

CH 4: COMMUNITY UTILITIES AND FACILITIES

In the Mount Ascutney Region there are numerous infrastructure systems and other public services that are essential to the health and welfare of our citizens, the functioning of communities, and to support the economy. This includes such things as water and wastewater systems, communication technologies, electricity, solid waste management, health and human services, emergency services, and other civic facilities and services. Transportation facilities and services are addressed separately in Volume 2 of this Plan.

The purpose of this chapter is to document existing facilities and services; evaluate how they support or could better support local, regional, and state planning goals; and to identify priority investments. Vermont's planning goals (24 V.S.A. §4302) seek "to maintain the historic pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside." A critical focus for this chapter is planning how the existing facilities and services should be changed to better serve community needs as well as to support this land use goal. For example, villages without adequate water or wastewater systems will continue to struggle with village revitalization efforts and support affordable housing developments.

Utilities and Facilities Goals

To plan for and provide public facilities and services that meet the current and future needs of the Region and its individual towns and villages. To accomplish this in such manner that maintains the historic settlement pattern of compact centers surrounded by a rural countryside and supports and promotes the economic vitality and development goals of the individual communities and those of the Region. To achieve this goal we will:

1. Promote public water and sewer infrastructure in community centers and other areas designated for growth in the Regional Plan and municipal plans.
2. Facilitate and support broadband improvements so that every household in the Region has access to a fast, efficient and affordable broadband connection at speeds of 100mbps (upload)/100mbps (download).
3. Provide other public facilities and services – such as solid waste, health and safety, communications, and educational services – to all inhabitants of the Region in a financially sustainable, energy efficient, and equitable manner.
4. Maintain, enhance, and promote recreational, entertainment, and cultural opportunities for all residents of and visitors to the region.
5. Promote and support efforts to meet the demand for quality, safe, and affordable child care across the Region. (See also Economic Development and Health Chapters goals and policies)

A. Electricity, Water, and Sewer

The efficient use of community water and sewer services, and electricity, is vital to the health and welfare of regional residents. The placement and use of these services (and of the transportation network) often determine the character and development patterns of a town. Therefore, towns should carefully plan the placement of service lines to correspond to the areas in which they would most like to see development occur.

1. Electrical Transmission

TABLE 4.1 ELECTRICAL TRANSMISSION SERVICE PROVIDERS BY TOWN		
Towns	Electric Service Providers	
	Ludlow Electric	Green Mountain Power
Andover		X
Baltimore		X
Cavendish	X	X
Chester		X
Ludlow	X	X*
Reading		X
Springfield		X
Weathersfield		X
West Windsor		X
Windsor		X

Electric transmission service in the Region is provided by the Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO). Electric distribution service is provided by Green Mountain Power (GMP) and the Village of Ludlow Electric Light Department. (Electricity producers are discussed in the Energy Chapter.) Electricity, like water and sewer, is an important service for present and future development. The provision of electric utility services enables developers to plan for building structures and developing land at significant cost reductions and increased efficiencies. It is therefore important to place transmission lines and substations in areas that have been designated as desirable for growth.

Transmission lines transport electricity from various generators to customers through switching stations and substations. The larger network of transmission lines and stations are referred to as "the grid." In 2011, a VELCO Connecticut River Valley Study revealed deficiencies in the Coolidge to Ascutney transmission line. Efforts are ongoing to address these issues.

Customers can help defer costly transmission line upgrades and the construction of new power plant capacity through the use of energy efficient appliances and by taking measures to reduce their electricity use during peak demand periods. Other demand side management efforts include encouraging "green buildings," siting new houses to maximize solar advantage,

decentralized energy production such as generating electricity for individual residential or commercial buildings, or through energy conservation measures. (See the Regional Energy Plan, Volume 3 for conservation strategies.)

Power generating facilities and electrical transmission facilities are approved by the Public Utility Commission (PUC) under 30 V.S.A. §248 (Section 248). Projects subject to Section 248 review, including net-metered private wind turbines, are exempt from local regulations. However, the impacted municipality and regional planning commission may participate as interveners in the proceedings. Under Section 248 review process, projects are evaluated to determine if they serve the general public good and if they are consistent with the Regional Plan. In 2018, MARC’s Energy Plan received a Certificate of Energy Compliance from the Vermont Public Service Department, granting the Plan “substantial deference” in Section 248 proceedings. See the **Regional Energy Plan** for more.

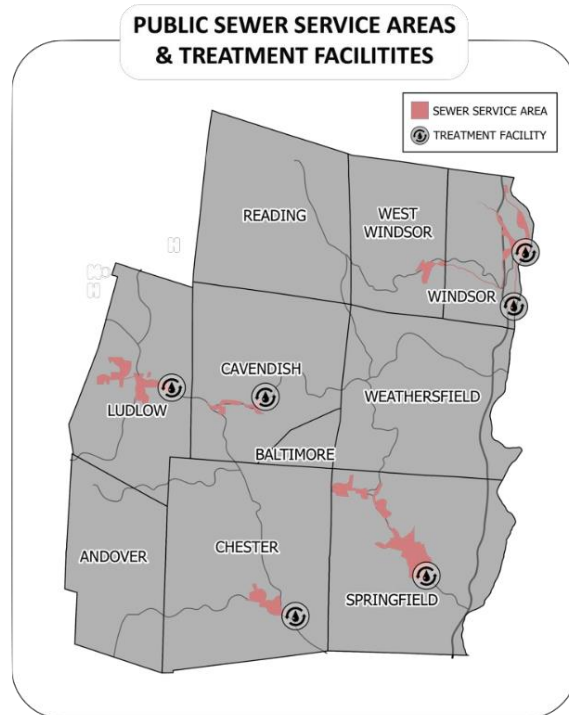
2. Community Water and Sewer Service

Availability of community water and wastewater service is essential to meet Vermont’s planning goal to maintain compact centers and a rural countryside. Regional centers listed in the Land Use chapter of this Plan were chosen largely because of their proximity to existing services, or potential for the efficient creation of new or expanded systems. These centers represent the Region’s highest priorities for directing growth through the creation of additional municipal water and wastewater capacity. (See the Land Use chapter for more on smart growth, growth centers, and sprawl.)

