

CH 3: LAND USE



Brownsville from Mt. Ascutney

A. Background

Settlement and land use patterns are among the most crucial aspects of how a region functions and grows. This plan places an emphasis on those patterns that characterize our region. The most common settlement pattern is the compact center surrounded by rural countryside. This quintessential Vermont landscape is found throughout southern Windsor County. It is the reason many people choose to live here and is the foundation of the Vermont brand, which benefits many of our region's businesses.

In order to maintain this settlement and land use pattern, most of our region's growth and development will need to occur in or near existing centers, where there is already a built environment and infrastructure to accommodate it, or where traditional settlement patterns and infrastructure can be reasonably extended as needed to accommodate growth over time.

Water and wastewater solutions are needed in some existing centers, such as Perkinsville and Felchville that presently rely on on-site systems.

This goal will be met primarily through town plans and local land use regulations. Towns will need to continue setting the stage for their own land use and development through responsible planning that takes into account settlement and land use patterns in the area and the needs of current and future residents. This regional land use plan is intended to provide a guiding framework for coordinated land use planning and regulation at the municipal level. The Mount

Ascutney Regional Commission¹ (MARC) consulted our towns' existing municipal land use plans while formulating this regional plan. The regional land use plan seeks to develop policies that balance support for local land use goals and objectives with support for regional compatibility between communities. When reviewing future town plans, the MARC will consider whether local land use plans are consistent with this regional land use plan. In most instances, the policies of this plan will bolster and supplement those found in the current land use plans and regulations of southern Windsor County towns. Only in the case of a conflict between local and regional policies with regard to a regionally significant project, will this regional land use plan take precedence over a town plan.

The regional land use plan also has a role in state planning and regulation. Development activities that are subject to certain state permits need to demonstrate conformance with this regional land use plan.

As stated by the Vermont Climate Action Commission, global climate change is a fundamental threat to Vermont, to our economy, environment, and way of life. The regional land use plan seeks policies to adapt to become more resilient in face of the anticipated impacts of climate change. That includes making our community centers resilient and more attractive places to locate, promoting energy efficiency and energy conservation, and maintaining a rural working landscape that is connected, resilient and functioning. For more information and policies regarding this, see the natural resources and emergency management chapters and the enhanced energy plan for the region.

¹ The Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission (SWCRPC) officially changed the organization's name to Mount Ascutney Regional Commission (MARC) on January 1, 2021.

Land Use Goals

To maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact centers surrounded by a rural countryside. To achieve the desired future land use and development patterns, development in the region must positively contribute toward:

- 1. Supporting a vibrant economy;**
- 2. Providing infrastructure that supports the goals of this Plan;**
- 3. Avoiding sprawl;**
- 4. Maintaining viable farms and forests;**
- 5. Encouraging energy conservation and climate adaptation;**
- 6. Promoting flood resiliency; and,**
- 7. Protecting sensitive ecological resources.**

B. Land Use Classifications

This land use chapter is formulated around six land use classifications that represent a progression from the least developed to the most developed areas in our region, as well as other more specialized land use categories, as shown on the Future Land Use Map. See the descriptions of each land use classification on the following pages.



In addition to the six land use classifications described above, the following other land use classifications that have special characteristics are also shown on the Future Land Use Map and described in more detail in the next section of this chapter:

SPECIAL USE AREAS

1. RIPARIAN AREAS
2. RESORT AND RECREATIONAL AREAS
3. INTERCHANGE
4. COMMERCIAL NODES AND CORRIDORS
5. INSTITUTIONAL
6. INDUSTRIAL



Conservation



Working Lands



Rural Residential



Hamlets & Village Centers



Residential Neighborhood



Town & Regional Centers

Least Developed

Most Developed

CONSERVATION. This land use classification includes lands that are protected from development through public ownership or conservation easements, as well as large blocks of forest land that are largely undeveloped. Some of these lands have physical constraints such as high elevations, steep slopes, or shallow soils. Much of the land is not readily accessible from year-round maintained roads. These factors combine to make these lands poorly suited for development.



Conservation lands are an essential element of our region’s landscape and are part of the rural countryside this plan seeks to preserve. They provide ecological services – such as wildlife habitat, floodwater reduction, soil retention, carbon sequestration, recreation, and scenic beauty – that make them a valuable resource for our region. The recreational use of conservation lands contributes to the quality of life enjoyed by our region’s residents and to the tourism industry that is a significant component of our regional economy.

The most suitable uses of conservation lands are wildlife habitat and nature preserves, forestry and agriculture, hunting and fishing, outdoor recreation and seasonal camps, environmental education, flood attenuation and groundwater recharge, and similar low-intensity uses that leave the land in a primarily undeveloped, natural state. Conservation lands are generally not appropriate for residential development or for extensions of infrastructure, including but not limited to roads and utilities, that would facilitate further development.

It is our vision that conservation lands will contribute to the environmental, social, and economic well-being of our region and will remain in a largely undeveloped state for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations. To achieve this, MARC will encourage and assist towns to enact effective land use plans and controls intended to guide future residential development away from conservation lands and to limit forest fragmentation and development on land with significant natural resource constraints. On conservation lands, the overall density of residential development allowed is not to exceed 1 dwelling unit per 10 acres.



WORKING LANDS. This land use classification includes rural lands used for farming, forestry, resource extraction, renewable energy generation, and other resource-dependent land use activities. These lands generally remain in large tracts and large areas are actively managed for production. A significant portion of these lands have high quality soils that are necessary to support viable farming and forestry operations. This classification also includes undeveloped lands that are not

readily accessible from year-round maintained roads or that may have physical constraints that make them poorly suited for development.

Farming and forestry are the foundation of our region's rural economy and maintain the working landscape that is valued by residents and visitors alike. Alongside conservation lands, working lands are an essential element of our region's character and are part of the rural countryside this plan seeks to preserve. Fragmentation and conversion of these lands to residential or other uses that are not resource-based weakens that foundation and our region's overall economic health. The proliferation of residential or other uses that are not resource-based also decreases the viability of traditional working land uses due to the potential for conflicts over off-site impacts of working lands such as odors, dust, noise, traffic, etc. The most suitable uses of working lands are agriculture and forestry, farm owner and labor housing, rural enterprises, resource extraction, renewable energy generation, outdoor recreation, hunting and fishing, environmental or agricultural education, wildlife habitat and nature preserves, flood attenuation, groundwater recharge, and similar land-based or resource-dependent uses.

