

Economy & Working Lands

Aspiration

Foster a resilient, equitable, and adaptable economy that creates opportunities for a skilled and diverse workforce, sustains working lands, preserves rural character, advances environmental stewardship and expands local food production.

Goals, Strategies and Policies

Goal 1. Diversify the regional economy to provide stable employment across a broad range of industries, occupations and income levels.

Strategies:

- 1.1. Align workforce development with employer needs in health care, technology, trades and services.
- 1.2. Identify skill gaps that limit access to higher-paying jobs.
- 1.3. Provide technical assistance to municipalities to update zoning bylaws that enable flexible workspaces, home businesses and light industry.
- 1.4. Prioritize:
 - a) job creation that offers living wages and opportunities for career advancement; and
 - b) economic development efforts in industries that build long-term resilience.
- 1.5. Partner with:
 - a) colleges, technical schools and employers to expand apprenticeships; and
 - b) economic development organizations to evaluate workforce programs to ensure effectiveness in diversifying employment opportunities.
- 1.6. Promote:
 - a) programs that connect residents to training in high-demand and emerging industries;
 - b) second-career and older worker retraining opportunities to strengthen labor force participation;
 - c) entrepreneurship through incubators, accelerators, and small business grants;
 - d) job placement services and career counseling for underemployed workers;
 - e) broadband expansion to improve access to remote work opportunities; and
 - f) regional and state initiatives to attract and retain young workers.
- 1.7. Integrate workforce development into regional economic planning.
- 1.8. Preserve opportunities for traditional trades while preparing for economic transformation.

Policies:

- 1.1. Support:
 - a) broadband expansion initiatives that increase access to remote work opportunities;
 - b) partnerships with higher education institutions to expand apprenticeships and training;
 - c) workforce training programs that address regional employer needs;

- d) retraining opportunities for displaced or older workers; and
 - e) workforce housing policies that align with economic development goals.
 - 1.2. Support updates to municipal zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations that:
 - a) allow flexible and adaptive workspaces; and
 - b) allow entrepreneurship incubators, coworking spaces, and home-based businesses in designated areas.
 - 1.3. Support regional coordination among municipalities to:
 - a) pool resources for workforce training and entrepreneurship hubs; and
 - b) develop shared workforce pipelines, especially in high-demand sectors like healthcare, trades, and technology.
 - 1.4. Oppose:
 - a) economic development projects that create long-term dependence on a single industry; and
 - b) state and regional incentives for businesses that do not offer living wages.
 - 1.5. Require regional workforce programs and proposals seeking regional planning commission support to include an equity analysis demonstrating how opportunities are accessible across income, gender, race, age, and ability.
 - 1.6. Employ regional workforce development data to guide public investment.
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Goal 2. Expand business retention, growth and entrepreneurship that anticipates market opportunities and strengthens local communities.

Strategies:

- 2.1. Provide technical assistance to municipalities to:
 - a) align zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations with business retention and expansion goals; and
 - b) plan for infrastructure upgrades that enable business innovation and growth.
- 2.2. Partner with chambers of commerce and industry associations to identify succession planning models to help family-owned and small businesses transition successfully.
- 2.3. Improve access to business resources in rural and underserved areas.
- 2.4. Identify opportunities for market diversification in agriculture, forestry, tourism and technology.
- 2.5. Promote:
 - a) resources that improve access to capital, credit and investment networks;
 - b) the integration of entrepreneurship training into workforce development;
 - c) technical and financial support programs for small businesses and startups; and
 - d) regional marketing campaigns that highlight local products and services.
- 2.6. Prioritize:
 - a) business development that contributes to resilient, community-based economies; and
 - b) support for businesses that align with regional sustainability goals.
- 2.7. Discourage business practices that deplete local natural resources.

Policies:

- 2.1. Support municipal updates to zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations that:

- a) enable business expansion; and
 - b) allow adaptive reuse of vacant or underutilized properties for small business incubation.
- 2.2. Support:
- a) infrastructure planning in designated areas that meets business development needs;
 - b) new business development that demonstrates alignment with community economic goals;
 - c) rural and underserved areas through targeted business development programs;
 - d) regional marketing strategies to promote local goods and services; and
 - e) succession planning efforts for small and family-owned businesses.
- 2.3. Oppose:
- a) practices that undermine local resource sustainability; and
 - b) land use regulations that unnecessarily restrict small-scale business operations.
- 2.4. Limit:
- a) incentives for businesses that extract resources without reinvesting locally; and
 - b) barriers to broadband expansion in rural business areas.
- 2.5. Require business development proposals seeking regional planning commission support to include a resilience plan.