TABLE 4.2 MUNICIPALLY OWNED PUBLIC WATER SUPPLIES IN THE MOUNT ASCUTNEY REGION	
Town/System Name	Population Served ⁴
Cavendish & Proctorsville Villages	950
Chester Village	3,200
Ludlow Village	2,818
Springfield	9,800
Windsor	2,350
Ascutney Fire District #2	485

⁴ Source: Vermont Water Supply Division; SDWIS Program, August January 2021.

Apart from the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund,⁵ limited public infrastructure funding opportunities mean that small communities are often limited in their ability to encourage dense, mixed-use development in villages not currently served by water and wastewater facilities. For this reason, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) presents a unique opportunity for towns to invest in water and sewer infrastructure. Lack of shared or centralized water or wastewater service make the further growth of many villages in the Region difficult or impossible. Perkinsville and Felchville both face challenges due to a lack of public water and wastewater services. While Ascutney Village does have a public water system, lack of a public wastewater system limits further growth. Currently, Cavendish, Chester, Ludlow, Springfield, and Windsor host public water and wastewater facilities. The town of Windsor provides wastewater service to the former Ascutney Mountain Resort area and Brownsville Village. With the exception of the Weston Heights system in Windsor, all wastewater facilities in the region operate around or under 50% of their design capacities and have sufficient excess capacity to meet their needs for the foreseeable future. However, certain industries such as breweries can put a greater strain on treatment plants due to the high concentrations of nutrients in their effluent regardless of overall flow volume. Pre-treatment, project phasing, or capacity upgrades may be a necessary local permit condition to accommodate certain new industries or developments.



Improvements continue to be made to wastewater treatment facilities in the region to improve their operations and increase capacity. Chester completed a \$1.1 million upgrade of its wastewater treatment facility in 2007 and Ludlow completed a \$2.9 million upgrade in 2020. Springfield completed system upgrades in 2004, expanding its facility from 2.2 to 2.4 million gallons per day and improving phosphorus treatment. Springfield also expanded its infrastructure along VT Route 11 to the Southern State Correctional Facility. Since a pressure reduction valve was necessary to tap into a force line, it is unlikely that many of the properties along the line will connect to it; therefore, it is not seen as a contributor to sprawl. Springfield's public water system is currently operating under a temporary permit, and the Town is actively working to address low pressure problem areas. Springfield has voted to allocate the majority

⁵ <https://dec.vermont.gov/water-investment/water-financing/cwsrf>

of its ARPA funding to replacing the water main on Clinton Street from Seavers Brook Road to South Street.

Towns are encouraged to engage in capital planning for their water and wastewater systems to meet requirements of state statute, maintain current levels of service, and to support planned future growth. Carefully planned investments coupled with appropriate zoning provisions can encourage smart growth and discourage scattered and strip development.

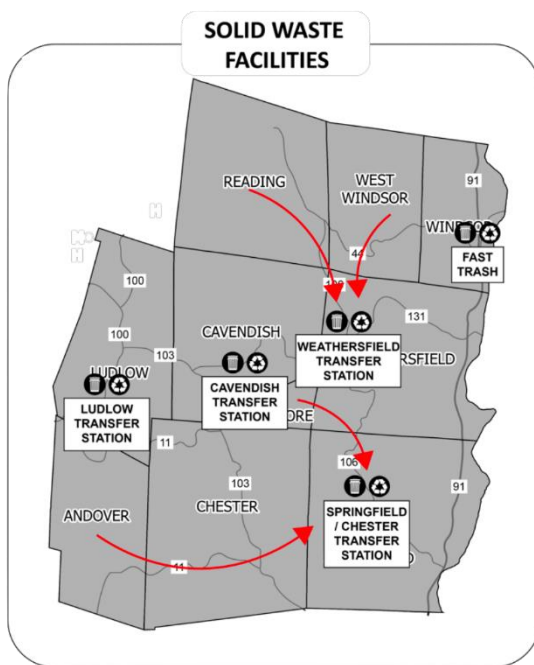
3. Private Water and Sewer Systems

In addition to municipal water and wastewater systems, the Region is also served by privately owned wells and on-site septic systems. There are a total of 50 non-municipal water systems in the Region⁶, examples of which include those serving mobile home parks, condominiums, schools, industrial sites, and campgrounds.

De-centralized septic systems may allow for greater densities where municipal wastewater systems are not available. A decentralized system is where a cluster of structures share a common wastewater system for either on-site or off-site disposal. *Wastewater Solutions for Vermont Communities* (Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs, January 2008) is a good guidance document for solving community wastewater problems. In some cases, the establishment of a public or community water system serving village lots with on-site septic systems may facilitate increased densities. Monitoring to ensure the efficiency of these systems is important for the protection of the water supply, which is essential to the health and welfare of the Region.

⁶ Source: Vermont Water Supply Division; SDWIS Program, August January 2021.

B. Solid Waste Facilities



Until its dissolution on June 30, 2007, the New Hampshire/Vermont Solid Waste Project was a bi-state agency, consisting of two districts and serving a total of 29 towns in New Hampshire and Vermont. The districts were formally organized in 1981. Two facilities were constructed in New Hampshire, including a waste to energy facility in 1987 and an ash monofill in 1988. At that time, the Project contracted with Wheelabrator Claremont, Inc., to incinerate solid waste from its member towns' residential, institutional, and commercial sources. All of the towns in the Region are part of the Southern Windsor/Windham Counties Solid Waste Management District (District). See the District's website at

www.vtsolidwastedistrict.org for more




information.

In 1987, Vermont legislature passed Act 78, a revision to state solid waste law that recognized the environmental and economic impacts of landfilling and incinerating an ever-increasing waste stream, and articulated policies encouraging reduction, reuse, and efficient disposal of solid waste. State law also defines a role for regional planning commissions in solid waste planning, conditioning certification of solid waste facilities on conformance with a regional plan.