It is our goal that the region's working lands will continue to be actively managed for rural production. To achieve this, MARC will encourage and assist towns to enact effective land use plans and controls intended to guide future residential development away from working lands and to limit the conversion and fragmentation of productive farm and forest land. Where the goal is to maintain working lands, the overall density of residential development allowed is not to exceed 1 dwelling unit per 10 acres.



RURAL RESIDENTIAL. This land use classification encompasses rural areas where residential development has displaced farming or forestry as the primary land use. These areas may share many physical characteristics with the region’s working lands, but more of the land has been subdivided into residential lots and is no longer configured to support larger- scale or intensive rural production. These areas may

include farm and forest lands, but agricultural or timber management activities are more likely to be secondary income sources, hobby farms, or homesteading operations.

Through context-sensitive approaches to siting and design, housing can be accommodated in these rural settings in a manner that protects the productive, ecological, and/or scenic value of these lands provided that the overall density of development in the area remains low. There should continue to be a mix of undeveloped lands, working lands, and residential lands in this classification. Most of the region’s new housing should not be located in rural residential settings, but should be guided into existing settlement areas or adjoining areas designated for future growth. The most suitable uses of rural residential lands are agriculture and forestry, rural enterprises, renewable energy generation, outdoor recreation, hunting and fishing, environmental or agricultural education, wildlife habitat and nature preserves, flood storage, housing, and similar low-impact uses.

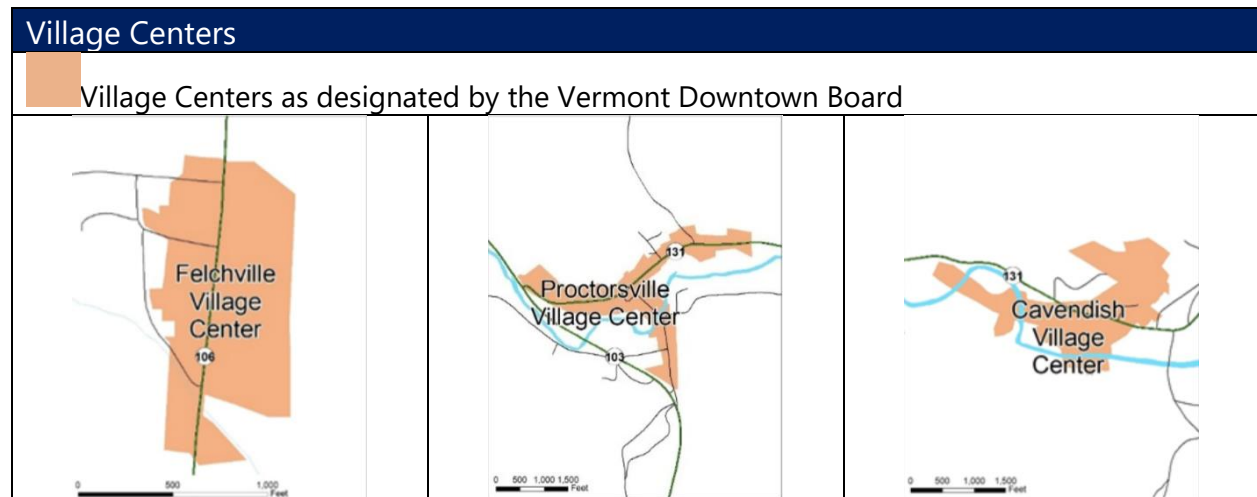
It is our vision that the rural residential areas throughout the region will continue to provide primarily single-family housing in a rural setting that maintains open space between developed sites and offers views of the surrounding natural or agricultural landscape. Accessory dwellings, two-family housing and co-housing are also suitable for rural residential areas. The development pattern will remain irregular (ex. variation in lot sizes and building design) and will respond to the topography and other natural features of the land. Given the absence or limited capacity of the public infrastructure (roadways, water, sewer) serving these areas, large-scale, high-density or rapid development that would significantly increase the amount of housing in these areas is not appropriate. To achieve this, MARC will encourage and assist towns to enact effective land use plans and controls intended to discourage further encroachment of rural residential development into areas designated as working lands or conservation areas. Where the goal is to accommodate rural residential development, the overall density of residential development allowed should not exceed 1 dwelling unit per 2 acres, and local regulations should guide the siting and design of new homes in a manner that preserve rural character and open space.

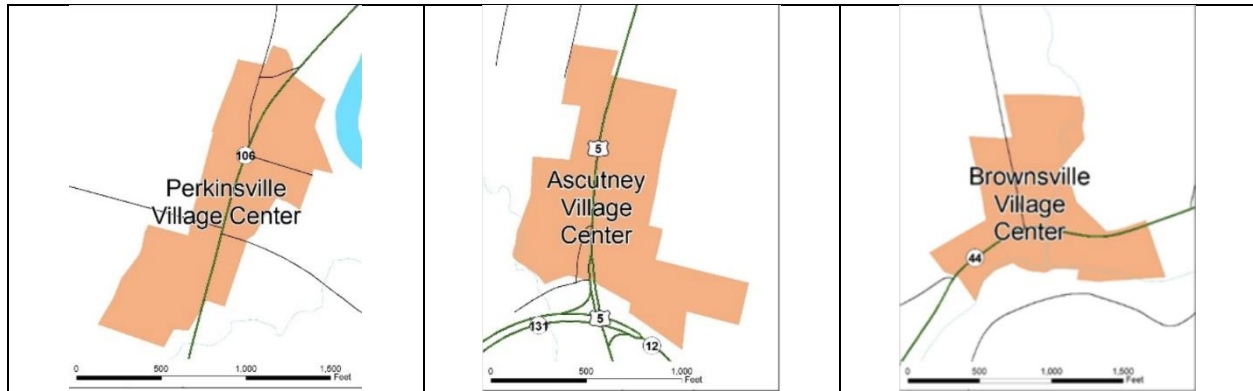


HAMLETS AND VILLAGE CENTERS. This land use classification recognizes the smaller traditional centers in our region that developed historically in locations with economic value such as sites with waterpower for mills, crossroads where travelers would stop, or railroad stations where agricultural products could be shipped to urban markets. They also served as the focus of community life with schoolhouses, churches,

cemeteries, and other civic institutions that had to be located relatively close to where people lived prior to the advent of the automobile. Most of the hamlets have long since lost any economic activity or civic function and remain solely as small residential clusters. The village centers, alternatively, have often retained some level of commercial activity such as a general store or inn, and/or active civic functions such as a school, church, library, or grange hall.

