



MEMO

Date: 3 August 2026
To: Regional Plan Committee
From: Brian Voigt, Program Manager
Re: Regional Future Land Use Map Updates

✉ ACTIONS REQUESTED:

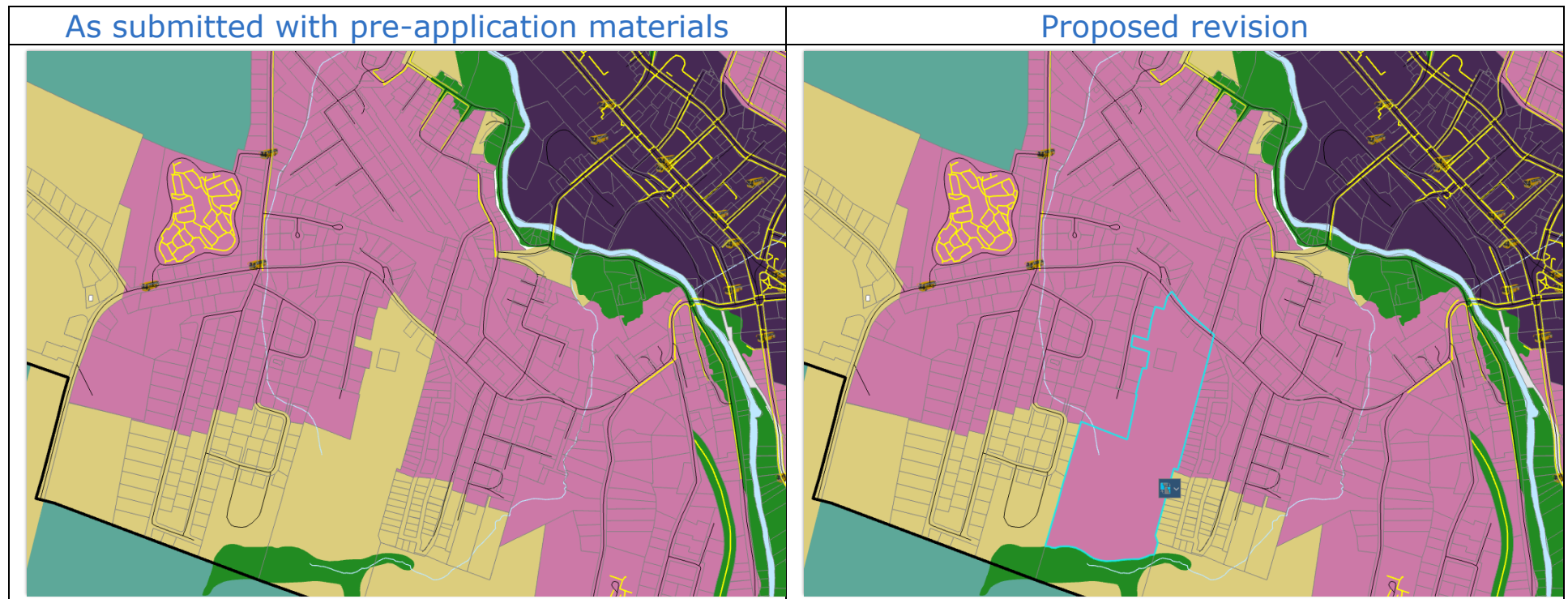
1. **Discuss** proposed updates to the Regional Future Land Use map.
2. **Discuss** options for addressing Centers and Neighborhoods where existing development is located in mapped flood hazard areas and future development could increase density.
3. **Move** to endorse the proposed updates to the Regional Future land Use map.

Expand Centers and Neighborhoods

Barre City Prospect Heights

Barre City has undertaken extensive planning and utility investments in the vicinity of the 30-acre Prospect Heights site. The parcel lies between existing residential areas designated as Planned Growth Areas in the draft Regional Future Land Use map submitted for Land Use Review Board pre-application review. The city has secured nearly \$9 million in grant funding for infrastructure expansion to support development of up to 90 mixed-income housing units.