Goal 3. Maintain equitable economic growth in communities with high unemployment or low per capita income.

Strategies:

- 3.1. Identify communities with persistent unemployment or poverty.
- 3.2. Align regional development programs to concentrate resources in distressed communities.
- 3.3. Promote:
 - a) infrastructure investments that improve economic competitiveness;
 - b) federal and state initiatives aimed at rural economic revitalization;
 - c) access to public services that support workforce participation;
 - d) community participation in economic development programs;
 - e) workforce training tailored to community-specific needs; and
 - f) initiatives that expand local job creation in communities with persistent unemployment or poverty.
- 3.4. Provide technical assistance to municipalities to:
 - a) plan for inclusive workforce participation by addressing barriers such as housing, childcare and transportation;
 - b) integrate childcare, healthcare, and transportation access into local economic development plans; and
 - c) attract sustainable businesses.
- 3.5. Evaluate progress using income, employment and community well-being metrics.

Policies:

- 3.1. Support:
 - a) affordable workforce housing initiatives in distressed communities;
 - b) childcare, healthcare and transportation initiatives that remove workforce barriers;

- c) workforce training tailored to local needs in high-unemployment communities;
- d) targeted public investment in communities with persistent unemployment;
- e) flexible, locally driven approaches to addressing economic inequity;
- f) broadband access and digital equity programs in underserved areas;
- g) equitable distribution of regional economic development funds; and
- h) federal and state initiatives focused on rural economic revitalization.

3.2. Oppose:

- a) economic development initiatives that bypass distressed communities;
- b) development projects that increase cost burdens on existing residents without providing local economic benefits;
- c) policies that increase financial or regulatory barriers for small businesses; and
- d) the displacement of low-income residents from revitalizing communities.

3.3. Require:

- a) inclusive public engagement in economic planning processes; and
- b) equity impact analyses for proposals requesting regional planning commission support for funding in distressed communities, to assess both benefits and risks of displacement.

3.4. Employ community well-being and income metrics in evaluating program success.

Goal 4. Concentrate economic development in areas designated for growth where infrastructure, services and transportation can support long-term prosperity.

Strategies:

4.1. Align economic development incentives with infrastructure capacity.

4.2. Provide technical assistance to municipalities to:

- a) improve access to jobs and essential services through integrated land use and transportation planning;
- b) identify priority infrastructure investments to support economic development.

4.3. Promote:

- a) investments in tourism-serving infrastructure, including wayfinding, signage, and public amenities;
- b) mixed-use development that integrates housing, employment and essential services; and
- c) equitable access to amenities, employment and essential services within areas designated for growth.

4.4. Improve the capacity of and access to utilities and transit in growing communities.

4.5. Evaluate outcomes of growth center development in meeting housing targets and employment needs.

Policies:

4.1. Support:

- a) municipal planning that integrates transportation and land use;
- b) mixed-use development in areas with infrastructure and services;
- c) regional marketing of designated growth areas to attract investment;
- d) equitable access to jobs and services;
- e) redevelopment of underutilized properties in growth areas;

- f) affordable housing and anti-displacement measures in areas designated for growth; and
 - g) investments in infrastructure in designated growth areas.
- 4.2. Oppose:
- a) zoning and land use changes that encourage leapfrog development;
 - b) the expansion of infrastructure in areas not designated for growth; and
 - c) sprawling development patterns that undermine designated growth area viability.
- 4.3. Require climate resilience and equity analyses before lending regional planning commission support for infrastructure investments in designated growth areas.
- 4.4. Employ regional coordination to align land use, housing, and economic growth strategies so they reinforce one another.

Goal 5. Incentivize agriculture, forestry and other resource-based industries that sustain working lands.