Village Centers shown on the Future Land Use Map are generally consistent with the 2020 boundaries for the state-designated Village Centers as shown below. For those villages that do not presently have designation, the Future Land Use Map approximates a boundary for each community center.





Many of these areas are suitable for infill development, more intensive use of existing buildings, and redevelopment of obsolete or abandoned structures or sites. The most suitable uses of hamlets and village centers are housing, small-scale commercial and light industrial uses, civic uses, and similar low-impact uses. Village centers may accommodate future growth and infill or redevelopment, while hamlets should remain in their current form and density without significant growth or change in the character or intensity of development.

Most of our region's town plans call for guiding future growth and development to their hamlets and village centers. However, the lack or limited capacity of water and/or sewer infrastructure constrains development potential within many of our region's hamlets and village centers. Many of the hamlets and village centers are located along streams or rivers and include lands, structures, and infrastructure that are at risk of flood-related damage. These challenges will need to be addressed to achieve the land use and settlement pattern envisioned by state, regional, and local plans.

It is our vision that the hamlets and village centers will retain their historic role and character as focal points in the rural landscape and major contributors to the sense of place and identity of the region's rural towns. Our hamlets and village centers will continue to be the hearts of their towns, hosting civic buildings and uses, and providing the gathering places that sustain a sense of community. The hamlets and village centers will remain compact with distinct edges, and will not sprawl into the surrounding countryside with scattered, low-density development along roadways. Historic buildings will be rehabilitated and/or adapted for new uses in a manner that maintains or restores their architectural integrity. New development will be designed and sited in a manner that is compatible with and reinforces the traditional built pattern. Where appropriate and feasible, infrastructure will be provided within hamlets and village centers to support higher intensity use of existing buildings and new infill development. The built environment in village centers will prioritize walking and bicycling over automobiles.

To achieve this, MARC will encourage and assist towns to enact effective land use plans and controls to guide growth to hamlets and village centers to the maximum extent feasible and

appropriate given factors such as the availability of infrastructure and land suitable for development. To maintain, and extend as appropriate, the traditional settlement pattern, the overall density of residential development allowed should be at least 1 dwelling unit to the acre in hamlets and 2 dwelling units to the acre in village centers.



NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL. This land use classification encompasses the traditional residential neighborhoods that extend out from our traditional downtowns and village centers. They feature primarily single- and two-family homes on small lots, although closer to the downtowns there is more diversity of housing types and multi-family housing. Many of these neighborhoods are served by municipal water

and/or sewer infrastructure. They are pedestrian-oriented, featuring low-traffic neighborhood streets (often with sidewalks), and offer convenient access to the services and amenities located in our downtowns and nearby commercial areas. The cohesive and intact traditional development patterns create a strong sense of community in these neighborhoods.

It is the overall policy of this plan to guide most of the region's residential growth into existing settlement areas in and around the traditional centers. While these neighborhoods are largely developed, there remains some opportunity for appropriately scaled infill and modest densification within most existing neighborhoods and for development of new neighborhoods within areas served or planned to be served by municipal infrastructure. There is also a need for ongoing maintenance and rehabilitation of the older housing stock in many of these neighborhoods, particularly energy-efficiency improvements.

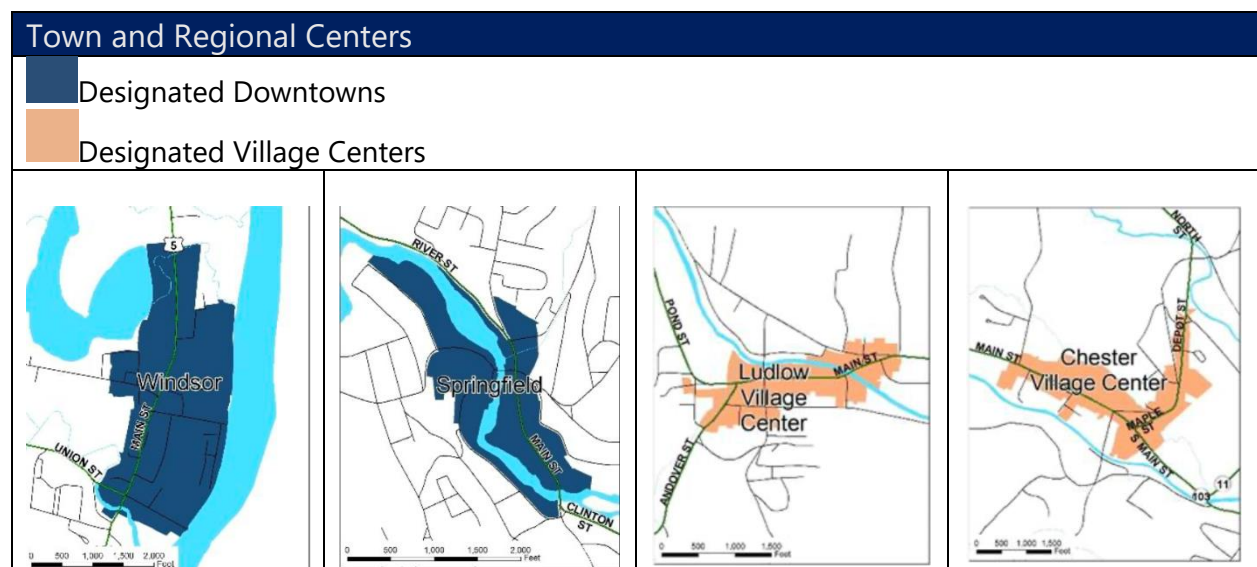
It is our vision that the neighborhood residential areas throughout the region will continue to function as they have historically – as high-density, primarily residential neighborhoods. The housing stock will be maintained and rehabilitated, as necessary. A limited amount of infill development will occur, but infill will be compatible with and not adversely affect the character or dramatically change the density of these neighborhoods. New neighborhood areas in proximity to existing centers may be created in a manner that logically extends the existing settlement pattern. The most suitable uses of neighborhood residential areas are housing, small-scale service and retail businesses that cater primarily to area residents, civic uses, and similar low-impact uses.