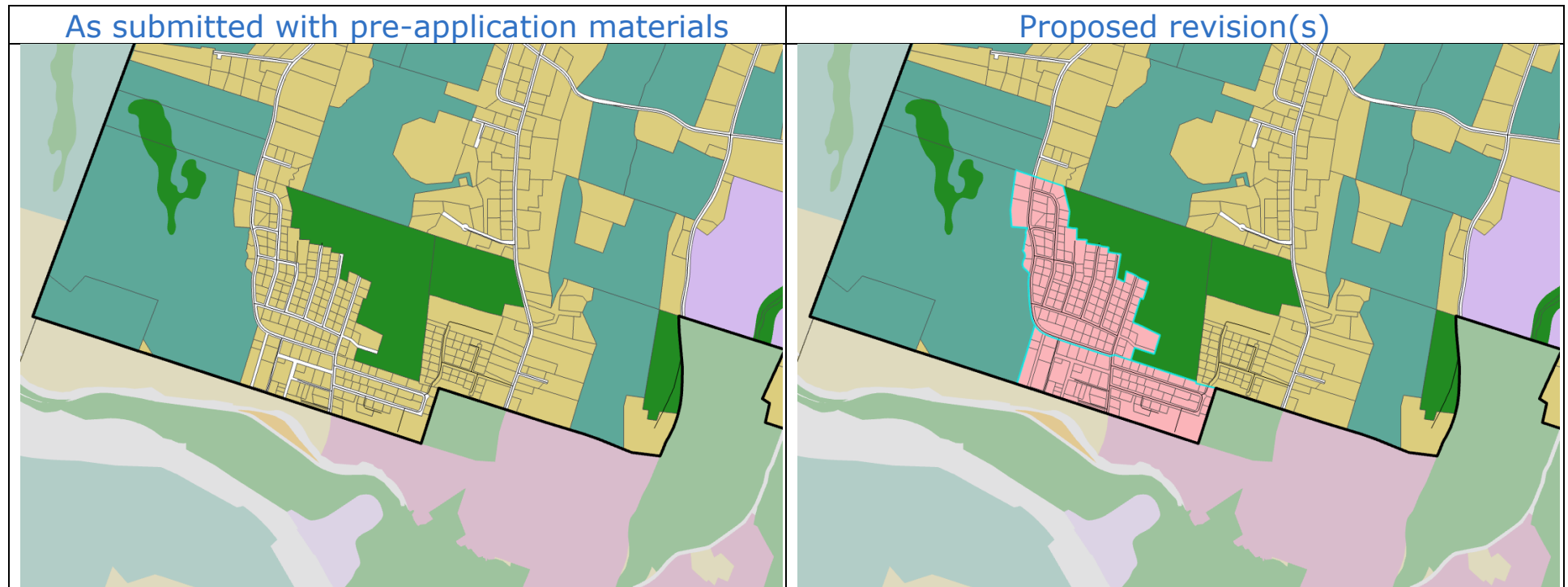
Staff recommendation: update the classification of this parcel from Rural – General to Planned Growth Area.



