

Williamstown Municipal Plan
Staff review
November 2010

Background:

The following is a review of the Williamstown Plan under the provisions and standards of Chapter 117, Section 4350, wherein it is stated “a regional planning commission shall review and approve plans of its member municipalities, when approval is requested and warranted.” Conditions warranting approval include findings that the plan:

- Contains each of the **ten** elements listed in section 4382 of Chapter 117;
- Is consistent with the **thirteen** goals established in Section 4302 of Chapter 117. (“Substantial progress toward attainment” of these goals is the standard by which consistency is evaluated); and
- Is **compatible** with the Regional Plan and the approved plans of other municipalities in the Region.

General Comments:

The previous Williamstown Plan was adopted in 2005 and approved by CVRPC in that same year. The Plan before us now represents a comprehensive rewrite of that document. It is a thorough and well written document

Another new aspect to the Plan is its response to the directives of CVRPC’s Housing Distribution Plan. The Plan includes a narrative and supporting maps to address this new requirement. This is further discussed within The Ten Elements section under #10.

The Ten Elements:

- 1. A statement of objectives, policies and programs of the municipality to guide future growth and development of land, public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.**

Each chapter of the Plan ends with a section listing the Town’s respective Goals, Policies and Tasks. The chapters include Community Profile, natural and Cultural resources & Features, Education & Learning, Housing, Community, Utilities, Facilities, Services, and Organizations, Energy, Economic Development, Transportation, Land Use Patterns and Adjacent Municipalities & Regional Coordination. Lastly, the Plan includes a chapter titled “Implementation Priorities” where the Town has identified 8 objectives which are the most “critical and achievable” during the lifespan of this plan.

- 2. A land use plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses...**

This element is primarily address in the Land Use Patterns section (Chapter X, pg 79-86), wherein the town provides an overview of historical and current land uses and also recognizes the value of traditional land use patterns, the benefits of smart growth and the negative impacts of sprawl. The chapter includes a description of desired future land uses (village/mixed use areas, residential/agriculture areas, and conservation and forestry areas), these are also identified on the Map 3 titled “Town of Williamstown, VT

Land Use Plan.” Additionally the chapter includes a description of Growth Management Tools which are available to the town and a discussion about the how they are or could be employed.

3. A transportation plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities...

This elements is address in the Transportation section (Chapter IX, pg 69-78), where in current conditions, maintenance issues, safety issues and traffic solutions/alternatives are discussed. Map 1 titled “Town of Williamstown, VT Roads and Building Locations” as well as all subsequent maps depict the roads and their general classifications. Transportation is also discussed within the Energy section of the plan wherein the town recognizes the impacts of our ‘car-culture’ in relation to current settlement patterns.

4. A utility and facility plan consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective community facilities and public utilities...

The Plan includes a section titled “Community, Utilities, Facilities, Services, and Organizations” (Chapter VI, pg 40-51) which includes a discussion about water supply, wastewater, electricity and telecommunications, municipal buildings and land, municipal government, the post office, and the animal control officer, police/crime, fire, enhanced 911, ambulance, health and wellness childcare, solid waste and churches. The school area, the wellhead protection area, the municipal water district and the sewer treatment area are depicted on Map 3 titled “Town of Williamstown, VT Land Use Plan.”

5. A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Chapter III titled “Natural Resources, Features and Hazards” (pg 12-21) includes a discussion of Productive Resources (forest and ag land and earth resources), Protective Resources (surface water, wetlands, natural heritage sites, wildlife habitat and scenic areas), and Environmental Hazards (soil, water, air pollution, noise pollution, flooding and fluvial erosion.) Map 2 titled “Town of Williamstown, VT Wetlands, Wildlife Habitat and Natural resources” and Map 4 titled “Town of Williamstown, VT Earth and Mineral Resources” (which depicts quarries/sand and gravel pits, farm land, natural resource areas, and the village) depicts most of the discussed topics within the chapter. Eight Natural Resource & Features Goals are outlined at the end of the chapter followed by numerous policies.