To achieve this, MARC will encourage and assist towns to enact effective land use plans and controls to accommodate infill and modest densification in a manner that will not dramatically alter the character of these neighborhoods. To maintain, and extend where appropriate, traditional neighborhood development patterns, local regulations and other policies or actions should seek to maintain and/or improve building quality and energy-efficiency, front yards and greenspace, and sidewalks and streetscapes in order to contribute to the quality of life and character of these neighborhoods. The density of residential development allowed in neighborhood residential areas should range from 3 to 12 dwellings per acre on average.



TOWN AND REGIONAL CENTERS. This land use classification includes the downtowns and commercial areas in our region’s four larger centers – Chester, Ludlow, Springfield, and Windsor. These centers continue to serve – as they did historically – as employment and service centers for the surrounding towns. They feature traditional downtown business districts characterized by historic buildings and settlement

patterns (multi-story buildings built at or close to the sidewalk), as well as commercial and mixed-use areas. These centers are largely served by municipal water and/or sewer infrastructure. The Town and Regional Centers shown on the Future Land Use Map are generally consistent with the 2020 boundaries for the state-designated Downtowns and the larger state-designated Village Centers as shown below.



Historically, there were distinct edges between these compact centers and the surrounding rural countryside. Auto-oriented development, particularly along the state numbered highways just outside the historic business districts and in some cases along the main streets within them, has frayed that traditional settlement pattern. As discussed in relation to the commercial nodes and corridors, the quality and character of the built environment in our downtowns and commercial areas can be preserved or enhanced through quality building and site design and the provision of streetscaping and sidewalks.

These centers have traditionally been and should continue to be the focus of growth and development in our region. They are suitable for infill development, more intensive use of existing buildings, and redevelopment of obsolete or abandoned structures or sites in a manner that is compatible with and reinforces the historic pattern, form, and character of the built environment. Revitalization of these town and regional centers is a primary goal of this plan.

It is our vision that town and regional centers will retain their historic role and character as traditional downtowns, and will be the focus of economic and community development. They will remain essential components of our region's sense of place and identity, and will host the civic uses and gathering places that sustain a sense of community. Town and regional centers may be used for a mix of commercial, industrial, civic, and high-density residential uses. The town and regional centers will remain compact with distinct edges and will not sprawl into the surrounding countryside with low-density and/or auto-oriented development along the highways that would undermine the economic viability of downtown businesses. Historic buildings will be rehabilitated and/or adapted for new uses in a manner that maintains or restores their architectural integrity. New development will be designed and sited to be compatible with and reinforce the traditional built pattern. Town and regional centers will be places where people can enjoyably and safely walk and bike – they will be designed for people rather than cars.

To achieve this, MARC will encourage and assist towns to enact effective land use plans and controls to guide future growth and development into the traditional centers. To maintain the traditional settlement pattern and encourage infill development, the overall density of development allowed should be at 4 dwelling units to the acre or higher. Local land use regulations should ensure that, in the downtown business districts, development will generally be in the form of mixed-use, multi-story buildings. These buildings should be built at or close to the edge of the sidewalk, with retail and service uses on the ground floor and office or residential uses above. Off-street surface parking will be located to the rear, side, or below buildings. While in commercial corridors, there may be single-use and single-story buildings that house retail, service, or light industrial uses that, due to their scale or character, are not well-suited to locating downtown. As these single-use, single-story buildings redevelop, it is expected that they take measures to better fit the intent of the location (e.g. add greenspace or landscaping, modify the building articulation, or increase building height). All new structures

within town and regional centers must be built to last with quality materials and architectural details that are compatible with nearby historic structures.

C. Special Use Areas

This land use chapter takes into account other future land use areas in our region that have special characteristics. These special use areas are shown on the Future Land Use Map.



RIPARIAN AREAS. The riparian areas serve as an overlay land use category, and include land along rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and wetlands throughout our region. These areas have soil and vegetation characteristics that are strongly influenced by the presence of water and that distinguish them from surrounding lands. Historically, flooding, and the eroding and depositing of sediment that results, was the

predominate force shaping riparian areas. Now, human activities such as damming or channelizing streams, filling or draining wetlands, clearing streambank vegetation, and constructing impervious surfaces has altered, and in many cases adversely impacted, the natural dynamics and functions of riparian areas. Healthy riparian areas provide multiple benefits to our region such as:

- Helping control nonpoint source pollution (run-off from developed lands) by holding and using nutrients, and reducing the amount of sediment entering our surface waters;
- Offering recreation opportunities and contributing to the scenic beauty of our landscape;
- Supplying food, cover, and water for a diversity of animals and serving as migration and travel routes between habitats for a variety of wildlife;
- Reducing downstream floodwater velocity, erosion, and sedimentation, and flood peaks; and,
- Maintaining the water table and the base flow of streams and rivers.

It is our vision that riparian areas outside the developed areas of the region will remain largely undeveloped and naturally vegetated to preserve their critical ecological and flood mitigation functions. The most suitable uses of lands within riparian areas outside our downtowns and village centers are wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, environmental education, flood attenuation and groundwater recharge, and similar low-intensity uses that leave the land in a primarily undeveloped, natural state. Little new development other than water-dependent structures such as bridges or passive recreation amenities, such as trails, will occur within

riparian areas. Existing development within riparian areas subject to damage from inundation or fluvial erosion will be flood-proofed or removed as most appropriate to reduce the risk to life and property. Rivers and streams will be reconnected to their floodplains and allowed to move naturally within their corridors to the maximum extent feasible given the location of existing infrastructure and development.

Within the developed areas of the region, it is our vision that riparian areas will be transformed into community amenities that provide recreational opportunities, are visually attractive, and serve as green infrastructure to the maximum extent feasible. The substantial investment in public infrastructure and private development within riparian areas will be safeguarded to the maximum extent feasible through flood-proofing and upstream flood attenuation and mitigation efforts.



