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REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENTS

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Prepared For: Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies

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REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

Why were the regional plans assessed?

The Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA) requested this outside assessment of the 11 regional plans. The assessment was completed with support from the Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs), the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and the High Meadows Fund.

This project is a continuation of VAPDA's efforts to evaluate and improve upon the effectiveness of regional planning initiated by the 2010 Challenges for Change. In 2011, VAPDA hired the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) to conduct a statewide strategic assessment to evaluate the capacity and potential of the RPCs to serve as a resource for state government and their communities. One of the findings of the NADO report identified a need to "establish a higher level of consistency and performance across the entire statewide network of RPCs."

This assessment is intended to examine the consistency, completeness and effectiveness of the regional plans in regard to meeting statutory requirements, implementing the state's planning goals, and fulfilling their prescribed roles.

How were the regional plans assessed?

This Regional Plan Assessment used 28 criteria including the 10 plan elements required by 24 VSA § 4348a(a) and the 13 statewide planning goals established in 24 VSA § 4302(c). The remaining five criteria were the planning process described in 24 VSA § 4345a(5), the requirement to define substantial regional impact found in 24 VSA § 4345a(17), the use of the plan in Act 250 proceedings, the use of the plan in Section 248 proceedings, and the plan's overall user-friendliness.

The plans were given a letter grade (A+ to F) for each criteria equivalent to points on a 0-10 scale. The points were totaled

for all 28 criteria to assess the overall grade for each plan. Generally, the grading system indicates:

- A** The plan fully addresses the criteria. All of the required components of a plan element are complete, the rationale is well-considered and built on a solid planning foundation, and the desired outcomes are well-articulated. The plan includes policies, strategies, recommendations or projects that are specific, directive and would make substantial progress towards furthering statewide planning goals if implemented.
- B** The plan mostly addresses the criteria. Most of the required components of an element are complete and there is evidence of a solid planning foundation for the associated policies. The plan includes policies, strategies, recommendations or projects that align with statewide planning goals, but as stated they may not be adequately specific or directive to ensure their implementation.
- C** The plan partially addresses the criteria. Some of the required components of an element are incomplete or the evidence of a solid planning foundation for associated policies may be lacking. The plan may include policies or recommendations that align with statewide planning goals, but they are expressed in broad, general terms that do not provide specific guidance for implementation measures that would achieve the desired outcome.

GRADE	POINTS	
	PER CRITERIA	ENTIRE PLAN
A+	10	266-280
A	9	238-265
A-	8	210-237
B+	7	182-209
B	6	154-181
B-	5	126-153
C+	4	98-125
C	3	70-97
C-	2	42-69
D	1	15-41
F	0	0-14

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- D** The plan only superficially addresses the criteria. Most of the required components of an element are incomplete and there is no evidence of a solid planning foundation for associated policies. The plan may re-state a statewide planning goal, but it does not offer any more specific policy guidance on how that goal should be implemented in the region.
- F** The plan does not address the criteria. The required element is essentially incomplete or missing, and there is no evidence of a solid planning foundation for associated policies. The statewide planning goal is not referenced or supported with policies or recommendations.

For the 10 required plan elements, the assessment considered:

(1) Statement of Basic Policies. Does the plan express a clearly articulated vision and guiding principles for growth and development in the region? Is the language used directive ('must' or 'shall') or suggested ('may' or 'encourage')?

(2) Land Use Element. Does the plan contain a land use element and a future land use map? Is there a written description of the desired future land use pattern for the region, including the appropriate location, intensity and character of development? How was the map created and what does it represent? Does the written statement and map recognize the hierarchy of the regional settlement pattern (ex. downtowns, village centers, suburban neighborhoods, hamlets, rural and working lands, and remote or undeveloped lands)? Does the written statement and map reinforce Vermont's traditional settlement pattern of compact centers separated by rural countryside? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local land use plans and regulations?

(3) Energy Element. Does the plan include an inventory and assessment of the energy being produced and consumed in the region? Does the plan consider how the region's planned

growth and development will affect energy demand? Does the plan include policies on energy conservation that are specific enough to direct action to reduce energy consumption? Does the plan make clear connections between land use patterns and energy consumption? Does the plan offer guidance on the appropriate siting or scale of renewable energy projects in the region? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local energy planning and programs?

(4) Transportation Element. Does the plan include an inventory and assessment of the region's transportation infrastructure, facilities and services? Does the plan include a transportation map showing existing and any planned transportation features? Does the plan include a prioritized list of transportation improvements that will be needed to accommodate planned growth with estimates of timing and cost, and identification of potential funding opportunities? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local planning for transportation improvements?

(5) Utility and Facility Element. Does the plan include an inventory and assessment of the region's utilities, facilities and services? Does the plan include a map showing existing and any planned infrastructure and facilities? Does the plan include a prioritized list of improvements that will be needed to accommodate planned growth with estimates of timing and cost, and identification of potential funding opportunities? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local planning for infrastructure and facility improvements?

(6) Statement of Preservation Policies. Does the plan express clearly articulated guiding principles related to the preservation of significant natural, scenic and historic resources? Is the language used directive ('must' or 'shall') or suggested ('may' or 'encourage')?

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(7) **Implementation Program.** Does the plan identify specific actions or projects that would implement its policies, including priorities, timing, cost estimates, funding opportunities, lead agency or organization, and potential partners?

(8) **Compatibility Statement.** Does the plan include an assessment of the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region? Does it include an assessment of how its plan for growth and development may affect adjoining regions? Does it identify shared resources that require coordinated planning?

(9) **Housing Element.** Does the plan include an assessment of the region's housing needs? Is the assessment based on the best available data, and forecasts of demographic and economic trends? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local planning around housing issues?

(10) **Economic Development Element.** Does the plan include an assessment of the region's economy? Is the assessment based on the best available trend data and forecasts? Is there a description of desired future economic development in the region, including the appropriate location, type and scale of development? Does the plan recommend specific projects or programs to implement its economic development policies? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local planning for economic development?

Regional plans must be consistent with the 13 statewide planning goals listed in 24 VSA § 4302(c). The statute goes on to define consistency as requiring "substantial progress toward attainment of the goals." Substantial progress implies that there will be measurable or perceptible change from the current condition to a condition that is closer to what is envisioned by the goal. This assessment examined the policies, programs and projects recommended in the regional plans with the following questions in mind:

Are there policies or projects in the plan, that if implemented, would result in a measurable or perceptible change?

Are the policies stated clearly and specifically enough to ensure the desired outcome?

Do the policies do more than state the desired outcome, do they describe how to get to the desired outcome?

The determination of a plan's level of consistency with the planning goals was significantly influenced by the language and phrasing of the policy statements, in addition to the specificity of their content and the support for the policies expressed elsewhere in the plan.

A number of the plans primarily format their policies as action verb statements. The strength of the verb (encourage, support, promote, require, etc.) and the specificity of the statement determine the level of consistency the policy exhibits.

“Keep agricultural land and forested lands in profitable and productive use.”

“Support the growth and vitality of working farms and managed forests.”

Other plans primarily format their policies in standard sentence format. This frequently leads to use of the passive tense, which is perceived as weaker expression than the action verb statement even if the wording is otherwise essentially the same. The strength of the policy is also dependent on the verb selected (should, may, shall, must, etc.).

“Agricultural land and forested lands should be kept in profitable and productive use.”

“The growth and vitality of working farms and managed forests must be supported.”

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A few plans include some policies phrased in the future tense, which are perceived as stronger and more active than those expressed in the passive tense.

“Agricultural land and forested lands will be kept in profitable and productive use.”

“The growth and vitality of working farms and managed forests will be supported.”

Several of the plans phrase many policies as recommendations for municipalities. This may be an appropriate format for a subset of the policies, but when used too frequently, the regional plan is perceived to be avoiding its responsibility to set regional policies.

“Municipalities should encourage the profitable and productive use of agricultural land and forested lands.”

“Municipalities are encouraged to support the growth and vitality of working farms and managed forests.”

The policies that exhibit the highest level of consistency with the statewide goals are those that offer more specific guidance on how to implement the goal.

“Keep agricultural land and forested lands in profitable and productive use by: encouraging expansion and development of value-added enterprises; promoting the region’s agritourism destinations and local products...”

For each of the 13 statewide planning goals, the assessment looked for specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, would result in substantial progress towards attaining the goal. General, broad statements of support or encouragement - examples would be “promote pedestrian-friendly village areas” or “maintain water quality” - were not considered adequate to result in substantial progress. Provisions like “construct or upgrade sidewalks when roads are built or repaired in villages” or “restore or maintain naturally-vegetated

buffers of at least 50 feet along all surface waters” were considered adequate to result in substantial progress.

With regard to the planning process, the assessment considered whether there had been an opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan, as well as what background studies or data serve as a foundation for the plan.

The assessment examined how each plan defined ‘significant regional impact’ and how that definition influences the regional commission’s participation in state regulatory proceedings.

To assess the plan’s effectiveness in Act 250 and Section 248 proceedings, the directness and specificity of the language used to express policies was considered (use of directive or obligatory terms rather than discretionary or permissive terms).

The final criteria is not a statutory requirement, but relates to the overall readability and user-friendliness of the plan. Is it effectively communicating its message? Is it well-organized and structured? Does it use plain language or is it full of poorly explained planning jargon? Who is the target audience for the plan?

How is this report organized?

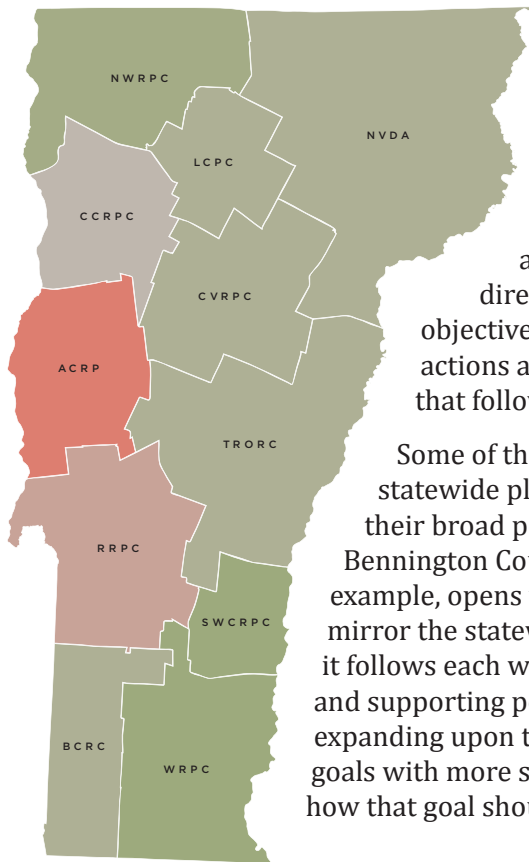
Following this introduction is a statewide summary of the major findings by criteria. Finally, there is an individual summary report for each regional plan.

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Average Score: B+

All of the regional plans include policies to guide future growth and protect the environment, but most do not communicate their core principles clearly and succinctly. Several plans open with a vision, purpose or broad goal statement, but most of them need to be read in their entirety to get a sense of the basic



or foundational policies for the region. These policies appear in multiple places throughout the plan. All of the plans could more clearly articulate these guiding principles, ideally as an opening to the plan directly linking all the goals, objectives, policies, strategies, actions and recommendations that follow, to those principles.

Some of the plans build upon the statewide planning goals to establish their broad policy framework. The Bennington County Regional Plan, for example, opens with 11 goals that largely mirror the statewide planning goals, but it follows each with further discussion and supporting policy statements. By expanding upon the state's broad planning goals with more specific policies on how that goal should be implemented

in the region, the plan more effectively communicates its core principles:

“Provide for safe, convenient, economic, and energy efficient transportation systems. Emphasis should be placed on the maintenance and improvement of existing roads. However, timely completion of the Route 279 in Bennington, particularly its northern leg, and planned improvements to Route 7 in Pownal are critical projects...”

The Windham Regional Plan also uses the statewide planning goals as a template for its regional goals, but before stating those goals the plan offers a vision statement that is intended to “form the basis of this Plan” and “provide a background for understanding the Plan’s policies.” One of the sentiments expressed in that vision statement is:

“A sustainable future with an identification of—and focus on—critical issues, especially including environmentally and economically sustainable energy sources.”

Following the regional goals, the Windham Regional Plan identifies energy as the regional priority. Energy policies are then woven into all elements of the plan and the plan states that “This regional priority will also guide the WRC’s work program over the life of this Plan.” By making energy a common theme and integrating it into all the plan elements, connections between the elements and overall vision are strengthened.

Several of the regional plans separate the policy components of the plan from the inventory and analysis components. One strength of this approach is that with the policies grouped together, it becomes easier to make connections between elements and comprehend the policies in context with one another. The Lamoille County Regional Plan is organized in this manner and it takes a unique approach by identifying a series of issues and then establishing policies in response to those issues that often encompass multiple plan elements.

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

(A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.

(B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.

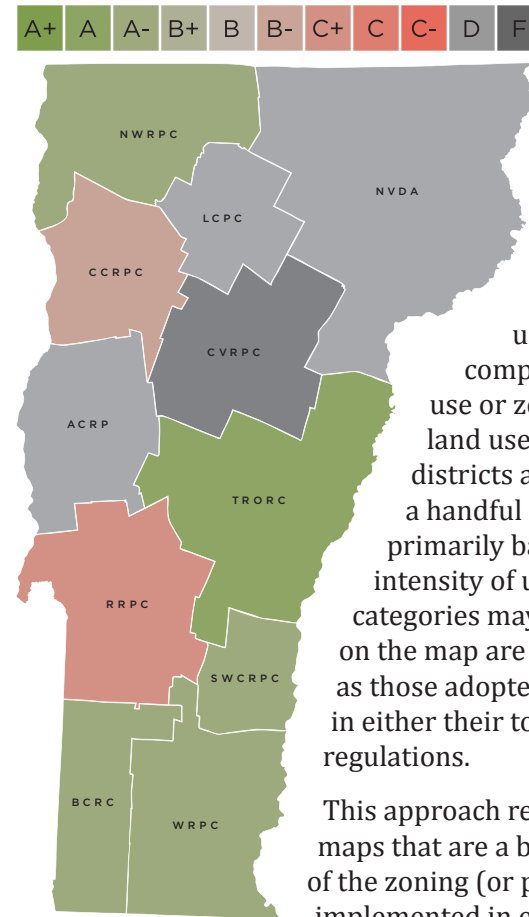
(C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.

(D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Average Score: B-

The regional plans display several distinct approaches to establishing a regional land use plan and map. There is also considerable variability among the plans in how specifically the land use element describes each region's desired future land use pattern.

The Central Vermont Regional Plan does not include a future land use map. The plan's land use element contains general goals and policies such as *"CVRPC endorses the concept of creating new villages to accommodate new growth,"* but the lack of a future land use map limits the effectiveness of the policies to guide future growth and development. Similarly, the Regional Plan for the Northeast Kingdom establishes land use goals and policies without applying them to specific locations on a future land use map. The land use goals and policies for the Northeast Kingdom are broad, general statements such as *"New development should be compatible with existing land uses, and agree with local plans."* The plan's future land use map consists of a series of points showing the locations of the region's urban, town and village centers and industrial parks. Neither plan accomplishes the statutory requirement to set forth the location, amount, intensity and character of desired future land use in the region.



The Addison County Regional Plan, Lamoille County Regional Plan, and to a lesser degree Chittenden County's ECOS Plan have a common approach

to their future land use plan and map - a compilation of municipal land use or zoning. The municipal land use planning areas or zoning districts are grouped together into a handful of future land use areas primarily based on the density or intensity of use allowed. While the categories may be generalized, the lines on the map are essentially the same as those adopted by the municipalities in either their town plans or zoning regulations.

This approach results in future land use maps that are a better representation of the zoning (or planning) techniques implemented in each municipality than of the region's or even the individual municipalities' planning intent. For example in the Lamoille County region, Wolcott's own plan calls for the town to remain a low-density rural community, but the town zoning allows for one home per 1 or 2 acres virtually town-wide. As such, the town is almost entirely classified as Mixed Use, the second most intense land use classification on the region's future land use map, rather than Rural Residential.

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Additionally, these “compilation” future land use maps generally do not accurately reflect the hierarchy of urban, town and village centers within the region. For example, looking at the Addison County future land use map it is not readily apparent that Middlebury is the regional center with Vergennes and Bristol as secondary centers. The village centers in rural towns like Shoreham and Lincoln have nearly as much or even more land classified as the highest-intensity Village and Commercial/Industrial planning region on the regional future land use map as the true regional and town centers.

This distortion of the relative size, use and density of existing/planned centers is also evident in the Chittenden County future land use map. For example, Williston has a larger area classified as the highest-intensity regional planning area, Center, than Burlington, and Milton has a Center area that is only slightly smaller than Burlington. Interestingly, several Chittenden County towns also have essentially 1- or 2-acre zoning town-wide, but on the regional future land use map most of those lands are in the Rural planning area, unlike the approach used in the Lamoille County region.

The Addison and Lamoille County plans do not establish specific land use policies for the planning areas shown on the future land use map. As a result, neither plan accomplishes the statutory requirement to set forth the location, amount, intensity and character of desired future land use in the region. The Chittenden County plan provides slightly more description of desired future land use within each planning area and the plan has an overall policy of directing 80% of new development to the 15% of the region classified into one of the areas planned for growth (all the future land use planning areas except for Rural).

The Rutland Region’s future land use map includes the following statement, *“This map is a generalized land use map. It is not intended to regulate actual uses in specific geographic areas, but instead reflect potential land use patterns.”* It visually

represents this approach by literally blurring the lines between its four planning areas. The map also shows a series of points representing the region’s centers, villages, hamlets and business parks. The plan does include a statement describing the desired future land use within each planning area, but in general terms:

“Agricultural and silvicultural activities should continue to dominate the Region’s low density areas. Development in low density areas should be unobtrusive and maintain the rural character and scale of the locale.”

The remainder of the regional plans share another common approach to their future land use maps and plans. The maps establish regional land use planning areas with boundaries that, while they may be generalized, are clearly delineated. These boundaries are not dictated by municipal plans or zoning, and as such more accurately reflect the hierarchy of urban, town and village centers within the region. They are also more effective at distinguishing between rural lands best suited for conservation, for agriculture or forestry, or for rural residential use. Several of these plans also have inset maps and related descriptions of specific areas such as regional centers, village centers or interchange areas that provide more detail on the geographic extent of and land use policies for those specific areas.

These plans also express their land use policies in greater detail and use more directive language. The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan has the most specific policies to guide development within each planning area. For example, the plan states:

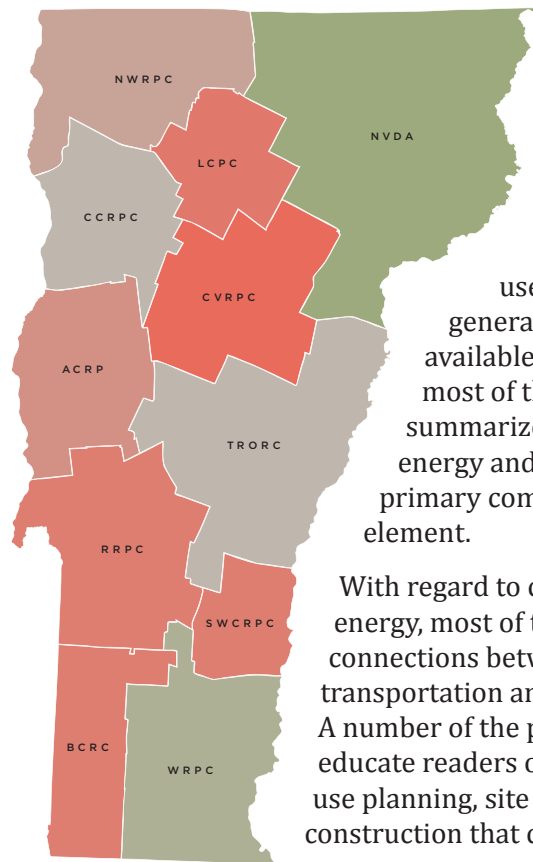
“Principal retail establishments must be located in Town Centers, Designated Downtowns, or Designated Growth Centers to minimize the blighting effects of sprawl and strip development along major highways and maintain rural character.”

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Average Score: C+

Unlike the statutory provisions for the land use, utilities and facilities, housing and economic development elements, the statute suggests rather than mandates the content of the energy



element. It says that the energy element may include an analysis of energy resources and needs within the region, and most of the regional plans do attempt to do this. However, regional-

level data on energy use and, to a lesser degree, generation is not readily available to the RPCs. As a result, most of the regional plans simply summarize portions of the state energy and electric plans as the primary component of their energy element.

With regard to conservation of energy, most of the plans make connections between land use patterns, transportation and energy consumption. A number of the plans attempt to educate readers on approaches to land use planning, site design, and building construction that can conserve energy.

Energy conservation and efficiency typically are encouraged, but not required. Many of the plans include a policy statement similar to this one from the Windham Regional Plan, *“Encourage all new development to follow the energy conservation guidelines developed by the Vermont Public Service Department for Act 250 permits.”*

When discussing renewable energy, however, the plans are less consistent. Several plans recognize the siting of renewable energy projects, particularly utility-scale wind power, as an unresolved issue in the region. For example, the Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, *“While the RPC supports and encourages the development of alternative energy facilities in the Region, it also believes that they should not come at a cost to the Region’s natural resources.”* This conflict between the plans’ natural and scenic resource policies and their energy policies is largely unresolved. A few plans call for the RPCs and/or towns to develop more clear siting guidance for renewable energy projects.

The two regions with the most well-developed energy elements are those that are home to major energy facilities - Windham County and the Northeast Kingdom. The Windham Regional Plan identifies energy as the region’s highest priority issue and weaves energy policies throughout the plan. The plan does include some specific policy statements that would apply to energy generation and transmission projects. The Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan includes an Energy Strategy with a unique approach - an energy portfolio for the region that sets forth how various energy sources should be used to meet the region’s energy needs.

Additionally, the Bennington County RPC has a Regional Energy Plan that offers much more specific policies and recommendations than most of the regional plans’ energy elements. The RPC intends for this plan to become formally adopted into the regional plan.

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

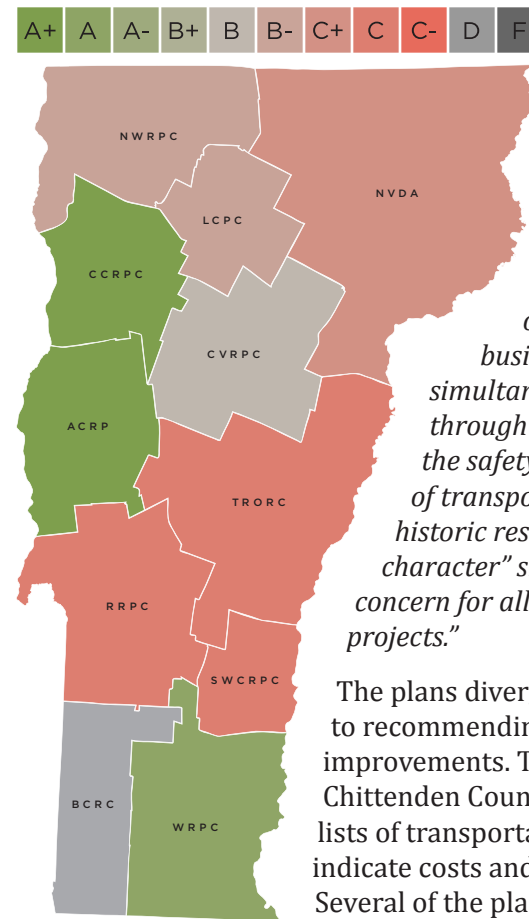
Average Score: B-

Nearly all of the plans include a thorough inventory and analysis of their region's transportation infrastructure. This assessment found that only the Bennington County Regional Plan did not adequately meet this statutory requirement and that was based not on the content of their Regional Transportation Plan, but rather on a technicality - the transportation plan is not formally incorporated by reference into the regional plan.

In fact, the Bennington County Regional Transportation Plan describes and assesses the major transportation corridors particularly well. It presents a series of corridor maps that use symbols and notations to document conditions, use, function, needs issues and planned improvements. These maps effectively summarize pages of text into a single-page visual representation. Unlike most of the other plans, the Bennington plan also includes mapping of proposed transportation facilities.

A number of the transportation plans are organized primarily by corridor. The plans that discuss not only the highways and vehicular traffic, but transit, pedestrians, bicyclists, rail, parking, etc. by corridor are generally more effective at describing the current condition and future needs of the entire transportation system than those that discuss each mode or topic separately.

The Southern Windsor Regional Transportation Plan does a particularly effective job of linking land use and transportation planning. It includes a section that describes the desired characteristics and functions of the transportation system within



each of the Regional Plan's future land use planning areas:

“The transportation infrastructure within town centers should support economic development opportunities and local business interests, and simultaneously accommodate through traffic while maintaining the safety for non-motorized forms of transportation. Preservation of historic resources and “community character” should be a primary concern for all road improvement projects.”

The plans diverge in their approach to recommending and prioritizing improvements. The Addison and Chittenden County plans have prioritized lists of transportation projects that indicate costs and funding strategies. Several of the plans reference, but do not include, the project lists developed by the regional transportation committees.

The transportation chapter of the Addison County Regional Plan includes an implementation matrix that lists project location, brief description, time frame, transportation goals addressed, level (local, regional, corridor), capital cost, potential funding sources, lead entity, partners, and next steps for each transportation policy.

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§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Average Score: C-

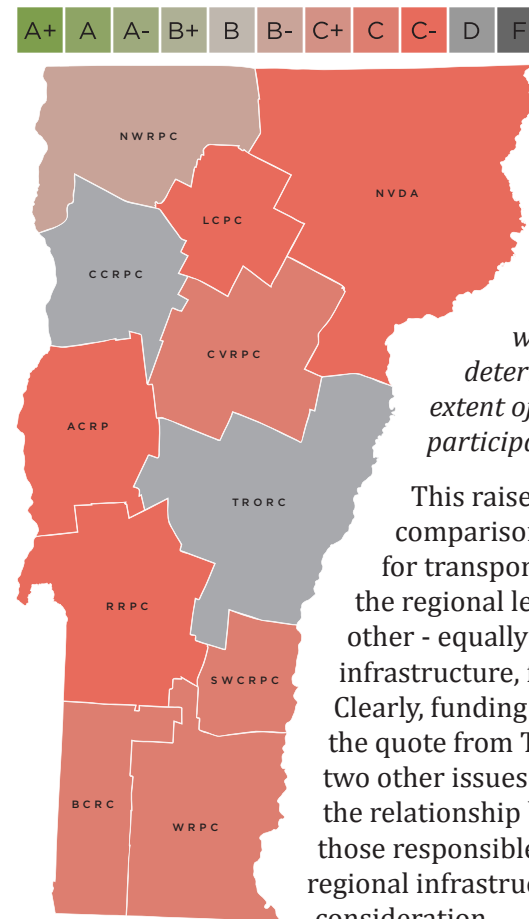
The utilities and facilities elements are the weakest overall component of the regional plans. Only a few of the plans have a thorough inventory of local and regional community facilities and public utilities. Even those that document their region's existing utilities and facilities generally do not assess whether there is adequate capacity or needed improvements to support desired future growth.

