commission update the town's resource inventories and, in association with the Planning Commission, prioritize resources for further protection. Resource protection is also called for under the town's land use and development regulations, for consideration in local development review proceedings.

6. To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

Many recommended resource protection strategies, noted above, incorporate techniques to protect and enhance environmental quality – including recommendations for more effective stormwater management; stream, river and wetland setbacks and buffers; restricting development in floodplains, on steep slopes, and in high elevation areas poorly suited for development; and the use of conservation easements and development regulations to protect significant resources.

7. To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Energy policies and recommendations are addressed under Section 7. These include recommendations for reducing energy use in town buildings (e.g., through insulation, the installation of more efficient lighting, heating, cooling systems, etc.) and, to the extent feasible, the use of energy efficient equipment and vehicles. In addition to energy conservation, the development and sustainable use of renewable resources is also encouraged, as are more energy efficient development patterns (e.g., clustered development) and transportation options (e.g., ride sharing and a local park and ride facility).

8. To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

The plan recognizes that Bolton is noted for a variety of outdoor recreational facilities and opportunities available to local and state residents, and to many visitors to the area – including local recreation paths, sections of statewide trail networks, Winooski River access, protected climbing trails (CRAG-VT), extensive state land holdings (Camels Hump State Park, Mount Mansfield State Forest, Robbins Mountain Wildlife Management Area), locally conserved lands (Preston Pond) and the Bolton Valley Ski Resort and Nordic Center. As noted above, the plan includes recommendations and policies for maintaining and enhancing these existing resources, and for developing additional resources (e.g., Sarah

Holbrook land) for public access and recreational use. The plan recommends that the Bolton Conservation Commission be charged with managing local trail networks and recreational resources.

9. To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

Agriculture and forestry are addressed in both Section 2 (Land Use) and in policies regarding the local economy (Section 1.3). The plan recommends that the resource base continue to be protected from fragmentation and incompatible development, and that local farming and forestry operations be supported through tax abatement programs and by providing information about available programs to local landowners.

10. To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.

The plan notes that there are extensive pockets of gravel soils in town that may be important enough to be considered for purchase to ensure supplies of road gravel.

11. To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

Local housing needs, and meeting the town's share of regional affordable housing needs, are addressed in Section 8. Related recommendations including reviewing the town's land use regulations ensure that they do not have the effect of excluding affordable housing, and providing regulatory incentives, such as density bonuses, to encourage more affordable housing development in appropriate locations.

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

Existing facilities and services, and related infrastructure needs, are addressed Section 5, as well as in the Transportation and Education sections, and are shown on the "Utilities and Facilities Map." Facilities and services other than the school and local road network are limited to the town office, fire department, the town garage, and town-owned land. The plan includes a recommendation that the rate of growth should not exceed the capacity of the town to provide facilities and services – especially in relation to existing school capacity – and that the impacts of development on town facilities and services should be addressed in the local review process. It is also recommend that the town develop and adopt a capital improvement program that schedules needed capital improvements (e.g., building, land and road improvements) and major equipment purchases, in relation to available funding. Given the lack of local police protection, neighborhood community watch programs are also recommended.

13. To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process.

The plan identifies existing child care facilities in town, including a YMCA program offered through the Smilie School which provides after-school care and activities for school-aged children. Given the percentage of town residents with children who work, the plan identifies the need for additional and more diverse child care options. Related policies, including a survey of local child care needs and a review of the town's land use regulations regarding child care facilities are addressed in Section 6.3.