Strategies:

- 5.1. Identify and promote emerging opportunities in sustainable agriculture and forestry.
- 5.2. Integrate climate adaptation practices into farm and forest management.
- 5.3. Partner with chambers of commerce and industry associations to promote value-added product development.
- 5.4. Promote:
 - a) farmland protection standards in municipal plans;
 - b) workforce training in agriculture and forestry;
 - c) the diversification of farm and forest operations to strengthen viability; and
 - d) programs that improve farm and forest product innovation.
- 5.5. Concentrate public investment in enterprises that align with sustainability goals.
- 5.6. Provide technical assistance to municipalities to update zoning bylaws to include provisions for farm processing facilities, sawmills and ag-related enterprises.
- 5.7. Provide technical assistance to municipalities to plan for:
 - a) agritourism and forest-based tourism to diversify income opportunities on working lands;
 - b) infrastructure critical to agriculture and forestry; and
 - c) long-term access to farmland and forestland.
- 5.8. Evaluate the economic contributions of industries reliant on working lands to regional prosperity.

Policies:

- 5.1. Support:
 - a) farm-to-school and institutional purchasing programs that sustain local producers;
 - b) training and education for agricultural and forestry workers;
 - c) public-private partnerships that invest in working lands infrastructure; and
 - d) development incentives that prevent fragmentation of farm and forest lands.
- 5.2. Support updates to municipal zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations that:
 - a) allow value-added enterprises on farms and forestlands; and
 - b) allow agri-tourism and farm processing facilities.

- 5.3. Oppose public funding for industries that degrade soil, water or forest resources.
- 5.4. Require proposals for agricultural and forestry enterprises to demonstrate alignment with soil health, carbon storage and water quality best practices before lending regional planning commission support.

Goal 6. Maintain farmland, forest and rural open space to preserve the integrity, connectivity and productivity of working lands.

Strategies:

- 6.1. Identify and map prime farmland and forestland.
- 6.2. Prioritize the preservation of contiguous blocks of forest and farmland.
- 6.3. Provide technical assistance to municipalities to:
 - a) utilize data and tools (e.g. ANR Atlas) to evaluate land conversion and subdivision proposals;
 - b) plan for development patterns that avoid conversion of key working lands;
 - c) preserve rural scenic resources that contribute to the region's cultural identity;
 - d) discourage development that weakens agricultural and forestry viability;
 - e) consider conservation finance tools such as local option taxes, dedicated conservation funds or transfer of development rights; and
 - f) integrate working lands protection into municipal planning.
- 6.4. Promote:
 - a) conservation finance mechanisms (e.g. ecosystem service credits, local option taxes) to fund the preservation of working lands;
 - b) conservation easements and long-term lease agreements to maintain the working landscape;
 - c) land conservation initiatives and the preservation of cultural landscapes including barns, orchards, and stone walls as part of regional identity;
 - d) succession planning programs that connect retiring landowners with new farmers, foresters and conservation buyers to maintain long-term stewardship of working lands; and
 - e) partnerships with land trusts and conservation organizations to preserve working lands.
- 6.5. Partner with conservation organizations to educate the public and municipal officials about the cost(s) to communities of fragmenting the working landscape.
- 6.6. Evaluate land cover conversion trends and conservation outcomes annually.

Policies:

- 6.1. Support updates to municipal zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations that:
 - a) preserve large blocks of farm and forest land; and
 - b) the preservation of cultural landscapes and rural identity.
- 6.2. Support:
 - a) conservation easements;
 - b) ecosystem services markets (carbon, water quality) that compensate landowners for stewardship;

- c) succession planning and intergenerational transfer programs to keep farmland, forests and family-owned businesses tied to working lands in active production; and
 - d) the integration of working lands protection in municipal planning.
- 6.3. Oppose:
- a) land conversion that fragments key agricultural and forest areas;
 - b) updates to zoning bylaw and subdivision regulation that weaken protections for working lands and open space; and
 - c) new subdivisions that undermine the viability of working land.
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Goal 7. Limit economic risks from climate change and extreme weather by strengthening resilience in businesses, communities and infrastructure.

Strategies:

- 7.1. Identify vulnerabilities in key infrastructure and industries.
- 7.2. Promote:
- a) resilient design in transportation, utilities, and facilities;
 - b) diversified economic activity to buffer against climate shocks;
 - c) business continuity and recovery planning; and
 - d) the alignment of business disaster recovery funding with long-term adaptation needs.
- 7.3. Provide technical assistance to municipalities to:
- a) integrate economic resilience planning with municipal hazard mitigation and plans to reduce risks to businesses, infrastructure and working lands.
 - b) integrate resilience into zoning bylaws, subdivision regulations and the development of municipal future land use maps;
 - c) incorporate climate vulnerability into capital improvement planning; and
 - d) identify and implement strategies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions in economic sectors.
- 7.4. Maintain access to critical services during emergencies.
- 7.5. Evaluate economic impacts of climate events and measure recovery progress.