Despite this, most of the plans recognize that a lack of infrastructure is the primary barrier to implementing the state's principal land use planning goal - compact settlements separated by rural countryside. Nearly all of the plans express a sentiment similar to this one from the Central Vermont Regional Plan:

“Lack of sewer and water infrastructure and marketable incentives for creative development are obstacles to smart growth in rural towns.”

The introduction to the Two Rivers plan explains why the plan offers general suggestions for implementation rather than more specific actions. This rationale is likely shared by most RPCs and applies particularly to the utility and facility element:

“...the more detailed programmatic steps necessary to actualize policies are left for the agencies involved to determine. This was done for three principal reasons. First, agencies specializing in areas outside the traditional purview of the Regional Commission have the appropriate technical personnel and resources to develop detailed implementation strategies. Second, because this Plan is not binding on the majority of organizations



necessary for its implementation, the participation of many key organizations cannot be mandated or guaranteed. Third, financial resources and constraints of the various organizations will play a major role in determining the manner and extent of each organization's participation.”

This raises an interesting point of comparison between how planning for transportation is occurring at the regional level versus planning for other - equally vital - types of public infrastructure, facilities and services. Clearly, funding is the core difference, but the quote from Two Rivers plan raises two other issues - technical expertise and the relationship between the RPCs and those responsible for or involved with regional infrastructure - that merit further consideration.

While water and sewer infrastructure clearly has the most immediate effect on land use, there are other concerns visible on the horizon. Several plans mention one or more of these - the Rutland Regional Plan does so particularly well. Examples include dependence on volunteers to provide essential community services, capacity of community services to support the state's aging-in-place policy, consideration of consolidating or restructuring schools, and the overall governance and administrative capacity of rural towns.

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Average Score: B-

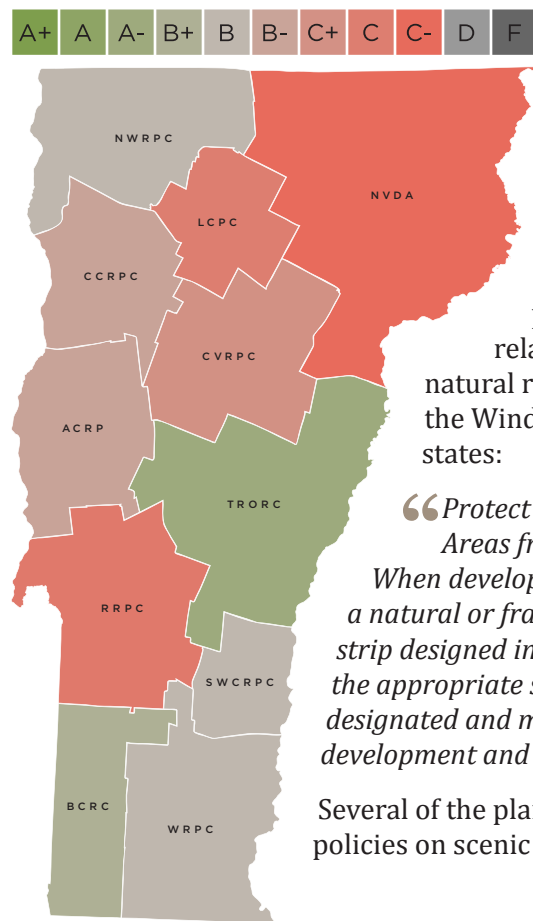
Unlike most of the statutorily required plan elements, this provision requires a statement of policies only, with no inventory or assessment of natural, scenic or historic resources. However, most of the regional plans include educational background

information on the region's resources. The plans generally do not discuss scenic and historic resources at the same level of detail as natural resources.

All the plans include policy statements that relate to the preservation of natural resources. For example, the Windham Regional Plan states:

“Protect Natural and Fragile Areas from development. When development is proposed near a natural or fragile area, a buffer strip designed in consultation with the appropriate state agency, must be designated and maintained between the development and natural or fragile area.”

Several of the plans have clear and specific policies on scenic resources, but many



are largely silent on the issue. For example, the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee plan states:

“Where development is proposed in areas of scenic value... design plans must: a) maintain the prominent natural feature of the developed area; b) work toward enhancing or retaining views; c) minimize adverse impact on views and areas of historic significance; d) minimize contrast with areas of historic significance; and e) reflect traditional settlement patterns.”

With regard to historic resources, most of the policies in the regional plans are broad or general. The focus of these policies is frequently historic character and buildings within downtowns and villages. For example, the Bennington County Regional Plan states:

“Important historic sites, structures, districts, and archaeological sites should be preserved. New development in historic areas should be architecturally compatible with its surroundings. The adaptive reuse of historic buildings is encouraged, and renovation work should maintain the architectural integrity of historic structures.”

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

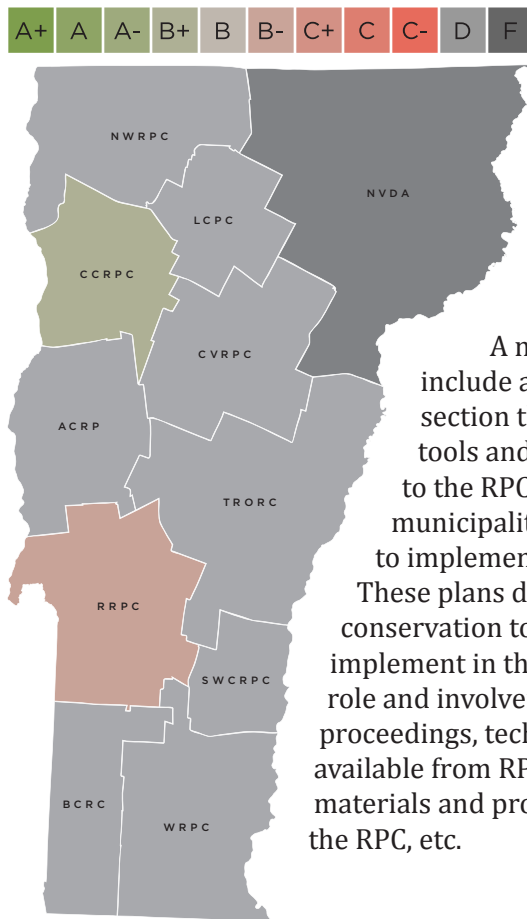
Average Score: C-

Most of the regional plans do not have a specific implementation program that “includes an investment strategy for regional facilities and services.” While most of the plans do not discuss implementation at that level of detail overall, several have a

transportation chapter or incorporate by reference a regional transportation plan that has a much more specific implementation program than the rest of the regional plan.

A number of the plans include an implementation section that describes the tools and approaches available to the RPC, and sometimes to municipalities or other partners, to implement the plan's policies.

These plans discuss smart growth or conservation tools municipalities can implement in their regulations, the RPC's role and involvement in state regulatory proceedings, technical assistance available from RPC staff, educational materials and programs available through the RPC, etc.



Several plans include sections within each chapter intended to be “recommendations” or “actions,” but the statements in these sections are often policies rather than specific next steps. For example, the Addison County Regional Plan includes the following recommended action, which is more of a policy than an action statement:

“Encourage communities to identify areas of high scenic value through an inclusive public process.”

While these sections may predominately consist of policy statements, they usually include a few examples of more specific next steps. For example, elsewhere in the Addison County Regional Plan is a recommended action to:

“Seek funding to undertake a study to determine potential sites for wind generation facilities of various scales in the region.”

The Rutland Regional Plan takes a unique approach to implementation. Each plan element includes actions that primarily consist of specific tasks to be completed by regional planning commission staff. As a result, the plan provides a strong foundation for the RPC's annual work plans. However, the scope of recommended implementation measures is largely limited to those actions that are within the purview of the RPC.

Chittenden County's ECOS Plan has the most specific overall implementation program amongst the 11 plans, largely as a result of the plan serving three purposes - metropolitan transportation plan, comprehensive economic development strategy, and regional plan. As a result of incorporating more detailed transportation and economic development recommendations, the ECOS plan has an implementation program that is closer to the statutory description. The plan identifies 174 specific projects to further the ECOS strategies, in addition to the transportation project list.

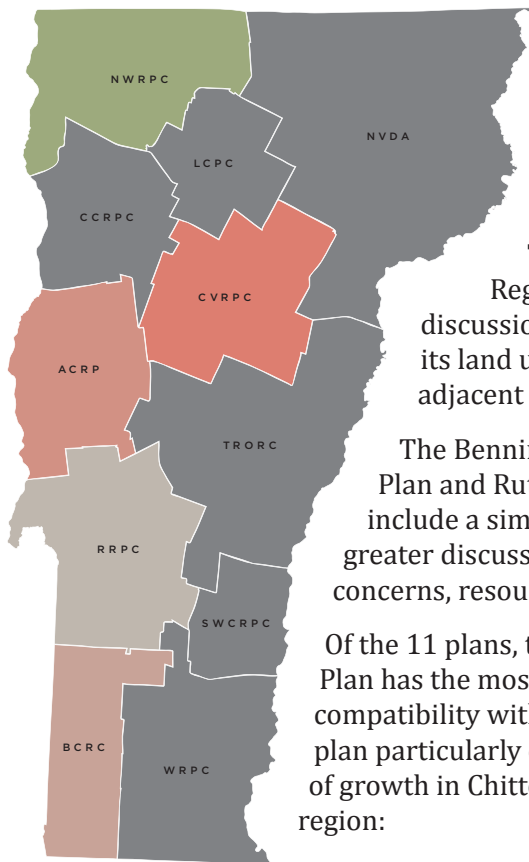
REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

STATEWIDE SUMMARY

\$4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Average Score: C-

Most of the regional plans do not demonstrate their compatibility with the plans of adjacent regions. A large number simply state in a sentence or two that the plans are compatible, without any further discussion or explanation.



The Central Vermont Regional Plan includes a limited discussion of the impacts of growth in Chittenden County on the region, as does the Addison County Regional Plan.

The Addison County Regional Plan expands this discussion further by comparing its land use plan to that of adjacent regions.

The Bennington County Regional Plan and Rutland Regional Plan both include a similar assessment and greater discussion of shared planning concerns, resources and impacts.

Of the 11 plans, the Northwest Regional Plan has the most thorough analysis of compatibility with adjoining regions. The plan particularly discusses the impacts of growth in Chittenden County on the region:

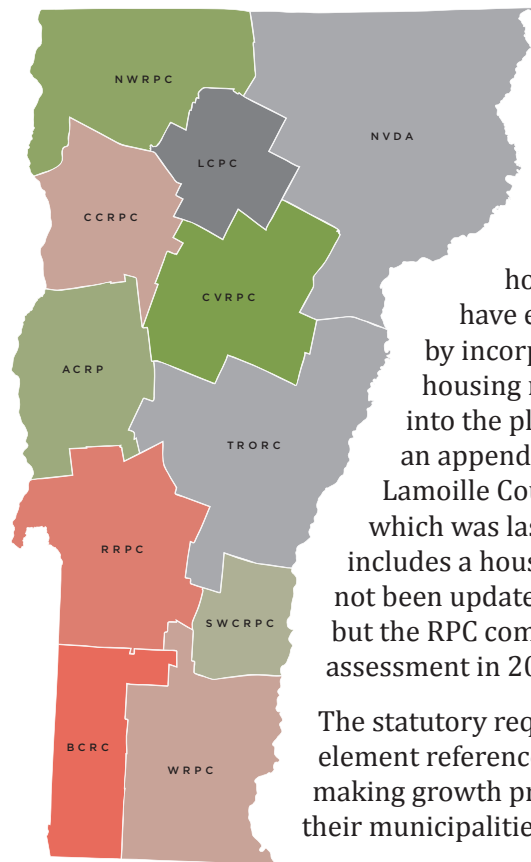
“Decisions made around Exit 17 along Route 2 greatly impact Grand Isle County... The Enterprise Planning Area has a potential for hosting land uses that may result in negative impacts on valuable farmland and burden utilities and facilities in Georgia and adjoining towns. If this happens it will be in opposition to the NRPC's policies supporting the protection of farmland and its objective of assisting towns, and particularly the Town of Georgia, in establishing growth centers and preventing sprawl. NRPC will continue to work with the CCRPC, the Town of Milton and the state to resolve these growth issues.”

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Average Score: B-

Most of the regional plan housing elements were last revised about a decade ago following the 2000 Census when housing costs were skyrocketing and affordable housing was in short supply in much of Vermont. As a result, nearly all of the plans



identify a need for housing in their region.

A number of the RPCs based their housing element on a detailed housing needs assessment. Some of the plans with weaker housing elements could have easily been strengthened by incorporating an existing housing needs assessment into the plan by reference or as an appendix. For example, the Lamoille County Regional Plan, which was last adopted in 2006, includes a housing chapter that has not been updated since the mid-1990s, but the RPC completed a housing needs assessment in 2005.

The statutory requirements for a housing element reference the RPCs' role in making growth projections and providing their municipalities with the demographic

and economic data required for effective planning. Some of the regional plans directly include that baseline data, while others reference studies or collections of data maintained by the RPC. Some of the RPCs have conducted their own population projections, while others continue to rely on statewide sources such as the MISER 2000-2020 projection.

This raises the question of whether it is still necessary for the regional plans to serve as a clearinghouse of background information and data in the age of Google. And if the plan should serve that role, how can it be kept current when data and information is being updated more frequently than the plan. What is also evident in reviewing the regional plans is a heavy reliance on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, and little effort to collect and analyze local data such as building permits that would provide a more nuanced understanding of growth and development trends at the municipal and regional level.

The associated policies and programs generally do not reflect the substantial and urgent housing needs identified in the regional plans. The Central Vermont Regional Plan offers the most specific strategy for addressing regional housing needs. It includes a regional housing distribution plan that establishes how much housing each municipality in the region should be planning for through 2020 and a framework for municipal planning:

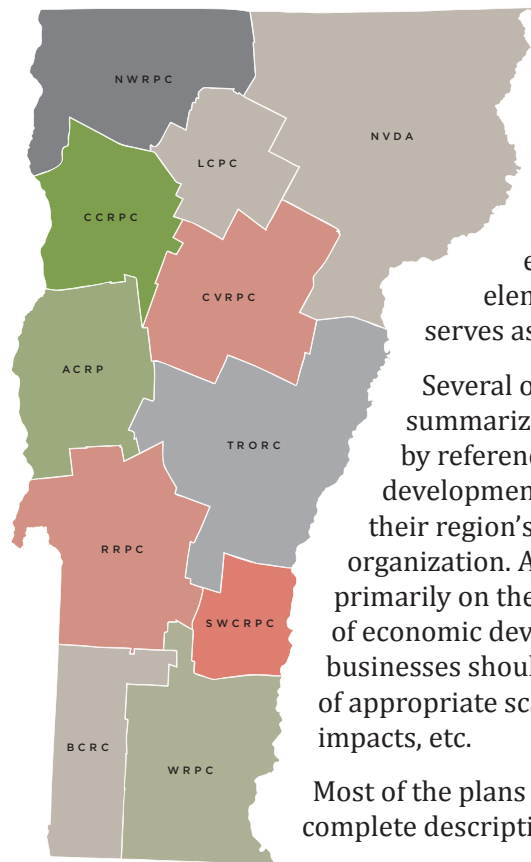
“Town plans shall contain a detailed map or maps of the town showing the town’s preferred locations for future housing units - consistent with current or proposed zoning - for 80% of the anticipated 10 to 15 year housing demand. Town plans shall also provide mapping updates that identify the locations and number of housing units created in the town since the previous town plan adoption. 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.”

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Average Score: B-

The economic development element was added to the statute in 2011, so most of the regional plans have not been updated since this requirement went into effect. However, most of the plans did have an economic development section, with the exception



of the Northwest Regional Plan. The format and extent of those sections varies substantially amongst the plans. The Chittenden County ECOS Plan has the most comprehensive economic development element given that it also serves as the region's CEDS.

Several of the regional plans summarize or incorporate by reference an economic development strategy prepared by their region's economic development organization. A few of the plans focus primarily on the land use component of economic development - where businesses should locate and discussion of appropriate scale, intensity, design, impacts, etc.

Most of the plans do not provide a complete description of their regional

economy and desired economic development. Several of the plans do a much better job of describing what the region doesn't want than what it does. Similar to the housing element, several of the plans rely primarily on Census data when describing economic conditions and trends, and do not incorporate other state and local data sources that could provide a more detailed understanding of the regional economy.

A number of the plans could be strengthened by building upon the economic development potential of tourism, recreation, agriculture and forestry in their regions. Many of the plans refer to one or more of these sectors as the foundation of their regional economy, but then when discussing economic development, are largely silent about these industries. The Windham Regional Plan includes economic development policies that are more specific in this area such as:

“Encourage restaurants and markets to obtain and supply agricultural products from within the region and Vermont.”

Those plans that summarize or incorporate their region's economic development strategy tend to have broad policies and recommendations that are not particularly specific to the region, but more likely to apply statewide - expanding access to capital, reducing tax burdens, streamlined permitting, etc. For example, many of the plans include general policies similar to this one from the Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Plan:

“Develop a stronger financing/ funding mechanism for business entrepreneurship.”

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

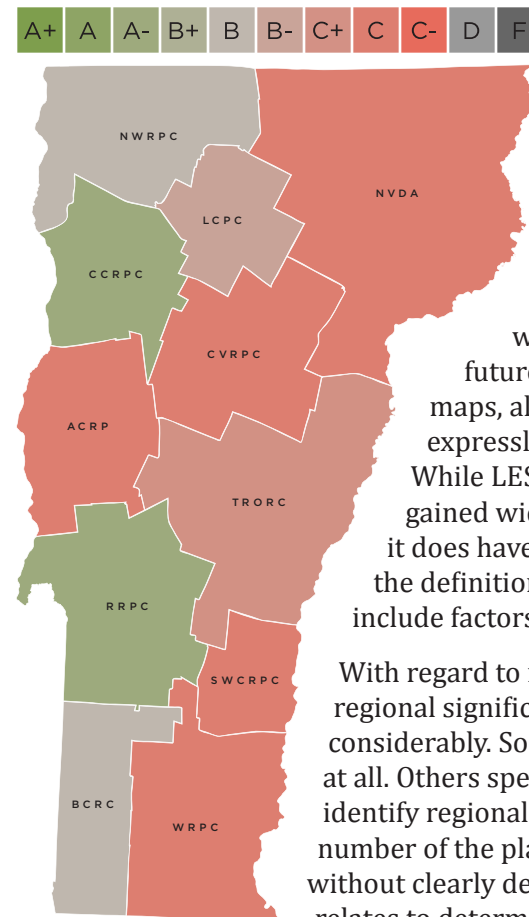
- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Average Score: B-

The assessment of the regional plans based on this statutory provision was difficult to complete without going beyond a review of the plans themselves. For example, only a few of the plans include any description of the planning process.

From the plans, it is evident that all the RPCs are maintaining GIS databases. Most of the plans reference multiple supporting studies or plans. The Rutland Regional Plan does this consistently throughout the plan, providing references and resources for further information. Given that creating interactive electronic publications has become relatively simple, there is an opportunity for the regional plans to “slim down” while retaining links to valuable background information. Most of the regional plans could benefit from linking to more of the supporting plans and studies the RPCs develop, and relocating lengthy descriptive sections that are currently part of the main body of the plan to appendices.

From the plans, it does not appear that any of the RPCs have completed a comprehensive land evaluation and site assessment (LESA) to identify viable farmland. Several do speak about LESA



as a tool that could be used for this purpose and several include a map of primary agricultural soils. It is likely that several of the regions have considered agricultural potential when developing their future land use plans and maps, although that is not expressly discussed in the plans. While LESA is a tool that never gained widespread use in Vermont, it does have the benefit of expanding the definition of viable farmland to include factors beyond soil productivity.

With regard to identifying areas of regional significance, the plans vary considerably. Some do not use the term at all. Others specifically define it and identify regionally significant resources. A number of the plans use the term generally without clearly defining it and how it relates to determining whether a project has a substantial regional impact.

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

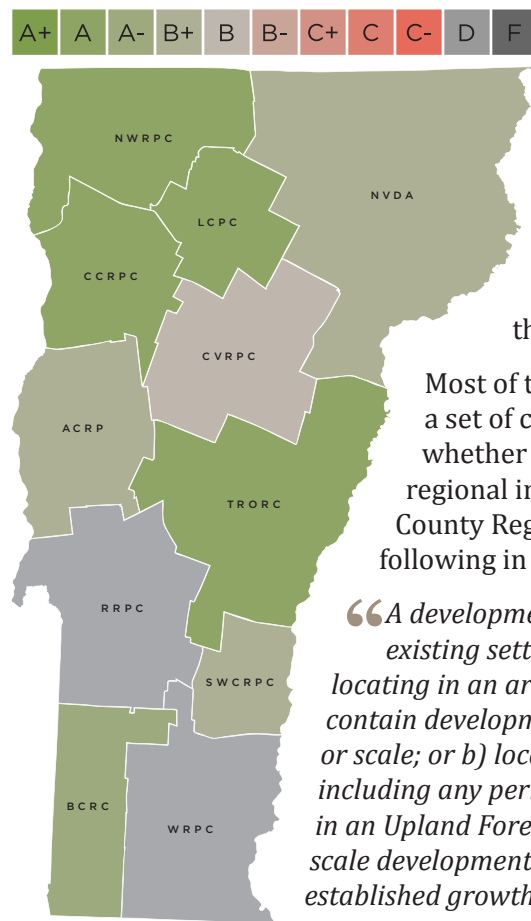
Average Score: B+

Most of the regional plans include a definition of substantial regional impact as required by this provision of statute. The Windham Regional Plan does not define the term, but instead describes the process the RPC follows for reviewing development projects. The Rutland

Regional Plan defines substantial regional impact in its glossary as “an impact that has considerable and ongoing impact on two or more municipalities” and the term is not used anywhere else in the plan.

Most of the regional plans use a set of criteria to determine whether a project has substantial regional impact. The Bennington County Regional Plan includes the following in their definition:

“A development that may modify existing settlement patterns by: a) locating in an area that does not currently contain development of a similar type or scale; or b) locating in a remote area, including any permanent development in an Upland Forest area; or c) a large-scale development occurring outside an established growth center.”



The Northwest Regional Plan sets thresholds for the number of housing units that would trigger a determination of substantial regional impact based on the municipality and whether the location is within or outside a growth center. The Central Vermont Regional Plan’s definition includes the following:

“Development projects of substantial Regional impact are those that will have substantial and ongoing impact on two or more municipalities... In addition, because CVRPC has identified housing as a critical need for the region, CVRPC will participate in the Act 250 review for any project which proposes to: increase the total number of year-round housing units in its host municipality by more than 2%; or create more than 30 having units of any type; or create more than five affordable housing units.”

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Average Score: B

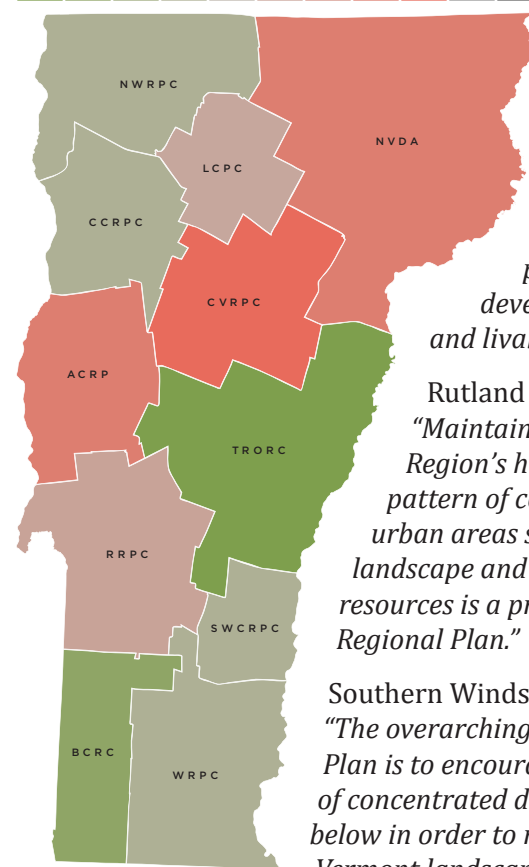
Most of the regional plans include multiple policy statements that align with this statewide planning goal. The strength and effectiveness of those policies are directly linked to the land use elements of the plans. The ability to implement these policies is also dependent on the availability of the infrastructure needed to support compact development.

Addison County Regional Plan states, “Support land development patterns concentrated in and around downtowns and village centers to preserve Vermont’s historic settlement pattern of villages and rural areas.”

Bennington County Regional Plan states, “Future development should be concentrated in and around growth centers (Appendix B-8); that is, the urban centers and villages in the region. These centers of development and activity should be surrounded by a rural landscape of farmlands, forests, and small rural residential communities. Moreover, the demarcation between growth centers and the rural environment should be quite distinct.”

Central Vermont Regional Plan states, “New development should be planned so as to respect the historic settlement pattern of compact villages, neighborhoods, and urban centers separated by rural countryside.”

Chittenden County ECOS Plan states, “Encourage future growth in the Center, Metro, Enterprise, Suburban and Village Planning Areas to maintain Vermont’s historic settlement pattern and respect



working and natural landscapes.”

Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, “Future development should follow traditional development patterns, while providing for economic development opportunities and livable communities.”

Rutland Regional Plan states, “Maintaining and enhancing the Region’s historic development pattern of compact villages and urban areas surrounded by a working landscape and protected natural resources is a primary goal of the Rutland Regional Plan.”

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, “The overarching goal of this Regional Plan is to encourage growth in the areas of concentrated development described below in order to maintain the traditional, Vermont landscape of densely-populated villages surrounded by open fields and large blocks of forested lands.”

Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Plan states, “The Regional Commission supports a land use planning concept which encourages a pattern of development that complements the traditional settlement pattern clearly recognized and existing in the region.”

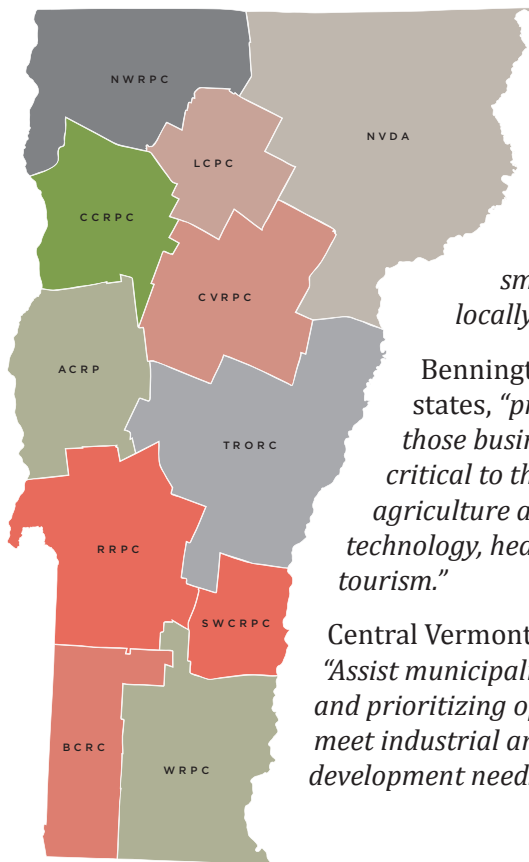
REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(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.

Average Score: C+

Nearly all of the regional plans include policies that align with this planning goal, although most are not specific or actionable. The policies in the Northwest Regional Plan that affect economic development address how commercial and industrial land

uses should be accommodated in the region.



Addison County Regional Plan states, *"The economy of the Addison Region is and should continue to be primarily comprised of small- to medium-sized, locally-owned businesses..."*

Bennington County Regional Plan states, *"provide strong support for those businesses deemed especially critical to the region: manufacturing, agriculture and forestry, information technology, health care, education, and tourism."*

Central Vermont Regional Plan states, *"Assist municipalities in identifying and prioritizing options available to meet industrial and commercial site development needs..."*

Chittenden County ECOS Plan states, *"Retain and support existing employers and job growth, grow target sector employers and entrepreneurs, and work to attract a greater diversity of employers and employees."*

Lamoille County Regional Plan states, *"Efforts that coordinate the development of business incubation in the region to support entrepreneurial activity and new business development, in cooperation with strategic partners, focusing on key regional industries are encouraged."*

Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, *"Develop and implement strategies to revitalize distressed areas and specific employment sectors within the Northeast Kingdom."*

Rutland Regional Plan states, *"...the available lands for development must be increased, delays and uncertainties in permitting process must be mitigated, and resources should be used to promote high-tech light manufacturing and rail-oriented businesses."*

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, *"To diversify the Region's economic base thereby reducing the risks of depending too heavily on one economic sector."*

Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Plan states, *"Improve the region's capacity to stimulate and sustain economic development and investment."*

Windham Regional Plan states, *"Promote activities and development that contribute to a strong and diverse economy, providing satisfying and rewarding job opportunities for all citizens in all parts of the region and supporting a strong municipal tax base, while maintaining environmental standards and promoting environmental justice."*

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Average Score: C

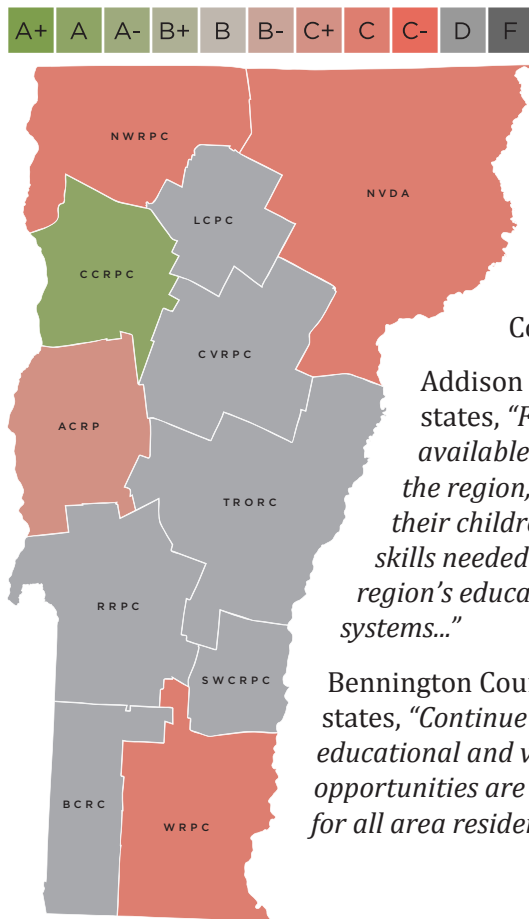
While all of the regional plans include policy statements that align with this statewide planning goal, most do not offer specific guidance on how the goal should be implemented in the region.

Chittenden County's ECOS Plan contains considerably more education policies than the other regional plans.

Representatives from the Chittenden County School Superintendents and the University of Vermont served on the ECOS Steering Committee.

Addison County Regional Plan states, "For programs to be available to assist new residents of the region, temporary workers and their children with learning the basic skills needed to fully participate in the region's education, economic and social systems..."

Bennington County Regional Plan states, "Continue efforts to ensure that educational and vocational training opportunities are sufficient and accessible for all area residents."



Central Vermont Regional Plan states, "Support efforts and programs to raise aspirations of the region's middle and high school students through career awareness education and training."

Chittenden County ECOS Plan states, "Improvements need to be made pre-K-12 to increase proficiency in reading, writing, math and science."

Lamoille County Regional Plan states, "Efforts that coordinate educational and employment needs for ensuring a highly skilled workforce that will meet the needs of local businesses and emerging technologies are encouraged."

Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, "Promote combined public/private educational programs and shared resources. Eliminate boundaries that impede knowledge and resource sharing."

Northwest Regional Plan states, "Support local efforts to seek funding to compare the feasibility and outcomes of establishing a regional "common" or "charter" school versus expanding existing schools as a means of addressing capacity problems at the region's high schools."

Rutland Regional Plan states, "Offer assistance in developing visions for education, e.g. by soliciting input from the business community regarding its needs for graduates, and providing that input to school officials."

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan states, "To create a system of accessible public education and workforce training opportunities."

Windham Regional Plan states, "Help to secure greater assistance from the state (financial and facilities assessment) to local and union school districts to provide quality education services and resources, as well as to meet state educational facility and program requirements."

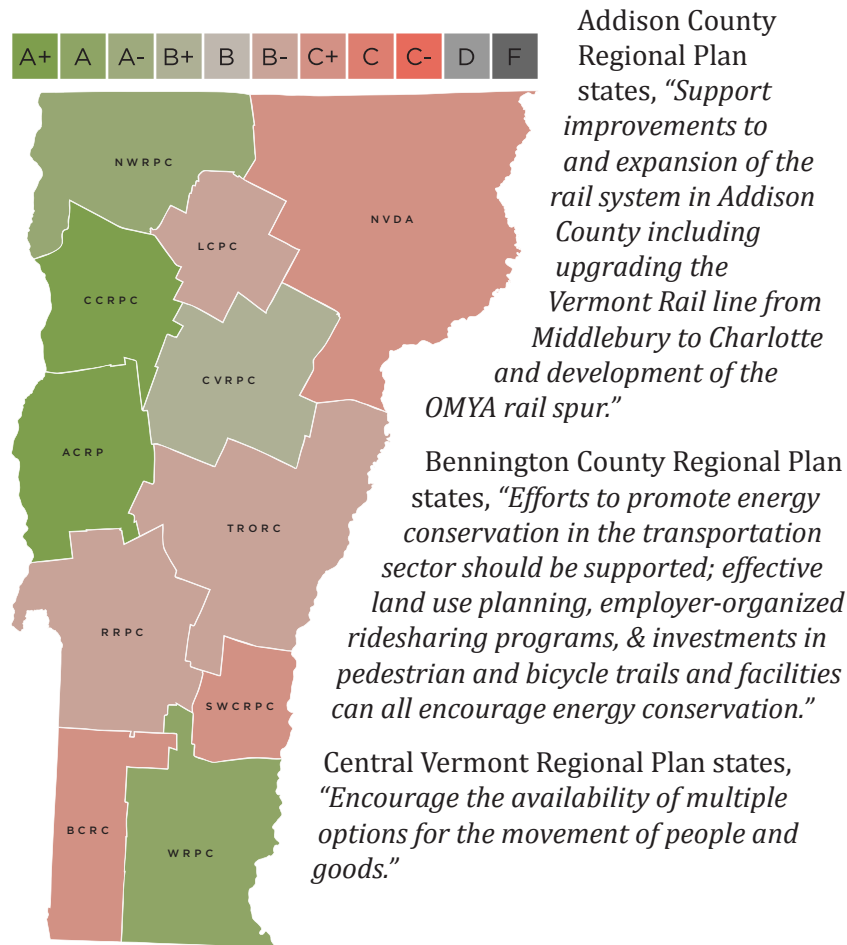
REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(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.

(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Average Score: B

All the regional plans include policies that align with this statewide goal. Most make connections between their energy policies and transportation policies.



Chittenden County ECOS Plan states, "Provide accessible, safe, efficient, interconnected, secure, equitable and sustainable mobility choices for our region's businesses, residents and visitors."

Lamoille County Regional Plan states, "The Better Back Roads Handbook should be followed for determining adequate standards."

Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, "Slow the deterioration of individual modes, and assist in reducing/averting costly repairs."

Northwest Regional Plan states, "Developers of commercial and industrial projects should be encouraged to use fewer and smaller parking spaces and lots and encourage the use of energy-saving alternative means of transportation such as providing reserved spots for car/van pool parking, bike racks, safe pedestrian circulation, and where warranted, transit stop locations."

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, "Promote alternative transportation practices that promote energy efficiency such as: expanding existing park-n-ride commuter parking lots, bicycle paths to lessen the dependency on single occupancy travel."

Two Rivers Regional Plan states, "On all new construction, transportation design speeds should be maintained or reduced with both roads and bridges maintaining their existing alignments. Geometric constraints that if removed could encourage greater volumes of traffic and/or truck traffic, should be left in place. All improvements should be made to context-sensitive designs that enhance the surrounding natural and built rural landscape."

Windham Regional Plan states, "Promote the reduction of vehicle miles traveled in Vermont through public education, expanded public transit infrastructure, rideshare programs and, park and ride facilities."

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Average Score: B-

All the regional plans include policies that align with this statewide planning goal. The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Plan has the most directive policies, particularly related to scenic resources. Most of the plans do not include policies related to archaeological resources.

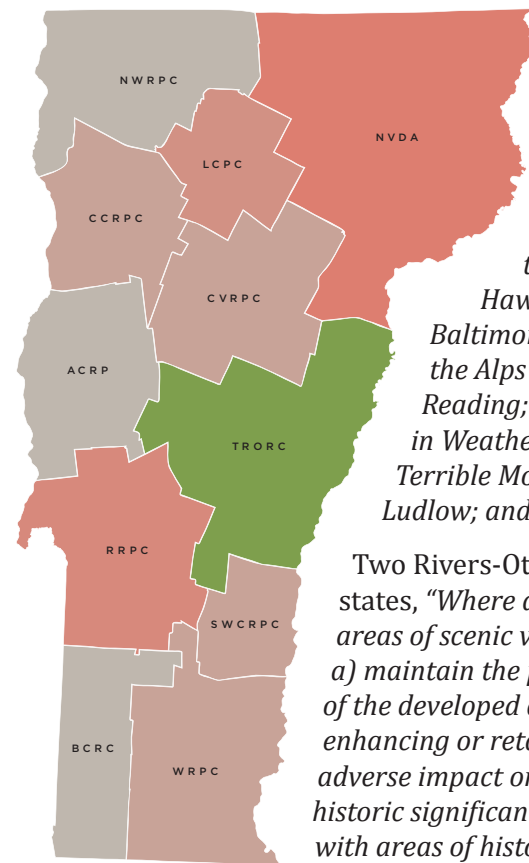
Addison County Regional Plan states, *“Development in areas of high scenic value due to scenic views or historic significance should minimize adverse impact on views and areas of historic significance.”*

Central Vermont Regional Plan states, *“Natural and cultural resource areas, as identified by this plan, shall be avoided wherever possible, in the location or routing of new substation or transmission facilities.”*

Lamoille County Regional Plan states, *“Restoration of riparian buffers of at least 50 feet are strongly encouraged along all surface waters. Existing riparian vegetation should be protected through such tools as management zones and shoreline zoning. LCPC supports riparian corridor education efforts.”*

Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, *“Significant historic, cultural, and scenic resources within the region should be identified and preserved.”*

Northwest Regional Plan states, *“To protect and maintain in healthy condition natural areas, fragile areas and areas with significant ecological value including wetlands, uplands, critical*



plant and animal habitats.”

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, *“The following sites are inherently and especially sensitive, and as such, development in these areas is discouraged:*

Hawks Mountain in Cavendish, Baltimore, and Weathersfield; the Alps region of Cavendish and Reading; Little Ascutney Mountain in Weathersfield and West Windsor; Terrible Mountain in Andover and Ludlow; and the Pinnacle in Ludlow.”

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan states, *“Where development is proposed in areas of scenic value... design plans must: a) maintain the prominent natural feature of the developed area; b) work toward enhancing or retaining views; c) minimize adverse impact on views and areas of historic significance; d) minimize contrast with areas of historic significance; and e) reflect traditional settlement patterns.”*

Windham Regional Plan states, *“Maintain any designated Class I wetlands in their natural condition. Ensure that any permitted alterations to Class II and Class III wetlands do not significantly diminish their functional, ecological, or aesthetic values.”*

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

(A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Average Score: B

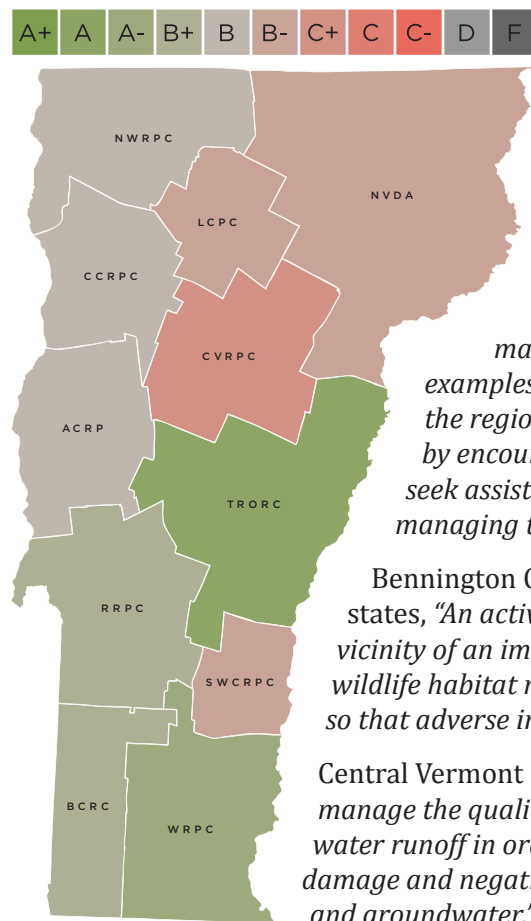
All of the regional plans include policies that align with this statewide planning goal. The policy statements share common themes - conserving wildlife habitat, maintaining riparian

buffers, supporting brownfield remediation - but vary in their specificity and the strength of the language used.

Addison County Regional Plan states, "Support efforts to maintain the remaining examples of Clay Plain forest in the region through education and by encouraging landowners to seek assistance from a forester in managing their clay plain woodlots."

Bennington County Regional Plan states, "An activity or development in the vicinity of an important natural area or wildlife habitat must be carefully planned so that adverse impacts are avoided."

Central Vermont Regional Plan states, "To manage the quality and quantity of storm water runoff in order to avoid property damage and negative impacts on surface and groundwater."



Chittenden County ECOS Plan states, "Revise public works and zoning ordinances with culvert and bridge design specifications that allow for wildlife passage and movement of floodwater and debris during high intensity events. Implement culvert and bridge designs that produce stable structure in river channels."

Lamoille County Regional Plan states, "Winter snow piles should be located at least 50 feet from any riparian buffers."

Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, "Identify, prioritize and implement brownfield mitigation projects within the region."

Northwest Regional Plan states, "Development that could pose a threat to ground and surface water should not be located in Source Protection Areas (SPA), identified groundwater recharge areas, or where such development is likely to adversely affect water supplies."

Rutland Regional Plan states, "Work with the Poultney-Mettowee and Otter Creek Natural Resource Conservation Districts, River Corridor Management Program to better address issues of nuisance species, watershed protection, and riparian buffers, and to prioritize these initiatives."

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, "Support efforts to reduce locally and regionally generated air pollutants by encouraging the use of energy conservation guidelines as developed by the Vermont Department of Public Service."

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan states, "Along waterways, developers, municipalities or private land owners must preserve or create vegetated riparian buffer zones that are consistent with state riparian buffer guidelines."

Windham Regional Plan states, "Take special precautions on slopes to avoid environmental damage, including negative consequences associated with erosion and landslides."

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Average Score: B

All of the regional plans include policies that align with this statewide goal. Several of the plans include more specific advice on development techniques and construction practices that conserve energy.

Addison County Regional Plan states, “For there to be small- to



medium-sized power producers throughout the Addison Region producing and distributing energy generated from a variety of sources.”

Bennington County Regional Plan states, “Continuing support

should be given to wind energy research and development in the region.”

Central Vermont Regional Plan states, “CVRPC recommends that practical energy conservation measures be taken during the siting, design, construction or renovation, and maintenance of buildings, building designs which incorporate the use of solar energy and other renewable energy technologies are encouraged.”

Chittenden County ECOS Plan states, “Reduce Chittenden County’s consumption of energy and reliance on non-renewable

energy. Improve the cost-effectiveness, efficiency and reliability of the energy production, transmission, and distribution system.”

Lamoille County Regional Plan states, “Development projects and transportation planning in the region must consider the energy demands and availability with conservation as a priority.”

Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, “Promote wood-based energy generation as a complementary resource to the wood-related industries in the region.”

Northwest Regional Plan states, “Developers of commercial and industrial projects should be encouraged to use fewer and smaller parking spaces and lots and encourage the use of energy-saving alternative means of transportation such as providing reserved spots for car/van pool parking, bike racks, safe pedestrian circulation, and where warranted, transit stop locations.”

Rutland Regional Plan states, “Engage the public in a Region-wide discussion about energy needs and the benefits and drawback to energy production within the Rutland Region.”

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, “Minimize long-term living costs through high quality design, energy efficient construction, and proximity to employment and/or service centers.”

Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Plan states, “The regional commission supports the PACE program and other similar statewide programs designed to make energy efficiency improvements more affordable and more likely to be implemented.”

Windham Regional Plan states, “Incorporate co-generation into proposed utility, industrial and commercial projects, including resort development, large-scale residential development and public facilities, wherever feasible.”

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

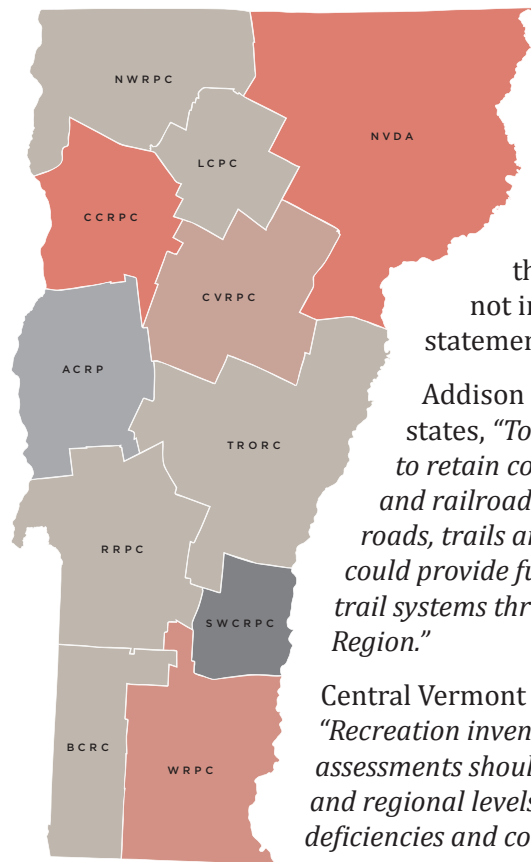
§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

(A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.

(B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Average Score: C+

Unlike most of the statewide planning goals, there is not a required planning element directly associated with the recreation



goal. The plans generally discuss recreation as an ancillary issue to land use, natural resources, transportation, utilities and facilities, or economic development. As a result, most of the regional plans do not include many policy statements related to recreation.

Addison County Regional Plan states, *"To encourage municipalities to retain control over unused road and railroad rights-of-way, Class 4 roads, trails and similar resources that could provide future opportunities for trail systems throughout the Addison Region."*

Central Vermont Regional Plan states, *"Recreation inventories and needs assessments should occur at the local and regional levels in order to determine deficiencies and conflicts, and to identify*

key recreational resources and opportunities on both public and private land."

Chittenden County ECOS Plan states, *"Support organizations and businesses that bring diverse people together around a myriad of themes: arts and cultural events, recreational and leisure activities...or any other activity that brings people together with a common interest."*

Lamoille County Regional states, *"The Lamoille River should be designated an alternate route for the Northern Forest Canoe Trail."*

Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, *"Special attention should be given to providing recreation activities for youths and seniors."*

Northwest Regional Plan states, *"Work with regional recreation groups to identify deficiencies in recreational infrastructure and develop plans for improvement, including signage, information kiosks, and maps."*

Rutland Regional Plan states, *"Create a Regional Bicycling Plan."*

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, *"Combine recreation and wildlife corridor uses to develop a greenways network in the Region."*

Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Plan states, *"Where development interacts with the Appalachian or Long Trails and other related side trails, design plans and construction must maintain the predominant scenic character and primitive qualities of the corridor."*

Windham Regional Plan states, *"Encourage access to forest lands (with permission of the landowner) for responsible hunting in order to control the deer population, and for recreational hiking."*

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

- (A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.
- (B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.
- (C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.
- (D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.
- (E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Average Score: B

All of the regional plans include policies that align with this statewide planning goal. Several of the regional plans address agriculture and forestry primarily as a land use issue, rather than from an economic development perspective as framed by the statute.

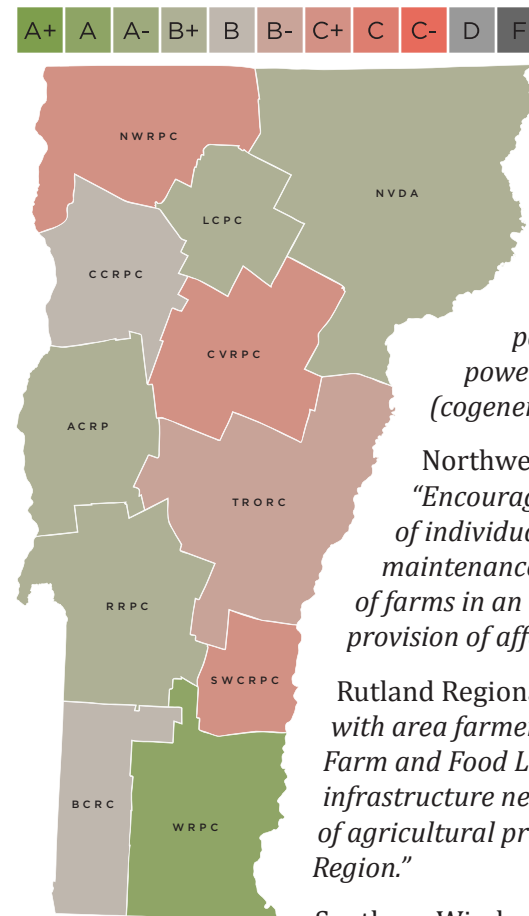
Addison County Regional Plan states, *"The economy of the Addison Region should continue to be significantly tied to agriculture and forest products in order to ensure the continuation of sustainable farming and forestry in the region and the maintenance of the region's rural character."*

Bennington County Regional Plan states, *"Support businesses that utilize local natural resources & encourage innovative agricultural and forestry practices and ventures."*

Central Vermont Regional Plan states, *"In light of all this, a strong, healthy agricultural economy is vital to the region's well-being.... As such, it is a primary goal of this regional plan to preserve and promote a viable agricultural economy, culture, and land base."*

Chittenden County ECOS Plan states, *"Support establishment of food processing industries, value-added product markets, workforce training, etc. to help support the viability of these industries."*

Lamoille County Regional Plan states, *"Local planning regulations that promote agricultural home businesses, home industries, agritourism, and other approaches that promote the increase of on-farm incomes are encouraged."*



Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, *"Provide management, financial, and technical assistance to local forest product industries, including wood product manufacturers, sawmills, paper mills, and wood-powered electrical generators (cogeneration)."*

Northwest Regional Plan states, *"Encourage not only the viability of individual farms but also maintenance of a sufficient density of farms in an area to encourage the provision of affordable farm services."*

Rutland Regional Plan states, *"Work with area farmers and the Rutland Area Farm and Food Link to identify gaps in infrastructure needed to increase supply of agricultural products produced in the Region."*

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, *"Inventory and prioritize agricultural lands using the Land Evaluation Site Assessment (LESA) and Forest Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (FLESA)."*

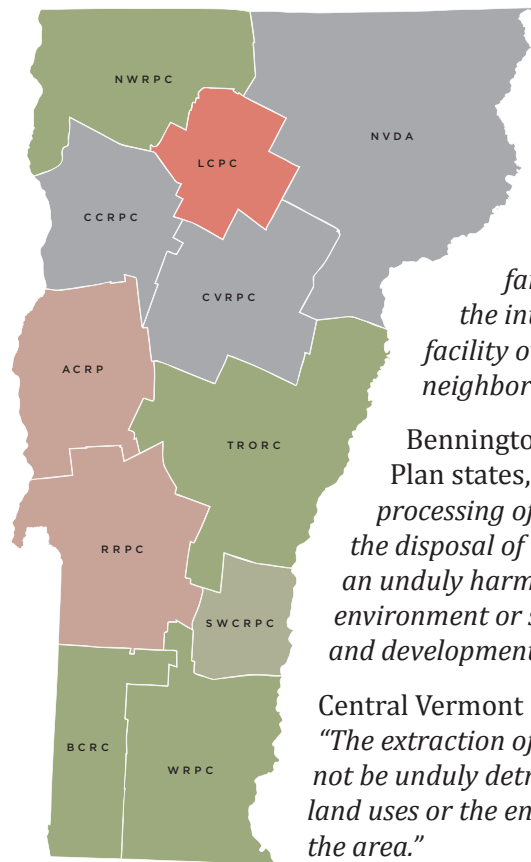
Windham Regional Plan states, *"Support a broad range of agricultural programs such as agri-tourism, agricultural demonstration, test projects, community supported agriculture, consumer or producer cooperatives, and farmers' markets."*

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(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.