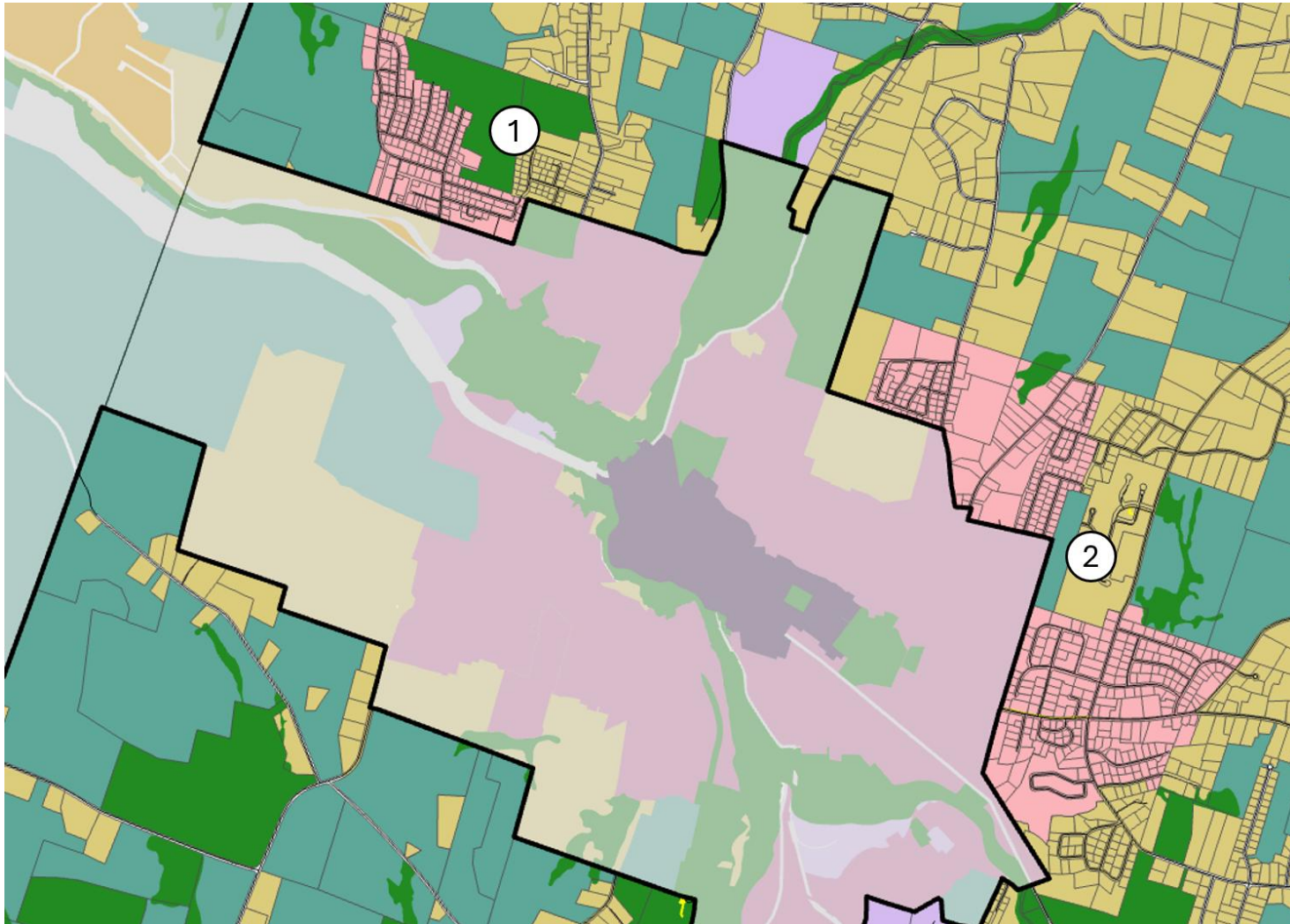
Barre Town Richardson Road

This established neighborhood is served by water and wastewater infrastructure, experiences low traffic volumes and functions as a continuation of Barre City's Planned Growth Area. The Town of Barre has requested that the area be designated as a Village Area, consistent with similar Barre Town neighborhoods adjoining Planned Growth Areas in Barre City.

Staff recommendation: update the classification of this parcel from Rural – General to Village Area.



Proposed revision to the Regional Future Land Use Map. Designating the area north of Richardson Road (1) as a Village Area reflects existing settlement patterns and utility infrastructure and is consistent with neighboring Village Areas located to the east of Barre City (2).



New Centers

The Warren Planning Commission has requested the designation of a Village Center in the Sugarbush – Lincoln Peak base area. It is currently mapped as Resource Based Recreation. Staff review indicates the area may qualify for Village Venter designation based on existing zoning, water and wastewater infrastructure, mixed residential and commercial uses, civic assets and the absence of mapped flood hazards. The area presents opportunities for workforce housing at this location, given its proximity to large employers. Although the area is not universally served by sidewalks or walking paths and transit service is seasonal, so work remains to meet complete streets objectives. However, a final engineering design for a pedestrian path connecting the Lincoln Peak base area with the Mad River Path (and ultimately Warren Village) is nearly complete. Civic / public uses regularly occur within the proposed area, but much of this activity takes place on privately-owned property. Possible alternative future land use classes for consideration include Village Center (Tier 1 eligible) and Transition-Infill (not Tier 1 eligible).

Staff recommendation: The Committee is encouraged to consider this request within a broader regional context. The approach adopted here may guide future land use planning across Central Vermont and serve as a model for accommodating future growth in locations that are both infrastructure-served and outside mapped flood hazard areas.

Development in Mapped Flood Hazard Areas

Background

In Central Vermont, many historic downtowns and villages developed along rivers and are now located within mapped flood hazard areas. While Act 181 grandfathered these areas into Tier 1-eligible future land use categories, the Regional Plan emphasizes reducing long-term flood vulnerability and directing future growth toward safer locations where feasible. This creates a planning challenge: how should existing developed neighborhoods in flood-prone areas be represented on the Future Land Use Map?

