

2008 CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLAN

ECONOMIC ELEMENT PROPOSED AMENDMENT

Adopted September 8th, 2015



A healthy economy is essential to maintaining Vermont's quality of life. A diversified and dynamic economy provides employment, stimulates social and cultural interaction, and provides the resources for the provision of a wide variety of community services, including education, health care and a well maintained physical infrastructure. On the individual level, a diversified economy offers greater opportunities for individuals to engage in satisfying and meaningful occupations and pursuits.

Economic vitality is a balance between human, natural and capital resources. The interaction of these factors determines the scale and intensity of growth and development. The Economic Element of the Central Vermont Regional Plan focuses on making effective use of the wide range of resources available in the region, while maintaining the balance of these resources.

DISCUSSION: GENERAL ECONOMIC PROFILE

Like the rest of Vermont, the Central Vermont economy has evolved from an agricultural/ manufacturing emphasis to a more complex mixture of economic activity. The growth of the travel/ hospitality/recreation industry, for instance, has contributed to the expansion of the retail and wholesale trades, and other services like construction and mortgage banking. Manufacturing, which has expanded to include food processing, plays a significant role in the attraction of tourists and the diversification of agriculture. No one sector can stand alone; changes in one will have an effect on all the others.

Total employment in Central Vermont is expected to increase by approximately 14,000 over the 2000-2020 period at an average rate of 1.4% per year. However, given a sharp drop in employment in 2008 and 2009, the Region exhibited only 1.3% growth between 2003 and 2013. While Washington County is expected to see

an increase in employment over the forecast horizon, it is expected to decrease its share of the total northwest region's (including Chittenden, Franklin, and Lamoille Counties) employment.¹

The region's diverse economy is divided among a variety of activities. This industry distribution is supported by an equally diverse educational and occupational profile of the work force. Of the adult population in Central Vermont, 92.6% have a high school diploma or better. 44.7% have either an Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree or graduate-professional degree. Central Vermont has a higher relative number of collegiate degrees, including Associates, Bachelors and Graduate/ Profes-

sional, compared to Vermont (42.3%) and the United States (35.8%). Within the Region there is significant variation in educational attainment with levels of adults with a high school diploma or less at 48.5% in Barre. These percentages have increased significantly since the 1990 census. The occupational profile of the work force indicates that the largest category falls into public administration, health care and social assistance or retail trade.



Cabot Creamery, Cabot, Vermont.

Approximately 60% of the region's employment is concentrated in the urban core, which is made up of Montpelier, Berlin, Barre City and Barre Town, with most of the balance of employment opportunities found in Waterbury, Northfield and the Mad River Valley towns. Together the region's employment centers account for about 89% of the region's employment and approximately 73% of its population.

Just as the region's economy has evolved from locally focused agriculture and manufacturing to its current place in the more complex New England and national marketplace, it will continue to evolve as markets change and competition in all sectors becomes more global.

1 United States. Census Bureau. Population and Housing Census. 2000

2 Vermont. Department of Labor. Vermont Employment Projections. 2000.

Projections developed by the Office of Policy and Information of the Vermont Department of Employment and Training help to identify the shifts that are occurring in the state and regional economies. National and international forces have a tendency to have greater influence on manufacturing, while state and regional market forces combine to influence the non-manufacturing side.

The growth of the state economy is closely linked to the expansion of trade and service industries which meet the demands of residents and tourists. Our proximity to the urban centers of the Northeast plays a major role as a market in our recreation/tourist activities. The growth in resident income also contributes to the importance of the trade and service industries.

While the next two decades are expected to produce employment growth at a rate of about 1.4% per year, approximately 84% of this growth is expected to be in the non-manufacturing sector with the addition of approximately 11,000 jobs over the forecast period (1.6% annual growth). Most of this increase (62%) will be in service industries that will grow faster than the rest of the non-manufacturing sector.

Employment in the manufacturing sector is forecast to grow 1.1% per year or by 1200 jobs by 2020. The government sector is expected to add the same number of new jobs while growing at an annual rate of only 7%.