All Vermont municipalities, either individually or as part of a solid waste district or an intermunicipal association, are required by Vermont law to adopt a Solid Waste Implementation Plan (SWIP). The SWIP documents town or district waste management facilities and articulates how solid waste will be managed over the subsequent five years and must be in compliance or consistent with the State goals, as well as in accordance with any municipal or regional plan, prepared and adopted pursuant to 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117.

In conformance with Act 78, the District adopted a Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan in 1993. On June 2, 2008, the District received pre-approval from ANR of its revised SWIP and adopted the SWIP that year after two public hearings. Subsequently, ANR approved the District's updated SWIPs in 2013 and 2018.

In 2012, the Vermont Legislature unanimously passed the Universal Recycling Law (Act 148), which bans three major categories of materials from Vermonters' trash bins:

- ["blue bin" recyclables](#) 
- [leaf and yard debris; clean wood](#) 
- [food scraps \(organics; compostable kitchen wastes\)](#) 

Act 148 was phased in over the course of five years, 2015 – 2020, with updates made in 2018 and 2019:

1. Beginning October 1, 2019, unclaimed bottle bill deposit fees (escheats) are collected and remitted to the Department of Taxes, and deposited into the Clean Water Fund.
2. Effective July 1, 2020, Single Use Products Ban of plastic straws, plastic stirrers, single-use plastic bags, and expanded polystyrene ("Styrofoam") food and beverage containers

1. Household Hazardous Waste Collections

The District sponsors two, one-day Hazardous Household Waste Collection events per year, at which residents and businesses from all member towns can safely dispose of hazardous household waste materials that are banned from incinerators and landfills. There is no pre-registration or fee for residents, but businesses are required to pay a fee and pre-register for all collection events. The District is in the process of constructing a permanent facility at the Springfield Transfer Station. Once this facility is open, much more household hazardous waste will be able to be disposed of, diverting it from the waste stream.

In order to ensure that solid waste management in the Region protects the environment, is economically efficient, and safeguards the health of the Region's residents, the goals, policies, and recommendations at the end of this chapter are adopted.

C. Community Health and Safety Resources

The health and safety of residents are of primary importance within any community. The provision of adequate services and facilities, including hospitals, ambulances, clinics, elderly care, convalescent homes, senior citizen centers, psychiatric care, police and fire protection, and detention facilities, helps to ensure a safe and healthy social environment. For a more in-depth discussion of public health in the Region beyond services and facilities see the Health Chapter.

1. Hospitals

Health care for the Region is provided through a variety of facilities and services, including two hospitals, medical clinics, and various facilities located outside the Region. Springfield Hospital is a 25-bed facility that provides a full-range of inpatient and outpatient care including 24-hour emergency services. The Hospital also provides care through the Windham Center, a 10 bed,

inpatient psychiatric center in Bellows Falls. Springfield Medical Care Systems (SMCS) collaborates with the Hospital and provides adult day care and specialty clinics operated in collaboration with Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) and Cheshire Hospital. Mount Ascutney Hospital in Windsor is affiliated with Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, and provides 35 beds and a variety of services, including 24-hour emergency medical facilities, acute care, rehabilitation services and specialty clinics. Medical clinics are located in Chester, Springfield, and Ludlow. Residents also commute to additional facilities in Vermont, including the Mountain Valley Health Center in Londonderry and Rutland Regional Medical Center. Several hospitals in New Hampshire also provide service to the Region, including Alice Peck Day Hospital in Lebanon, Valley Regional Hospital in Claremont, and DHMC in Lebanon. Residents must travel to DHMC, Cheshire Medical Center in Keene, NH, or other hospitals outside of the region for specialized care, such as dialysis or radiation treatments.

2. Nursing Homes and Assisted Living

The Vermont Health Care Association currently lists two nursing homes, one residential care facility, and two assisted living facilities in the Region as members (see **Table 4.3**). There is a high demand for more elderly care and housing facilities in the Region, and that need is expected to grow during the next several years (see the Housing chapter for more information).

TABLE 4.3 NURSING HOMES, RESIDENTIAL AND ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES IN THE MOUNT ASCUTNEY REGION				
Facility Name	Location	Services	Number of Beds	Demand
Gill Odd Fellows Home	Ludlow	Nursing	46	High
Springfield Health & Rehab Center	Springfield	Nursing	102	High
Cedar Hill Health Care Center	Windsor	Nursing	39	High
Village at Cedar Hill	Windsor	Assisted Living	20	High
Stoughton House- Historic Homes of Runnemedede	Windsor	Assisted Living	27	High
Evarts House- Historic Homes of Runnemedede	Windsor	Residential	12	High

Source: MARC, Staff at the above facilities, 2020

Increasing numbers of seniors prefer to “age in place”.⁷ Significant investment in public transportation, home care and other services is necessary to provide for elders and persons with disabilities to age in place safely and comfortably. The 2016 *Vermont Elders & Persons with Disability Transportation Program Review* report emphasized the need for additional funding for transportation services for elders “aging in place”.

⁷ https://www.vhfa.org/documents/publications/housing_elderly.pdf

3. Correctional Facilities

Southern State Correctional Facility in Springfield is the only correctional facility located in the region following the closure of the Southeast State Correctional Facility in Windsor in 2017. According to a May 2020 report from the Vermont Department of Corrections, the Springfield facility currently houses 337 male inmates, occupying approximately 89% of the facility's 377 available beds. A committee made up of state, regional, and local stakeholders, including MARC, are currently planning for the adaptive reuse of the Windsor facility. Land may also be available at the Southern State Correctional Facility for commercial redevelopment.

See the Emergency Management chapter for emergency services in the Region.