RESORT AND RECREATION AREAS. This category also serves as an overlay, and identifies locations that were intensively developed primarily for recreational or seasonal use. Examples include the Okemo Mountain Resort and nearby seasonal homes in Ludlow, the public recreation areas on Mount Ascutney, and the densely developed summer home communities around Lake Rescue and Lake Pauline, also in Ludlow. These are areas

with

significant natural amenities that bring visitors and seasonal residents to our region, as well as enhance the quality of life for year-round residents. Careful planning is needed to balance development of the facilities and amenities needed to support a four-season tourism industry with preservation of the features and natural settings that are essential to attracting visitors.

The most suitable uses of resort and recreation areas are recreational uses, particularly those that extend the season, diversify offerings, and/or connect recreational facilities. Other tourism- and recreation-supporting uses, such as dining, lodging, vacation homes, recreation equipment rentals, guide services, and transportation providers, are also suitable provided they remain within compact areas designated for residential and/or commercial uses. However, MARC encourages, and will assist its resort communities to build strong, mutually beneficial ties between tourist destinations and nearby downtowns and village centers. One way to achieve that objective is to limit the amount of non-recreation, commercial development in resort and recreation areas and guide more of those uses to nearby downtowns or village centers.

It is our vision that the region's resort and recreation areas will support a tourism industry that will continue to attract visitors and seasonal residents by offering a variety of recreational opportunities throughout the year. They will continue to enhance the quality of life enjoyed by our region's residents and will remain essential components of the sense of place and identity in their host communities. Trail networks and other recreational amenities will be added, improved, expanded, and/or interconnected for the benefit of residents and visitors alike. Future commercial or residential development within resort and recreation areas will remain compact and will be thoughtfully sited and designed with a context sensitive approach to not degrade the scenic beauty, natural resource base and unique sense of place that our tourism industry depends upon.



INTERCHANGE AREAS. This category also serves as an overlay, and includes land around Interstate 91 Exits 7 and 8. These interchanges create opportunities and challenges for their communities and our region with respect to land use and economic development. Interchanges attract development that, if not properly planned, can have adverse impacts on the economic viability of traditional centers, traffic safety and congestion, environmental quality and natural resources, and scenic character.

With good planning and land use regulation, interchange areas can be attractive, efficient community assets that are developed in a manner that is integrated and compatible with the surrounding landscape, and that efficiently provides necessary services to travelers and residents. The most suitable uses of interchange areas are businesses that provide necessary services to the traveling public or that are otherwise transportation-related (transit or trucking providers, for example). Redevelopment and infill of previously developed sites is preferred over greenfield development (i.e. development on previously undeveloped sites).

It is our vision that the interchanges will be attractive gateways to the region that provide necessary traveler services while establishing a distinctive sense of place, minimizing congestion, and avoiding unsafe traffic conditions. They will not be characterized by a pattern of low-density, auto-oriented sprawl. While the interchanges may offer traveler accommodations and services, businesses will not compete with commercial activities within the downtowns or village centers. Efforts will be made to entice visitors into the region's downtowns and village centers where most of the dining, lodging, and similar uses will be located. Existing development sites will be retrofitted or redeveloped in a manner that increases their economic value, enhances their visual appeal, and improves the quality of buildings and site design elements. To achieve

this, MARC will encourage and assist towns to enact effective land use plans and controls to manage the amount, type, and scale of commercial activity that may occur at the interchanges and to promote high-quality site and building design.



COMMERCIAL NODES AND CORRIDORS.

This land use classification includes locations outside of traditional centers that have been developed for commercial and light industrial uses, primarily since the 1960s. This development pattern arose in response to transportation and economic changes that led many customer-oriented businesses to cater to motorists and locate along major roadways. This development

pattern is now commonly referred to as sprawl and is often viewed as undesirable in a planning context. Strip development and sprawl is a problem of our own making; it has been cheaper to design, easier to finance, faster to permit, and less complicated to build than compact, walkable, mixed-use development in our traditional centers.

These areas are often the gateways into our traditional centers that create the first impression of a community for travelers. While the services provided in these areas are often essential to the community and region (automobile dealers, for example), this development pattern undermines our basic land use goal of maintaining compact downtowns and village centers surrounded by rural farm and forest lands. This plan recognizes that our region's commercial nodes and corridors are serving an important economic function that can be distinguished from, and complementary to, the function of the commercial districts within our traditional centers. To further state planning goals, it is a policy of this plan to mitigate or avoid many of the issues associated with sprawl – such as poor access management, excessive signage, lot frontages dominated by pavement, lack of sidewalks, and low-quality, generic, single-purpose buildings – through appropriate site planning and design.

Targeted land use planning and regulation can encourage transformation of these areas from single-use, car-dominated development into attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development. (See the illustrative images in the next section that demonstrate the intent of this statement.) Many of these locations, particularly those that are served by existing water and/or sewer infrastructure, are suitable for redevelopment. Existing development sites in commercial nodes and corridors often present the potential for more intensive use in a manner more consistent with our land use goals. Redevelopment should transform these areas through improved access management and site design, provision of streetscaping and sidewalks, and

construction of higher-quality, distinctive, multi-purpose buildings. Redevelopment and infill of previously developed sites is preferred over further greenfield development.

It is our goal that the region's commercial nodes and corridors will be transformed to function efficiently and adapt to changes in transportation modes, economic trends, and lifestyle preferences over time; and that a pattern of low-density, auto-oriented sprawl will not expand further into the region's rural areas. Existing development sites will be retrofitted or redeveloped in a manner that increases their economic value, enhances their visual appeal, and improves the quality of buildings and site design elements. Where appropriate and feasible, infrastructure will be improved or provided to support higher intensity use in these already developed areas. The commercial nodes and corridors will become places that people can safely walk and bike around as well as drive to.

To achieve this, MARC will encourage and assist towns to enact effective land use plans and controls to guide businesses of different types and scales to the appropriate location – downtown or village center vs. commercial node or corridor – and to promote high-quality site and building design. The most suitable uses of commercial nodes and corridors are larger-scale or land-intensive commercial and light industrial uses that are not compatible with the scale, settlement pattern, and pedestrian-orientation of our traditional downtowns and village centers and multi-unit housing located in proximity to employment, services, and transit. Where deemed desirable, commercial nodes and corridors may be designated for mixed-use (residential and commercial) development.



landmarks.