The granite industry has long been at the heart of the Central Vermont Region's manufacturing sector. The region is a melting pot of ethnic heritage brought about by the influx of immigrants drawn to the region's granite quarries and manufacturing plants. The industry continues to be a major employer, with over 1,000 jobs and in excess of \$100 million in sales. In recent years, the industry has emphasized diversification of its product line and improvement of its fabrication processes. Innovation has led to reductions in such health and environmental hazards as dust and sludge, and has led to greater utilization of processing wastes.

Ski areas are viewed as one of the Region's resources, combining economic benefits and recreational opportunities. Ski area growth has direct implications for the natural, physical and socio-economic environments. The ski industry also presents the potential for secondary impacts through associated employment in the service and

construction sectors, as well as the expansion of seasonal and permanent housing. A challenge exists to balance the competing demands of accommodating growth while preserving resources.

By its nature, the ski industry operates within some of the more environmentally sensitive areas of the Region. The ski areas, themselves, have often recognized the strong relationship between the health of the environment and the health of the ski industry and have demonstrated a desire to ensure that ski-related development respects the natural environment.

Central Vermont continues to have significant ties to the agricultural and forest-based economies. In addition to direct economic contribution, farms and forests helps to define the Region's cultural identity and provides Central Vermont residents with open space, recreational opportunities, aesthetic pleasure, and a sense of place. The continued economic viability of these highly valued working landscapes will be a key factor in preventing the conversion of these lands to other uses.

Though a variety of economic and social factors continue to threaten the local sourcing that was common in the past, new economic and social forces make this a good time to look anew at local food and wood product manufacturing. Many farmers are growing for local markets, local processors are feeling pressure for growth, the majority of maple producers have diversified their operations, and public interest in maintaining our agricultural economy is clearly on the rise.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Self Sufficiency

Research has shown that community and economic development are best supported when local solutions and resources are brought to bear on local problems.

Small, new businesses are the backbone of economic development and job creation. In Washington County, enterprises with less than 20 employees comprise 90% of total private businesses while providing for 38% of total private employment.

(National figures are 87% and 26%, respectively.) Even though initial employment gains may be small, start-up businesses have immediate impacts on the local economy. Small companies tend to hire locally, buy locally and put more money into the local economy than they take out.

Over the past decade Vermont has become a leader in small business formation, with the Central Vermont region adding its share of new, small, innovative businesses to the list. In Central Vermont the vast majority of the more than 2000 employers fit the definition of small business.

Business development is influenced by a number of factors, as is the ability of the Central Vermont region to nurture, attract, and retain the businesses that are crucial to the economy. The Central Vermont Regional Plan attempts to capitalize on the region's positive factors, and also identify problems along with potential solutions.

Education

The quality of the work force and quality of life are directly related to community emphasis on education. Elementary and high school education are the basis of the human infrastructure. They provide the skills necessary for individuals to interact with one another in civil and meaningful ways. They are also the source of basic vocational skills in communications, mathematics, and problem solving.

As our society becomes more technologically advanced, these elementary skills take on even greater importance. Complex manufacturing techniques require workers who can process information and manipulate advanced machinery. Information management requires the ability to identify, isolate and utilize a wide variety of data.

The Central Vermont region is served by a high quality public and private school system. The region's seven high schools provide curricula ranging from college preparatory to vocational education. Several high schools have received state recognition for excellence in education. The region's elementary schools are in the forefront of the educational reform movement, making great strides in performance based

programs, several of which have been recognized at the national level, and curriculum integration.

Institutions of higher education play an important role both as major employers and as support institutions for technology based industry. The Central Vermont region hosts six colleges and post-secondary schools. Spin off institutes and for-profit ventures undertaken by the higher education community have added substantially to the economic and cultural wellbeing of the region. Advanced educational institutions also play a major role through the provision of programs that advance technical and problem solving skills.

While an elementary and high school education can provide the building blocks for an educated work force, individual advancement and technological improvement will depend on the development of life-long learning habits and opportunities for all workers. The public education system must expand to meet the vocational needs of adults. Public and private institutions and employers must take a proactive role in identifying the skills necessary for economic vitality in the future, and take the steps necessary to prepare and retain the work force.

Transportation and Communication

A number of factors contribute to the appeal of Central Vermont to businesses. The transportation system in Central Vermont provides ready access to markets for goods produced here, as well as facilitating the flow of tourists into the region from the major northeast metropolitan areas. The region is served by the interstate highway system and national freight and passenger rail service. Private business and general aviation are served by the all-weather Edward F. Knapp State Airport, and passenger air service is readily accessible through the Burlington International Airport.