Average Score: B-

All of the regional plans mention extraction of earth resources, but some do little more than restate the statewide planning goal. Several of the plans include directive policy language that could be applied to extraction operations seeking Act 250 permits.



Addison County Regional Plan states, "Encourage towns which wish to promote sand and gravel operations to make sure their conditional use standards are clearly written, are administered fairly, and that they balance the interests of the town, the facility owner/operator and of the neighboring landowners."

Bennington County Regional Plan states, "The extraction and processing of earth resources and the disposal of wastes must not have an unduly harmful impact on the environment or surrounding land uses and development."

Central Vermont Regional Plan states, "The extraction of sand and gravel should not be unduly detrimental to surrounding land uses or the environmental quality of the area."

Chittenden County ECOS Plan states, "Support the growth and vitality of working farms and managed forests; and sustainably manage sand and gravel extraction operations."

Lamoille County Regional Plan states, "It is generally preferred that each community in the region identify, develop and utilize their own sources of gravel over requiring it to come from neighboring communities."

Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, "Support the use of the region's mineral and soil resources in a manner that will support economic growth and development in the region."

Northwest Regional Plan states, "Mineral and earth resource extraction and processing facilities must be planned, constructed, and managed: So as not to adversely impact existing or planned uses within the vicinity of the project site..."

Rutland Regional Plan states, "Map mineral resources to help towns identify areas for future mineral extraction and ensure land use compatibility."

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, "Mineral extraction and processing facilities should be planned, constructed, and managed: to provide direct access to Class III or better highways..."

Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Plan states, "All sites must plan for their eventual rehabilitation.... topsoil shall not be removed from sites and excavations shall stop early enough so that stable slopes can be established."

Windham Regional Plan states, "Extraction of mineral resources shall not interfere with or have negative impacts on groundwater, air quality (dust and noise), and special community resources (historic sites, recreation areas, or scenic areas). Extraction sites must handle truck traffic without creating unsafe conditions for adjoining landowners."

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

(A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.

(B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.

(C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.

(D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Average Score: C+

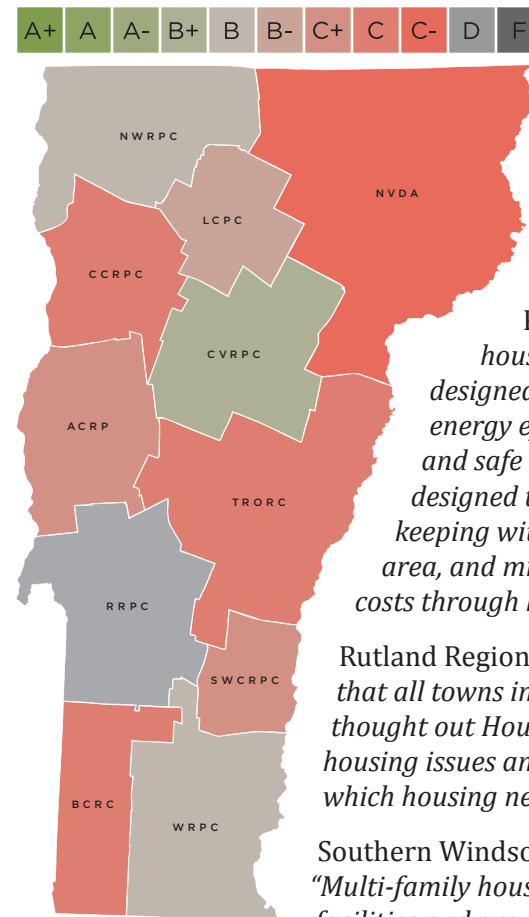
All of the regional plans include policies that align with this statewide planning goal. Most of the plans focus heavily on suggesting approaches that municipalities could take to address housing needs. The plans include relatively few specific or actionable policies.

Bennington County Regional Plan states, *"Municipalities should develop housing plans that include an identification of any affordable housing issue in their community, an assessment of resources available to address the problem, widespread public involvement, and a plan of action."*

Central Vermont Regional Plan states, *"Encourage towns to develop a streamlined permitting process for housing along with density bonuses and lowering of impact fees in growth centers, Village centers and downtowns, and other areas where housing growth is desired."*

Chittenden County ECOS Plan states, *"Implement incentives that encourage more housing construction that is lower cost including, but not limited to, affordable and supportive housing."*

Lamoille County Regional Plan states, *"Municipalities are encouraged to allow sites for manufactured housing parks in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwelling subdivisions."*



Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, *"Assist towns to create housing policies that address the affordable housing needs of low-income residents."*

Northwest Regional Plan states, *"All affordable housing projects should be designed or retrofitted to be energy efficient, provide healthy and safe living conditions, be designed to be appropriate and in keeping with the character of the area, and minimize long term living costs through high quality design."*

Rutland Regional Plan states, *"Ensure that all towns in the Region have a well thought out Housing Plan that identifies housing issues and outlines steps through which housing needs will be addressed."*

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, *"Multi-family housing, assisted living facilities and group homes should be encouraged in close proximity to services in village and urban centers or along public transportation fixed routes."*

Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Plan states, *"The development of accessory apartments, or the conversion of larger homes into multiple family structures for congregate housing for the elderly or other special needs groups is endorsed by this plan."*

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

(A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.

(B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

Average Score: C

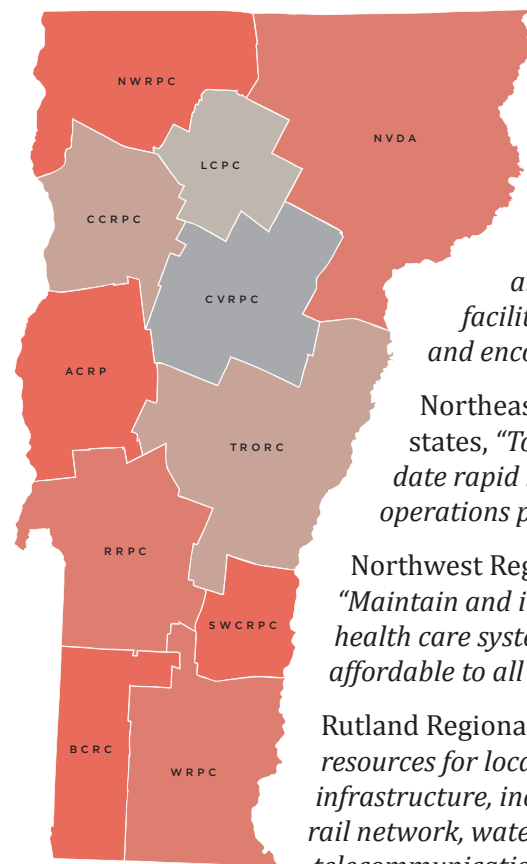
All of the regional plans include policies that align with this statewide planning goal. Most of the plans focus heavily on suggesting how municipalities should plan for public facilities and services in broad and general terms. Most of the plans make a connection between guiding growth into planned growth areas and providing the infrastructure needed to support that land use pattern.

Addison County Regional Plan states, *“Work with the region’s small water supply systems to build administrative capacity, coordinate with each other and develop capital improvement plans and budgets.”*

Bennington County Regional Plan states, *“Development which exceeds a town’s planned growth rate, or which causes substantial economic hardship to a town because of the increased demand for facilities and services, is inappropriate and shall not be permitted.”*

Central Vermont Regional Plan states, *“The construction of new educational facilities should occur in locally designated growth areas or in other locations that will maximize their convenience and accessibility to the population and infrastructure, and will contribute to the vitality of communities.”*

Chittenden County ECOS Plan states, *“Expand and improve implementation of financing tools available to municipalities with particular emphasis on options that level the playing field between greenfield development and infill development and to help direct new investment dollars to strengthen existing neighborhoods...”*



Lamoille County Regional Plan states, *“Planning for community utilities that address the needs of the community’s current and future residents is encouraged. Use of capital budgets and programs for long term facilities planning is supported and encouraged.”*

Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, *“Towns should have up-to-date rapid response and emergency operations plans.”*

Northwest Regional Plan states, *“Maintain and improve a high quality health care system that is accessible and affordable to all residents of the region.”*

Rutland Regional Plan states, *“Seek resources for local towns to upgrade infrastructure, including roads, bridges, rail network, water supply, sewer, and telecommunications.”*

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, *“To ensure that existing or proposed correctional facilities are sited, maintained, and managed in a manner which ensures the safety and security of local residents.”*

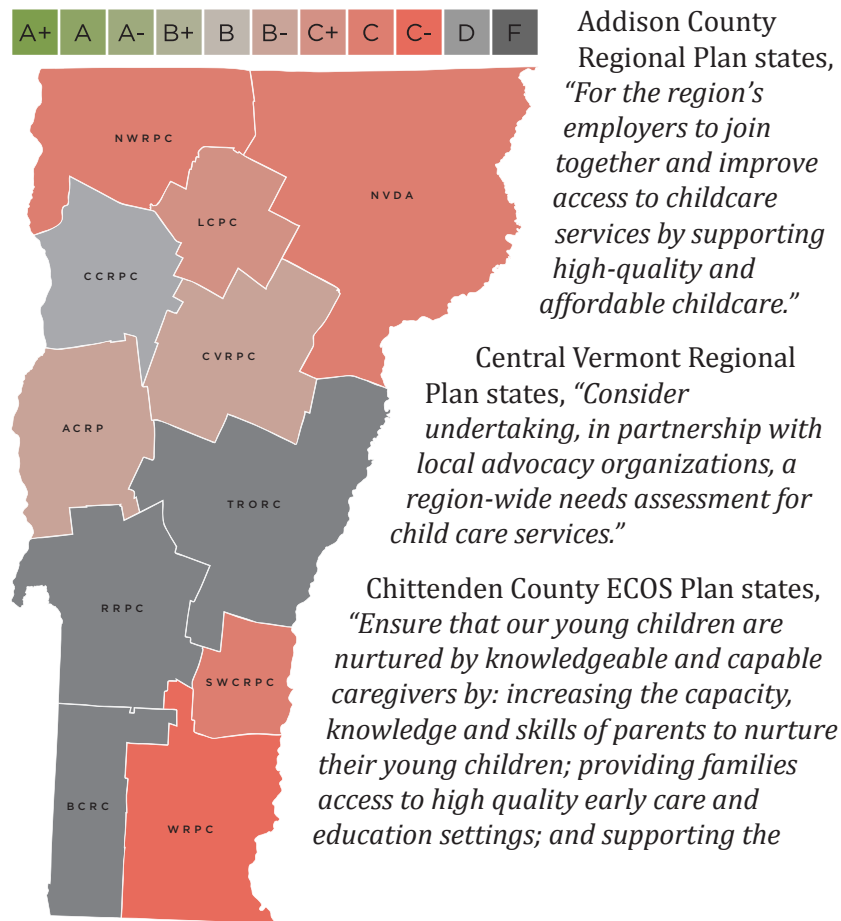
Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Plan states, *“The scale, type, and design of major public utilities and facilities should be undertaken so as to complement the future land-use settlement patterns recommended in this plan and relevant municipal plans.”*

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT STATEWIDE SUMMARY

§4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Average Score: C-

This final statewide planning goal was added to the statute in 2003. Many of the regional plans restate the planning goal, but provide little further guidance on how it should be implemented in their regions.



ability of early care and education providers to develop the skills and knowledge needed to care for children."

Lamoille County Regional Plan states, "Support the Lamoille Valley Businesses Child Care Connection and others' efforts to improve all aspects of child care in the region, including development of a regional child care facility."

Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan states, "Support efforts to improve the child care system in the Northeast Kingdom."

Northwest Regional Plan states, "Municipalities periodically should review land-use and development regulations to identify needed amendments to authorize quality child-care services in appropriate locations convenient to households, including as home occupations."

Southern Windsor Regional Plan states, "Assist in an inventory of publicly owned buildings throughout the region to evaluate and prioritize those suitable as a potential child care facility."

Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Plan states, "Support initiatives to develop childcare facilities where a need has been proven and the location conforms with this regional plan."

Windham Regional Plan states, "Address the childcare, eldercare, and care for persons with disabilities needs of families by encouraging the development of appropriate facilities."

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

ADDISON COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING

§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?

The plan expresses basic policies for the region in broad, general language that could not be effectively used to manage future growth and development. Each element of the plan, except for land use, includes goals and objectives, some of which provide more specific policy guidance. However, the goals and objectives are distributed throughout a 460-page document and as a result the plan does not communicate its core message - the basic policies for the region - clearly.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

(A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.

(B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.

(C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.

(D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?

The plan includes a land use element and map, which defers to the land use plans and policies of each municipality to set forth the location, amount, intensity and character of land use in the region. The land use map is a composite of municipal future land use maps with the various planning regions in all municipalities grouped into four generalized land use categories (Village and Commercial/Industrial, High Density Residential, Rural and

Agricultural, and Forestland and Conservation/Floodplain). The narrative description provides little guidance on each category's desired future land use pattern.

Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?

The plan does not identify any specific proposed development projects that could create regional impacts, but does define the development activities/locations that will be considered projects with regional impact. The plan also includes a map of Regionally Significant Resources and states that projects impacting any of those mapped resources would be considered to have regional impacts.

Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?

While the plan recognizes the central role of agriculture in the region, it does not include specific land use recommendations for maintaining farmland.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Does the plan identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs?

The plan has an energy element that includes an analysis of the region's energy resources and needs, although the underlying data is now out-of-date and more regional energy-related data may now be available than when the chapter was written.

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

ADDISON COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING

Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?

The goals and objectives provide a fairly complete statement of policy on energy conservation, but the plan does not include specific land use policies intended to promote energy conservation.

Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?

The goals and objectives generally promote expanded generation of renewable energy in the region. Since the plan speaks specifically against large-scale generation intended primarily to serve markets outside the region, it can be inferred that the plan would not be supportive of a renewable energy project that generated greater amounts of power than what would be needed to serve the region - although this is not directly stated. The plan is largely silent on the siting of renewable energy projects, but does identify a need to further study the issue and to balance energy goals with concerns over scenic character and natural resources.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs?

The plan has a transportation element, which is the regional transportation plan, that presents a thorough description and

assessment of the region's transportation infrastructure and needs. It includes a series of maps showing transportation infrastructure and facilities.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?

The transportation element contains an implementation policy plan that makes specific recommendations for transportation improvements. The cost, potential funding, parties involved and priority of each project is described.

Score: A+ (10 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?

The plan provides a thorough descriptive inventory of the region's community/public utilities and facilities. It does not include a utilities and facilities map (there is a school facilities map). The plan provides a very clear and detailed snapshot of the current (as of 2005 when the chapter was written) availability of community/public utilities and facilities, but overall it does not address the connections between the region's infrastructure, facilities and services and anticipated future growth. The plan does not include an analysis of the utilities' and facilities' ability to meet future demand.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?

While there are a few specific and some general needs identified in the Utilities, Facilities and Services chapter, overall, the plan

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ADDISON COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING

does not recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities. The existing inventory, if updated, would provide an excellent foundation for assessing the need for improvements and making more specific recommendations.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?

While the plan supports and encourages strategies to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources, there are relatively few specific or actionable statements. Policies related to natural resource preservation are primarily found in the Natural Resources chapter. Given the length and complexity of that chapter with policy statements found throughout the chapter's 108 pages, the plan does not effectively or clearly communicate its guiding principles on resource preservation.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?

With the exception of the transportation recommendations, the plan generally does not identify specific actions or projects that should be undertaken to further the plan's goals and objectives.

The recommended actions intended to serve as the implementation section of the plan are distributed throughout a 460-page document. Many of the recommended actions are

general statements of support for or encouragement of others' actions.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?

The plan briefly mentions the impact of growth in Chittenden County on the Addison County region, but does not include a full assessment of the potential impacts from adjoining regions.

Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?

The plan does not assess whether growth and development in the Addison County region may impact adjacent regions.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?

The plan does identify the need for housing in the region and within each municipality, although the analysis is based on data that is no longer current.

Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?

The plan incorporates a 20-year, town-level population and household projection that is used to forecast housing needs. This analysis could be strengthened if it provided more detail about

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

ADDISON COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING

the size/type of households anticipated as that would help inform planning for appropriate housing types.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?

The plan presents a fairly complete picture of the region's economy and recent trends, but is less precise in describing what is desired in the future. There is no forecast of or targets for future growth.

Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?

The plan includes a number objectives and recommended actions related to economic development and particularly emphasizes the importance of small business, farming, forestry and tourism in the region. The plan mentions the need for workforce housing, childcare, education and training, transportation, and other infrastructure to support growth. While the goals, objectives and recommended actions included in this chapter are phrased more directly than in other chapters of the plan, they still could be further strengthened by specifically identifying the improvements and services needed to support economic development as envisioned in the plan.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

While the RPC follows the statutory requirements for public notice and hearings when revising and re-adopting the regional plan, there has not been broad-based public involvement in developing the plan since 1994. The RPC has used a planning process that seeks to involve key stakeholders in helping to draft plan chapters.

What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

The plan references a number of supporting studies and plans, and presents a significant amount of data in the forms of tables and maps.

Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

The plan includes a Regionally Significant Resources Map, which includes: the Vermont Railway Mainline; areas of sand or gravel potential; major watershed streams and ponds larger than 20 acres; significant wetlands; rare, threatened, endangered natural communities; federal land; state land; and state highways and major roads.

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

ADDISON COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING

Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The plan does not identify viable agricultural lands.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

How does the plan define ‘substantial regional impact’ and how does that definition influence the RPC’s involvement in regulatory proceedings?

The plan includes a definition of substantial regional impact, which includes a series of criteria primarily related to the scale of the project and whether its impacts extend beyond the host community. The plan also sets forth a process for the Act 250 Review Committee to mediate any conflicts between local and regional plans prior to the initial Act 250 proceeding.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The principal land use policy expressed in the plan is to guide growth into downtowns and villages and to maintain farm and forestland. The plan also speaks to investing in infrastructure, transportation and other public improvements within downtowns and villages, and focusing community facilities and services and economic development in those areas. However, the policies are mostly statements of support or encouragement and

not specific or actionable. Further, the lack of a well-articulated land use plan undermines the implementation of this state planning goal.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a number objectives and recommended actions related to economic development and particularly emphasizes the importance of small business, farming, forestry and tourism in the region. These statements describe what should be done to strengthen the region’s economy. The plan could be more effective at implementing this statewide goal if it identified more specific programs or projects needed to support economic development in the region. The plan mentions the Comprehensive Development Strategy for the region, which could be a source of more specific programs or projects.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes several objectives that align with and expand upon this statewide planning goal. The discussion of vocational training in the plan is limited. The plan would be strengthened by incorporating more specific and actionable programs or projects related to education and vocational training.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

ADDISON COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING

§4302(c)(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.

(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The transportation chapter's goals, objectives and recommended actions provide a greater level direction and guidance than those found elsewhere in the plan. The transportation element contains an implementation policy plan that makes specific project-level recommendations for transportation improvements.

Score: A+ (10 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan clearly supports and encourages the identification, protection and preservation of natural, scenic and historic resources, there are relatively few specific or actionable policies, programs or projects. Within the Natural Resources chapter there is some guidance on the siting and design of development to protect scenic resources. The plan could be strengthened by incorporating these recommended approaches into the goals and objectives portion of the chapter and into the land use plan, and by adding similar guidance related to protection of natural and historic resources.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

(A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan's policies align with this statewide planning goal, but they are generally statements of support and encouragement and not actionable or directive.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The goals, objectives and recommended actions align with this statewide planning goal. The plan is generally supportive of energy efficiency and conservation, as well as small-scale renewable energy projects. However, the energy-related policies are primarily statements of support or encouragement and are not specific or actionable.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

- (A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.
- (B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does not include specific, actionable policies related to recreation that would provide guidance on how this statewide planning goal should be implemented in the region.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

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ADDISON COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

- (A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.
- (B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.
- (C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.
- (D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.
- (E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan clearly expresses the central role of farming and forestry in the region's economy. Most of the plan's policies are statements of support and encouragement rather than specific, actionable recommendations. More clearly communicating the plan's underlying policies related to farming and forestry within the future land use element and map would strengthen the plan's effectiveness at furthering this statewide planning goal.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan's policies are generally supportive of and encourage extraction of earth resources, but provide little guidance with regard to how that activity should be appropriately carried out. The policies and actions are not specific or directive enough to be effectively used in an Act 250 proceeding.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
- (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
- (C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
- (D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan recognizes a need for housing in the region, the policies for addressing this need are primarily to encourage action by municipalities or other entities in the region. The policies do recognize the linkages between the affordability of housing, and energy and transportation costs. If the plan is to serve primarily as a framework for municipal action, it would be strengthened by providing more specific guidance on approaches to land use planning and regulations that would facilitate affordable housing development.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

- (A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.
- (B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does not fully assess the region's future need for public facilities and services, and therefore does not provide an adequate foundation on which to recommend specific policies or projects. Most of the utility and facility policies are not specific

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or actionable. There is virtually no discussion of improvement projects or strategies for financing infrastructure.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan includes policies that align with this statewide planning goal, they do not provide specific guidance on how this goal should be implemented in the region.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?

Nearly all of the policy statements in the plan are discretionary or permissive ('should' and 'encourage') rather than directive or obligatory ('must' or 'shall'). As such, the plan's policies may not be able to be effectively applied in regulatory proceedings.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?

Most of the policy statements related to the types of development that will require a Certificate of Public Good are expressed in discretionary or permissive language that will likely be less effective in a Section 248 proceeding. The plan does not include specific guidance on siting large-scale energy projects but does call for large-scale energy generation or transmission facilities that will primarily serve markets outside the region not to be constructed or expanded in the region. The plan does include language related to scenic impacts.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?

The plan consists of nine chapters; most of the chapters are further subdivided into sections that consist of a summary, goals and objectives, recommendations, and documentation and analysis.

The documentation and analysis portions of most chapters are "encyclopedic" with a considerable amount of background information and data about the region. For that reason, most

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chapters open with a brief summary that incorporates the main points from the documentation and analysis section.

Most of the chapters contain multiple sections, each with their own set of goals, objectives and recommendations. The distribution of these statements throughout the 460-page document makes locating and considering them in context with one another very difficult.

Given that the plan chapters have been revised individually since 1994, there is not a consistent tone, format or structure to the plan. Additionally, each chapter is essentially self-contained, with little cross-referencing between chapters.

Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?

The plan appears to be primarily a clearinghouse of information about the region. Its complexity and length likely limits how effectively it can be used as a framework to guide municipal planning.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: C+ (125 out of 280 points)

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§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?

The second chapter of the plan presents 11 broad goals for the region, and each goal is followed by a brief discussion and supporting policy statements.

Some of the 'Policies and Actions' sections of the chapters that follow refer back to these goals, while others do not. Further, the 'Policies and Actions' sections are not consistent in their format and tone - some are primarily actions or positions to be taken by BCRC, while others are mostly general policy statements. There are also policy statements found throughout the text of the plan chapters.

The plan could be strengthened if the connection between the broad goals in Chapter 2 and the policies and actions was more consistently and clearly made in each chapter. The intent of the plan would also be more clearly communicated and the plan would be more user-friendly if the policy language was consistently located, distinguished from factual or background information, and phrased within each chapter.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

- (A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.
- (B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.
- (C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.
- (D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?

The plan includes both a land use map and a written statement that describes the land use patterns, types and densities desired in the region. Land is classified into a series of land use planning areas (Urban Centers, Villages, Hamlets, Rural Lands, and Upland Forests). The urban centers and villages are compact areas and are designated as the planned growth centers for the region. The land use chapter ends with a series of 10 policy and action statements that summarize the desired future uses and densities, and the desired location and characteristics of particular types of development.

While the content of the land use chapter fulfills the statutory requirement, it could better communicate the region's future land use policies if the information was presented in a more organized and user-friendly format. There is a significant amount of repetition and overlap between the sections for each planning area and the policies and actions that conclude the chapter. The map is also not fully integrated with the text. The map shows hamlets as a distinct planning area from the rural lands, but the text groups hamlets as a subcategory in the rural section. There is also a "proposed growth center" shown on the map that is not referenced in the text. Illustrations to accompany the design

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guidance could also help communicate the concepts to a general audience.

Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?

There are no specific development projects that are identified as having the potential for regional impact, but the plan includes a specific set of criteria to be used to determine whether a project would have significant regional impact.

Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?

The plan calls for preserving viable agricultural land and implementing land use strategies that will have the effect of guiding development away from farmland. The plan includes a map of agricultural soils, but does not specifically identify high priority farmland that should be protected from development. The plan discusses BCRC engaging in a program to promote the conservation of small fields.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Does the plan identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs?

The Regional Plan does not identify or assess the region's energy resources and needs except for a brief discussion of the potential for renewable power generation in the region. The 2009 Regional Energy Plan includes some state-level data related to energy consumption and more detailed discussion of the potential for renewable power generation in the region. The Regional Plan would be strengthened by either updating the energy chapter based on the recent energy plan, or incorporating that plan by reference.

Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?

The plan is clearly supportive of energy conservation and makes connections between energy conservation and land use and transportation policies. The 2009 Regional Energy Plan includes more specific policy guidance on energy conservation which could be incorporated into the energy chapter of the regional plan.

Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?

The plan is generally supportive of renewable energy, including larger-scale wind and biomass projects. The 2009 Regional Energy Plan mentions local opposition to commercial-scale wind projects, but neither plan offers specific guidance on how to balance energy goals with resource protection goals.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs?

The Regional Plan does not fully describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs. The Regional Transportation plan does include a more thorough description and assessment, but that plan is not explicitly incorporated in the Regional Plan.

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The Regional Transportation Plan includes a series of maps of the major highway corridors that clearly identify needs and issues, and summarize existing conditions. It includes recommendations for improved public transit service, and walking and biking facilities. The Regional Plan would be strengthened by incorporating, either directly or by reference, the more specific Regional Transportation Plan.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?