Policies:

- 7.1. Support:
- a) programs that expand access to affordable insurance for farms and small businesses in climate-vulnerable areas;
 - b) municipal planning that integrates hazard mitigation and economic resilience;
 - c) resilient infrastructure design and retrofits;
 - d) the diversification of local economies to reduce exposure to climate risks; and
 - e) greenhouse gas reduction measures in economic sectors.
- 7.2. Oppose:
- a) new development in flood hazard areas;
 - b) reinvestment in areas repeatedly damaged by disasters; and
 - c) infrastructure expansion in areas where exposure to climate risks are high.

- 7.3. Require capital improvement and development proposals seeking regional planning commission support to integrate resilience measures and demonstrate alignment with hazard mitigation and floodplain management plans.
 - 7.4. Employ climate vulnerability assessments to guide public investment.
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Goal 8. Transform outdoor recreation into a sustainable economic driver that emphasizes scenic landscapes and respects natural resources.

Strategies:

- 8.1. Prioritize investments in recreation that create local economic benefits.
- 8.2. Align recreation development with conservation goals and carrying capacity.
- 8.3. Identify:
 - a) opportunities for year-round, diversified recreation offerings; and
 - b) best management practices for addressing visitor parking, waste management and public safety concerns at recreation sites.
- 8.4. Provide technical assistance to municipalities to:
 - a) plan for and develop recreation amenities;
 - b) plan for equitable access to outdoor recreation; and
 - c) improve connections between trail systems, downtowns, and transit.
- 8.5. Promote:
 - a) recreation that supports residents and visitors equitably;
 - b) recreation infrastructure that balances use and stewardship;
 - c) regional, interconnected trail networks;
 - d) the integration of recreation with cultural, agricultural and heritage-focused tourism; and
 - e) housing strategies that support seasonal and year-round recreation workers.
- 8.6. Preserve scenic resources as part of recreation planning.
- 8.7. Concentrate recreation development in areas with adequate access and facilities.
- 8.8. Evaluate recreation impacts on ecosystems and communities.

Policies:

- 8.1. Support:
 - a) recreation development aligned with conservation goals;
 - b) equitable access to recreation for residents and visitors;
 - c) investments in recreation infrastructure that balance use and stewardship;
 - d) housing development strategies that sustain the recreation workforce;
 - e) the integration of recreation into municipal economic development strategies;
 - f) regional collaboration in planning year-round recreation; and
 - g) trail network expansion that connect communities.
- 8.2. Oppose:
 - a) the development of recreation amenities in fragile natural areas; and
 - b) recreation development that diminishes scenic or cultural resources.
- 8.3. Require visitor management plans (including an assessment of carrying capacity) before lending regional planning commission support to new recreation projects.
- 8.4. Employ monitoring of recreation's secondary impacts (e.g. housing cost, traffic congestion) on host communities.

Goal 9. Expand public awareness of the economic, cultural and ecological importance of working lands through education and outreach.

Strategies:

- 9.1. Identify effective outreach methods to engage diverse audiences on the economic, cultural and ecological importance of working lands in Vermont.
- 9.2. Partner with producers, educators and nonprofits to:
 - a) deliver education programs on the role of agriculture and forestry in Vermont's identity;
 - b) plan educational campaigns that link food systems, climate resilience and community health with sustainable economic development;
 - c) promote intergenerational knowledge-sharing and the preservation of cultural knowledge on land use and stewardship; and
 - d) integrate working lands education into workforce and economic development programs.
- 9.3. Promote:
 - a) community events that showcase farm, forest, and rural traditions;
 - b) messaging that highlights the environmental benefits of stewardship;
 - c) tours, markets and demonstration projects.
- 9.4. Discourage misconceptions about the economic viability of working lands.
- 9.5. Evaluate outreach effectiveness through surveys and participation tracking.

Policies:

- 9.1. Support:
 - a) youth-focused education programs that connect schools with farms, forests, and rural businesses;
 - b) interpretive signage, tours, and demonstration projects;
 - c) outreach campaigns that highlight stewardship benefits; and
 - d) community events that celebrate agricultural and forestry traditions.
- 9.2. Oppose:
 - a) messaging that undermines the economic importance of working lands;
 - b) public funding for campaigns that do not align with stewardship values.
- 9.3. Require economic promotion campaigns to integrate messages about stewardship and long-term sustainability in order to gain regional support.