The Draft Regional Plan recognizes that Central Vermont has the highest flood risk in Vermont and that flood impacts disproportionately affect socioeconomically burdened populations, including many residents living in these developed neighborhoods. The Plan further states that "avoiding or limiting development and investment in identified flood hazard areas, where feasible, is a central goal," while acknowledging that it is easier to prevent new development than to remove or relocate existing development.

Accordingly, the Draft Regional Plan supports directing future growth toward existing settlements and potential new settlements outside mapped flood hazard areas while prioritizing investments that improve the resilience of existing developed communities. Existing development in flood-prone areas is expected to remain for the foreseeable future; however, recognizing that reality does not imply that additional development or increased exposure to flood hazards should be encouraged. Instead, future land use planning decisions should emphasize hazard mitigation, resilient redevelopment, adaptive reuse and investments that reduce long-term vulnerability.

In the Central Vermont region, approximately 400 acres of legacy state designations occur within mapped River Corridors or Special Flood Hazard Areas. These areas overlap a portion of approximately 900 parcels with a combined Grand List value exceeding \$800 million. Of those parcels, approximately 290, representing nearly \$180 million in Grand List value, are located entirely within mapped flood hazard areas. These estimates do not include the substantial public investment in water, wastewater, and power systems; transportation and communications infrastructure; and other utilities that serve these developed areas.

During the mapping process, lands adjacent to existing state-designated centers were assigned a Tier 1-eligible future land use category when they satisfied the criteria established in statute and the statewide mapping methodology. However, where those same lands intersect mapped River Corridors or Special Flood Hazard Areas, they were instead classified as Rural – Conservation.

Municipal Planning Commissions and Regional Planning Commission Board representatives have questioned whether classifying established downtowns, villages, and developed neighborhoods as Rural – Conservation accurately reflects existing land use patterns, municipal infrastructure investments or long-term community planning objectives. While several municipalities have requested that these developed areas instead be classified as Center or Neighborhood future land use areas, staff concluded that extending Tier 1-eligible classifications into mapped flood hazard areas would send a policy signal that is inconsistent with the Draft Regional Plan's flood resilience objectives.

Staff discussed this issue during CVRPC's pre-application meeting with the Land Use Review Board. As part of that discussion, staff presented the concept of a Special Use – Resilience future land use category as an alternative to either assigning these areas to Tier 1-eligible Center or Neighborhood categories or classifying them as Rural – Conservation. The

ensuing discussion demonstrated that there is no single accepted interpretation of how these areas should be classified.

One Land Use Review Board member expressed concern that creating an additional Special Use category would be inconsistent with approaches being used by other Regional Planning Commissions. Another questioned whether excluding these developed neighborhoods from Tier 1-eligible land use categories could create inequities for populations identified through the environmental justice analysis, noting that other Regional Planning Commissions have included similar areas within existing future land use classifications. A third member indicated that the proposal appeared to be a reasonable response to the unique planning circumstances found in the Central Vermont region. Staff emphasize that these comments were offered during an informal pre-application discussion and do not represent formal guidance or a decision of the Land Use Review Board.

Staff carefully considered these perspectives together with municipal feedback, statutory authority (provided under 24 V.S.A. § 4348a) and the policies contained in the Draft Regional Plan. Staff concludes that neither assigning these areas to Tier 1-eligible Center or Neighborhood classifications nor classifying them as Rural – Conservation fully reflects existing development patterns, municipal infrastructure investments or the Draft Regional Plan's emphasis on reducing long-term flood vulnerability. The proposed Special Use – Resilience category bridges that gap by recognizing that these areas are expected to remain developed while establishing that long-term resilience, rather than additional growth, should guide future land use decisions.

Although a Special Use – Resilience designation would not make these areas eligible for Tier 1 or the Community Investment Program under current statute, staff believes this tradeoff is justified. Tier 1 is intended to facilitate and incentivize growth in appropriate locations. Extending Tier 1 eligibility to areas known to face significant flood hazards could encourage additional private investment in locations where the Regional Plan seeks to reduce long-term flood exposure, while increasing the likelihood that public resources will be needed to support disaster response, recovery and infrastructure repair following future flood events. While these areas would not receive growth-related incentives under a Special Use – Resilience designation, they remain appropriate priorities for resilience investments, including hazard mitigation, floodproofing, infrastructure adaptation, property acquisition (where / when appropriate) and other public investments that reduce long-term flood risk.