The Regional Plan does not recommend and prioritize specific transportation improvements. There is mention of the importance of completion of Route 279 and improvements to Route 9 and Route 7A. While the Regional Transportation Plan identifies and discusses needed improvements in greater detail, it also does not prioritize the projects or provide indication of costs or financing options.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?

The plan includes a limited description and assessment of the region's utilities and facilities. It does include the statutorily required map. However, there is not a comprehensive assessment of the ability of the region's utilities and facilities to meet future demand. The plan recognizes the critical link between provision of public infrastructure and desired land use and development patterns, but does not recommend specific and actionable strategies to provide the necessary infrastructure.

The plan could be strengthened by a more thorough and detailed assessment of the ability of the region's public infrastructure and community services to accommodate growth that would identify needs and gaps and recommend projects.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?

The plan generally does not identify needed improvements to the region's utilities and facilities. A small number of specific projects are mentioned, but there is no prioritization and indications of cost or financing options.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?

There are policy statements throughout the plan that call for the preservation of natural, scenic and historic resources. Most of these policies are expressed as recommendations (indicated by the words 'encouraged' or 'should'), there are a few instances where the policies are stated as requirements (indicated by the words 'must' and 'shall').

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?

The plan includes an implementation section that primarily recommends general approaches for how BCRC can engage with municipalities and other regional entities to support their implementation of projects that further plan policies. While

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each chapter includes recommended policies and actions, those sections generally do not include discrete projects or specific funding strategies. Many of the policies and actions are statements of encouragement for various municipal policies and actions, or of support and assistance to municipalities or other entities when they take actions that further the plan's stated goals.

The plan clearly communicates a land use and development strategy that focuses growth in those areas with the infrastructure to support it, but it generally does not include a strategy for meeting any needed improvements to that infrastructure. A more specific implementation program could serve as the framework for annual work programs.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?

The plan does generally discuss the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the Bennington County region. It cites concerns about traffic generated from growth in Stratton and Hoosick, as well as the potential for reductions in air quality from a proposed power plant in Saratoga County, New York.

Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?

The plan does not describe any potential impacts that growth and development in the Bennington County region may have on neighboring regions. It does describe some of the cooperative planning efforts underway between regions - along river corridors and associated with the National Forest, for example.

This discussion would be strengthened if it more specifically assessed the planned land use along the region's borders and discussed the compatibility/incompatibility of those plans.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?

The housing chapter of the Regional Plan is built upon a 1996 Housing Needs Analysis. The specific recommendations of that analysis are described generally, but not directly incorporated into the plan; some of the data and targets from that study are part of Appendix B, which includes supplemental information and is not adopted as part of the plan. That analysis is out-of-date and should be updated to fully meet this statutory requirement.

Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?

The 1996 assessment of need appears to have been based on an analysis of population and housing characteristics and trends. However, when the plan was last adopted in 2007 that information would no longer have been current. Chapter 117 calls upon the RPCs to gather the population and housing data and make forecasts as needed to serve as a foundation for regional and municipal planning. The housing chapter of the plan should be updated to provide a more useful framework for municipal planning.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

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§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?

The plan does describe and assess the region's economy to a limited degree. A number of other plans and studies are referenced in passing within the economic development chapter that likely contain further detail, but they are not explicitly incorporated into the plan. There is additional data and economic development goals included in Appendix B. However, most of this information is not referenced in the economic development chapter.

Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?

The plan includes a series of policies and actions that describe in general terms what should be done to promote economic development in the region. The plan would be strengthened if these policies and actions more specifically identified how the strategies could be implemented in the region and who should be involved.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

The plan does not describe the planning process so the level of public involvement cannot be assessed.

What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

There are a number of supporting plans and studies cited in the plan, although none are explicitly incorporated. Appendix B of the plan contains supplemental data and information. This material is not part of the formally adopted portion of the regional plan.

Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

As part of the definition of substantial regional impact, the plan refers to 'regionally significant natural or cultural resources' and continues on to list a variety of resources that are encompassed by that term.

Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The plan includes a map of agricultural soils, but does not specifically identify high priority farmland that should be

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protected from development. The plan discusses BCRC engaging in a program to promote the conservation of small fields. It also describes how a land evaluation and assessment (LESA) program can be used to help identify priority farmland, but does not specifically recommend their use.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

How does the plan define ‘substantial regional impact’ and how does that definition influence the RPC’s involvement in regulatory proceedings?

The plan includes a series of seven criteria for determining whether development has the potential to cause a substantial regional impact. Any permanent development in the Upland Forest planning area or large-scale development outside a growth center (Urban Center or Village planning areas) would qualify as having substantial regional impact. Other criteria relate to infrastructure and service demands, impact on significant natural or cultural resources, and other effects on the local economy and housing supply resulting from the scale or intensity of proposed development.

The plan does not explicitly describe BCPC’s policy on participation in Act 250 or other regulatory proceedings and whether this definition of substantial regional impact influences that decision.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

This planning principle can be found in most chapters and is a foundational element of the regional plan. The land use plan reflects a desire for future growth and development to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside. Some of the policy statements that align with this goal are expressed as requirements (‘must’ or ‘shall’), but most are suggested (‘encouraged’ or ‘should’).

Score: A (9 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan’s economic development strategies are primarily policy statements that express support or encouragement rather than specific actions or projects.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

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§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes limited discussion of education and vocational training and does little more than re-state the statewide planning goal. The plan does not offer any guidance on how the goal should be implemented in the region.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.
(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a number of transportation-related policies that align with this statewide planning goal. However, the policies generally are not specific or actionable. The plan could be strengthened by adding the more specific recommended actions included in the Regional Transportation Plan and prioritizing the transportation improvements needed in the region.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan clearly supports and encourages the identification, protection and preservation of natural and historic features. This planning principle is woven into a number of the chapters. However, most of the policy language on this topic is expressed in permissive, suggested language. Some of the land use policies, for the Upland Forest planning area in particular, are worded as requirements.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

- (A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan's policies align with this statewide planning goal and this principle is reflected in the regional land use plan. The policy statements on this topic are a mix of recommended and required actions or approaches.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

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§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The Regional Plan provides some recommendations on development approaches that will have reduced energy demand, but there is considerably more guidance found in the Regional Energy Plan. The Regional Plan could more effectively promote implementation of this statewide planning goal if the more specific and actionable policies and strategies in the Regional Energy Plan were incorporated into the Regional Plan.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

- (A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.
- (B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

Recreation is a common theme found throughout the plan and is described as a critical element in the region. Despite this recognition, there are relatively few specific, actionable policies or projects identified in the plan.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

- (A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.
- (B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.
- (C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.
- (D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.
- (E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan clearly aligns with this statewide goal, it does not include specific or actionable policies or projects that would guide its implementation in the region. The policies expressed in the land use plan are strongly supportive of preserving working lands and focusing development in designated growth areas. The plan would be strengthened if the economic development components of farming and forestry were more clearly expressed and supported.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes policies that address both the importance of maintaining access to earth resources and the responsible extraction and use of those resources. The plan also notes that extraction is not a major industry in the region.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

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§4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
- (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
- (C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
- (D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan recognizes a need for housing in the region, the recommended strategies for addressing this need are primarily to encourage action by municipalities. Updating the 1996 housing needs assessment and directly incorporating targets or other implementation strategies into the plan would help further this statewide planning goal.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

- (A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.
- (B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does not fully assess the region's future need for public facilities and services, and therefore does not provide an adequate foundation on which to recommend specific policies or projects. Most of the utility and facility policies are not directive or actionable. There is virtually no discussion of specific projects or strategies for financing infrastructure.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

There are no policies in the plan that will result in substantial progress towards this statewide planning goal. The plan does call upon municipalities to consider evaluating the need for childcare facilities and accommodating them in their land use regulations.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?

The plan contains some policies that are stated in directive or obligatory language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings, particularly in relation to the siting and design of larger-scale commercial projects.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

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Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?

Most of the policy statements related to the types of development that will require a Certificate of Public Good are expressed in discretionary or permissive language that will likely be less effective in a Section 248 proceeding. The plan does not include specific guidance on siting large-scale energy projects or a clear community standard that could be applied to protect scenic resources.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?

The plan begins with a series of broad goals, which help communicate the over-arching principles of the plan. These are not particularly well integrated with the Policy and Action sections that follow in each chapter, however. There is a chapter for each of the statutorily required elements as well as History, Physiography, Natural Resource, and Coordination and Implementation chapters.

There is a significant amount of repetition within each chapter as many policy statements appear in the discussion text and

then are repeated verbatim in the Policies and Actions section at the end of the chapter. It would be helpful for the reader if the “information” and “policies” were easier to distinguish either through a difference in format or by fully consolidating all the policy statements together.

The plan would also benefit from greater use of formatting, graphics, tables, maps, etc. to highlight key points, illustrate planning concepts, and help the reader navigate the document.

Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?

The plan appears to be formatted primarily to follow statutory requirements. Many of the policy statements are aimed at encouraging particular approaches to municipal planning and land use regulations, so clearly municipal Planning Commissions are a primary audience for the plan.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: B- (130 out of 280 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?

The plan begins within an introduction that includes a purpose statement and a statement of basic policies, both of which express guiding principles for the region. These broad principles could be strengthened by using more direct language.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

(A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.

(B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.

(C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.

(D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?

The plan's land use element does not establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region. The plan discusses the region's land development issues and sets forth policies that could guide future land use and development. However, these do not form a comprehensive plan for desired growth and development, as well as resource protection, in the region.

Primarily, this is because the land use concepts are discussed broadly and not applied to specific locations in the region. The plan does not include a future land use map. The plan does

include a map that shows zoning by town, but that map is not directly referenced in the land use element. The land use element includes a policy that calls for the preparation of a regional land use map that "incorporates the developing land use plans of its municipalities and displays locally or state designated growth centers."

Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?

There are no specific development projects that are identified as having the potential for regional impact, but the plan includes a specific set of criteria to be used to determine whether a project would have significant regional impact.

Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?

The plan recognizes preserving and promoting a viable agricultural economy, culture and land base as a primary goal for the region. The plan does recommend creative approaches to development such as PUD, cluster or open space designs, and discourages infrastructure extensions that would facilitate development of farmland. The plan includes a map that shows primary agricultural soils, but does not specifically identify high priority farmland that should be protected from development.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Does the plan identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs?

The plan does not inventory and assess the region's energy supplies and demand. The energy element includes general information about different types of energy generation and some

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state-level data regarding energy use. Most of the discussion in the chapter is not specific to the region.

Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?

The plan is clearly supportive of energy conservation. A more detailed assessment of current consumption trends would provide a stronger foundation on which to base more specific policies, such as goals or targets for reductions in energy use, for example.

The plan does make connections between energy conservation and land use and transportation policies. However, the lack of a well-articulated land use plan limits the plan's effectiveness at guiding land use in a direction that would result in energy conservation.

Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?

The plan includes policies that are generally supportive of renewable energy. However, the plan contains conflicting policies on the issues that surround large-scale energy projects, particularly commercial ridgeline wind farms. It would be possible to find policy statements to both support and oppose such a project in the plan. While this conflict is acknowledged to some extent in the energy element, it is neither resolved nor is it clear how the benefits and impacts should be weighed. Two specific locations - Worcester Range and Camel's Hump - are identified as inappropriate locations for industrial turbines. This is a difficult issue that likely lacks a regional consensus, but the plan could provide a stronger framework for the determination of what, where and how energy projects will be sited in the region.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs?

The Regional Transportation Plan is adopted by reference into the Regional Plan. The Regional Transportation Plan provides a thorough inventory and assessment of the region's transportation system, which is presented through written description, maps, and supporting data. A brief summary of key findings from the Regional Transportation Plan is included in the Regional Plan.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?

The Regional Transportation Plan recommends needed transportation improvements. While the projects are generally not prioritized and information about cost and financing is not included, the region does have a methodology for prioritizing projects that is described in an appendix to the Regional Transportation Plan.

The Regional Transportation Plan is very detailed and thorough, but it could be strengthened by formatting and organizing the information and recommendations in a more consistent and user-friendly manner. The recommendations, in particular, are not as prominent in the document as they could be. The project recommendations could be more directly linked to the goals and policies, which would answer the question of how those goals and policies should be implemented. Specific references from the Regional Plan and to the Regional Transportation Plan could help

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

users navigate the plans and highlight important information and recommendations.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?

The plan does describe, and to a limited extent assess, the community facilities and public utilities in the region. It includes a series of maps that locate utility and facility sites and service areas. However, it does not fully analyze the ability of public utilities and facilities to meet future demand. The plan recognizes the lack of infrastructure as one of the primary obstacles to smart growth, but it does not propose strategies for addressing this problem. The plan could be strengthened by a more thorough and detailed assessment of the ability of the region's infrastructure systems, facilities and services to accommodate growth that would identify needs and gaps and recommend projects.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?

The plan generally does not identify needed improvements to community facilities and public utilities.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?

While the plan clearly supports and encourages strategies to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources, there are relatively few specific or actionable statements. The policies are primarily statements of support and encouragement. A more well-articulated land use element would reinforce the policies related to resource preservation.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?

Generally, the plan does not describe specific actions or projects that will be needed to implement the policies. The Regional Transportation Plan does include recommended projects.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?

The land use element of the plan does make limited reference to the influence that growth and development in neighboring Chittenden County are having on some portions of the region. The compatibility statement could be strengthened by documenting the evidence of growth pressure in the region from Chittenden County and recommended approaches for mitigating the

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CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

undesirable and maximizing the beneficial affects of the resulting development.

Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?

The plan notes that most of the region's boundaries are mountainous, wilderness, or very low-intensity areas, which limits the likelihood of land use conflicts. A more well-articulated land use plan would provide greater certainty that such conflicts would not arise.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?

The plan describes and quantifies the need for housing at both the regional and town level.

In response to a housing needs assessment and growth forecasts, CVRPC recognized a need to pro-actively plan for housing in the region. The strategy selected and incorporated into the plan was a Regional Housing Distribution Plan, which projected a 15-year demand for housing by municipality and required municipalities to demonstrate that they have planned to accommodate the anticipated housing growth. While the forecasts should be re-evaluated given changes in the market during the past 5 years, the underlying strategy provides a clear framework and direction for municipal planning.

Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?

The assessment of housing needs is based on several studies including a *2005 Housing Needs Assessment* and an *Economic and Demographic Forecast for 2000-2020*. Some of the data from those reports is directly incorporated into the body of the plan and some is included in the appendices.

Score: A+ (10 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?

The plan's Economic Element provides a limited description and assessment of the region's economy. It does present some statistics documenting current conditions, and identify economic development opportunities and challenges. A more thorough inventory and assessment would provide a stronger foundation for policies, programs and projects. The policies related to focusing economic development in existing centers, providing/improving infrastructure, and ensuring the availability of suitable sites for commercial/industrial uses would be strengthened if also supported by a well-articulated land use plan.

Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?

The economic development strategies recommended are consistent with and tie into policies found elsewhere in the plan - focusing development in existing centers, increasing the supply of affordable housing, utilizing the region's natural resource base. The plan would be strengthened by stating the policies more directly and identifying specific programs or projects that are needed to support a healthy economy in the region.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

The plan does not describe the planning process, so the level of public involvement cannot be determined.

What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

The plan references several studies or other plans. Several of these are incorporated by reference (ex. Economic and Demographic Forecast, the Regional Transportation Plan), while others are referred to in the body of the plan (ex. Housing Needs Assessment, hazard mitigation plans, etc.). The plan presents data from a variety of sources and supplements the text with a series of maps.

Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

The plan does not explicitly identify “areas of regional significance” as described in this section of the statute although the land use element includes describes landscape features and areas that could be viewed as regionally significant.

Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The plan includes a map of primary agricultural soils and speaks to the importance of conserving farmland in the region. It does not identify specific agricultural land in the manner envisioned by the statute.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

How does the plan define ‘substantial regional impact’ and how does that definition influence the RPC’s involvement in regulatory proceedings?

The plan defines substantial regional impact as a “substantial and ongoing impact on two or more municipalities” and cites a number of factors that are likely to trigger a substantial regional impact. This definition is found in a footnote to the compatibility statement and not within the main body of the text.

The plan notes that CVRPC has Act 250 Review Policies and has decided to limit their participation in Act 250 to only those aspects of a project found to have regional impact or to significant housing projects.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan's policies clearly align with this statewide goal, the lack of a well-articulated land use plan limits the plan's effectiveness at guiding growth and development in the region in a manner that would maintain compact centers separated by rural countryside. The plan acknowledges as much by stating "Most municipalities support smart growth principles, but have not been able to put them into practice. In fact, most new development is occurring in low density zones."

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The economic development strategies recommended are consistent with and tie into policies found elsewhere in the plan - focusing development in existing centers, increasing the supply of affordable housing, utilizing the region's natural resource base. The plan would be strengthened by stating the policies more directly and identifying specific programs or projects that are needed to support a healthy economy in the region.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The goal and policies related to education and vocational training are not specific or actionable, and provide little guidance on how the statewide planning goal should be implemented in the region.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a number of transportation goals and policies, which are primarily statements of encouragement or support. The Regional Transportation Plan, which is adopted by reference into the Regional Plan, lists specific transportation improvements that are needed in the region. The plans could be strengthened by highlighting how the identified projects will implement the goals and policies.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan clearly supports and encourages the identification, protection and preservation of natural and historic features, there are relatively few specific or actionable policies or projects. The plan would be strengthened by integrating the resource protection goals into a more well-articulated land use plan.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

- (A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan's policies align with this statewide planning goal, but they are generally statements of support or encouragement, and not actionable or directive.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan is generally supportive of energy efficiency and conservation, as well as use of renewable energy. However, the energy-related policies are primarily statements of support or encouragement.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

- (A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.
- (B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

It is clear that recreation is important in the region, contributing to quality of life and economic vitality. The plan recognizes that a more thorough recreation inventory and needs assessment is needed. The plan could be strengthened by incorporating more specific, actionable recommendations. Including specific projects within the plan that could help secure financing for their implementation.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

- (A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.
- (B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.
- (C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.
- (D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.
- (E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While preserving and promoting "a viable agricultural economy, culture and land base" is stated as a primary goal of the plan, there is relatively little guidance on how this should be achieved in the region. The economic chapter recognizes the importance of resource-based industries in the region, but also does not include specific or actionable policies or projects that would further this statewide goal.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4302(c)(10) To provide for the wise & efficient use of Vermont's natural resources & to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan notes that the granite industry was once the foundation of the region's economy and remains a small, but important sector. Despite the earth resources and extraction ongoing in region, there is only a single, broad policy statement on the extraction of sand and gravel.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
- (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
- (C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
- (D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The Regional Housing Distribution Plan provides a clear direction to municipalities and a framework for assessing whether the region is making progress towards this statewide planning goal. The housing chapter also includes a list of actions to be taken by the RPC to address housing, most of which are related to encouraging or supporting municipal actions through local planning and land use regulations. This is the only plan chapter to include "actions."

The plan does an excellent job at defining housing needs, but is less effective at recommending and guiding the actions that will be necessary to meet those objectives. While clearly aligned

with this statewide goal, the plan's policies and actions could be expressed more directly and better supported through a well-articulated land use plan.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

- (A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.
- (B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community & the area to provide facilities & services.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does not assess the region's future need for public facilities and services, and therefore does not provide a strong foundation on which to recommend specific policies or projects. Most of the public facility- or service- related policies are general statements of support or encouragement and are not directive or actionable. There is no discussion of or strategies for financing public facilities and services.

There are some connections made between provision of facilities and services, growth management, and desired land use patterns. These concepts could be expanded upon to strengthen both the facility and services element of the plan, and the land use element.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan restates the statewide planning goal and includes several related policies. The childcare policies are generally

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

statements of support or encouragement, but the plan does recommend completing a regional childcare needs assessment.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?

Nearly all of the policy statements in the plan are discretionary or permissive ('should' and 'encourage') rather than directive or obligatory ('must' or 'shall'). As such, the plan's policies may not be able to be effectively applied in regulatory proceedings.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?

Nearly all of the policy statements in the plan are discretionary or permissive ('should' and 'encourage') rather than directive or obligatory ('must' or 'shall'). As such, the plan's policies may not be able to be effectively applied in regulatory proceedings.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?

The plan is organized with an introduction that is followed by 10 chapters, one for each of the statutorily required elements. Each chapter begins with a discussion and concludes with goals and policies. The structure of the plan is consistent and straightforward.

Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?

The plan appears to be written for a general audience. Planning concepts, when referred to, are usually explained. The introduction states that the primary purpose of the plan is to "enhance the lives of the region's residents," but that concept is not clearly carried through the remainder of the plan. This quality-of-life guiding principle could be highlighted and emphasized as a connecting theme throughout the plan.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: C+ (109 out of 280 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

CHITTENDEN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?

The combination of the vision, principles, broad goals, topic goals and the strategies form a framework for managing future growth and development in the region. As the plan is organized, this framework is not immediately evident to the reader, however.

The plan opens with a lengthy description of the ECOS planning process that is followed by the vision, principles and broad goals. If this order was reversed, particularly with the vision and broad goals moved to opening pages of the plan, the guiding principles would be more effectively communicated.

The 17 topic goals are presented individually throughout Chapter 2. If they were also presented together, perhaps within the introduction alongside the broad goals, a reader could - from a single page - get a much better sense of the plan's overall framework for managing future growth and development. In general, the introduction does not clearly explain the elements of the plan and the relationships between them.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

- (A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.
- (B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.
- (C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.
- (D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?

The plan describes desired future land use and development within the region, primarily as established through currently adopted municipal zoning. The land use map is a composite of municipal zoning districts grouped into six general planning areas (Center, Metro, Suburban, Enterprise, Village, and Rural). As such, these areas do not accurately reflect the regional hierarchy of settlement patterns - Williston has a Metro area roughly equal to that of Burlington, and Milton has a Metro area larger than Winooski or South Burlington.

The future land use map and the written description of the planning areas shown on that map are located within different parts of the plan, which could be confusing to the reader. The future land use map is presented in association with Strategy 3.2.2, which calls for 80% of new development to occur in the areas planned for growth (includes all planning areas except for the Rural Planning Area or 15% of the region's land area).

The written explanation of the planning areas within Chapter 4 is primarily descriptive and general. It does not include specific standards that could be applied in regulatory proceedings.

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Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?

The plan does not identify any specific proposed development that has potential for regional impact. However, the plan does state that development outside the planning areas designated as appropriate areas for growth are more likely to have a significant impact on the region.

Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?

The protection of working lands is one of the core guiding principles of the plan and there are some general recommendations for maintaining farmland included in the plan.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Does the plan identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs?

The 2012 ECOS Energy Consumption and Production Analysis Report, which is referenced in the regional plan, is a thorough assessment of the region's current energy consumption, recent trends in consumption and efficiency/conservation, and existing energy supplies and generation. The study does not project future needs.

Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?

The plan includes a number of policies that relate to energy conservation, but most are general statements of support and encouragement rather than statements that are specific or actionable. The plan's approach to future land use - focusing new development within the 15% of the region's land area planned

for growth - furthers energy conservation goals, particularly by supporting transit service.

Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?

The plan is supportive of the state's goal of 90% renewable energy by 2050 and includes a number of policies that encourage renewables. The plan notes that siting of energy projects and the lack of local control or influence is a matter of concern to municipalities in the region. It recognizes the conflicts that exist between natural/scenic preservation goals and renewable energy goals. The plan does not specifically offer any guidance on energy project siting or scale.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs?

The plan includes a thorough assessment of the region's transportation infrastructure and needs, which is presented through written description, maps, and supporting data.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan, which is part of the overall ECOS plan, does identify specific transportation improvements, estimated costs and funding sources.

Score: A+ (10 out of 10 points)

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§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?

The plan includes an extremely limited description and assessment of the region's utilities and facilities. It does include a map that shows some of the region's existing utilities and facilities.

School facilities, libraries, hospitals and government/administrative facilities are not mentioned at all in the plan. Recreation facilities, energy infrastructure, communications infrastructure, and solid waste facilities are only mentioned in passing. More information is provided about wastewater treatment, water supply and stormwater facilities, including some indication of their ability to meet future demand. There is further discussion of the region's utilities and telecommunications in the Economic Competitive Assessment Report, prepared as part of the ECOS process, but this information is not directly referenced in the plan.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?

The plan does not recommend or prioritize specific improvements that are needed to the region's utilities and facilities. Provision of utilities and facilities is essential to implementing the plan's land use strategy. The plan would be strengthened by assessing the needs and recommending projects, similar to the transportation plan.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?

While the plan clearly supports and encourages strategies to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources, there are relatively few specific or actionable statements. Additionally, the plan is essentially silent on the preservation of historic resources except as they contribute to scenic character.

The Natural Resources Analysis referenced in the plan includes more specific recommendations. For example, it calls for municipalities to follow the recommendations and use the tools outlined in CCRPC's Natural Areas Planning Guide and to implement the recommendations of the Vermont Wildlife Action Plan. Some of these more specific, actionable strategies could be incorporated into the main body of the regional plan to strengthen the preservation policies.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?

This regional plan is designed to be a strategic plan and therefore, with the exception of the transportation element, it focuses on implementation efforts over a five-year period and on the ECOS projects currently in progress. While there are a few specific funding-related recommendations, generally the plan does not detail long-range projects or investments that will be needed to implement the plan's strategies and actions. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan and the CEDs, which are part of the overall

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ECOS plan, do identify specific transportation improvements and community projects, and estimate costs and funding sources for many.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?

The plan does not assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on Chittenden County. It simply makes the statement that the plan is compatible with the plans of adjoining regions with no demonstration of how that determination was made.

Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?

The plan does not assess the impacts that growth and development in Chittenden County may have on adjacent regions. It simply makes the statement that the plan is compatible with the plans of adjoining regions with no demonstration of how that determination was made.

Score: F (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?

The plan does clearly identify, and to a limited degree quantify, the need for housing in the region. As a strategic plan, it does this on a regional, rather than municipal level, and over a short rather than long period.

When the plan quantifies the need for housing it generally identifies the amount needed by 2015. Given that this plan is being adopted in 2013, the time horizon is not far enough out. Municipalities will be looking to the regional plan for guidance on projected growth and housing needs to help shape their plans, policies and implementing regulations and will likely want to look out to at least 2020, based on the current 5-year municipal planning cycle. It is evident from reading the plan that CCRPC has done longer-term projections and estimates of growth. The plan could be strengthened by including more specific and longer-term projections of housing needs within the main body of the document.

Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?

The plan is built on a detailed analysis of current demographic, housing and economic data, which is referenced, but not included, in the plan.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?