6. An educational facilities plan consisting of a map and statement of present and projected uses and the local public school system.

The Plan includes a chapter titled Education & Learning (Chapter IV, pg25-29). It contains information about local education levels, enrollments trends, funding challenges, physical condition/location, community mapping program and adult education. The school area is depicted on Map 3.

7. A recommended program for the implementation of the development plan.

The policies contained within each chapter provide guidance on implementing the goals set within each respective chapter. In addition, the last chapter, Chapter XII titled Implementation Priorities, sets out 8 objectives which are “more critical and achievable than others” within the 5-year lifespan of the plan.

8. A statement indicating how the plan relates to the development trends and plans for the adjacent municipalities, areas and the region.

The Plan contains a chapter titled Adjacent Municipalities and Regional Coordination (Chapter XI, pg 87-88). It provides a summary of adjacent towns and relevant cross boarder land use issues and concerns. It also includes a section regarding the town's membership with CVRPC.

9. An energy plan, including an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs and problems within the municipality, a statement on the conservation of energy, a statement of policy on the development of renewable energy, and a statement on patterns and densities of land use likely to result in conservation.

The Plan contains an Energy Chapter (Chapter VII, pg 52-58). It outlines the towns current and potential energy sources, its usage, and a discussion about conservation including demand side management, transportation and buildings and structures. The chapter includes a goal to encourage energy conservation and development of renewable energy resources followed by 11 policies and tasks. The Land Use and Transportation Chapters also include goals, policies and tasks related to energy conservation and efficiency.

10. A housing element, including a recommended program for addressing low and moderate-income persons' housing needs.

The Plan contains a chapter on housing (Chapter V, Pg 30- 39). It includes information about general trends and conditions, affordability, special needs housing, Fair Housing Laws and municipal responsibility, and Federal Response. The Goals, Policies and Tasks section of the plan outlines a plan for addressing low and mod-income persons housing needs.

The Plan also acknowledges and responds to CVRPC's Housing Distribution Plan:

CVRPC Regional Housing Distribution Plan elements	Williamstown Plan
<p>The Regional Housing Distribution Plan is intended to be used by municipalities when updating their land use plans and regulations; AND</p> <p>Town Plans adopted after January 1, 2009 are expected to incorporate this Housing Distribution Plan onto their town plan housing element.</p>	<p>Williamstown Town Plan Pages 31-33</p>
<p>Town Plans shall contain a detailed map or maps of the town showing the town's preferred locations for future housing units – consistent with current or proposed zoning – for 80% of the anticipated 10 to 15 year housing demand.</p>	<p>Map 5 titled "Town of Williamstown, VT Future Development Sites." The Plan also states "the planning commission would like to encourage housing units within the current village area and adjacent locale."</p>
<p>Town Plans shall also provide mapping updates that identify the locations and number of housing units created in the town since the previous town plan adoption.</p>	<p>The Plan also includes a map titled "Town of Williamstown, VT New Homes Built Between 2000-2009."</p>
<p>Towns and cities are required to demonstrate the community's intent to meet the proposed housing unit numbers laid out in the Housing Distribution Plan or to describe in detail the obstacles that make attainment impossible. CVRPC will consider the planning effort to encourage housing development in relation to the Housing Distribution plan when approving a municipal plan.</p>	<p>The Plan does recognize that without zoning regulations it is difficult to influence developers to conform to Town's vision of supporting 'smart growth' principles yet the Plan does outline the following goals and strategies in regard to the Housing Distribution Plan: "To offer a range of rental and ownership opportunities for all income groups to meet the Town's projected housing units needed by 2020" and to "Consider the relationship between land use patterns, land use policy and housing development" by a variety of strategies including "strive to direct anticipated new development through the year 2020 to the areas depicted on Map 3 (or should it be Map 5?) and in accordance with CVRPC's Housing Distribution Plan.</p>
<p>CVRPC can and will work with municipalities to overcome any local barriers to housing production that prevent attainment of the housing unit numbers and suggest programs of local actions to address those barriers to housing. Towns unwilling to implement programs to address barriers to housing may have their plans denied Regional approval.</p>	<p>n/a</p>

The Williamstown Plan acknowledges the Housing Distribution Plan in both the narrative and in the map appendices. Yet while not a specific requirement of the Housing Distribution Plan, it does not discuss the physical capacity or community desire to accommodate over 300 new housing units within either the redefined Village areas or within the 'Future Development Sites' area. The Town may consider looking at this more closely in future iterations of the plan. As depicted on Map 6 between 2000-2009 only 18% of new homes were built within the Village areas.