D. Communications Facilities

TABLE 4.4 COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE PROVIDERS											
Utility Type	Service Providers	And.	Balt.	Cav.	Che.	Lud.	Rea.	Spring.	Wea.	West Winds.	Winds.
Telephone	Comcast (Xfinity)			X		X		X*	X*	X	X
	VTel				X			X			
	TDS		X	X		X			X*		
	Consolidated Comm.	X		X	X		X*	X*	X	X	X
Cable	TDS			X							
	Comcast			X		X		X*	X*	X	X
Local Access	SAPA				X			X	X		
	Okemo Valley TV			X		X					
	Windsor On-air	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	VTel*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Broadband	Comcast (Xfinity)			X		X		X*	X*	X	X
	TDS	X	X	X		X		X	X*		
	Consolidated Comm.	X		X	X		X*	X*	X*	X*	X
	HughesNet	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	EC Fiber						X			X	X
	Viasat	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Wavecomm	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
VTTEL	X				X			X			

Communications facilities are an essential service for most Vermont residents and businesses. Countless economic, social, and cultural benefits are available to communities that possess free

and open access to people and ideas in other parts of the world. Developing the necessary communications infrastructure and access to these services, such as broadband, is an integral component of economic development and land use planning. The COVID-19 public health emergency emphasized the importance of broadband access when in-person economic and educational activities are restricted.

1. Telecommunications

a. Land-Line Telephone Services

Over ninety percent (90%) of Vermont residents had one landline telephone in their household, according to the 2018 Vermont Telecommunications Plan prepared by the Vermont Department of Public Service. While mobile phones and email are now everyday means of communication, land-line phones continue to provide critical functions, including 911 emergency services and health care information networks. In the Region, these services are provided by four providers: Comcast (Xfinity), VTel, TDS, and Consolidated Communications (formerly FairPoint).

b. Wireless Communication Facilities

The Department of Public Service, records 22 telecommunications facilities approved by the Vermont Public Utility Commission (PUC) under 30 V.S.A. § 248a between 2011 and 2017⁸. The majority are located in Ludlow. A 2018 Wireless Drive Test conducted by the Department of Public Service collected wireless service data along State Highways, for each of Vermont's six facility based operating providers: AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, US Cellular, Verizon Wireless and VTel Wireless. The measurements ranged from No Service to Great Service at a download speed of over 10 Mbps (megabits per second). In the Region, service was generally worse along state routes in western areas, especially in Reading, Cavendish, and Chester.⁹ Improving wireless service in the region is vital not only for convenience but to improve public safety. Public safety agencies, such as emergency medical services, fire, and police departments, rely on wireless communications and telecommunications to provide essential services, disseminate vital information, and respond to emergencies.

⁸ A map showing locations of approved facilities is available here:

<https://publicservice.vermont.gov/content/tower-locations>

⁹ The resulting report can be found here:

https://publicservice.vermont.gov/sites/dps/files/documents/Mobile%20Wireless%20Coverage%20in%20VT_Jan%202019.pdf

The accompanying map can be found here:

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=444a3d49c2374d509958f1c0e1d0d21b>

Network infrastructure must be developed in an efficient, safe, and thoughtful manner. Possible impacts upon scenic and cultural resources, aesthetics, and public health should all be considered during the planning process.

(1) Telecommunications Act of 1996

Congress enacted the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which called for the rapid deployment of advanced telecommunications and information technologies and services. The Act significantly limited communities' traditional zoning and health authorities over the siting of towers, giving the FCC almost sole power to regulate a variety of environmental siting issues including public health concerns.

Wireless telecommunication facilities require near "line of sight" access from the user to a tower to avoid disconnected calls. In addition, the new technology, PCS and SMRS in particular, operate at a low frequency with a range of only one and half to two miles. Our Region's topography dictates that these facilities are located at close intervals, resulting in more locations.

(2) Local and Regional Planning

Thoughtful local and regional planning, which includes viewshed analysis, should be done for the inevitable siting and development of future wireless communications facilities. The Vermont League of Cities and Towns has prepared a Model Wireless Telecommunications Facilities Bylaw. Contact the RPC office if your town would like a copy. The MARC can also assist towns in understanding the limitations of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and how Act 250 applies, identifying which ridge lines and viewsheds to preserve, determining alternative locations and designs that could mitigate negative impacts, and outlining provisions for the removal of a facility when it is no longer needed. 24 V.S.A. § 4412(9) authorizes local administrative review for telecommunication facilities with no or de minimis impacts.

2. Television, and Other Media

While television and radio are largely used for entertainment purposes, they are also a key part of the communications system in the Region. Both play a role in accessing information and emergency broadcasting. Cable television is available in at least a portion of eight towns in the Region (see Table 4.4). There are two satellite television providers that can serve any location as long as the site allows for adequate satellite reception. Local public access television channels include Springfield Area Public Access television (SAPA TV), Okemo Valley TV, and Windsor On-Air.

Numerous commercial radio stations serve this area, but only one station broadcasts from this region. Vermont Public Radio broadcasts on eight stations statewide, one of which – 89.5 WVPR – broadcasts from the summit of Mount Ascutney in Windsor.

Newspapers that serve this Region include the Eagle Times, The Vermont Journal, The Shopper, Vermont Standard, Springfield Reporter (online only), The Valley Marketplace, Valley News, Chester Telegraph (online only), and Rutland Herald.

3. Broadband and Public Wi-Fi

a. Broadband

In the last decade, broadband service has not just become a prominent means for communication, but a necessary means for businesses and residents to perform day-to-day tasks. “In 2018, through Acts and Resolves No. 169, the General Assembly found that broadband is essential for supporting economic and educational opportunities, strengthening health and public safety networks, and reinforcing freedom of expression and democratic, social, and civic engagement.” During the COVID-19 pandemic, this proved to be especially true. People rely heavily on efficient broadband service for schools, workforce training programs, distance learning programs, remote work, telehealth visits, amongst other tasks. It is yet to be seen how the COVID-19 pandemic will affect our Region permanently, but it is projected that some of the “temporary” lifestyle and work changes set about in the pandemic, will become more permanent.