The plan, by incorporating three detailed analyses (Economic Base Analysis, Economic Competitive Assessment, and Target Sector Analysis), provides a thorough assessment of the region's economy.

Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?

The plan includes strategies, policies and recommended actions intended to support a healthy economy in the region. The plan also serves as the region's Comprehensive Economic

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Development Strategy (CEDS) and therefore includes a list of specific projects to further the region's economic development goals.

Score: A+ (10 out of 10 points)

§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

This plan was developed through a five-phase process that provided multiple opportunities for meaningful and broad-based public involvement. CCRPC reached out to local organizations and municipal partners, engaged the public through the arts and social media, and specifically sought input from marginalized communities.

What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

The plan was built upon previous planning efforts and a number of technical studies undertaken as part of the ECOS planning process. These are referenced throughout the plan.

Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

The plan does not identify areas of regional significance.

Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The plan does not identify viable agricultural lands although primary agricultural soils are shown on the Natural Systems Areas Map.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

How does the plan define 'substantial regional impact' and how does that definition influence the RPC's involvement in regulatory proceedings?

The plan clearly defines a project as having 'substantial regional impact' if it is not consistent with the future land use plan, but notes that the policies of the regional plan will only be given effect over the policies of the municipal plan if there is a conflict whereby one plan would allow the project and the other would not. The RPC has a policy to guide its review of applications and participation in state regulatory proceedings.

Score: A (9 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

- (A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.
- (B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.
- (C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The principal land use policy expressed in the plan is to focus new development within the areas planned for growth. The plan also speaks to investing in infrastructure, transportation

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and other public improvements within areas designated for growth and protecting rural, working and natural lands from development. However, the strategies and related actions are mostly statements of support or encouragement and not specific or actionable.

Many of projects funded through the ECOS grant and listed under the strategies in Chapter 3 of the plan are furthering this goal. The project lists included in the MTP and CEDS also contain many specific recommended projects that would result in substantial progress towards attainment of this goal, but that connection is not directly stated in the plan.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The ECOS Plan also serves as a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. As such, it includes a number of specific policies and recommended projects that could further this goal.

Score: A+ (10 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes specific policies and recommended projects that further this goal. The plan's education policies were based on the Chittenden County Education Analysis completed as part of the ECOS planning process, which identified needs and offered general recommendations.

Score: A (9 out of 10 points)

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§4302(c)(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.

(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The ECOS Plan also serves as the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. As such, it includes a number of specific policies and recommended projects that could further this goal.

Score: A+ (10 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

(A) significant natural and fragile areas;

(B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;

(C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;

(D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan clearly supports and encourages strategies to identify, protect and preserve natural and historic resources, there are relatively few specific or actionable statements.

Additionally, the plan is essentially silent on the preservation of historic resources except as they contribute to scenic character.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

(A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan clearly supports and encourages strategies to maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and

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land resources, there are relatively few specific or actionable statements.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a number of policies that relate to energy conservation, but most are general statements of support and encouragement rather than statements that are specific or actionable. The plan's approach to future land use - focusing new development within the 15% of the region's land area planned for growth - furthers energy conservation goals, particularly by supporting transit service.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

- (A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.
- (B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan contains little specific policy language related to outdoor recreation. Recreation appears in the plan primarily as a sideline or supporting issue when another topic is being discussed. Many recreation-related projects appear in both the CEDS and MTP project lists indicating that it is a focus of community improvement efforts.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

- (A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.
- (B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.
- (C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.
- (D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.
- (E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan is clearly supportive of agriculture and forest, but most of the related policies are not specific or actionable. The plan's approach to future land use - focusing new development within the 15% of the region's land area planned for growth - furthers this goal. However, the plan focuses much more on policies that encourage development within the growth areas rather than to policies that discourage it in rural areas.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does not include specific policies or recommended projects related to the appropriate extraction of earth resources.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

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§4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
- (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
- (C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
- (D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan clearly identifies affordable housing as a critical concern for the region. However, the housing-related policies are general statements of support and encouragement rather than statements that are specific or actionable.

The Chittenden County Regional Plan had previously included housing targets that municipalities had to plan for before their plans would be approved by CCRPC. That approach has been dropped and the ECOS Plan does not set forth another strategy to make substantial progress toward attainment of this goal.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

- (A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.
- (B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan speaks about the provision of public facilities and services in general terms and contains very few specific or

actionable statements on the topic. The CEDS project list contains a number of recommended public facilities and services projects.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan makes two statements related to child care, but both are broad aspirations not specific policies or recommended projects.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?

Generally, the plan's policies are statements of support or encouragement and are not directive.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

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Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?

Generally, the plan's policies are statements of support or encouragement and are not directive. There is no specific guidance on siting of energy or telecommunications projects.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?

The plan is organized into four chapters: Introduction; Regional Analysis; and Plan Priorities; Implementation; and Using the ECOS Plan. Chapter 2 is further subdivided into four subsections containing 17 topics, each of which describes a goal and lists indicators intended to measure how well the region is doing relative to achieving that goal.

The organization of the plan is not well-described in Chapter 1 and the connections between the 31 concerns, 17 topic goals and the 8 strategies is not readily apparent. If the concerns-strategies matrix on page 79 had been referenced or appeared in the introduction, it would have helped the reader make those connections. A similar chart could have been created for the goals and strategies. The organization of the plan generally follows the

steps of the ECOS planning process, and as a result the contents of the plan are fragmented and it is challenging to navigate.

Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?

The plan does not appear to have been written for a general audience, but rather for the organizations involved in its development. The ECOS planning process emphasized bringing together many partners working in the region. This brought a greater focus on some topics - like education and health - that are often not well addressed in regional plans. The resulting plan is an over-arching strategic document for all the involved partner organizations that could be used to coordinate and prioritize their annual work plans.

The plan is heavier on broad, shared concepts and goals than on specific, directive policies that could be used to guide future growth and development in the region. Given the strategic natural and short time horizon of the plan, it will probably not be that useful as a framework or guidance document for municipal planning in the region.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: B- (153 out of 280 points)

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§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?

The plan's Policy and Implementation document opens with an executive summary that includes a vision statement and three primary objectives. Those themes are re-stated and expanded upon throughout the policy document.

The plan's policies are generally not expressed in directive language ('must' or 'shall'). Rather they recommend and suggest particular approaches to guiding future growth and development ('encourage' or 'should'). The introduction to the plan's Informational and Planning document discusses the desire for local control by municipalities and individuals in the region. The region's 'bottom-up' approach to planning is also presented in the opening to the Land Use and Development chapter of the Informational and Planning document.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

- (A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.
- (B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.
- (C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.
- (D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?

The plan includes a land use element and map, which defers to the land use plans and policies of each municipality to set forth the location, amount, intensity and character of land use in the region. The land use element describes three land use planning areas for the region - compact settlements, fringe and scattered environments, and rural and natural environments - and briefly discusses how growth and development should be guided in each.

The land use map is a composite of municipal land use planning or zoning district maps generalized into six land use categories. This results in a map that reflects each municipality's technical approach to land use planning rather than the desired settlement pattern of compact centers separated by rural countryside described in the plan's land use element.

The relationship between the written statement and the map is not well-defined. The terms used to describe planning areas are also inconsistent throughout the plan. Policies refer to growth center and villages, while the land use element uses the term 'compact settlements.' Similarly, natural resources policies refer to the 'working landscape environment' and 'built/developed areas', terms that do not appear in the land use element.

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Despite the confusion of terminology, the underlying land use principles expressed throughout the Policy and Implementation document are consistent - both internally and with state planning goals. However, the land use principles being encouraged elsewhere in the plan are not clearly articulated in the land use element or future land use map.

Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?

The plan does not identify any proposed development that has the potential for regional impact. It does include specific criteria for determining significant regional impact as discussed below.

Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?

The plan does recommend approaches for maintaining farmland including both protecting farmland from development and improving the economic viability of farming as a means to keep land in production.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Does the plan identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs?

The plan does not identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs.

Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?

The plan does encourage general approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy.

Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?

The plan's policies generally express support for renewable energy while also suggesting conflicts between large-scale wind projects and other regional goals. The plan states that large-scale wind projects are not compatible with the region's mountain recreational areas. However, it does not provide clear or directive guidance on project siting of energy projects, including large-scale wind.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs?

The Regional Plan summarizes the description and assessment of the region's transportation infrastructure and needs found in the Regional Transportation Plan.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?

The lists of recommended transportation projects and needs have not been included in the plan (either the Regional Plan or the Transportation Plan). The plan states that the Planning Commission and Transportation Advisory Committee maintain lists of projects and annually prioritize and recommend projects to the state. Adding the transportation project lists would strengthen the plan.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

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§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?

The plan identifies the region's community/public utilities and facilities, but there is not a thorough assessment of their ability to meet future demand. A lot of the associated data and information is very out-of-date and likely no longer relevant or accurate.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?

Although the plan describes many of the region's community/public utilities and facilities as unable to meet future needs only a few specific improvements are identified.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?

The plan contains policies that encourage the preservation of natural resources; there is little mention of scenic or historic resources. However, these policies are statements of support and encouragement, and are not directive. A more clearly-articulated land use element would reinforce the policies related to resource preservation.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?

The plan does not set forth actionable strategies for implementing its recommended policies. The plan identifies only a limited number of specific improvements or projects, and there is virtually no discussion of funding. The plan is often used to support grant applications and incorporating a more comprehensive set of improvements or projects could help secure funding.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?

The plan does not include a compatibility statement that assesses the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region.

Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?

The plan does not include a compatibility statement that assesses the impact that growth and development in the region may have on adjacent regions.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

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§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?

The plan does not identify the need for housing in the region. The housing section is very out-of-date (based on a regional housing study from the early-1990s).

Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?

The data and analyses upon which this element should be based need to be updated in order to assess current housing needs. Chapter 117 calls upon the RPCs to gather the population and housing data and make forecasts as needed to serve as a foundation for regional and municipal planning.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?

The plan is based on a thorough assessment of the region's economy (Greater Lamoille County Region Long-Term Strategic Economic Development Plan), which was completed in 2004.

Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?

Both the Regional Plan and the Long-Term Strategic Economic Development Plan include recommended economic development strategies. Most of these are recommended policies rather than specific actions or projects.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

From the description provided in the plan, it appears that the planning process primarily relied on targeting specific stakeholders and less on input from the general public, although the commission followed the statutorily required notification and hearing process.

What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

The plan references a number of supporting studies and directly summarizes several (transportation, economic development, housing). The Informational and Planning document presents data from a variety of sources and a series of maps are included for reference.

Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

The plan twice mentions regionally significant resources. "Regionally significant ridgelines" are identified in a policy statement related to ridgeline development. "Regionally significant natural and cultural features" are included in a

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statement that relates to determining substantial regional impact that includes a list of general resource types.

Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The plan speaks to the region's agricultural lands in general terms, but does not specifically identify viable agricultural lands. The future land use map does recognize the agriculture conservation districts adopted in two of the region's towns.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

How does the plan define 'substantial regional impact' and how does that definition influence the RPC's involvement in regulatory proceedings?

The plan establishes precise criteria for determining whether development has the potential to cause a substantial regional impact based on location, scale, intensity, infrastructure and service demands, and other effects.

The plan also clearly expresses the commission's policy with regard to state regulatory proceedings. LCPC will participate in all Public Service Board hearings under Section 248. It will review all Act 250 applications, but will only participate and comment on those that have a regional impact.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The principal land use policy expressed in the plan is to guide growth into compact settlements. The plan also speaks to investing in infrastructure, transportation and other public improvements within areas designated for growth and protecting outlying working and natural lands from development. However, the policies are mostly statements of support or encouragement and not specific or actionable. Further, the lack of a well-articulated land use plan undermines the implementation of this state planning goal.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

Both the Regional Plan and the Long-Term Strategic Economic Development Plan include recommended economic development strategies. Most of these are recommended policies rather than specific actions or projects.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

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§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The discussion of education and vocational training in the plan is limited. The plan does not include specific policies or recommended projects related to educational and vocational training opportunities.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.
(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a substantial number of transportation-related policies that align with this statewide planning goal. Most of the policies are statements of support or encouragement and are not specific or actionable. The plan could be strengthened by adding the project lists and priorities referenced, but not included in the plan.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan clearly supports and encourages the identification, protection and preservation of natural resources, there are relatively few specific or actionable recommendations or projects. Additionally, the plan is essentially silent on the preservation of historic and scenic resources.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

- (A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan's policies align with this statewide planning goal, but they are generally statements of support and encouragement and not actionable or directive.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan is generally supportive of energy efficiency and conservation, as well as use of renewable energy. However, the energy-related policies are primarily statements of

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encouragement and there are no specific projects recommended to further this statewide planning goal.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

- (A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.
- (B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

In addition to policies directed specifically towards recreation, the topic is integrated throughout the plan. It is clear that recreation is a central theme for the region and the plan could be strengthened by incorporating more specific, actionable recommendations. Including specific projects within the plan could help secure financing for their implementation.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

- (A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.
- (B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.
- (C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.
- (D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.
- (E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan recognizes the region's working landscape and resource base as its economic base. It also notes the need to improve the economic viability of farming and forestry, in addition to preserving land base. Throughout the plan, there are a substantial number of policies related to farming and forestry. Most, however, are statements of support and encouragement rather than

specific, actionable recommendations. Better representing the plan's underlying policies related to farming and forestry in the future land use element would strengthen the plan's effectiveness at furthering this statewide planning goal.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

There are only a few policy statements related to the extraction of earth resources. The plan indicates that there is earlier planning work related to this issue that could potentially be used as a starting point for further consideration of how these limited resources should be managed.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
- (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
- (C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
- (D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan integrates housing-related policies throughout and makes connections between housing, economic development, infrastructure and land use policies. However, the policies are primarily statements of encouragement and there are no specific projects recommended to further this statewide planning goal. A

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current assessment of housing needs in the region would likely reveal particular housing types or market segments that are not currently being well-met, and would provide the necessary foundation for more specific recommendations.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

(A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.

(B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan recognizes the critical role of infrastructure in facilitating desired development patterns, supporting economic development and protecting environmental quality. The plan would be more effective if specific infrastructure needs and recommended projects were identified.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a limited discussion of child care, primarily as one of the 'community wellness' issues incorporated into the plan. There is a general overview of the topic, but further discussion and more specific recommendations are warranted if childcare is an important indicator of community wellness the region wants to improve upon.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

LCPC-8

Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?

Nearly all of the policy statements in the plan are discretionary or permissive ('should' and 'encourage') rather than directive or obligatory ('must' or 'shall'). As such, the plan's policies may not be able to be effectively applied in regulatory proceedings.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?

Nearly all of the policy statements in the plan are discretionary or permissive ('should' and 'encourage') rather than directive or obligatory ('must' or 'shall'). As such, the plan's policies may not be able to be effectively applied in regulatory proceedings.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?

The plan consists of two documents, a Policy and Implementation component and a Informational and Planning component. It opens with a vision statement and three primary objectives that establish a broad framework for the policies that follow. Those objectives relate back to the land use element, although that connection is not expressly stated.

The Policy and Implementation component is set up in a format that identifies an issue and then lists policies to address it. This organizing structure is easy to follow and understand. There is a considerable amount of overlap and linkages between issues and their associated policies. The plan would be strengthened if those connections were made more evident to the reader.

The Informational and Planning component is succinct, but it provides enough background information on most topics for the reader to understand the rationale behind the policies. The chapters in this component are not consistent in their structure and scope, primarily because a number are summaries of other planning documents. The plan would be strengthened if these chapters were updated and re-structured to follow a common format and outline. The connection between the two components could also be improved by highlighting the issues that appear in the Policy and Implementation document in the Informational and Planning document.

Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?

The plan seems best suited to serve as framework for development of municipal plans and land use regulations. Many of the policies are encouraging municipalities to incorporate various planning concepts or approaches into their work.

Score: A- (7 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: C+ (110 out of 280 points)

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§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?

The plan opens with a regional vision that describes the core values and shared goals of Northeast Kingdom communities. The first volume of the Regional Plan is the Regional Goals & Strategies, which presents all the policies for the region. The goals and strategies are also restated within their respective chapters. The plan's policies are generally not expressed in directive language ('must' or 'shall'), rather they recommend and suggest a particular course of action ('encourage' or 'should').

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

(A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.

(B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.

(C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.

(D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?

The land use chapter discusses existing land use and development concerns including suburbanization, sprawl, residential development of farmland, brownfields and shoreline development. The future land use section describes five categories of land use (Regional Urban Centers, Service Centers, Rural Villages, Rural Areas, and Industrial Parks). The land use categories, except for Rural Areas, are shown as a series of

points on the Future Land Use Map. The text provides a general description of the existing land use and development pattern within each category. The narrative description provides little guidance on each category's desired future land use pattern.

Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?

The plan does not include any specific development projects that have potential for regional impact. It does call for a three-year moratorium on large-scale wind projects in the region to provide time to assess the impact of additional development of that type on the region.

Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?

The land use chapter opens with discussion of forestland and agriculture. There are goals and strategies primarily focused on improving the economic viability of farming. There are no specific land use recommendations for maintaining farmland, although maintaining the working landscape and land-based industries is a core element of the regional vision.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Does the plan identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs?

The 2020 Energy Strategy is incorporated as part of the Regional Plan. The strategy includes a limited assessment of energy consumption in the region, primarily based on state-level data, but does project future demand based on projected growth in the region. It provides a more detailed assessment of existing and potential energy generation in the region and notes that the region will be a net exporter of electricity once the Kingdom

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Community Wind Project is up and running. The strategy also discusses the transmission and distribution infrastructure in the region. The strategy recommends an “energy portfolio” for the region that describes how each energy resource should fit into the region’s energy supply over an eight-year planning period.

Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?

The 2020 Energy Strategy is supportive of energy conservation and generally encourages approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy. These policies would be more effective if combined with a well-articulated land use plan for the region. The recommended energy portfolio calls for promoting and utilizing efficiency and weatherization as much as possible and encourages municipalities to lead by example by conducting energy audits of public buildings and making improvements as needed.

Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?

The 2020 Energy Strategy is supportive of small-scale renewable energy, as well as biomass, methane and hydro - all of which are recommended for expansion as part of the region’s energy portfolio. Given the recent construction of several large-scale wind projects in the region, the strategy includes the resolution passed by the NVDA board to suspend new construction of industrial wind turbines taller than 200 feet for a three-year period to allow time for a thorough evaluation of the impact of wind towers on the region. Upon completion of the study, NVDA envisions further revising the Energy Strategy to incorporate the findings and recommendations.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

NVDA-2

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

Does the plan describe and assess the region’s transportation infrastructure and needs?

The Regional Transportation Plan is incorporated as Volume III of the Regional Plan and serves as the transportation element. The plan includes a detailed description and maps of the region’s transportation infrastructure. The analysis examines each of the major highway corridors and establishes goals and objectives for the transportation system in that corridor.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?

The plan does identify recommended transportation improvements along the region’s main highway corridors, primarily in general terms. The needs are not prioritized and information on their cost and financing is not included.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Does the plan describe and assess the region’s community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?

The plan does not provide a full inventory of community facilities and public utilities, and generally does not assess their ability to

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meet future demand. For example, the public water systems are listed with information about their source and population served, but there is no indication of their capacity.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?

While there are general issues identified, the plan does not recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community facilities and public utilities and facilities.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?

While the plan clearly expresses support for preserving the natural resources, in particular, and scenic and historic resources to a lesser degree, that support the region's land-based industries and contribute to community character and quality of life, the statements lack the specificity that would be needed to effectively guide their preservation. A more well-articulated land use plan could strengthen and reinforce the existing goals and strategies related to resource preservation.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?

The plan does not include a implementation program. Each chapter includes a series of strategies, but these are primarily broad policy statements. The plan generally does not recommend

specific mechanisms - projects or programs - for furthering the goals and implementing the policies.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?

The plan does not assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region. It simply states that the adjoining Vermont regions have similar plans for maintaining their "rural nature" to that of the Northeast Kingdom.

Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?

The plan does not assess the impacts that the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions. It simply states that the adjoining Vermont regions have similar plans for maintaining their "rural nature" to that of the Northeast Kingdom.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?

The plan discusses the region's housing needs in general terms, but does not include a detailed assessment of current and future housing needs. The plan does not provide an adequate framework for guiding municipal planning.

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Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?

Some county-level demographic and housing data is presented in the plan, primarily based on Census data. The plan refers to Woods and Poole population projections, but no projections are incorporated into the plan. Chapter 117 calls upon the RPCs to gather the population and housing data and make forecasts as needed to serve as a foundation for regional and municipal planning.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?

The plan presents data to document the existing economic conditions in the region, discusses economic development challenges, and lists opportunities for business assistance and financing.

Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?

While still primarily statements of support and encouragement, the plan includes a more thorough set of economic development strategies.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

The plan does not include a description of the planning process, so no assessment can be made. The last complete plan update was in 2005, which replaced a plan that had been in place since 1995. Two sections of the plan have just been revised and re-adopted, the Regional Transportation Plan and the 2020 Energy Strategy.

What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

The plan incorporates data from a variety of sources and uses maps, tables and charts to present information that supports the text.

Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

The plan does not identify areas of regional significance.

Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The plan does not identify viable agricultural lands.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

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§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

How does the plan define ‘substantial regional impact’ and how does that definition influence the RPC’s involvement in regulatory proceedings?

The plan defines substantial regional impact as a development project that would have an impact one or more municipalities in addition to the host community, on a resource that is widely used by people outside the host community, or that may significantly affect the character or identity of neighboring municipalities.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While this planning principle is incorporated into the plan, it is not a strongly-expressed theme or underlying foundation of the plan’s policies. The lack of a well-articulated land use plan and a future land use map that delineates settlement and rural areas limits the plan’s effectiveness at implementing this statewide planning goal.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a series of economic development strategies that provide a clearer indication of how this statewide goal should be implemented in the region than is the case for most of the other planning goals. Economic development is a central theme of the plan and is incorporated throughout.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan is clearly supportive of this statewide planning goal, it does not provide specific, actionable policies to guide its implementation in the region.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan clearly aligns with this statewide planning goal, but the transportation-related strategies are primarily statements of support or encouragement.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

NORTHEASTERN VERMONT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The strategies related to natural, scenic and historic resource protection are primarily general statements of support and encouragement. These resources are not well defined or identified in the plan. The plan does not provide specific guidance on how this statewide planning goal should be implemented in the region.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

- (A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan speaks more to protecting the quality and health of the region's natural environment and makes connections between this and the health of the region's economy which is largely dependent on land-based industries. Still, the strategies are primarily statements of support and encouragement. A more well-articulated land use plan could reinforce and strengthen the plan's ability to further this statewide planning goal.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The 2020 Energy Strategy sets forth a recommended "energy portfolio" for the region that if implement would result in substantial progress towards this statewide planning goal. Implementation of this goal would be strengthened if the land use policies more clearly guided future development in a manner that would conserve energy.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

- (A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.
- (B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The land use chapter of the plan includes a brief summary of the 2003 assessment of outdoor recreation completed as part of the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan, but the plan does not fully inventory and assess the region's recreation resources. The plan includes only a limited number of fairly broad policy statements related to recreation. The plan could be strengthened by incorporating more specific, actionable recommendations. Including specific projects within the plan could help secure financing for their implementation.

Score: C (5 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

NORTHEASTERN VERMONT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

- (A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.
- (B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.
- (C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.
- (D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.
- (E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The land use chapter opens with a discussion of forestland and agriculture that focuses on strengthening these industries. The plan encourages forest owners to consider sustainable forestry certification programs and includes policies that promote wood products industries. It also discusses diversification and organic certification as emerging opportunities for agriculture in the region and includes policies that support value-added businesses and food ventures. These strategies are general and are statements of support or encouragement.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

There are only a few, general policy statements related to the extraction of earth resources. These strategies are not specific or actionable, and do not provide adequate guidance on how this statewide planning goal should be implemented in the region.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
- (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
- (C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
- (D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan aligns with this statewide planning goal, it does not provide specific, actionable policies to guide implementation in the region. Municipal plans and regulations can greatly influence the type, cost and location of housing in the region. The regional plan should provide a framework that municipalities can use to shape their housing policies and implementing regulations.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

- (A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.
- (B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does not include specific, actionable policies that would guide implementation of this statewide planning goal in the region. A more complete assessment of the future needs for infrastructure improvements in the region would provide a stronger foundation for specific recommendations.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

NORTHEASTERN VERMONT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

§4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan states that childcare in the region is “seemingly in a constant state of crisis” and notes that there is a shortage of providers and exceptionally high-turnover of providers. However, the goals and strategies are broad statements that align with the statewide goal but provide little specific guidance on how it should be implemented in the region.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?

Nearly all of the policy statements in the plan are discretionary or permissive (‘should’ and ‘encourage’) rather than directive or obligatory (‘must’ or ‘shall’). As such, the plan’s policies may not be able to be effectively applied in regulatory proceedings.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?

Nearly all of the policy statements in the plan are discretionary or permissive (‘should’ and ‘encourage’) rather than directive or obligatory (‘must’ or ‘shall’). As such, the plan’s policies may not be able to be effectively applied in regulatory proceedings.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?

The plan consists of three volumes: Regional Goals & Strategies, Regional Analysis, and the Regional Transportation Plan. The first volume is a compilation of the goals and strategies that are also found in each chapter of the second volume. Placing all the goals and strategies together in one section makes it possible to consider them in relation to one another and identify all of the policies that might be relevant to a particular area, project or topic. The plan is fairly consistent in structure and tone throughout. The written text incorporates a lot of statistics and lists that would be more effectively communicated in table or list form.

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

NORTHEASTERN VERMONT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?

The introduction notes that there are three basic purposes for the plan: guidance in regional and local planning and decision making, general information, and a basis for state review processes. As described previously, the language of the plan generally lack the specificity that would be needed to be effectively used in review processes. Additionally, the guidance on regional and local planning is broad and general - largely due to the lack of a well-articulated future land use plan for the region.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: C+ (99 out of 280 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?

The plan opens with a vision statement that describes what is desired or necessary to support a healthy and sustainable quality of life in the region.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

(A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.

(B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.

(C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.

(D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?

The land use chapter of the plan (with supporting description in the Regional Profile) describes the region's current land use patterns and analyzes development constraints. Then, the region is divided into seven planning areas (Village, Hamlet, Growth Center, Growth Expansion Area, Agricultural Resource Lands, Conservation & Forest Resource Lands, and Rural Lands). The desired future land use within each of these areas is described in general terms. Each growth center is mapped in further detail. The land use chapter concludes with a series of goals, policies and objectives, including a set for each planning area that further sets forth the desired future land use within that area.

Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?

The plan does not identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact, but does speak to recent growth patterns around interstate exits and in other parts of the region that are suburbanizing and that if sustained will change the character of the region.

Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?

The land use plan includes a number of policy recommendations that encourage planning, development and conservation approaches intended to maintain farmland.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Does the plan identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs?

The plan has an energy chapter that includes a limited analysis of the region's energy resources and needs that relies primarily on state-level data. More regional-level energy data may now be available than when the chapter was written.

Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?

The plan does include policies that encourage energy conservation and efficiency, although these are generally expressed as discretionary statements. It includes several policies that encourage approaches to land use patterns and building practices that will reduce energy consumption.

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Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?

The plan is generally supportive of renewable energy, particularly small-scale generation and low-impact projects. It includes a set of criteria intended to be used to review power generation projects. However, most of these statements are expressed in discretionary rather than mandatory language and therefore may be less effective in regulatory proceedings.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs?

The Regional Transportation Plan is incorporated into the Regional Plan as an Appendix and serves as the transportation element. At the RPC's request, the 2010 draft plan was reviewed for this assessment rather than the 2003 adopted plan, as it is a more accurate reflection of their transportation planning efforts.

The draft Regional Transportation Plan provides a fairly thorough description and assessment of the region's transportation infrastructure through the written text, data tables and a series of maps. The heart of the plan is a more detailed inventory of the major highway corridors that includes goals and strategies for each, some of which are specific improvement projects.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?

The draft Regional Transportation Plan recommends needed transportation improvements within the region's major highway corridors. However, the projects are not prioritized and information about cost and financing is not provided.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?

The plan includes a fairly complete description and assessment of the region's community facilities and public utilities, although it appears to have not been updated prior to the most recent plan adoption in 2007. It catalogues the public water and wastewater systems in the region, mapping their service areas and identifying their reserve capacity. While it notes that a number of the region's wastewater treatment systems are nearing capacity, it does not discuss expansion plans or costs. The plan also lists public school facilities and their capacity issues and expansion plans.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?

The plan does not recommend or prioritize needed improvements to community facilities and public utilities.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

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§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?

The goals and policies found in the Natural & Cultural Environment Resources chapter constitute a set of guiding principles for the preservation of natural, scenic and historic resources. More specific identification of regionally significant resources and guidance on issues like scenic impacts would make the plan more effective at protecting these resources through state regulatory proceedings.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?

Generally, the plan does not describe specific actions or projects that will be needed to implement the policies. The Implementation chapter of the plan generally describes the tools and avenues available to the RPC to implement the plan. The draft Regional Transportation Plan does include recommended projects.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?

The plan does assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region. It notes the potential conflict between planned land uses along the Georgia-Milton line,

and the potential for sprawl along the Route 104 corridor into the region.

Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?

The compatibility statement does not specifically speak to any potential impacts that growth and development in the region may have on adjoining regions, although the compatibility (or lack thereof as described above) of the regions' land use plans was examined.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?

The plan provides a thorough assessment of the need for housing in the region. It presents a significant amount of municipal-level housing data that will be useful for municipal planning, including an affordability gap analysis for both ownership and rental housing.

Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?

The assessment was based on an analysis of a variety of demographic and housing data, including historic trends. The plan includes the MISER population projection for the region's municipalities for 2000 to 2020.

Score: A (9 out of 10 points)

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§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?

The plan does not include an economic development element. The plan presents a limited assessment of income and poverty in the region as part of the Regional Profile. It notes that a future amendment to the plan will include an economic development chapter based on the Franklin County Strategic Economic Development Plan and the Economic Development Strategic Plan for Grand Isle. The plan includes a brief excerpt from each of those plans - key strategies from the Franklin County plan and goals from the Grand Isle plan.

Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?

While the plan includes strategies and goals from the two county economic development plans, it is not clear whether they are intended to be incorporated into the Regional Plan as policy statements. They are presented in a text box as part of the Regional Profile. Some of the policy statements in the land use chapter are related to economic development, but these are primarily related to where commercial and industrial development should locate in the region.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

The introduction describes the planning process undertaken to prepare the 1998 Regional Plan, which included a variety of opportunities and mechanisms for public involvement. There is no indication of what the planning process has been for subsequent plan updates.

What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

The plan refers to a number of supporting studies and plans, and incorporates data from a variety of sources that is presented in tables, charts and maps to supplement the text.

Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

The term "regionally significant resources" is used in several locations within the plan, primarily in reference to natural and scenic resources. However, that term is not defined nor is there an explicit statement of what specific resources would be considered regionally significant.

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Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The land use chapter of the plan identifies agricultural land as one of the land use planning areas.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

How does the plan define ‘substantial regional impact’ and how does that definition influence the RPC’s involvement in regulatory proceedings?

Substantial regional impact is defined within the Implementation chapter. The definition establishes a series of primarily quantitative criteria for determining when a project has potential for substantial regional impact including housing developments with a specified number of units (number varies by community and whether locating within or outside a growth center) and commercial projects based on number of employees, building size and location within or outside a growth center. The Implementation chapter also includes a discussion of the cumulative impacts of incremental development.

Score: A (9 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The principal land use policy expressed in the plan is to focus new development within designated growth areas and to

discourage development in outlying rural and resource areas. The plan also speaks to investing in infrastructure, transportation and other public improvements within existing centers. Most of the policies that further this statewide planning goal are expressed as statements of support or encouragement.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does not include any specific, actionable policies, programs or projects primarily intended to further this statewide planning goal.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes several policies and an objective that aligns with this statewide planning goal. While these statements provide some guidance on how this goal should be implemented in the region, they are not specific or actionable.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

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§4302(c)(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.

(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The draft Regional Transportation Plan includes goals and strategies that further this statewide planning goal. These statements are a mix of specific projects, policies that are suggested, and improvements or policies that will be required.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

(A) significant natural and fragile areas;

(B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;

(C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;

(D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a number of policies and objectives that relate to the preservation of natural and historic resources. Most of these are general statements of support or encouragement, but some are more specific and actionable. The plan includes discussion of archaeological resources and calls for locating and mapping areas with potential archaeological resources.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

(A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a number of policies and objectives that align with or further this statewide planning goal. Most of these are general statements of support or encouragement, but some are more specific and actionable.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

Some of the policies related to energy efficiency and renewable energy are specific or actionable (primarily those intended to apply to large-scale projects in a regulatory context), but most are statements of support or encouragement. The plan does make a strong connection between energy, land use and transportation policies. There are no energy projects identified in the plan.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

(A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.

(B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan provides a limited inventory of the region's recreation resources and does contain goals, policies and objectives that align with this statewide planning goal. The land use chapter speaks to how recreation areas and amenities should

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be incorporated into future development plans, and to the importance of maintaining public water access. However, the policies are largely statements of support or encouragement. One objective does call for additional planning for recreation infrastructure and facilities, which if completed would likely result in more specific implementation recommendations.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

- (A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.
- (B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.
- (C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.
- (D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.
- (E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

Promoting agriculture and forestry are core principles expressed throughout the plan and the plan's land use policies align with this statewide planning goal. However, this goal emphasizes farming and forestry as industries, while the plan addresses them more from a land use rather than economic development perspective. An economic development element that had a strong focus on agriculture, forestry and value-added businesses would reinforce the land use policies that call for the maintenance of the working landscape.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan states two goals and three policies related to mineral and other earth resources, including a policy that lists a series of required criteria for extraction and processing facilities. Operations "must be planned, constructed, and managed to not result in the loss of prime agricultural land and to provide direct access to Class 3 or better highways" for example.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
- (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
- (C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
- (D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes policies that further this statewide planning goal and offers guidance on how it should be implemented in the region. Most of the policies are expressed as statements of support and encouragement.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

(A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.

(B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan clearly is supportive of this statewide planning goal, most of the utility and facility policies and objectives included in the plan are not directive or actionable. There is virtually no discussion of specific projects or strategies for financing infrastructure.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a limited assessment of the need for and supply of childcare in the region, and notes that supply has not kept pace with demand. The policies presented in the plan, however, are general statements of encouragement for action to address this issue through municipal plans and regulations, and by the region's employers, schools and community organizations.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?

Some of the plan's policies are expressed using directive or obligatory language that could be effectively applied in an Act 250 proceeding, but most are worded using 'encourage' or 'should.' Careful consideration should be given to the phrasing of policies, and those that the RPC would want applied to development through the Act 250 process should clearly be worded as mandatory requirements.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?

The plan includes some policies related to telecommunications projects that would be relevant during Section 248 proceedings. Some of these statements are phrased as requirements, but most are expressed using discretionary or permissive language. It also includes a set of criteria intended to be used to review power generation projects. Similar to the telecommunications policies, most of these statements are expressed in discretionary rather

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

than mandatory language and therefore may be less effective in regulatory proceedings.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?

The plan is organized into a series of chapters, primarily based on the statutorily required plan elements. Each chapter includes inventory and analysis sections, and concludes with a series of goals, policies and objectives. There are maps, charts and illustrations incorporated into the text, which improves the plan's ability to communicate important information. Most chapters of the plan are consistent in their structure and tone, although the form of the policy statements does vary throughout. There could be a stronger connection between the vision statement that opens the plan and the policy statements that follow in each chapter.

Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?

The plan appears to be primarily focused on providing encouragement, support and direction for local planning and land use regulations.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: B- (150 out of 280 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?

The plan opens with a vision statement that calls for the Rutland Region to be a place “with a vigorous economy, where residents enjoy a high quality of life, and with a well cared-for environment.” There are basic guiding principles that appear consistently throughout the plan. However, the plan primarily describes what ‘could’ be done to manage future growth and development rather than what ‘should’ or ‘must’ be done. So while the plan offers many excellent approaches and principles, those ideas could be expressed in a manner that would be more effective at guiding future growth and development.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

(A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.

(B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.

(C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.

(D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?

The future land use map and the associated narrative that describes the areas and features shown on the map offers a broad and general description of desired land use patterns in the region. The map consists of four generalized land use areas: high density development, medium density development, low density

development, and development constrained. The region’s urban center, sub-regional centers, business / industrial parks, airport, town centers, villages and hamlets are represented as symbols on the map.

The land use element does not include specific standards that could be applied in regulatory proceedings. It speaks most precisely to the appropriate location for future development and less precisely to appropriate intensity. The land use element provides little guidance on the appropriate character of future development.

Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?

The plan does not identify any proposed development that has the potential for regional impact.

Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?

The plan’s underlying approach to land use is to guide development towards existing centers and away from farmland. The plan also repeatedly refers to cluster development and planned unit development approaches that could be used to protect farmland.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Does the plan identify and assess the region’s energy resources and needs?

The plan includes a limited analysis of the region’s energy resources and needs, although it relies primarily on state-level data.

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Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?

The plan recognizes that building practices, siting, and settlement patterns are the areas where people's choices can have greatest impact on energy consumption and encourages compact settlement patterns in/near village areas and energy-efficient buildings. While the plan clearly supports energy conservation, it does not include specific policy statements on the topic.

Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?

The plan is generally supportive of renewable energy production in the region. It notes that there is potential for large-scale wind on the spines of the Green and Taconic Mountains in the region, but stops short of providing guidance on project siting or scale. Instead, the plan calls for a region-wide discussion of energy needs and the benefits and drawbacks of energy production in the region. Several of the actions listed in the plan involve the RPC assisting municipalities with identifying suitable locations for renewable energy projects and developing criteria for reviewing energy projects.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs?

The plan includes a thorough description and general assessment of the region's transportation infrastructure, supplemented with maps of existing conditions and data tables. The plan does identify needs and describe desired improvements, primarily within the region's main travel corridors.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?

The plan does identify future transportation needs, but it generally does so in general terms. The plan generally does not identify and describe specific projects, and it does not prioritize the needs or provide information on cost and financing.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?

The plan does an excellent job at discussing the general needs for and issues related to a broad range of community services and infrastructure. It includes chapters on health and wellness,

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

community involvement, and emergency management - topics that are not required by statute but are critical aspects of the region. However, the plan does not provide a detailed inventory and assessment of facilities and utilities, and their ability to meet future demand. The plan also does not include a complete utility and facility map (it does have a map that shows library locations in the region).

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?

While there are general needs identified, the plan does not recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities. The existing inventory and discussion of challenges would provide an excellent foundation for assessing the need for improvements and making more specific, project-level recommendations.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?

While the plan clearly encourages the preservation of natural, scenic and historic resources and that is an underlying theme of the land use plan, there are relatively few policy statements that speak directly to those issues. The format of the plan does not emphasize policy statements. It identifies needs and often options for addressing those needs without explicitly setting policy or making a recommendation.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?

While the plan does not include a discrete implementation program and funding strategies, each chapter of the plan ends with a section of RPC Actions. Most of these are specific projects or services the RPC should pursue or offer, while others recommend partnerships and assistance the RPC should make available to others.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?

While not a detailed assessment, the plan notes the potential for impact within the region from expansion of the ski resort and related development (particularly traffic and housing) in Ludlow and continued residential growth pressure emanating from Manchester and Dorset. It does not find, however, any inconsistencies between the region's land use plans and those of its neighbors.

Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?

The plan recognizes that Brandon serves as center for communities in both Rutland and Addison counties, and notes the potential for impact on adjoining regions from expansion in Killington. It also describes some of the shared resources and planning efforts underway between the regions.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

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§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?

The plan generally identifies the region's housing needs, but does not quantify them in terms of numbers of units by type, cost or location. The plan provides very little guidance to municipalities when planning for housing.

Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?

The plan includes some population and housing data in the Regional Profile (Chapter 2) as well as within the Housing chapter. It also references, but does not incorporate the 2004 Rutland County Housing Needs Assessment, which appears to include a more detailed assessment of need.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?

The plan provides a limited description and assessment of the region's economy. It includes some economic data in the Regional Profile (Chapter 2) as well as within the Economic Activity chapter. The plan references, but does not incorporate the 2007 Rutland Region Economic Development Strategy, which likely includes a more detailed analysis of current economic conditions and trends. The Economic Activity chapter does recognize the relationship between factors such as affordable housing, availability of infrastructures, community services and quality of life amenities, access to recreation and quality of the natural environment and a healthy economy in the region.

Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?

The plan does identify, broadly, a number of goals and improvements that are needed in the region to support economic growth. There are a couple of specific actions, like getting approval for the region's CEDS, but most of the policy and action statements are general. The CEDS likely contained more specific strategies that could have been incorporated into the plan directly, or by reference, that would have strengthened this element.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

The plan describes the planning process, which included efforts to get input from a variety of stakeholders. As evidenced by the information contained in the plan, the RPC was successful at engaging other partners throughout the region in developing the plan. The plan also emphasizes the importance of public outreach and involvement in planning at all levels.

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

Many chapters of the plan include lists of resources and references, including other supporting plans and studies. It references various technical reports that were developed during the planning process, however none of these are formally incorporated into the plan.

Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

The plan defines regional significance as a feature that “is either uncommon in the physiographic region in which it occurs, or one of the approximately 20 best of its kind in the region, or if its alteration or closing to the public would cause a substantial decrease in the natural resources or recreation opportunities of the region.” However, that definition in the glossary is the only reference to or use of the term in the plan.

Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The plan does not specifically identify viable agricultural lands, but is supportive of preserving farmland and promoting agriculture in the region.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

How does the plan define ‘substantial regional impact’ and how does that definition influence the RPC’s involvement in regulatory proceedings?

The glossary of the plan includes a basic definition of substantial regional impact as something that “has considerable and ongoing impact on two or more municipalities.” This is the sole mention of substantial regional impact in the plan and there is no discussion of the RPC’s role in regulatory proceedings in the plan.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan states that “Maintaining and enhancing the Region’s historic development pattern of compact villages and urban areas surrounded by a working landscape and protected natural resources is a primary goal of the Rutland Regional Plan. This goal is reflected throughout this document.” This planning principal appears throughout the plan and is reflected in the land use element. However, the plan includes very little specific, actionable policy language that could ensure that future growth and development is consistent with this statewide planning goal.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes relatively few specific, actionable policies, programs or projects that would further this statewide planning goal. The CEDS likely contained more specific actions that could have been incorporated into the plan directly, or by reference, that would have provided more clear guidance on how this goal should be implemented in the region.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does an excellent job of identifying the region's education- and training-related issues and challenges. However, it does not recommend specific policies, programs or projects that would address those challenges and issues. The 'actions' listed in the plan are limited to steps the RPC itself can take. If the plan also included actions that could be taken by other entities, it would provide more guidance on how this statewide planning goal should be implemented in the region.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does identify transportation needs and recommend actions or policies for the RPC that could further implementation of this statewide planning goal. The transportation chapters contain more specific recommendations than other parts of the plan.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan clearly aligns with this statewide planning goal, it includes very few specific, actionable policies, programs or projects. In particular, there is far less said about historic, archaeological and scenic resources within the plan than about natural resources.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

(A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan speaks to the challenges posed by current development patterns and practices on natural resource quality in the region. Its policies align with this statewide planning goal. Most of the recommended actions focus on assisting municipalities with better identifying, planning for and implementing regulations to protect natural resources.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan primarily calls upon the RPC to work with its member municipalities to plan for, and implement through regulations, more compact, energy-efficient approaches to development. The plan would be strengthened by providing more of a policy framework to help guide local planning efforts.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

(A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.

(B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan identifies several specific actions, such as creating a regional open space plan, that the RPC could take to implement this statewide planning goal. It also includes several policy statements that express support for improving recreation opportunities, such as connecting trail networks throughout the region.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

(A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.

(B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.

(C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.

(D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.

(E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan discusses the issues and needs of the agricultural and forest industries in the region. It includes several specific actions the RPC can take (in partnership with municipalities or other regional organizations) to support and strengthen those economic sectors, including promoting greater production and consumption of local food.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan discusses the issues surrounding mineral and groundwater extraction in the region. It includes several specific actions the RPC can take, primarily to assist towns with better information and more robust planning/regulations related to extraction. It does not include specific policies or recommendations that could be effectively applied during an Act 250 proceeding. Given the amount of extraction that has and continues to occur in the region (which is well-described in the plan), the plan would be strengthened if it provided a policy framework that could help guide municipal actions and be applied in state regulatory proceedings.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

RRPC-7

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

\$4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
- (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
- (C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
- (D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan does not include goals or policies for housing, it does include a number of actions for the RPC to take to help meet the region's identified housing needs. These actions are primarily to assist municipalities with local housing-related planning, regulations and programs. The plan does not offer specific guidance on what needs to happen in the region to make substantial progress towards this statewide planning goal.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

\$4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

- (A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.
- (B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does not fully assess the region's future need for public facilities and services, and therefore does not provide an adequate foundation on which to recommend specific policies or projects. While the plan does include some actions to be taken by the RPC to further this statewide planning goal, there is no

discussion of specific improvement projects or strategies for financing infrastructure.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

\$4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a limited discussion of childcare, noting that it is related to the affordability of housing and economic development. The plan does not recommend any specific policies, programs or projects that would further this statewide planning goal.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?

The plan generally does not include directive or obligatory ('must' or 'shall') policy statements that could be effectively applied in regulatory proceedings.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

RUTLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?

The plan generally does not include directive or obligatory ('must' or 'shall') policy statements that could be effectively applied in regulatory proceedings. The plan also does not include guidance on siting large-scale utility projects or clear community standards for aesthetic impacts.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?

The is organized into a series of chapters, each of which is divided into six sections (Introduction, Current Conditions, Unmet Needs, Future Trends, Meeting Current and Future Needs, and RPC Actions). Overall, the plan does an excellent job of concisely describing current conditions and future needs in the region, although for those elements that have a statutory requirement for an inventory and analysis the overview provided may not be adequately detailed.

However, there is a lack of clarity in how the statements made in the Meeting Current and Future Needs sections should be interpreted. In most chapters, these are presented essentially as options available for addressing the issues raised in the preceding sections. It is not evident in how the statements are phrased

nor is it explicitly stated that these are policies that the plan is establishing for the region.

The summary of topics and issues that opens the plan presents a concise overview of the current state and needs of the region. It could benefit from a title and/or short opening statement that explained what the section is and how it relates to the content that follows. Perhaps listing the highest priority policies, programs or projects to address those needs as part of this summary would be a way of addressing the plan's lack of guidance on what should (rather than just could) be done to the meet the identified needs.

The plan also includes case studies, lists of resources and references, sidebars that highlight the connections between topics, and a glossary. These features all contribute to making the plan more accessible to a general audience.

Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?

The plan states that the plan was written for several audiences including to aid local officials preparing town plans, to guide the RPC in its work, to provide information to businesses and developers interested in the region, to inform state agencies as they develop plans and projects, and to support activities of and grant applications for other entities in the region. The list of actions would clearly be useful to the RPC in setting its work plans. However, the plan seems like it would be less effective at guiding local planning as the framework it establishes is very general. Certainly, the examples and resources identified could be useful to municipalities.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: C+ (102 out of 280 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

SOUTHERN WINDSOR COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?

The plan opens with a series of broad regional goals and policies, which are further supplemented by goals and policies in each chapter. The plan defines a goal as a “broad statement of what the Region ultimately wants to achieve” and a policy as an “agreed-upon course of action to be followed to achieve the goals” that contains “the principles or standards that guide the choices of implementation measures.” The policies are generally expressed in discretionary or permissive language (ex. ‘should’), or are statements of support or encouragement.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

(A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.

(B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.

(C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.

(D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?

The plan’s written statement and map of future land use classifies land into eight future land use categories (Regional Center, Town Center, Village Center or Hamlet, Medium-Density Neighborhood, Resort Center or Recreation Area, Industrial Site, Rural, and Resource). The plan describes the desired future land use pattern, including in general terms the appropriate location, intensity and

character of future development in each. It also identifies specific areas exhibiting strip development and recommends future development approaches to reverse the existing or emerging pattern. The descriptions of desired future land use patterns are largely, but not entirely, expressed using ‘should’ and ‘encourage’ rather than ‘must’ or ‘shall.’ The land use chapter also discusses the particular land use and development issues at the region’s interstate interchanges and the relationship between land use patterns and energy conservation.

Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?

The plan does not identify any specific development that has potential for regional impact, but does generally discuss development associated with resort and recreation areas as typically having impacts that affect the region and beyond due to factors such as traffic and housing.

Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?

The plan recommends municipalities develop LESAs for both farm and forest land. It also includes policies on the siting of buildings, roads and utilities with respect to maintaining farmland.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Does the plan identify and assess the region’s energy resources and needs?

The plan does not identify and assess the region’s energy resources and needs, although it presents some state-level data on energy use.

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Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?

The plan's land use plan encourages development approaches that would conserve energy and the plan also makes connections between transportation policies and reducing energy use in the transportation sector. These policies are primarily general statements of support or encouragement, and are not specific or actionable.

Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?

The plan includes some policy statements intended to guide the siting and design of energy projects in the region, primarily with the goal of avoiding impacts to natural and scenic resources. The plan states that alternative energy facilities "should not come at a cost to the Region's natural resources" and then provides guidelines for such projects. However, the guidance falls short of providing a clear community standard on aesthetics that could be applied during a Section 248 proceeding, or specific siting criteria.

The discussion of wind, and to a lesser degree solar, power projects could be improved by more clearly addressing project scale. The discussion of wind generation, in particular, combines both commercial and residential scale projects and doesn't clearly distinguish between them.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs?

The Regional Transportation Plan is the second volume of the Regional Plan. It provides a thorough description and assessment of the region's existing transportation infrastructure. Despite being a separate volume, it is well-integrated with the region's land use plan and includes a description of how the transportation system should function within each land use planning area. The transportation plan discusses future needs in general terms, but does not identify specific improvement projects or estimate their costs or financing mechanisms.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?

The plan does not include a prioritized list of specific transportation improvements.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

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§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?

The plan includes a limited assessment of the region's community facilities and public utilities and maps showing the location of facilities and utilities. Water and wastewater systems are inventoried with a rough indication of those systems' ability to meet future demand and the capacity of elderly care and housing facilities is identified with general characterization of demand, for example. For other facilities and utilities, the inventory is not complete and/or the plan provides only a broad indication of future needs.

The plan could be strengthened by a thorough assessment of the ability of the region's infrastructure systems, facilities and services to accommodate growth that would identify needs and gaps and recommend projects to address them.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?

The plan does not identify or prioritize specific improvements to the region's community facilities and public infrastructure.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?

The plan includes policies that support the preservation of natural, scenic and historic resources. The policies are primarily general guidelines or statements of support or encouragement. The plan does include a limited list of "sensitive sites" and discourages development in these areas to protect scenic and open space resources (Hawks Mt., the Alps region, Little Ascutney Mt., Terrible Mt. and the Pinnacle).

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?

The implementation chapter identifies the tools and options available to the RPC to implement the plan's policies. Within the chapters, a number of the recommendations are actions that the RPC could take to implement the policies. The plan does not identify specific improvements that are needed, prioritize those needs or discuss cost or financing mechanisms.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?

The plan simply states a review was completed. It does not demonstrate compatibility or assess the impacts that outside growth and development may have on the region.

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Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?

The plan simply states a review was completed. It does not demonstrate compatibility or assess the impacts that the region's growth and development may have on adjoining regions.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?

The plan clearly identifies a need for housing in the region and includes an excellent discussion of housing affordability issues, although the analysis is based on data that is no longer current.

Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?

The plan is based on an analysis of population and housing data, as well as the findings of the 2002 Upper Valley Housing Needs Analysis. The plan does not incorporate any projections of future growth or specifically quantify the future need for housing by municipality, type, cost, etc. The plan could be strengthened by providing more precise recommendations and targets to help guide municipal planning efforts. Chapter 117 calls upon the RPCs to gather the population and housing data and make forecasts as needed to serve as a foundation for regional and municipal planning.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?

The plan summarizes information from the 2003 Regional Strategic Economic Development and Community Development Plan. While it provides an overview of the evolution of the region's economy, the plan does not fully describe the region's current economic situation and desired future economic development. The plan does identify key economic development issues and opportunities in the region such as the need to re-use former industrial sites and buildings, the lack of affordable housing, and the effects of the economic downturn and changing demographics.

Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?

The plan does not recommend specific economic development strategies. The policies in the economic development chapter primarily reinforce those found in the land use chapter related to guiding growth into existing centers. It is likely that more specific programs and projects were identified in the Strategic Economic Development and Community Development Plan.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

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§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

The plan does not describe the planning process so no assessment can be made of the level of public involvement.

What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

The plan references a number of supporting studies and plans. The written text is supplemented with data and analysis in the form of maps, tables and charts.

Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

The plan describes the buildings, sites and districts listed in the state and federal historic registries as regionally significant resources. The plan refers to regionally significant scenic and natural resources, and includes a map entitled “Significant Natural Resources” that shows rare, threatened and endangered species and significant natural communities, wetlands, deer wintering areas and bear habitat. However, it is not explicitly stated whether the term “regionally significant” should be applied to the resources on the map, and there is not a specific listing of regionally significant natural resources.

Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The plan discusses the process of identifying farmland through a LESA, and includes a map showing prime and statewide agricultural soils. However, it does not specifically identify viable agricultural land.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

How does the plan define ‘substantial regional impact’ and how does that definition influence the RPC’s involvement in regulatory proceedings?

The plan includes a definition of substantial regional impact that is based on a series of qualitative and quantitative criteria related to the location, scale, character and intensity of the proposed use. The plan also notes a need for assessing the cumulative impacts of incremental development.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

- (A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.
- (B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.
- (C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The principal land use policy expressed in the plan is to focus new development within existing settlement areas and to discourage fragmentation of rural land. The plan also speaks to investing in infrastructure, transportation and other public

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improvements within regional, town and village centers, and protecting rural and resource lands from development.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan's economic development policies are not specific or actionable. It is likely that more specific programs and projects were identified in the Strategic Economic Development and Community Development Plan.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The goals and policies related to education and vocational training are not specific or actionable.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan clearly aligns with this statewide planning goal, but the transportation-related policies are generally not specific and actionable. Most are statements of support or encouragement.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While many of the plan's policies align with this statewide planning goal, most are general statements of support or encouragement. As such, the effectiveness of their implementation through regulatory proceedings or guiding local planning efforts may be limited. Archaeological resources are not specifically described and are only briefly mentioned in several policy statements.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

(A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan's policies align with this statewide planning goal, but they are generally statements of support and encouragement and not actionable or directive.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan's policies are clearly supportive of energy efficiency and conservation, but less supportive of renewable energy. The

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policies are largely statements of support and encouragement, and most are not actionable or directive.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

(A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.

(B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

There is limited discussion of recreation resources, facilities and needs in the plan, despite the recognition of the role of recreation and tourism in the region's economy. The plan does not include specific, actionable policies that would further this statewide planning goal.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

(A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.

(B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.

(C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.

(D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.

(E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

Agriculture and forestry are discussed primarily through a land use lens - as a means to retaining open space, habitat and aesthetics - rather than from an economic development perspective. The plan's land use policies do strongly support the retention of farm and forest land, and those policies are reinforced through the policies in the Natural Resources chapter

related to siting of buildings, roads and utilities with respect to preservation of farm and forestland. Agriculture and forestry are not discussed within the Economic Development chapter.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The land use chapter includes specific policies guiding the RPC's participation in the Act 250 review of extraction operations. The natural resources chapter includes further policies related to mineral resources, although these are generally statements of support or encouragement intended to guide appropriate approaches to resource extraction.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

(A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.

(B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.

(C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.

(D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan clearly aligns with this statewide planning goal, the housing-related policies are primarily general statements of support and encouragement. The plan does not communicate any urgent need for changes in policy to increase the amount of

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housing in the region despite the demonstrated need for housing, particularly affordable housing, in the region. There are no recommendations for construction of specific types of housing, or targets for the amount, location or type of housing included in the plan.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

(A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.

(B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does not fully assess the region's future need for public facilities and services, and therefore does not provide an adequate foundation on which to recommend specific policies or projects. Generally, the utility and facility goals and policies are not specific or actionable. There is virtually no discussion of improvement projects or strategies for financing infrastructure.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does assess the need for and supply of childcare in the region, although it does recommend that a needs assessment be completed along with an evaluation of the suitability and availability of space in public buildings in the region to be used as childcare facilities. The childcare policies are primarily

statements to encourage action on this issue by municipalities, school districts and employers.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?

Some of the plan's policies are expressed using directive or obligatory language that could be effectively applied in an Act 250 proceeding, but most are worded using 'encourage' or 'should.' Careful consideration should be given to the phrasing of policies, and those that the RPC would want applied to development through the Act 250 process should clearly be worded as mandatory requirements.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?

The plan includes specific policies related to communications facilities, expressed in both directive and permissive language, that would be applicable to the Section 248 regulatory process. It

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also includes some guidelines for alternative energy facilities that are intended to protect natural and scenic resources.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?

The plan is organized into a series of chapters, primarily based on the statutorily required plan elements. Each chapter includes inventory and analysis sections, and concludes with a series of goals, policies and recommendations. Most chapters of the plan are consistent in their structure and tone, although the form of the policy statements does vary (ex. 'Promote the development of broadband...' vs. 'Large contiguous tracts of forest should be managed...') throughout. The economic development chapter, which is largely a summary of another plan, is structured somewhat differently from the other chapters. There could be a stronger connection between the regional goals and policies found in the introduction and the goals, policies and recommendations that follow in each chapter.

Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?

The introduction to the plan states that the primary intent of the RPC has always been to assist with and advocate for planning and development activities in member towns. Given that, the plan could be strengthened by incorporating specific implementation actions and, in some areas, more specific guidance on how municipalities should implement the plan's policies.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: C+ (116 out of 280 points)

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§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?

The plan contains clear and specific policies that can be effectively used to manage the region's future growth and development. Reading the plan in its entirety, there is a well-defined vision for future land use in the region. However, the plan does not open with an executive summary, vision statement or a set of basic, over-arching goals that could more clearly and succinctly communicate the plan's basic principles. The policies are distributed through the 300-page plan, which makes them challenging to find and consider in relation to one another.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

(A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.

(B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.

(C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.

(D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?

The plan includes a detailed description of desired future land use and development in the region. The plan establishes seven land use areas, which are shown on the future land use map (Regional Center, Town Center, Village Settlement, Hamlet Areas, Interchange Areas, Rural Areas, and Conservation and Resource Areas).

These land use areas represent the hierarchy of settlement patterns within the region and define compact settlement areas separated by rural countryside. The land use element of the plan also establishes a consistent regional framework for considering and assessing each municipality's land use plan.

The plan sets forth specific policies to guide development within each land use area. Some of these policies are expressed as recommendations (as indicated by the words 'encouraged' or 'should'), while others are required (as indicated by the words 'must' and 'shall').

Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?

There are no specific development projects that are identified as having the potential for significant regional impact, but the plan includes a specific set of criteria to be used to determine whether a project would have significant regional impact.

Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?

The underlying land use policies expressed in the plan are intended to guide development to developed areas and away from rural areas, which will serve to maintain farmland. Throughout, the plan includes specific suggestions for locating and designing development to protect farmland, rural character and other natural resources. As discussed below, the plan does not speak as directly to sustaining agriculture from an economic perspective as it does from a land use perspective.

Score: A (9 out of 10 points)

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§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Does the plan identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs?

The plan does not identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs.

Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?

The plan's over-arching land use policies are supportive of energy conservation and the energy chapter restates those policies. The connection between those policies and energy conservation could be more clearly explained for a general audience.

Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?

The plan does include actionable policies on the siting of energy generation and transmission facilities and lists specific areas (based on their features) where such facilities are not suitable.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs?

The plan includes a general description of the region's transportation infrastructure. Except for the projects associated with the region's major transportation corridors (Route 302, Route 4, Route 5, Route 66, Route 100, and Route 107), the plan does not identify specific transportation needs. The transportation map included in the plan shows existing infrastructure, but it does not show any planned infrastructure or identified needs.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?

The plan does include recommended transportation improvements along the region's main highway corridors. However, these projects are not prioritized and information on their cost and financing is not included.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

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§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?

The plan includes a limited inventory of public wastewater and water supply systems, as well as public schools. There is not an assessment of the ability of public utilities and facilities to meet future demand. Infrastructure is essential for the successful implementation of the land use strategies set forth in this plan. The plan could be strengthened by a thorough assessment of the ability of the region's infrastructure systems, facilities and services to accommodate growth that would identify needs and gaps and recommend projects to address them.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?

The plan identifies a few needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities. However, there is not a comprehensive and prioritized list of improvements.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?

The plan contains clear and specific policies that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources. Some of these policies are expressed as recommendations (as

indicated by the words 'encouraged' or 'should'), while others are required (as indicated by the words 'must' and 'shall').

While most of these policies are found in the Natural Resources and Historic, Cultural, Archeological and Scenic Resources chapters, there are additional policies in the Land Use Chapter and most other chapters of the plan. Additionally, the Natural Resources and Historic, Cultural, Archeological and Scenic Resources chapters are formatted with goals, policies and actions at the end of each sub-section. The distribution of these policies throughout the plan makes it challenging to find and consider them in relation to one another.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?

While each chapter includes recommended actions, the plan does not include a specific implementation program. The recommendation sections generally do not include discrete projects or specific funding strategies. Many of the recommendations are statements of encouragement for various municipal policies and actions, or of support and assistance to municipalities or other entities when they take actions that further the plan's stated goals and policies. An implementation strategy could serve as the framework for annual work programs.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

TWO RIVERS-OTTAUQUECHEE REGIONAL COMMISSION

§4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?

The plan simply states a review was completed and no potential conflicts were found between the regional plan and the plans of adjoining regions. It does not assess the impacts that outside growth and development may have on the region.

Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?

The plan simply states a review was completed and no potential conflicts were found between the regional plan and the plans of adjoining regions. It does not assess the impacts that growth and development in the region may have on adjoining regions.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?

The plan identifies a broad and general need for housing at a regional level, and the underlying causes of the shortage of housing. There is no town-level analysis of housing need, nor specific identification of the need for affordable, special need or elderly housing.

Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?

The assessment, as presented in the plan, is not based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics. The 2002 Upper Valley Housing Needs Analysis may have been based

on such work, but that information was not part of the summary incorporated into the plan. There is mention of the Upper Valley Housing Coalition and their work to address the shortage of affordable workforce housing. None of their specific findings or recommendations are incorporated into the plan.

The demographic and housing data presented in the plan is out-of-date. Given that the plan was re-adopted in mid-2012, more current 2010 Census data may not have been available. However, the 2000 data could have been supplemented with more recent state and local data. Chapter 117 calls upon the RPCs to gather the population and housing data and make forecasts as needed to serve as a foundation for regional and municipal planning.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?

The plan provides only a general description of the region's economy. The Economic Development chapter states that a regional economic analysis was just completed as part of the 2011 CEDS and that the results informed the regional plan. However, none of the data or analysis appears in the plan, nor was the CEDS clearly incorporated by reference.

The economic data presented in the plan is out-of-date. Given that the plan was re-adopted in mid-2012, more current 2010 Census data may not have been available. However, the 2000 data could have been supplemented with more recent state and local data.

Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?

Most of the policies and recommendations related to economic development are considerably less specific and tailored to the

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

TWO RIVERS-OTTAUQUECHEE REGIONAL COMMISSION

region than those in other chapters of the plan. They generally express broad, statewide economic development concerns such as tax policy and permit reform.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

The plan does not describe the process by which the plan was developed or whether there was any public involvement beyond the participation of the appointed commissioners and the statutorily required notice and hearing process.

What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

There are a few supporting studies or other planning documents mentioned in the plan. None are incorporated by reference into the plan. The plan relies heavily upon Census data regarding demographics, housing and economic trends. A series of reference maps are included.

Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

The plan speaks of regionally significant transportation facilities, significant natural resources and natural areas in need of special protection. The plan is not clear as to whether these should be interpreted as “areas of regional significance” as described in this section of the statute.

Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The plan generally recognizes the region’s agricultural lands based on soils and rural settlement patterns and includes a map of primary agricultural soils. Agricultural land is referred to throughout the plan as an important resource and repeatedly the plan restates the region’s policy of guiding development away from agricultural land and minimizing impacts to, or fragmentation of, agricultural land. A land evaluation and site assessment system was not used to specifically identify high priority farmland.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

How does the plan define ‘substantial regional impact’ and how does that definition influence the RPC’s involvement in regulatory proceedings?

The plan establishes precise criteria for determining whether development has the potential to cause a substantial regional impact based on location, scale, intensity, infrastructure and service demands, and other effects.

Score: A (6 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

TWO RIVERS-OTTAUQUECHEE REGIONAL COMMISSION

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan repeatedly references the principle of maintaining the region's traditional settlement pattern of compact center separated by rural countryside. The Land Use chapter, as well as other plan chapters, contain specific and actionable policies to implement this statewide planning goal. Most of the land use planning areas have some supporting policies or recommendations that are expressed as requirements ('must' or 'shall'), in addition to those that are suggested ('encouraged' or 'should').

Score: A+ (10 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The policies and recommended actions related to economic development are not specific or actionable.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The goals, policies and recommended actions related to education and vocational training are not specific or actionable.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a variety of transportation-related policies and recommendations. Many are statements of encouragement or support, but a few - particularly those with a direct land use connection - are more specific and actionable. There are some transportation projects listed along the main corridors through the region. There are no policies or recommendations related to rail or air service.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

TWO RIVERS-OTTAUQUECHEE REGIONAL COMMISSION

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

Policies that would result in substantial progress towards protecting and preserving important natural, scenic and historic landscape features can be found throughout the plan. There is a considerable amount of design guidance found in several sections of the plan.

Score: A+ (10 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

- (A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan contains a number of specific policies and actions that will further this goal. In particular, it strongly calls for retaining or restoring naturally vegetated buffers along streams, shorelines and wetlands. The plan notes a need for improved identification and mapping of natural resources in several places. It could be strengthened by listing and perhaps prioritizing specific resource inventory projects that should be completed in the region.

Score: A (9 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

Some of the policies related to energy efficiency and renewable energy are specific or actionable, but most are statements of support or encouragement. There are no energy projects identified in the plan.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

- (A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.
- (B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes specific, actionable policies related to recreation trails and bike/pedestrian facilities. It calls for continued public access for recreational activities. It does not include any specific recreation projects that would implement this statewide planning goal. Identifying specific projects could help secure funding.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

TWO RIVERS-OTTAUQUECHEE REGIONAL COMMISSION

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

- (A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.
- (B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.
- (C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.
- (D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.
- (E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The policies and recommendations related to agricultural and forest industries are generally not specific or actionable. Agriculture and forestry are discussed primarily through a land use lens - as a means to retaining open space - rather than from an economic development perspective. The plan's land use policies do strongly support the retention of farm and forest land.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes specific policies that could be used to assess whether a proposed extraction operation would be appropriate. The criteria provided in the Natural Resources chapter could be strengthened by referencing the Land Use chapter and tailoring the acceptable level of impact based on the land use planning areas.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
- (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
- (C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
- (D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan addresses housing policy primarily through a land use lens, with less of a focus on meeting the need for housing in the region than on implementing the land use goals for compact settlement patterns.

The plan does not communicate any urgent need for changes in policy to increase the amount of housing in the region despite the findings of the Upper Valley Housing Needs Analysis that indicates that housing development is not keeping pace with economic development. There are no recommendations for construction of specific types of housing, or targets for the amount, location or type of housing included in the plan.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

TWO RIVERS-OTTAUQUECHEE REGIONAL COMMISSION

§4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

(A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.

(B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan clearly speaks to the linkage between land use planning and the provision of public facilities and services. It establishes a specific, actionable policy related to growth and the capacity/cost of public facilities and services. It does not identify any utility, facility or service needs, improvements, expansions that might be needed to accommodate future growth, nor does it address financing such projects. As discussed above, identifying, listing and prioritizing facility needs would strengthen the plan.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes only a superficial mention of child care. There is no assessment of the need for or availability of child care in the region upon which to base policies or recommendations.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?

Many plan policies, particularly those directly related to land use, are directive. These 'must' or 'shall' statements can effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings.

Score: A+ (10 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?

Some plan policies that would apply to energy facilities, including those related to land use and resource protection, are directive. These 'must' or 'shall' statements can effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings. The plan could be strengthened by identifying specific locations or types of areas that would be suitable for renewable energy projects, such as solar farms or wind farms, or including a more nuanced discussion of project scale as it relates to compatibility.

Score: A (9 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?

The plan starts with an introduction, followed by a profile of the region and then a series of topic-based chapters. There is no vision statement or statement of broad goals at the start of the plan, which would help communicate the core principles of the plan to the reader.

Each chapter includes background information, goals, policies and recommendations. The goals and policies of the plan are distributed throughout; in some chapters, they are all grouped together, while other chapters are further divided into subsections each with their own goals, policies and recommendations. This makes it difficult for the reader to find and to comprehend the goals, strategies and recommendations in context with each other.

Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?

The plan's focus is directing land use in the region and therefore it has two primary audiences - those involved in municipal planning and land use regulation, and those involved in state land use permitting and appeal proceedings. The plan is not aimed at communicating with a general audience.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: B- (143 out of 280 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

WINDHAM REGIONAL COMMISSION

§4348a(a)(1) A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?

The plan opens with a vision statement and a set of broad regional goals, which generally align to the statewide planning goals. The plan also recognizes energy as the highest priority planning and development issue in the region and connections to energy are made throughout the plan.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(2) A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

(A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.

(B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.

(C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.

(D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?

The plan classifies land in the region into six land use planning areas (Resource, Productive Rural, Rural Residential, Village/Downtown, High Intensity Mixed Use, Resort Center) as shown on the Proposed Land Use Map. The current and desired future development of each land use classification is described in general terms, and there are a series of policies that further detail the desired character and location of future development within each area.

Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?

The plan does not identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact.

Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?

The plan calls for future development in rural areas to be low intensity and sited so as to not conflict with agriculture. It encourages farmland conservation and greater use and funding of the Current Use Program.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(3) An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

Does the plan identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs?

The plan has an energy chapter that includes a limited analysis of the region's energy resources and needs that relies primarily on state-level data. More regional-level energy data may now be available than when the chapter was written.

Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?

The land use chapter of the plan specifically calls for approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy. Those approaches are reinforced with policies in the energy chapter and with policies elsewhere in the plan related to reducing transportation energy use.

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

WINDHAM REGIONAL COMMISSION

Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?

The plan includes a policy statement that applies to all energy generation, transmission and distribution projects that calls for avoiding and minimizing environmental impacts, conducting thorough and proper impact studies, adequately addressing areas of concern, and addressing issues related to facility operation and reliability. While the plan is supportive of renewable energy production and recognizes that there has been public opposition to commercial wind projects around the state, it does not include specific guidance on project siting or scale.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(4) A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs?

The Transportation chapter of the Regional Plan summarizes the more detailed Regional Transportation Plan, which is also incorporated by reference. The Regional Transportation Plan provides a thorough inventory and assessment of the region's transportation infrastructure and needs. The Regional Plan includes three transportation-related maps that supplement the text - Existing Transportation Network, Projects to Enhance the Transportation System, and Future Transportation Network.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?

The Regional Plan and Regional Transportation Plan both identify and prioritize needed transportation improvements. The plans

do not generally include information related to cost and financing options.

Score: A (9 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(5) A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?

The plan includes a limited assessment of the region's community facilities and public utilities and maps showing the location of facilities and utilities. The water and wastewater systems are inventoried the most thoroughly with a rough indication of those systems' ability to meet future demand. For other facilities and utilities, the inventory is not complete and/or the plan provides only a broad indication of future needs.

As the plan notes, infrastructure is essential for the successful implementation of the region's land use and economic development strategies. The plan could be strengthened by a thorough assessment of the ability of the region's infrastructure systems, facilities and services to accommodate growth that would identify needs and gaps and recommend projects to address them.

Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?

The plan does not identify, recommend or prioritize needed improvements to community facilities and public utilities.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

WINDHAM REGIONAL COMMISSION

§4348a(a)(6) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?

The plan includes policies that support the preservation of natural, scenic and historic resources. The policies are primarily general guidelines or statements of support or encouragement.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(7) A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?

Generally, the plan does not describe specific actions or projects that will be needed to implement the policies. The Implementation chapter of the plan generally describes the tools and avenues available to WRC to implement the plan. The Regional Transportation Plan does include recommended projects.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(8) A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?

The plan does not assess the impact that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region.

Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?

The plan does not assess the impact that the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions.

Score: F (0 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(9) A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?

The plan does clearly identify, and to a limited degree quantify, the need for housing in the region. The plan could be strengthened by providing a more detailed projection of housing needs (by municipality, by type, by cost, etc.).

Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?

The plan is built on an analysis of demographic, housing and economic data, and references a number of additional studies that served as a foundation for the housing chapter.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

§4348a(a)(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?

The plan includes a general description and assessment of the region's economy. A more detailed inventory and analysis would provide a stronger foundation for the policies and may help identify specific economic development programs or projects that would be beneficial for the region.

Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?

The policies in the economy chapter of the plan emphasize land-based industries (farming, forestry, tourism) and include strategies for supporting and expanding those sectors of the regional economy. The plan could be strengthened by more specifically identifying the programs or projects needed to implement the policies.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

WRC-3

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT

WINDHAM REGIONAL COMMISSION

§4345a(5) Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

The planning process was not described in the plan and therefore no assessment can be made of public involvement.

What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

The plan refers to a number of supporting plans and studies and incorporates a series of maps, as well as data tables and charts. The maps are useful and provide information that is not necessarily covered in the written text. The plan would be strengthened by more explicitly cross-referencing the maps in the relevant sections of text.

Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

The plan does not explicitly identify areas of regional significance, but the Natural Resources chapter includes discussion and associated maps of areas that could be considered regionally significant.

Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The plan includes a map of important farmland, based on soil criteria, but does not explicitly identify agricultural lands.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4345a(17) As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

How does the plan define 'substantial regional impact' and how does that definition influence the RPC's involvement in regulatory proceedings?

The plan does not define substantial regional impact. Instead, the plan describes the process the WRC Project Review Committee follows to review projects that may have regional importance, that might contribute to cumulative impacts, that might be precedent setting, or otherwise referred to the committee. The committee will assess conformance with town and regional plans, and determine whether there is any conflict among the plans. If there is a conflict, WRC staff and the committee will use the set of questions included in the plan to guide a determination of whether there is a substantial regional impact.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

- (A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.
- (B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.
- (C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The principal land use policy expressed in the plan is to focus new development within existing settlement areas and to

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encourage rural development in the form of new hamlets. The plan also speaks to investing in infrastructure, transportation and other public improvements within villages and downtowns, and protecting rural and resource lands from development.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes policies that align with and further this statewide planning goal. In particular, the plan emphasizes economic development strategies for the agricultural and forestry sectors as well as related tourism and value-added manufacturing. The policies found in the economy chapter also reinforce the intent of the land use chapter to guide growth and development into existing centers. The plan could be strengthened by more specifically identifying the programs or projects needed to implement the policies.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes several policies that align with this statewide planning goal. The discussion of vocational training in the plan is limited. The plan would be strengthened by incorporating more specific and actionable programs or projects related to education and vocational training.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

Both the Regional Plan and Regional Transportation Plan include specific policies and recommended projects that further this statewide planning goal. Both plans also make connections between transportation policies and the policies in the land use, community resources and energy chapters.

Score: A (9 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan clearly aligns with this statewide planning goal, but it does not provide specific, actionable guidance on how this goal should be implemented in the region. The plan is essentially silent on protection of archaeological resources.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

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§4302(c)(6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

(A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan contains a number of policies that further this goal and those are reinforced by the plan's land use policies. The effectiveness of these policies, particularly with relation to guiding development activities, could be improved by incorporating more specific standards or guidelines (recommending a minimum buffer width, for example).

The plan also notes a need for improved identification and mapping of natural resources in several places. It could be strengthened by listing and perhaps prioritizing specific resource inventory projects that should be completed in the region.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

Energy is an underlying theme of the plan and energy-related policies appear throughout. The land use and transportation chapters, in particular, include policies that align with this statewide planning goal. While clearly this goal is strongly supported, the plan would be strengthened by incorporating more specific and actionable policies, programs or projects that could be implemented in the region.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

(A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.

(B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The land use and economy chapters of the plan clearly speak to recreation and tourism as critical components of the region. Despite this recognition, the plan does not fully inventory and assess the region's recreation resources, and it includes only a limited number of fairly broad policy statements related to recreation. The plan could be strengthened by incorporating more specific, actionable recommendations. Including specific projects within the plan could help secure financing for their implementation.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

(A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.

(B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.

(C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.

(D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.

(E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan incorporates specific policies that further this statewide planning goal into the land use, economy and natural resources chapter. The plan's economy chapter emphasizes the importance of land-based industries in the region, including agriculture and forestry. The strong connection to economic development recognizes the importance of agriculture and forestry as

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businesses and the need for them to remain profitable in order to maintain the region's working landscape.

Score: A (9 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(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.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes a specifically-worded policy that states that extraction "shall not interfere with or have negative impacts on" natural and community resources and that such operations must appropriately manage truck traffic. It also calls for land to be developed in such a way as to maintain future opportunities for extraction where mineral resources exist. This section could be strengthened by providing more specific guidance on project siting or standards for screening and rehabilitation that could be applied in state regulatory proceedings.

Score: A- (8 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
- (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
- (C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
- (D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan includes policies that further this statewide planning goal and makes connections between housing policies, and the policies in the land use, economy, energy, and community

resources chapters. The plan could be strengthened by incorporating more specific guidance, particularly to guide municipal plans and land use regulations, on how to implement these broad policies.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

- (A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.
- (B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

The plan does not fully assess the region's future need for public facilities and services, and therefore does not provide an adequate foundation on which to recommend specific policies or projects. Most of the utility and facility policies are statements of support or encouragement, and are not specific or actionable. There is no discussion of improvement projects or strategies for financing infrastructure.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

§4302(c)(13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?

While the plan includes a brief assessment of childcare needs in the region and several policies that align with this statewide planning goal, it does not provide specific guidance on how this goal should be implemented in the region.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

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Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?

Some of the plan's policies are expressed using directive or obligatory language that could be effectively applied in an Act 250 proceeding. Careful consideration should be given to the phrasing of policies, and those that WRC would want applied to development through the Act 250 process should clearly be worded as mandatory requirements.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?

The plan speaks to some issues that are relevant to Section 248 proceedings and includes some policies that are stated as requirements. However, the plan does not fully address the siting or aesthetic issues that are associated with many energy projects.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?

The plan is organized into a series of chapters, generally aligning with the statutorily required plan elements. Each chapter begins by describing existing conditions and ends with a series of policy statements. Generally, the plan is clearly and concisely written, and consistent in tone and structure from chapter-to-chapter.

Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?

The introduction to the plan states that the plan "is the basis for the WRC's day-to-day operations" and that it also serves "as a guideline for local planning efforts." Given these two primary stated purposes, the plan could be strengthened by incorporating specific implementation actions and, in some areas, more specific guidance on how municipalities should implement the plan's policies.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: B- (153 out of 280 points)