Table 3 compares the Distribution Plan numbers from 2004-2009 (215 units) to the number of actual units constructed during that same time frame (140) yet does not discuss the difference between these numbers (75 units). Apparently, construction in the Town has not kept pace with the forecasted projections.

However, in the Community Profile Chapter the Plan does recognize that the EPR forecast for 2020 is highly unlikely considering the stagnant population growth from 2000-2007 (a net increase of only 2 people.) While the population has not grown significantly housing units have continued to increase and the Plan recognizes this is most likely due to a variety of lifestyle changes. The Plan concludes "that the Town must continue to plan for growth and development despite an apparently stable population." The goals and policies through out the Plan (not only within the Housing Chapter) identify the desire to promote smart growth principles to meet future needs.

In the staff's estimation, the Williamstown Town Plan has met Regional Plan expectations.

The Goals:

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

Goals, strategies and tasks primarily outlined in the Land Use Chapter address this state planning goal and include and are not limited to:

- Maintain vitality of Williamstown and Foxville Village area by encouraging high-density growth by denying infrastructure extension for any large development outside the Village/Mixed use areas and Consider seeking Village Center designation
- To preserve the working landscape by sustaining farm and forest land and other rural resource lands to maintain contiguous tracts of open land and minimize land use conflicts by working with developers to create cluster developments and conservation subdivisions

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.

Although not required by state statute, the Williamstown Plan contains a section on Economic Development (pg 59-68). Among its goals are:

- To nurture our existing business
- To recruit new business and services to town to increase the tax base while keeping the rural culture of the community alive and authentic
- To develop broad based support for agriculture as an economic activity

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

The Education and Learning Chapter of the Plan includes the following relative goals and strategies:

Education Goals

- To strive for schools that foster community-learning opportunities where students and adults learn together and to create a learning community by supporting and encouraging community-school partnerships, supporting efforts to broaden access to

adult and senior educational opportunities and supporting vocational education opportunities

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 Transportation Chapter includes an extensive Goals, Policies and Tasks section and includes:

- To Maintain and preserve our transportation system (includes limiting construction of new roads in open fields and design them so they do not increase forest fragmentation and correct unsafe roads and improve safety of Hebert Road and Cogswell Street.)
- To increase the safety and perception of safety and choices in transportation including non-motorized users, walkers, horses, that shares the use of our streets (Includes consideration of sidewalks and pedestrian walkways between Construction Hill Road, South Main Street and the Post Office.)
- To enhance the street environment (study the re-establishment of few roads, which will help with circulation including Henry Road to Flint Road, Erskin to Graniteville Road. Adding connector road between Pump and Pantry to the former Lacillade Lumber.)
- To promote reduction of transportation energy costs (by encouraging concentrated settlement patterns which minimizes transportation related costs)
- To be accountable to and educate the community about the roads (including maintain a long term schedule for road improvements.)
- To manage roadway access (includes encouragement of shared driveways.)

5. To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including significant natural and fragile areas, outstanding water resources, significant scenic roads, waterways and views and important historic structures.