Communities should not have to choose between eligibility for resilience investments and eligibility for development incentives; these are distinct public policy objectives that should be implemented through different planning tools. A future land use classification that recognizes existing development while directing future decisions toward resilience outcomes provides a more accurate representation of these areas and better aligns the Regional Future Land Use Map with the goals of the Draft Regional Plan.

Draft Definition Special Use – Resilience Category

Definition: The Special Use – Resilience land use category identifies developed areas that face significant exposure to flood hazards and where long-term community resilience should guide future land use decisions. These areas generally include land within river corridors, Special Flood Hazard Areas and other locations subject to recurring flood impacts where existing development is expected to remain, but future growth should be carefully managed.

This designation recognizes the importance of the many historic downtowns, villages, and developed riverfront areas in the region while encouraging land use decisions that reduce long-term flood risk and support resilient communities.

Acknowledging that existing development will remain in these locations does not imply that additional development or increased exposure to flood hazards should be encouraged. Instead, future land use decisions should prioritize reducing long-term flood exposure, strengthening community resilience and avoiding additional vulnerability where practicable.

Appropriate actions may include resilient redevelopment, adaptive reuse of existing structures, strategic hazard mitigation, infrastructure adaptation, floodproofing, elevation of structures and other measures that reduce long-term flood vulnerability.

Classification Options

Staff have identified three potential approaches for classifying lands within mapped River Corridors and Special Flood Hazard Areas. Each option reflects a different balance between the statewide mapping methodology, municipal requests, statutory flexibility and the flood resilience policies contained in the Draft Regional Plan.

Option 1: Broad Application of the Special Use – Resilience Category

Under this option, all lands outside legacy designated areas and within mapped River Corridors and Special Flood Hazard Areas would be designated

as Special Use – Resilience, regardless of whether the land is developed or undeveloped. These areas would not be eligible for Tier 1 designation or the Community Investment Program under current guidelines. Additional language could be incorporated into the Flood Resilience Element of the Regional Plan emphasizing that these areas should receive priority consideration for hazard mitigation, resilience investments, infrastructure adaptation, floodplain restoration, voluntary property acquisition and other measures intended to reduce long-term flood risk.

The primary advantage of this approach is consistency. It establishes a single future land use category for areas where flood resilience, rather than future growth, is the dominant planning objective. This approach recognizes that flood risk exists in both developed communities and undeveloped areas and provides a consistent regional framework for identifying locations where future land use decisions should prioritize resilience through flood mitigation and adaptation.

Option 2: Targeted Application of the Special Use – Resilience Category

Under this option, the Special Use – Resilience designation would apply only to developed areas that would otherwise meet the criteria for Center or Neighborhood future land use classifications but are located within mapped River Corridors or Special Flood Hazard Areas. Flood hazard areas outside existing developed areas would continue to be classified as Rural – Conservation. As with Option 1, these areas would not be eligible for Tier 1 designation or the Community Investment Program under current guidelines. Additional language could be incorporated into the Flood Resilience Element of the Regional Plan emphasizing that these areas should receive priority consideration for hazard mitigation, resilience investments, infrastructure adaptation, floodplain restoration, voluntary property acquisition and other measures intended to reduce long-term flood risk.

This approach recognizes that developed flood-prone neighborhoods present a different planning challenge than undeveloped flood hazard areas. It creates a future land use category specifically intended for locations where existing development and public infrastructure are expected to remain, but where long-term planning should emphasize resilience, hazard mitigation, adaptive reuse and reducing future flood exposure rather than encouraging additional growth.

The primary advantage of this approach is that it more accurately reflects existing development patterns than the Rural – Conservation classification while remaining consistent with the Draft Regional Plan's objective of avoiding or limiting additional development and investment in areas known to face significant flood hazards.

Option 3: Classify Developed Areas as Centers or Neighborhoods

Under this option, developed areas within mapped River Corridors and Special Flood Hazard Areas that are served by municipal water and wastewater infrastructure and otherwise satisfy the requirements of the statewide mapping methodology would be classified as a Center or Neighborhood future land use category. Municipalities with these classifications would be eligible to pursue Tier 1B designation and, where applicable, could apply for Tier 1A status.