The State's communications policy and planning have benefited Central Vermont in the form of a network of telecommunications infrastructure that enables information-based industries to link into a worldwide telecommunications network. There remain challenges to both take advantage of this advanced technology, and to keep pace with the developments of this quickly changing industry. The increasing region

-wide availability of the state-of-the-art telecommunications/information technology infrastructure (including high speed internet access and wireless communications) is increasing work options for Central Vermonters.

Quality of Life as an Economic Consideration

Quality of life is a difficult concept to define, yet many would agree that it stems from the sense of security and well-being that comes from being part of a community. Central Vermont's small town character, with its opportunities for participatory government, diverse social interaction, and human scale commerce plays a major role in maintaining an excellent quality of life.

Essential to a high quality of life is a dynamic and varied cultural experience. The village as the center of social activity provides the critical mass necessary for a flourishing interchange of ideas, art and culture. The traditional New England village is a virtual textbook of human history. The variety of architectural styles reveal the economic and social fortunes of its inhabitants, past and present.

The New England village is considered by many to be the pinnacle in land use design. In scale and function, it satisfies our needs for privacy, community and livelihood. Maintaining historic development patterns of village centers surrounded by resource based agricultural, mineral, forest and recreational activities balances economic and environmental interests. Concentrating growth and development within the confines of a village or "growth center" allows the community to implement infrastructure improvements in an efficient and effective manner that will improve the quality of life while limiting the degradation of the environment.

Central to the preservation and development of village patterns and commerce are affordable public utilities and services that allow increases in residential and commercial densities. While the costs of water and sewer for dispersed development can be borne by individual owners and users, public systems that benefit the entire community are frequently beyond the capacity of individual users to support. Equitable methods of financing that recognize the social, economic and environmental

³ Vermont has the highest tuition costs in the nation for state universities and colleges while ranking 47th out of 50

benefits of public infrastructure must be developed.

The availability of safe and affordable child care services is critical to the Central Vermont Region. Quality child care benefits families by preparing children for schooling and social interaction while enabling parents to work and provide income. It benefits businesses by expanding the workforce and creating more reliable, productive employees. Furthermore, child care facilities are businesses themselves and their existence expands local and Regional economies directly through the hiring of workers and purchase of goods and services. The need for childcare is prevalent across the state: 71% of Vermont children under 5-years old are in the care of someone other than their parents for at least part of the day.

CHALLENGES

A number of obstacles have been identified as impediments to economic development. The limited number of clearly identified, well-served, commercial/industrial sites hampers the ability of local businesses to expand and new ventures to develop. Some sites are identified as commercial or industrial in town zoning ordinances, but lack the needed sewer, water, electrical services or transportation infrastructure, while other areas have services available, but are not zoned for commercial/industrial use.

Similarly, the capacity of some of the region's existing public infrastructure is being severely strained by age, quality and the demands being placed on it from all sectors. The costs of upgrading and expanding public facilities often out pace the ability of users to pay.

The lack of venture and expansion capital is a serious obstacle to business development, especially for smaller enterprises. In Vermont's small business climate, where loans have traditionally been made as much on the credibility of the individual as on the assets of the company, the effect has been profound.

Utility costs represent a substantial portion of the operating costs of many businesses, primarily in the manufacturing sector. Vermont's climate and location alone mean increased energy use and cost compared to other areas. Conflicting and

sometimes lengthy permit decisions have also complicated the development process. Development proposals are reviewed by numerous state agencies, local boards and regional planning and environmental commissions, each adding its own perspective and requirements. The myriad of permits that are sometimes required can tend to discourage the inexperienced business-person.

There has been much discussion in recent years regarding salaries in Vermont and the desirability of compensating workers with a “livable wage” (defined as the hourly wage/annual income necessary to cover all basic needs plus all relevant local, Federal, and State taxes. Basic needs include: food, housing, child care, transportation, health care, clothing, household and personal expenses, and insurance). It is an often heard refrain that our young people often leave the State to find higher paying jobs elsewhere. The fact that Vermont placed in the top five states in multiple job-holders in 2000 may provide further evidence that low wages may be a problem here. Unfortunately, this trend is actually accelerating.