It is imperative to the success of the Region that every household has access to, not just broadband, but fast and efficient broadband connection. As noted in the “2019 Broadband Speeds” map below, Andover, Chester, Springfield, and most of West Windsor have access to adequate internet service. Windsor, Weathersfield, Baltimore, Cavendish, and Ludlow all struggle with consistent access to service.

Broadband – High-speed Internet and communication networks provided by a wide band of frequencies that enables many messages to be communicated simultaneously.

Fiber Optics – Fiber optic cable is a high-speed data transmission medium. It contains tiny glass or plastic filaments and has a speed of a symmetrical 100mbps (upload)/100mbps (download) speed.

Cable – Cable broadband connects your home to a fiber cabinet in your area. However, instead of using copper wires, cable broadband uses coaxial cables to connect to the cabinet, giving you a much faster internet connection than the traditional copper phone line at speed that can range from asymmetrical 25mbps (upload) / 3mb(download) speed to anywhere over 100mbps upload speeds. Although speeds can be high, this can be inconsistent.

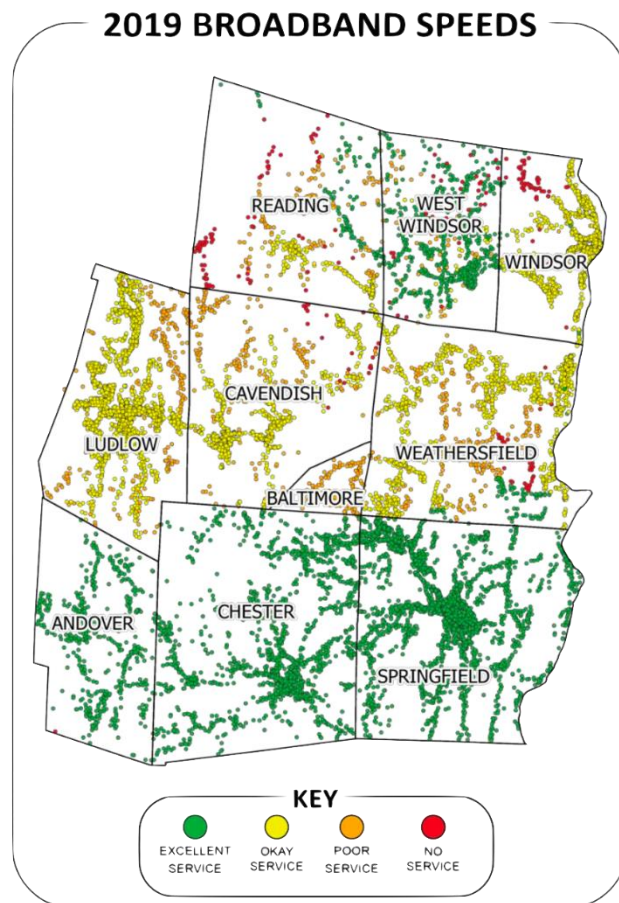
Digital Subscriber Line (“DSL”) –

Technologies that extends the ability of copper telephone lines to carry data and communications, this technology is becoming increasingly outdated and sometimes fails to reach over 4 (upload)/ 1 (download) speeds, which is considered “underserved” according to federal standards.

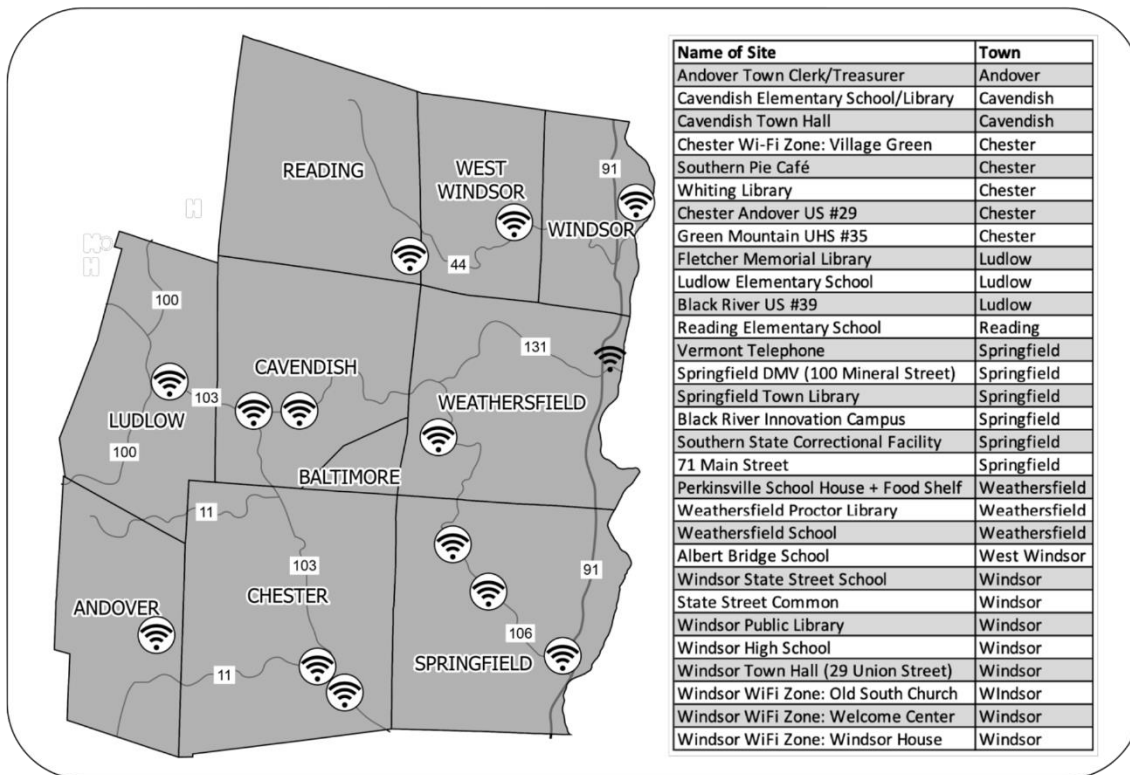
Satellite – High-speed satellite internet services are generally not as fast as DSL; however, are available on any site with a clear view of the southern sky.