The primary advantage of this approach is that it provides municipalities that meet the statutory requirements with the greatest autonomy and preserves access to state programs intended to support compact development, housing and community investment. However, staff believes this option presents challenges when considered against the flood resilience policies contained in the Draft Regional Plan. Tier 1 designations are intended to facilitate and incentivize growth in appropriate locations. Extending Tier 1 eligibility into areas known to face significant flood hazards could result in additional private investment and increased exposure in locations where the Regional Plan seeks to reduce long-term flood vulnerability.

This approach does not preclude development from occurring in these locations, but staff believes that future land use policy should more explicitly distinguish between supporting the resilience of existing development and encouraging additional growth in known flood hazard areas.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends pursuing either Option 1 – Broad Application of the Special Use – Resilience category or Option 2 – Targeted Application of the Special Use – Resilience Category.

Staff believes the Special Use – Resilience classification provides the best balance between recognizing existing development and infrastructure investments while avoiding future land use designations that encourage additional growth in areas with significant flood risk. This approach aligns with the Draft Regional Plan by supporting growth in settlements outside mapped River Corridors and Special Flood Hazard Areas while prioritizing resilience investments, adaptation and hazard mitigation in existing vulnerable communities.

Although this recommendation does not extend Tier 1 eligibility or Community Investment Program incentives to these areas, staff believes that distinction is appropriate. Growth incentives should be directed to locations where additional development aligns with regional planning objectives, while flood-prone developed areas should instead be prioritized

for investments that reduce long-term vulnerability, including hazard mitigation, floodproofing, infrastructure adaptation, voluntary property acquisition and resilient redevelopment.

The Special Use – Resilience designation does not prevent continued investment in these communities. Rather, it provides a more accurate framework for guiding investment toward adaptive reuse, elevation, floodproofing and other measures that reduce exposure to future flood impacts. While other Regional Planning Commissions have taken different approaches to classifying flood-prone developed areas, this approach reflects Central Vermont's unique circumstances, including the concentration of flood-vulnerable communities, substantial existing investment and the Draft Regional Plan's emphasis on building resilience in existing communities.

Statutory Background

Flood Resilience Element - 24 V.S.A. § 4348a(a)(11)(A):

A flood resilience element that:

- (i) identifies flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas, based on river corridor maps provided by the Secretary of Natural Resources pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 1428(a) or maps recommended by the Secretary, and **designates those areas to be protected, including floodplains, river corridors**, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, **to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property**; and
- (ii) recommends policies and strategies to protect the areas identified and designated under this subdivision (A) and to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and public investments.

Special Use Area - 24 V.S.A. § 4348a(a)(12):

A map delineating future land use area boundaries for the land uses in subdivisions (A)–(J) of this subdivision (12) as appropriate **and any other special land use category the regional planning commission deems necessary**

Future Land Use Area map Methodology - 24 V.S.A. § 4348a(e)

The Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies shall develop, maintain, and update standard methodology and process for the mapping of **areas eligible for Tier 1B** status under 10 V.S.A. § 6033 and designation under chapter 139 of this title.

3 V.S.A. § 6002 – Benefits and Burdens Analysis

3 V.S.A. § 6002(1) “Environmental benefits” means the assets and services that **enhance the capability of communities and individuals to function and flourish in society**. Examples of environmental benefits

include access to a healthy environment and clean natural resources, including air, water, land, green spaces, constructed playgrounds, and other outdoor recreational facilities and venues; affordable clean renewable energy sources; public transportation; fulfilling and dignified green jobs; healthy homes and buildings; health care; nutritious food; Indigenous food and cultural resources; environmental enforcement; and training and **funding disbursed or administered by governmental agencies.**

3 V.S.A. § 6002(2) "Environmental burdens" means any **significant impact to** clean air, water, and **land**, including any destruction, damage, or impairment of natural resources resulting from intentional or **reasonably foreseeable causes**. Examples of environmental burdens **include climate change impacts**; air and water pollution; improper sewage disposal; improper handling of solid wastes and other noxious substances; excessive noise; activities that limit access to green spaces, nutritious food, Indigenous food or cultural resources, or constructed outdoor playgrounds and other recreational facilities and venues; inadequate remediation of pollution; reduction of groundwater levels; **increased flooding or stormwater flows**; home and building health hazards, including lead paint, lead plumbing, asbestos, and mold; and damage to inland waterways and waterbodies, wetlands, forests, green spaces, or constructed playgrounds or other outdoor recreational facilities and venues from private, industrial, commercial, and government operations or other activities that contaminate or alter the quality of the environment and pose a risk to public health.