The Region’s downtowns and villages were primarily established along the Winooski River and its major tributaries. This development pattern leaves our communities very susceptible to flood damages amongst other natural hazards and weather events that can affect community vitality and economic activity. This vulnerability became extremely evident during 2011 flood events, including Tropical Storm Irene, during which a great number of businesses were directly impacted by flood damage or indirectly impacted due to road closures, tourism impacts or dips in local spending. There is a need to incorporate an economic component into future analyses related to our communities’ flood vulnerabilities and to include actions to better prepare businesses for future flood events.

The Demographic Challenge

Continued economic vitality depends on the existence of a skilled, knowledgeable and innovative “next generation” workforce. With an older than average and rapidly aging population, along with the lowest percentage of people in the 25 to 29 age group in the nation, Vermont faces some serious challenges in this regard.

Recent studies in the State suggest two different points of view on, and approaches

to, solving the State's demographic problem. The 2006 report of the Governor's Next Generation Commission espouses the belief that many young people are "forced" out of the State by the high cost of post secondary education, lack of available training, and lack of early awareness regarding career/educational choices. Its recommendations focus primarily on retaining young people already in the State by providing them with financial and other incentives for them to stay, helping them develop skills to offer employers, and providing them the information to make better decisions about their futures.

Another point of view, delivered in a 2007 report commissioned by the Vermont Department of Economic Development, argues that the so called "youth flight" or "brain drain" is a natural, perhaps even healthy phenomenon common to all rural areas. This document (Growing Vermont's Next Generation Workforce) suggests that instead of trying to prevent out-migration, the State should instead focus on "brain circulation" – "The capture of new talent and the recapture of native talent after they have experienced other places." CVRPC believes both approaches have validity and merit and that the data they present and recommendations they offer are not mutually exclusive, and are probably complementary.

The later study included sizable surveys of recent alumni of Vermont colleges. Among the positive revelations of these surveys was that a high percentage of the respondents had an interest in moving back to, or remaining in, Vermont. Notable among the reasons offered was an affinity for the State's environment and culture. Chief among the barriers were our relatively low wages and high cost of living – a daunting financial "double whammy." While stating that 80% of the State's college students move out of Vermont within one year after graduation, the report did cite a number of unique opportunities for Vermont and makes a case for optimism. Among the encouraging factors are:

- Colleges and universities are already actively engaged in attracting young people to Vermont – over 50% of those enrolled are from out of State.
- Vermont's tourism/recreation industry is a "natural draw" for young people to experience Vermont's quality of life.
- The younger generation is less bound to the notion of corporate employment and

more inclined to make "value-based" career choices than previous ones. Both of these factors bode well for entrepreneurial, innovative, "socially responsible," small business development.

- Information technology has widened the horizons for recruitment and marketing.
- According to survey results, "Students who become interns at area companies are up to 75% more likely to stay in Vermont."

CVRPC must recognize these trends and strive to support and cultivate opportunities for young people to stay in, return to, or discover our Region as an exciting and affordable place to work and live.

SUMMARY

Vermont's "quality of life," its work force, the environment, and Vermont's positive marketing image are assets to doing business in Central Vermont.

Central Vermont has the underpinnings of a strong economy. The diversity of its larger employers, the number of small employers, the variety and level of skills found in its labor force, and the quality of life are its prime assets. In conjunction with local governments, businesses and other regional development groups, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission will participate in economic development efforts by helping communities capitalize on their assets and helping the region and state to overcome economic obstacles.

The purpose of this element is to guide and plan for economic development that will create employment in Central Vermont which keeps pace with the region's labor force, provides an adequate flow of taxable economic activity to fund State programs, and increases the wealth and economic well being of residents.

ECONOMIC GOALS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1: Full employment⁴ and the creation and preservation of high quality jobs in a diverse range of occupations.

Goal 2: Business retention, growth and development that anticipate and meet market opportunities.

Policy 1: Promote career exploration and education planning for all young people and reduce barriers to participation in some form of post-secondary education or training.