AND

6. To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources. In accordance with Act 250.

The Natural Resources, Community Utilities and Facilities, Transportation and Land Use Chapters include goals, policies and tasks which strive to protect Williamstown's natural and historic resources in a variety of ways including but not limited to:

- Promote sound management of natural resources by encouraging buffers along surface waters, encourage 50 ft buffer around all classes of wetlands and establishing a Conservation Commission
- Preserve the aesthetic quality and working landscape by discouraging ridgeline development or conspicuous development on prominent landscape/scenic and encouragement of clustered or open space subdivision
- Minimize impacts from new development on deer yards and critical wildlife habitats
- Protect the water supply through information and education to town residents
- Revitalize the sense of community by encouraging preservation and restoration of historic sites and community landmark and place historic buildings on the National Register of Historic Buildings.
- Purse Village Designation

- To Maintain and preserve our transportation system (includes limiting construction of new roads in open fields and design them so they do not increase forest fragmentation.

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

The Plan makes a number of proposals designed to meet this goal primarily within the Energy chapter but also within the Transportation and Land Use Chapters. Among them are:

- Support efforts to create a fund to provide low interest capital to building owners to make investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy
- Encourage the development of small scale wind, solar, or hydro power by individuals, or groups of individuals, to offset fossil fuel consumption and promote self sufficiency
- Encourage land use planning that: encourages the concentration of social and civic services, employment and housing opportunities within or adjacent to Williamstown's villages; supports the expansion of telecommuting, teleconferencing, and public transit ; provides for pedestrian transport options and promotes the development of commuter parking lots.
- Promote the reduction of transportation costs by promoting alternative forms of public transport and encouraging concentrated settlement patters,

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

The Plan has a section (recreation resources, Chapter VI, pg 44-45) devoted to this topic and recognizes the value of the local state park. While there are no specific goals and strategies within this chapter directly related to recreational opportunities goals and policies within the Transportation and Natural Resource Chapter demonstrate the town's commitment to maintain and enhancing rec opportunities, and they include:

- Increase safety and choices in transportation by planning pedestrian and bike paths and consider class IV roads for hiking and horseback riding.
- Work with the State to develop a management plan for Ainsworth State Park

However, it is recommended that future iterations of the Plan address this goal more directly.

9. To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

This goal is addressed in both the Natural Resources and Economic Development Chapters of the Plan. Looking toward the future Williamstown seeks to:

- Develop broad support for agriculture and an economic activity by encouraging establishment of a farmers market, encourage participation by land owners in use value and land trust programs and to work with VTC to help farmers with business planning.

The Town may want to consider addressing this goal more directly in future iterations of the Plan. Additionally these industries could be further encouraged in the energy section of plan as they relate to the production for biomass fuel sources.

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 addresses this state goal predominately within the Natural Resources chapter and offers the following strategies:

- Balance the benefits of earth resource extraction with their associated impacts by discouraging sand and gravel extraction that would be unduly detrimental to the surrounding land uses and environmental quality and ensure land is stabilized during and after the extraction process.

11. To ensure the availability of housing for all Vermonters.

The Plan strives to “encourage the development of housing opportunities to meet the current and future needs of diverse social and economic groups” and “offer a range of rental and ownership opportunities for all income groups in order to meet the Town’s projected housing units needed by 2020.” Strategies include:

- Educate the community about housing opportunities to help low income persons purchase homes
- Encourage a balance between affordable, middle and high-end housing
- Promote the conservation of the existing housing stock by seeking state funds
- Support the development of multi family and accessory dwelling units, particularly in the village areas

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

The Community Utilities Chapter and the Transportation Chapter addresses this goal most directly with a variety of goals, policies and tasks most notably with the following strategy:

- Develop a Capitol Investment Plan (CIP)

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

The Community Utilities Chapter includes a section on childcare (pg 48) and provides a variety of policies to the following goals:

- To promote and enhance quality childcare opportunities to families with young children.

Compatibility:

Chapter 117 states that “for one plan to be compatible with another, the plan is question (should) not significantly reduce the desired effect of the implementation of the other (approved) plan.” The Williamstown Town Plan, as proposed, is unlikely to have an adverse impact on the plans of neighboring towns.

Discussion/Conclusions:

The Williamstown Town Plan contains the essential elements of a municipal plan and at makes progress towards attainment of the 13 statutory goals. Furthermore, it is staff’s estimation the Plan satisfied the housing goals in the Central Vermont Regional Plan as set forth in the Housing Distribution Plan.