INSTITUTIONAL. This land use classification encompasses several sites and facilities throughout the region that are dedicated to public or quasi-public purposes such as airports, prisons, schools, and hospitals. These lands provide essential services or serve necessary civic functions, and most are likely to continue to do so. Many feature purpose-built structures that have unique characteristics and/or are considered local

It is our vision that most of these sites and facilities will continue in their current use, potentially with some upgrades or expansions over time, as necessary. If a special use site or facilities will no longer be used for a public or quasi-public purpose, this plan encourages its adaptive re-use in a manner that will be beneficial to the host community (provide needed housing or employment opportunities, for example) and contribute to the tax base.



INDUSTRIAL AREAS. This land use classification encompasses areas developed or designated for industrial use. Industry, particularly the machine tool industry in the Precision Valley, was a defining force that historically shaped land use and development patterns in parts of our region. Today, industry in our region tends to be smaller-scale and more diverse, increasingly based on local or artisanal products and the “Vermont”

brand, with less visibility and impact on surrounding lands. Industrial lands remain a critical economic development asset, particularly those with access to infrastructure (water, sewer, three-phase power, fiber optic lines, etc.) and to highway, rail, or air transportation.

This plan supports the full and efficient utilization of designated industrial areas to support and grow the regional economy by attracting and retaining quality businesses that create jobs and operate without adversely impacting surrounding land uses or the environment. The most suitable uses of industrial areas are larger-scale or higher-impact commercial and industrial uses that need larger sites or specialized facilities or infrastructure, or that generate substantial truck traffic or have other off-site impacts that require them to be buffered from residential neighborhoods and our downtowns and village centers. Redevelopment and infill of previously developed sites is preferred over greenfield development.

This plan also recognizes that the types of industrial uses occurring in the region have evolved away from heavy manufacturing towards artisanal or high-tech production. Smaller-scale and lower-impact industrial uses may not necessarily need to be in separate zones, and may be appropriate in mixed use areas. Similarly, traditional industrial sites such as mills or warehouses in our downtowns and village centers may be suitable for adaptive re-use – whether as housing or mixed-use commercial space.

It is our vision that the region’s industrial areas will retain their economic role and function principally as sites for industrial and non-retail commercial uses. Underutilized industrial sites, particularly those with good access to infrastructure and transportation networks, will be revitalized and adapted for new employment generating activities. Where appropriate and feasible, infrastructure will be improved or provided to support higher intensity use in these already developed areas. To achieve this, MARC will encourage and assist towns to enact effective land use plans and controls to guide industrial and other compatible commercial uses to these areas, and to guide residential and retail uses that are not compatible with industrial activities away from these areas.

D. Development Standards

Development Standards are intended to direct how future development and redevelopment can occur in ways that will achieve the goals in this Regional Plan. (See the discussion on Substantial Regional Impact in Chapter 11 for more detail and implications for Act 250 proposals.) Unless otherwise specified, each standard applies to all future land use categories. The term “compact centers,” used in the land use goal and development standards, generally includes the more developed portions of the region: Town and Regional Centers, Hamlets and Village Centers, and often Residential Neighborhoods. The term “rural countryside” includes the least developed areas: Conservation, Working Lands, and Rural Residential areas.

1. Land development will be consistent with the Future Land Use Map and the corresponding Land Use Classifications. Table 3.1 summarizes the future land use category descriptions, but the future land use map and full narrative descriptions should be referred to for the full meaning of the future land use plan for this region.

TABLE 3.1: SUMMARY OF FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES		
Category	Density	Description
Town and Regional Centers	Highest: 4 units per acre or higher	Historic, traditional, compact, larger community centers; Focus of economic and community development; Mix of commercial, industrial, civic, and high-density residential uses; Served by infrastructure; Designed for people rather than cars.
Neighborhood Residential	High: 3 to 12 dwellings per acre	Dense, walkable residential neighborhoods surrounding a larger community center; Served by municipal infrastructure; Where new housing is desired.
Hamlets and Village Centers	Moderate: 1 dwelling unit to the acre (Hamlets); 2 dwelling units to the acre (Village Centers)	Historic, traditional, compact, smaller community centers; Focal points, hearts of their towns; Mix of residential uses, smaller-scale commercial, civic buildings, gathering places that sustain a sense of community; Infrastructure is present or desired to support compact settlement patterns.

Rural Residential	Low-Moderate: 1 dwelling unit per 2 acres	Minimize development impacts to maintain rural countryside/rural character; Provide primarily single-family housing in a rural setting that maintains open space between developed sites and offers views of the surrounding natural or agricultural landscape.
Working Lands	Very Low: 1 dwelling unit per 10 acres	Actively managed portion of the rural countryside/working landscape; Avoid fragmentation of productive farm and forest lands; Sustain the rural landscape and traditional rural way of life.
Conservation	Very Low: 1 dwelling unit per 10 acres	Least developed portion of the rural countryside; Contribute to the environmental, social, and economic well-being of our region; Remain in a largely undeveloped state for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.
Industrial Areas	Variable	Larger-scale or higher-impact industrial and non-retail commercial uses; Specialized facilities or infrastructure; Off-site impacts that require them to be buffered from residential neighborhoods and community centers.
Commercial Nodes and Corridors	Variable	Transform from single-use, car-dominated development into attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development; Larger-scale or land-intensive commercial and light industrial uses that are not compatible with community centers; New multi-unit housing in proximity to employment, services, and transit.

Institutional	Variable	Public or quasi-public uses (e.g. airports, prisons, schools, and hospitals); Expected to continue in their current use; Adaptive re-use may be appropriate if it is beneficial to the community.
Resort and Recreation Areas	Variable	Support a successful tourism industry throughout the year; Development will remain compact and designed and sited in a context sensitive approach.
Interchange Areas	Variable	Attractive gateways to the region; Provide necessary traveler services.
Riparian Areas	Variable	Largely undeveloped, vegetated riparian areas outside of existing developed areas; Allow flexibility within developed areas (e.g. Compact Community Centers, Commercial Nodes and Corridors) to accommodate green infrastructure along with recreation facilities, maintenance of existing infrastructure and redevelopment of existing structures.

2. It is desirable that Municipal and other government buildings are located within **compact centers** in order to maintain and encourage the vitality of downtown and village areas, unless they do not allow for public visitation (e.g. water and wastewater facilities) or by their nature they need to be elsewhere (e.g. a shelter in the town forest).