- A. Promote sharing of best practices within the Region's supervisory unions with regards to dual-enrollment, work-based learning internship and apprenticeship programs and assist with identifying resources and incentives for these efforts.
- B. Promote an annual regional Student Career Day/Job Fair event targeted to High School students for summer employment, job shadow opportunities and internships.
- C. Facilitate effort to identify partners and formalize network of STEM-related (science, technology, engineering and math) companies, high schools, educational institutions, Tech Centers, and Community College of Vermont (akin to Vermont Youth Conservation Corps. concept, applied to STEM sectors) to provide hands-on training and internships.
- D. Identify, inventory and support resources programs that place emphasis on sound management and mentorship for young workers, particularly at-risk youth, in partnership with service providers such as Washington County Youth Services Bureau and ReSource/ReBuild.

⁴ The level of employment, or unemployment rate, which provides the maximum sustainable rate of economic growth and Gross Domestic Product without resulting in accelerating inflation. A Full Employment rate that is also just above the rate which will cause inflationary pressure, is called the Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment (VT Dept. of Labor).

E. Support and engage with Young Professionals organizations to better understand professional development needs and barriers to workforce stability in younger workers.

Policy 2: Deliver training and life-long learning to retain and expand a robust workforce with skills to match needs for current and future available jobs.

A. Support availability and awareness of training programs for underutilized workforce populations (e.g. dislocated, special needs and older workers) to attain skills to transition to new careers.

B. Increase local delivery of information regarding regional workforce training resources (e.g. Front Porch Forum, employer groups/trade associations, municipal web sites).

C. Promote partnerships with digital workforce training programs such as those piloted by the Vermont Digital Economy Project to increase access to workforce training opportunities, including those in more rural communities.

D. Encourage and collaborate with the State to conduct or reference existing labor skills gap analyses, where available, to: i) improve workforce data availability, ii) identify the types of jobs that businesses need to fill, and iii) document anticipated skills shortages.

Policy 3: Focus retention, growth and development efforts on industries and businesses that are a good fit with the Region's existing economic base and support sustainable economic development.

A. Increase collaboration between regional planning and economic development organizations, such as Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation, Capstone Community Action and Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce, in order to accomplish strategies identified in Policy 3.

B. Support and encourage expansion in sectors that are poised for growth, such as: health care, high tech manufacturing, software development and information technology, value added agriculture, higher education and recreation and tourism.

C. Support education on sustainable business best practices, on topics such as recycling, use of environmentally friendly materials and processes, and implementing energy efficiency improvements.

D. Explore opportunities to expand value added manufacturing networks (i.e. processing, storage, distribution, wholesale, retail, direct-to-consumer) and information exchanges.

E. Develop and disseminate information on development incentives, techniques and resources for towns and local development groups.

F. Provide a range of information regarding regulatory processes and available financial and technical resources and, where feasible, facilitate trainings for developers, entrepreneurs and business owners.

G. Research cooperative development models (e.g. Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, Cooperative Development Institute in Massachusetts, Cooperative Vermont in Burlington) and identify potential partnerships between the Region's cooperatives (the credit unions, food coops, and few worker-owned cooperatives) and other major "anchor" institutions (the State, educational institutions, etc.) to encourage more cooperative development in the Region.

Policy 4: Promote entrepreneurship and innovation in all business sectors and encourage small and micro business development.

A. Assess zoning and other regulatory barriers to entrepreneurship and small and micro business development, including home-based businesses and diversified agricultural enterprises.

- B. Continue to expand availability and improve the quality of broadband to enable telecommuting and home-based work opportunities, particularly in more rural areas of the Region.
- C. Identify policy and programmatic gaps and opportunities to expand access to capital for businesses, particularly knowledge-based.
- D. Work with Capstone Community Action partners to explore opportunities to develop a network (e.g. "Community Capital Exchange") where local businesses and investors come together to identify capital needs, investment, and opportunities to apply commercial strategies to maximize improvements in social and environmental well-being, such as Capstone Community Action's Community Capital Exchange initiative.
- E. Encourage organizations or professional associations to provide networking and a unified voice to creative economy sectors (writers, web designers, etc.).
- F. Explore opportunities for regional innovation partnerships and/or technology transfer with employers, educational and research institutions and other public partners.
- G. Encourage online marketing training and technology use for small and micro businesses, including participation in Vermont Digital Economy Project trainings and use of aggregated web platforms such as the Vermont Food System Atlas or Made in Vermont.
- H. Increase collaboration with business development organizations to enhance delivery of technical assistance to the wide range of small and micro businesses and entrepreneurial enterprises serving the Region.