Communication Union Districts – According to the Department of Public Service, “A Communications Union District (CUD) is an organization of two or more towns that join together as a municipal entity to build communication infrastructure together”

A map of broadband providers for each town can be found at this [link](#).



Public WiFi Locations



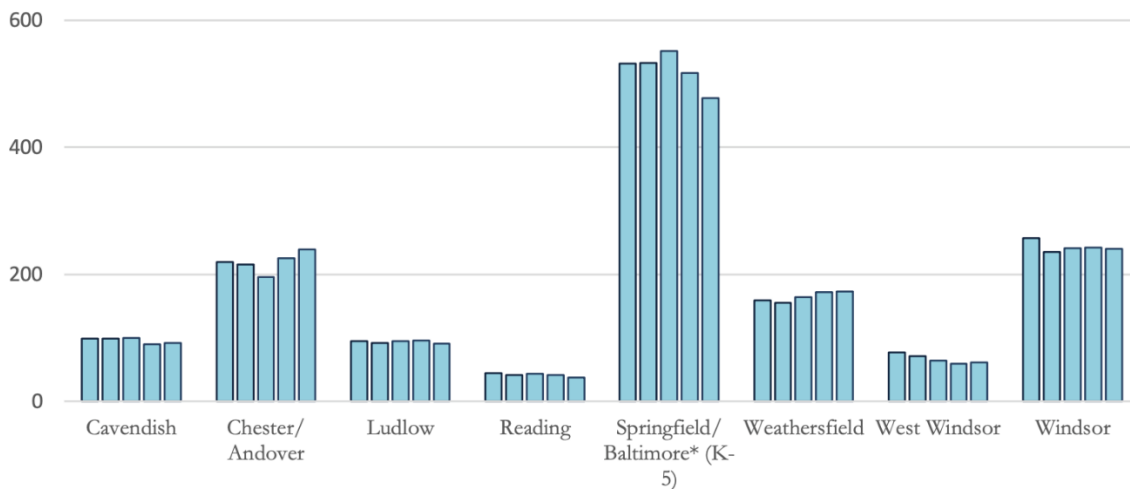
E. Educational Resources

Educational opportunities available in the Region include childcare facilities; elementary, middle, and high schools; vocational and technical schools, colleges, and universities; continuing education programs, museums, and historical societies; and libraries and cultural opportunities. Many factors should be considered in the analysis of schools and their ability to serve as adequate facilities for providing educational opportunities to area residents. Program and policy issues for public schools are generally addressed by local school or school district boards.

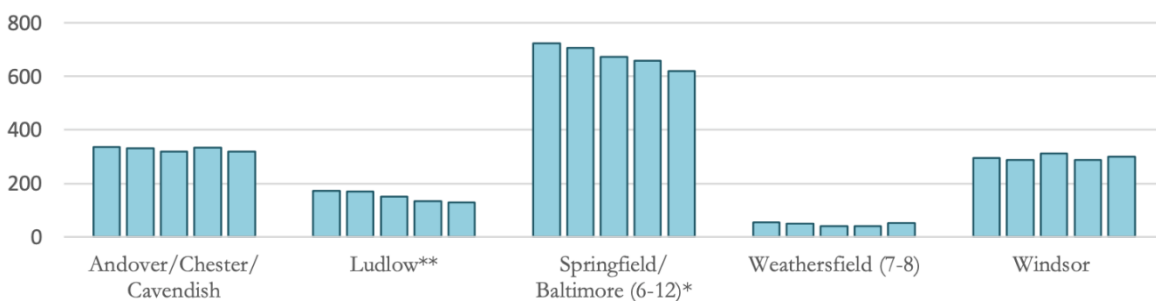
The Region is currently served by four supervisory unions: Springfield School District (SSD), Two Rivers Supervisory Union (TRSU), Windsor Central Supervisory Union (WCSU) and Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union (WSESU). Springfield, Chester, and Windsor are now the only towns in the Region with public high school facilities. . The student population in the Region has remained relatively stagnant in recent years. Many smaller schools have closed consolidated with larger schools under Act 46. Act 46 was enacted in 2015 to create a more sustainable student population and educational experience. These mergers occurred throughout the Region, leading to the closure of a number of schools, including Black River High School in Ludlow. The independent Expeditionary School at Black River has since opened in the former Black River High School building in Ludlow.

The River Valley Technical Center is in the Howard Dean Education Center in Springfield. It serves over 450 students for at least one period of course work per day and provides services for 600-1,000 adults. Services include a job training program which is contracted through Vermont Technical College. Also located in the Howard Dean Education Center are the Community College of Vermont's Springfield Office, and UVM Extension.

K-6 Enrollment by Academic Year
 2014/15 - 2018/19



7-12 Enrollment by Academic Year
 2014/15 - 2018/19



Source: Vermont's Education Data Warehouse (edw.vermont.gov). *Superintendent of schools office
 ** Black River High School in Ludlow closed in 2020.

The Vermont Legislature has enacted several educational funding programs seeking to provide all students with an equal opportunity for education regardless of municipal tax base. The current program, Act 68, sets statewide residential and non-residential tax rates providing base level funding per pupil in all school districts. Each district may then request additional funding from local taxpayers. This program remains controversial as overall costs and tax rates continue to rise. According to the Vermont Department of Education, per pupil spending in Fiscal Year

2018 was \$18,400. In its 2014 session, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 166 requiring school districts to provide at least 10 hours of pre-kindergarten instruction.