3. Any land development occurring within **compact centers** must be compatible with the traditional settlement pattern, including the location, form, and scale of buildings in relation to the street and to each other.



NOT THIS: SUBURBAN PATTERN



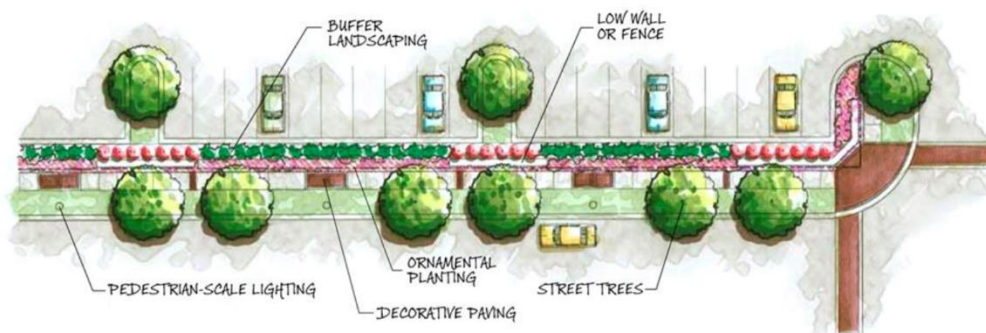
THIS: TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD PATTERN



THIS: SHARED PARKING LOCATED TO THE REAR OR SIDE OF BUILDINGS WITH CROSS ACCESS BETWEEN LOTS

4. Subdivisions in **neighborhood residential areas** or in areas **adjacent to compact centers** must be designed to follow and extend traditional neighborhood development patterns. To achieve this, new or extended neighborhoods should feature small, generally narrow lots of varying size and frontage accessed by a network of interconnected streets. Houses should be located close to the street with shallow front yards. Porches, low fences, street trees and/or front yard landscaping should be used to create an attractive, walkable streetscape. Suburban-style subdivisions that feature a regular, consistent pattern of lots, a limited number of building designs, excessively wide streets or driveways, and/or cul-de-sacs are discouraged.

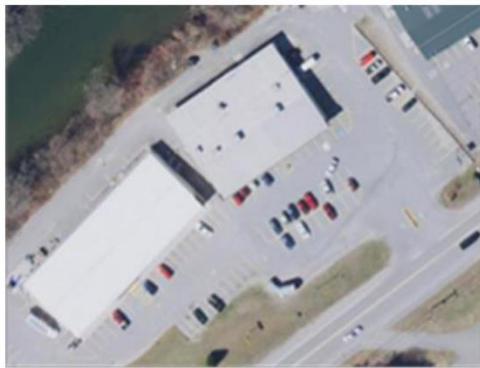
5. Off-street surface parking in **compact centers** must be located to the side or rear of buildings and not between the building and the street. Where lots are devoted entirely to parking or existing front parking cannot feasibly be eliminated or relocated, it should be separated and screened from the sidewalk and/or street with landscaping and/or decorative fencing.
6. New or reconstructed streets within **compact centers** must be designed to safely accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists to the maximum extent feasible.
7. As an element of any proposed land development, sidewalks within **compact centers** must be extended and repaired as necessary to safely accommodate pedestrians and to be accessible for all users.
8. Sites in **compact centers** as well as in **interchange areas** and **commercial nodes and corridors** must be designed to enhance the aesthetic character of the street or highway through well-designed signage, streetscaping and front yard landscaping, parking and service areas, and buildings.



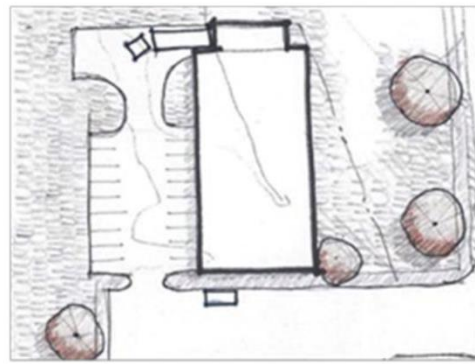
THIS: FRONT PARKING SCREENED TO ENHANCE THE STREETScape

9. Expanses of asphalt must not dominate the view from the street or highway in **compact centers, interchange areas** and **commercial nodes and corridors**. Large parking areas must be screened and landscaped, broken up into smaller units divided by landscaping, and/or located to the side or rear of buildings.

10. When any previously developed sites are modified substantially, access management and stormwater management must be upgraded as necessary to meet current standards.
11. Site plans within **commercial nodes and corridors, interchange areas, and industrial areas** must implement access management techniques such as shared drives, cross access, parallel service drives to the maximum extent feasible given physical conditions and existing development patterns on the site and adjacent lots.



Not This: Typical "Big Box" design



This: Building façade oriented to the street, parking to the rear of the building, sidewalk connections to the existing sidewalk, street trees.

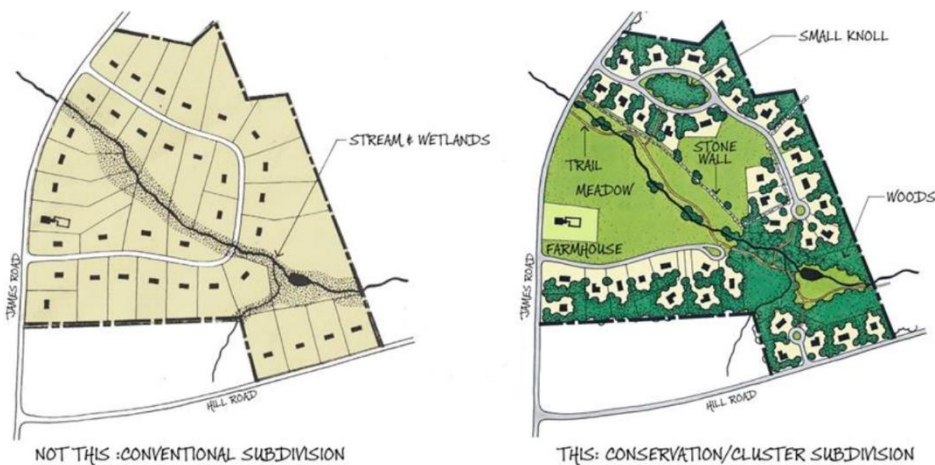
12. New site plans within **commercial nodes and corridors, interchange areas, and industrial areas** must include sidewalks and other facilities as appropriate to the location that accommodate multi-modal travel. Extension of sidewalks, multi-use paths and/or bike lanes along major corridors is strongly encouraged to facilitate connections between commercial sites and to nearby downtown / village center areas and residential neighborhoods.
13. New uses to be established in the **interchange areas** will be limited to those that do not compete with allowed businesses in a compact center unless it caters to visitor or traveler's services.
14. **Resort and recreation areas** will have transit service linking them to nearby downtowns or village centers.