Policy 5: Implement the goals and policies presented in the Utilities, Facilities and Services and Land Use elements of this Plan that enhance and optimize quality of place to attract and retain employers and residents.

These efforts to enhance and optimize quality of place include preservation of historic and cultural assets; maintaining the scenic qualities of our agricultural and forest lands, protection of natural resources and environmental quality, expansion of local food systems and healthy lifestyles, and increased access to recreational opportunities and amenities

POLICY 6: Ensure availability of commercial and industrial space to meet employment and business expansion needs.

- A. Assess capacity of commercial and industrial space using available data, including existing GIS information, and identify the various types of commercial and industrial space needs.
- B. Assist municipalities in promoting marketable sites and identifying assets, deficits and options available to meet industrial and commercial site development needs; for example, the potential for use of small wastewater treatment systems.
- C. Maintain inventory and support the reclamation and redevelopment of blighted, contaminated or potentially contaminated sites (i.e. "brownfields"). Continue to actively seek funds to facilitate this effort.
- D. For uses that do not require a rural location, guide and assist commercial, industrial and institutional uses to locate in downtowns, villages and adjacent industrial areas, or at those locations in the fringe areas that have been significantly developed and are zoned for such purposes.

Policy 7: Implement the goals and policies presented in the Energy, Utilities, Facilities and Services and Transportation elements of this Plan to maintain and plan for adequate infrastructure, energy, telecommunications, and transportation systems to accommodate and support business growth and expansion.

These efforts to maintain and plan for adequate systems to support business growth and expansion include support of:

A transportation system that efficiently transports goods and services and employees to their place of work;

An efficient and stable energy system that provides for reduced costs, consumption and reliance on nonrenewable energy sources;

State-of-the-art telecommunications/broadband infrastructure that would increase work options and reduce commuting and its impacts on the transportation infrastructure and the environment; and

Water, wastewater and storm water management systems in locations that allow for appropriately-scaled commercial and industrial expansion, higher densities and co-location of jobs, housing and services.

Policy 8: Support the continued use and sustainability of our natural resources and associated industries.

A. Encourage the continued productivity of viable mineral resources.

B. Facilitate the use of locally obtained materials for building and highway construction and maintenance. Assist municipalities in mapping the important, accessible resources.

C. Ensure that resource extraction operations follow best management practices to minimize impacts to the local and surrounding environment and other land uses, and to allow for site restoration.

D. Implement the goals and policies presented in the Land Use element of this Plan related to continued use, sustainability and protection of productive forests and prime agricultural soils.

Goal 3: Incomes sufficient to meet or exceed basic needs with opportunities to advance and to achieve financial security.

Policy 9: Support and encourage the business community and policy makers in developing strategies for the retention and creation of jobs that pay a livable wage.⁵

⁵ Defined in statute as the hourly wage required for a full-time worker to pay for one-half of the basic needs budget for a 2-person household, with no children, and employer-assisted health insurance, averaged for both urban and rural areas (VT Legis. Joint Fiscal Office).

A. Research and develop case studies of businesses that are pursuing or have achieved a livable wage for employees as a goal, research and identify primary barriers to businesses being able to pay livable wages, and research impacts of livable wage policies and incentives on the economies of other places.

Policy 10: Implement the goals and policies presented in the Housing, Transportation and Utilities, Facilities and Services elements to expand access to resources that promote stability in the workforce, including workforce housing, transportation solutions, affordable child care, and medical and mental health care.

Policy 11: Support efforts to develop and disseminate information on career pathways and advancement opportunities for industry sectors poised for growth.

A. Encourage employers to provide for training and education opportunities for employees of all ages to acquire, maintain, and improve the skills and knowledge necessary to advance.

B. Support statewide initiatives such as the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) Equity Pipeline and other Statewide Consortia developing career pathways in priority sectors identified in the 2020 Statewide CEDS, such as health care and value-added agriculture.

Policy 12: Support projects identified in the 2020 Statewide Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

Goal 4: Dynamic and resilient downtowns, villages and commercial districts.

Policy 13: Find new uses and opportunities for vacant and under-utilized sites and buildings.