F. Child Care

The availability of affordable, high-quality childcare is vital to the health and economic development of the Region and its inhabitants. Quality childcare contributes to early childhood development, enables parents of young children to enter or remain in the workforce, enhances the productivity of working parents, and contributes to the expansion of the local and regional economies. In addition, facilities that are located near residential clusters, schools, the workplace, or public transportation may reduce automobile trips and congestion. Public facilities such as schools, town offices, and libraries are often located in convenient locations and should consider providing childcare or space for childcare services as should private businesses. For more on the role of childcare in the region's health and economic stability and the potential role of businesses in providing childcare, see the Health and Economic Development Chapters.

The State of Vermont Child Development Division maintains a list of all registered home care providers and licensed childcare centers in the State, with the exception of informal arrangements. The State regulates childcare providers, requiring they meet the basic standards for children's health and safety. Many programs achieve a higher standard through accreditation by a national program.

In our Region the availability of childcare varies greatly by town. There are currently no listed state licensed facilities in the smallest, rural towns of West Windsor, Andover and Baltimore. The existing lack of access to child care has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. The Springfield Area Working Communities Challenge, a Federal Reserve funded initiative to increase workforce participation in the region, estimates that current capacity can only meet approximately half of the demand for child care. For a current listing of licensed providers and registered homes by town, visit www.brightfutures.dcf.state.vt.us, which currently lists 47 state registered facilities in the Region.

Child care expenses can deter some families from seeking safe and convenient services. The Child Care Subsidy Program, established by the Vermont Agency of Human Services, which is based on gross monthly income and family size can assist some low-income families with the cost of childcare. There are also some tax credits available for both businesses and employees and employer childcare subsidies, but many are underutilized.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Springfield Area Working Communities Challenge created a one-time grant fund for families in the Springfield Agency of Human Services (AHS) district, which includes all 10 towns in the Mount Ascutney Region. This fund was distributed by the Springfield Area Parent Child Center (SAPCC). It was intended to help parents and guardians

remain in the workforce or reengage in the workforce by temporarily covering costs pertaining to childcare, including back bill and registration fees.

SAPCC offers additional financial support for families to cover unexpected costs of living including transportation and housing challenges.

G. Recreation



Recreation Photograph 1 - Town of Ludlow with Okemo Ski Area in the Background, Source: MARC

1. Introduction

The Mount Ascutney Region offers many recreational opportunities to residents and visitors alike. Some of these opportunities include hiking, biking, camping, downhill skiing, x-country skiing, hunting, horseback riding, ATV riding, paddling, and fishing. The abundance and variety of opportunities within the region are not only a reason to live within or visit the region (outdoor recreation is commonly associated with the Vermont 'way of life'), but also an important sector of the economy.

2. Recreation Resources

The region is home to many areas devoted to indoor and outdoor recreation, ranging from public opportunities on state and municipal lands to those available on private lands. Ludlow is home to the Okemo State Forest and the Okemo Ski Resort, West Windsor is home to Ascutney Trails (a multi-use trail system) and Ascutney Mountain which is one of the Northeast's premier

hang-gliding spots, Windsor is home to the Mt. Ascutney State Park which offers several hiking trails, Springfield is home to the Toonerville multi-use path; and Reading is home to a large portion of the Green Mountain Horse Association's trail network. Furthermore, VAST (Vermont Association of Snow Travelers) maintains an expansive network of snowmobile trails in the region. Indoor recreation opportunities include craft fairs, contra dances, indoor concerts, and recreation centers.

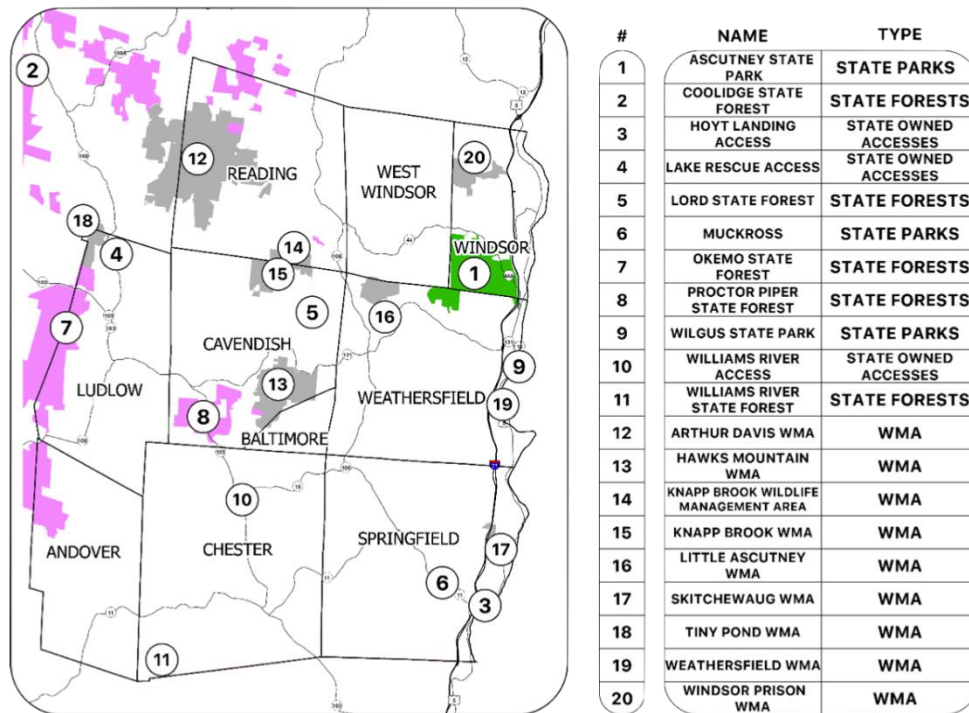
Public and private entities work continuously to improve and expand recreational opportunities in the region. Of particular note is the multi-jurisdictional Mount Ascutney Outdoor Recreation Plan, a multi-town initiative to improve the trail network on and around Mount Ascutney. A more comprehensive list of the Region's recreational resources is included below.