15. Land development in the **rural countryside** must be sited and designed to minimize fragmentation of priority forest blocks and habitat connectors, and to minimize adverse impacts on natural resources and the ecological services they provide, including but not limited to, wetlands, floodplains, river corridors, rare, threatened and endangered species, significant natural communities, elevations above 2,500 feet, and slopes steeper than 25%.

16. In **conservation** and **working land areas**, developments on slopes between 15- 24% will be designed and located on the site to minimize adverse erosion and storm water impacts by incorporating Low Impact Development (LID) or other strategies, including:
 - a. Development of a lot or site shall require the least amount of site disturbance and reduce the lot coverage and building footprints as much as possible in order to maintain the natural hydrologic processes and reduce the volume and water quality impacts of the proposed development.
 - b. Roads, driveways, buildings, and utilities are encouraged to be located on the flattest portions of the site.
 - c. Minimize crossing steep slopes with roads and driveways and lay them out to follow topographic contours to minimize soil and vegetation disturbance.
 - d. Minimize the length of driveways.
 - e. Reduce the total length of residential streets by examining alternative street layouts to determine the best option for increasing the number of homes per unit length.
 - f. The scale of development will not exceed the development capacity of the site.

17. Resource extraction operations must be designed and managed to avoid, minimize or mitigate (listed in preferential order) impacts to natural resources, transportation facilities and nearby land uses. Applications for new or expanded extraction operations must at a minimum include: an erosion control and stormwater management plan to ensure that the operation will not result in sedimentation of nearby surface waters and wetlands, or other impacts to water quality, adjoining property and public infrastructure downslope from the site; a landscaping plan that maintains existing mature vegetation or establishes naturalistic plantings to screen the operation as viewed from public vantage points and nearby property; and a reclamation plan to return the site to a condition suitable for other land uses allowed on the site.

18. Rural enterprises, such as value-added processing and direct marketing of farm and forest products, that support the economic viability of keeping farm and forest land in productive use are encouraged. Rural enterprises must be similar in scale and intensity to traditional farming or forestry operations, and must not result in undue off-site impacts, such as noise or traffic, (that are not customary) in the immediate area. Rural enterprises must have a direct and significant connection to local farming and forestry operations, and should not be dependent on importing non-local agricultural or forest products.



19. Any residential development occurring in the **rural countryside** must be sited and designed to minimize conversion and fragmentation of productive land, and to protect rural character. To achieve this, thoughtful site designs that cluster house lot (e.g. conservation subdivisions), locate homes off the land best suited for farming or forestry, and preserve open space are preferred, as is use of shared driveways and other infrastructure. Suburban-style subdivisions that feature a regular, consistent pattern of lots, a limited number of building designs, excessively wide streets or driveways, and/or cul-de-sacs are not consistent with our region's rural character.



20. Any new or expanded transportation facilities or utility infrastructure in the **rural countryside** must be located within existing corridors to the maximum extent feasible. When a new corridor is the only feasible option, it must be sited and designed to follow the natural grade and existing contours to the maximum extent feasible, and to minimize the amount of soil disturbed, forest canopy opened (both during and after construction), land taken out of production, and impervious surface created.
21. Water and wastewater infrastructure provided along state highways and Class 2 town highways **outside of existing compact centers** should not encourage or facilitate sprawl.
22. New development must manage all run-off from developed areas through green stormwater management practices to the maximum extent feasible given the physical characteristics of the site, and previously developed sites must be retrofit as necessary and feasible to provide improved stormwater management.
23. Preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive re-use of historic buildings in a manner that preserves their architectural character is strongly encouraged.
24. Rehabilitation and re-use of structurally sound buildings listed in the national or state registers of historic places, or listed as a contributing structure within a historic district, is preferred whenever feasible and such buildings generally should not be demolished unless the property owner demonstrates that the demolition is part of a redevelopment plan for the property that will have significant community or economic development benefits.
25. To promote flood resilient communities:
 - a. New development in the floodway area is prohibited.
 - b. New development in river corridor areas within compact centers must not exacerbate or divert the flow of flood waters, increase the risk of fluvial erosion hazards, and endanger the health, safety and welfare of the public or of riparian

- owners during flooding. All other new development in river corridor areas will be avoided.
- c. Any modifications to existing development in identified floodway and river corridors will maintain the existing distance between the existing primary building and the top of bank².
 - d. When rebuilt, substantially damaged structures in floodway or river corridors shall relocate to a location on the lot that is outside of the floodway or river corridors. If no such location on that lot exists, the structure must be relocated as far away from the hazard area as possible.
 - e. New development in identified floodway fringe (i.e. floodplain) areas will locate on a portion of the lot that is outside of the floodway fringe hazard area. If no such location on that lot exists, the structure must be located as far away from the hazard area as possible.
 - f. Development in identified floodway fringe (i.e. floodplain) areas will not significantly increase the peak discharge of the river or stream within or downstream from the area of development and endanger the health, safety, or welfare of the public or riparian owners during flooding.
 - g. The capacities of drainage channels and detention facilities will be maintained, and substantial reductions in flood storage through wetland destruction must be avoided.
 - h. The protection and restoration of floodplains, and upland forested areas³ that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be encouraged.
 - i. New berms that restrict rivers and streams access to adjacent wetlands and floodplains are prohibited, unless warranted to protect public safety. Efforts to improve river and stream access to adjacent wetlands and floodplains shall be made as appropriate based upon hydrologic studies.

26. When any alternative exists, developments will not be sited on soils that are susceptible to flooding or on soils that are not suited for foundations and/or septic systems.

² "Top of bank" refers to the point along a stream bank where an abrupt change in slope is evident, and where the stream is generally able to overflow the banks and enter the adjacent floodplain during flows at or exceeding the average annual high water stage.

³ Upland forested areas are described in the Flood Resilience section of this Plan