- A. Encourage and assist applications for Village Center designations in existing compact settlements not yet designated by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.
- B. Assist participating municipalities in designation renewals and in utilizing technical assistance and incentives offered by State designation programs to preserve and reuse significant, economically viable, and historic structures.
- C. Support rezoning of village centers for mixed-use development, encompassing commercial, light manufacturing, artisan and residential uses at traditional village density.
- D. Assist municipalities in: planning for capital investments, identifying barriers to redevelopment or reuse, and planning for adaptive reuse of buildings.
- E. Support and prioritize assistance with community-identified priority/anchor revitalization projects in our downtowns, village centers and growth centers as they are identified.

Policy 14: Focus infrastructure investments in downtowns, village centers and growth centers and promote use of healthy community design principles in public investments and land use regulations.

- A. Promote incorporation of Healthy Community Design⁶ and Complete Streets⁷ principles into public infrastructure, redevelopment projects, land use regulations and community engagement efforts.
- B. Assist municipalities in pursuing resources to upgrade infrastructure, including roads, sidewalks, bike paths, multi-use paths, bridges, rail, water, wastewater, and stormwater. Promoted shared services via inter-municipal agreements where appropriate.

⁶ Healthy Community Design links traditional concepts of planning (land use, transportation, community facilities, parks and open spaces) with health themes (physical activity, public safety, access to nutritious food, air and water quality, mental health and social equity) (Vermont Dept. of Health).

⁷ Complete Streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities (Smart Growth America).

Policy 15: Increase economic resilience by mitigation of and adaptation to extreme weather events and flooding.

- A. Encourage and assist employment centers with participation in FEMA's Community Rating System to enhance community-wide floodplain management efforts and reduce flood insurance premiums.
- B. Develop and implement outreach strategies targeted to business and residential property owners to raise awareness of flood risk and promote strategies and resources to reduce vulnerabilities.
- C. Work with communities to upgrade flood hazard bylaws and improve storm water mitigation strategies in order to minimize risks to homes, businesses and public infrastructure.
- D. Encourage communities to direct new commercial or industrial development to areas not at risk from erosion and inundation flood hazards, where feasible.
- E. Consider the benefit to local and regional economic resilience when prioritizing assistance with Hazard Mitigation Assistance grants.

Policy 16: Support coordinated and complementary efforts to market the Region's unique, yet-connected downtowns and villages.

- A. Utilize results from Vermont Downtown Action Team retail market analyses to assist with marketing available commercial space, business recruitment and start-up support.
- B. Promote collaborative marketing with common themes among regional downtowns and villages, chambers of commerce, scenic byway committees and Vermont Tourism via region-wide events and tours (e.g. cycling; hiking; food, farm and brewery; covered bridges; stone arts; and fall foliage) targeted to both visitors and residents.

- C. Support formation and expand capacity of community-based or business associations focused on village vitality, marketing and enhancements.

Goal 5: Sustainable and viable agricultural and forest lands.

Policy 17: Promote and expand asset-based recreation and tourism with an emphasis on year-round offerings.

- A. Support efforts to develop and update local and region-wide inventories of natural, historic, scenic, agricultural and recreational assets at the local level to support tourism and quality of life promotion.
- B. Investigate feasibility of a region-wide promotion effort similar to Newport's "Fresh by Nature."
- C. Identify gaps in offerings and support expansion of facilities to develop off-season activities, host multi-day events, conferences and weddings and various related support services.
- D. Work with municipalities to identify viable options for expanded commercial and public outdoor recreational facilities, including trail development and related infrastructure that are environmentally and culturally sustainable.
- E. Explore options and pursue resources to update VT TrailFinder web site.

Policy 18: Foster collaborative partnerships among regional food system stakeholders.

- A. Assist with identifying sustainable collaborative frameworks and funding sources to continue the work of the Central Vermont Food Systems Council.
- B. Collaboratively host an annual meeting focused on best-practice-partnerships among economic development, land use planning and conservation stakeholders to support local food systems.

C. Promote representation of the agricultural and/or forestry sector on town and regional economic development committees/boards.

D. Promote Handbook for Local Action in Sustainable Agriculture developed by the State and targeted to municipal officials, boards and staff and local volunteers.