Recreation Photograph 2 - Trailhead at the North Springfield Reservoir, Source: USACE

a. Federal Lands

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers owns and operates a dam along the Black River in Springfield. The associated land and impoundment, covering 1,361 acres of fields, forests, wetlands, and lakes is available to the public. Summer activities include swimming, sunbathing, picnicking, fishing, boating, kayaking, canoeing, and wildlife viewing. A shelter is available to rent for daytime use at the Stoughton Pond Recreation Area. In the winter, the land is available for cross-country skiing, snowmobiling and snowshoeing. For more information, visit: <http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation/NorthSpringfieldLake.aspx>.



STATE-OWNED RECREATION LAND

b. Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)

WMAs are owned by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife and are managed primarily for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and their habitat, but the areas also provide opportunities for outdoor recreation. There are nine WMAs in the southern Windsor County Region of varying size.

c. State Parks

There are three State Parks in the Mount Ascutney Region: Wilgus, Mount Ascutney and Muckcross.

Wilgus State Park sits along Route 5 in Weathersfield and offers a campground with shelters, access to the Connecticut River, and hiking with great views of the Connecticut River Valley. For more information about Wilgus State Park please visit the following webpage: <https://vtstateparks.com/wilgus.html>.

Ascutney State Park is located along Route 44 in Windsor, and offers camping and hiking opportunities. The Park includes a "Summit Road" ending approximately 1/2 mile from the summit of Mt. Ascutney. The summit can also be reached using a network of hiking trails. The

summit of Mt. Ascutney is home to a viewing tower and several other vantage points offering spectacular views of the surrounding countryside. The West Peak area is used as a hang-gliding launch platform. For more information on the Ascutney State Park including a recreational guide, please see the following website: <https://vtstateparks.com/ascutney.html>.

Muckcross State Park is located off of Route 11 in Springfield, a short walk from the park and ride. The Park is the region's newest, established in 2016. The Park offers areas for picnicking and a network of informal trails for visitors to hike and explore. Since it is a new park, Muckcross has no established facilities, but the State has commissioned a Master Plan outlining potential future uses and facilities for the Park. For more information about Muckcross State Park, please visit the following website: <https://vtstateparks.com/muckcross.html>.



Recreation Photograph 3 - Mt. Ascutney over Lake Runnemedede, Source: MARC

d. State Forests

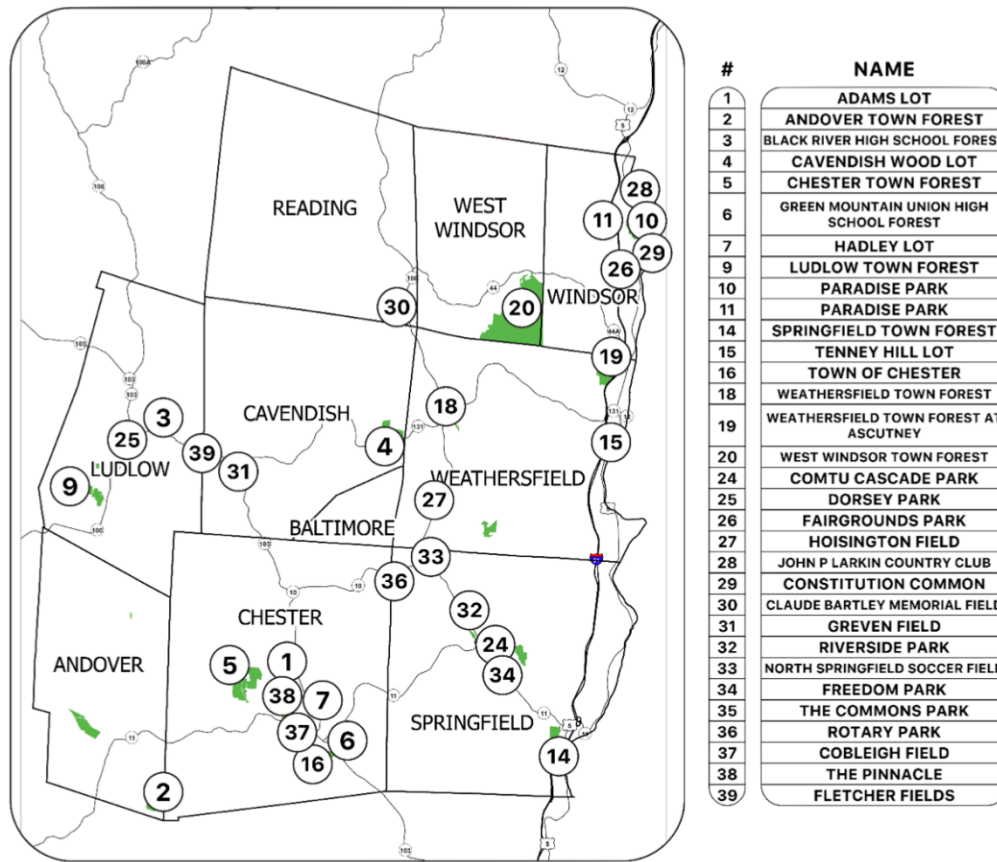
There are four different State Forests in the Mount Ascutney Region, the Albert C. Lord, Proctor Piper, Williams River, and Okemo State Forests. These lands are owned by the State of Vermont and are managed by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation. The Department's mission includes stewardship of these lands for the health, integrity, and diversity of important species, natural communities, and ecological processes, as well as management of

the forests for sustainable use including compatible outdoor recreation activities, such as multi-use trail systems. The Okemo State Forest is the only one in the region with its own informational document, which can be found here:

https://vtstateparks.com/assets/pdf/okemo_sf_trails.pdf .

e. Other State-Owned Lands

Hoyt’s Landing in Springfield offers fishing and boating access to the Connecticut River and picnic areas in the summer and ice fishing access in the winter.



TOWN-OWNED RECREATION LAND

f. Town Forests and Town Parks

In addition to the State-owned lands, many of the municipalities in the Mount Ascutney Region own land that is used for recreational purposes. These lands include municipal parks, forests, ballfields, and fairgrounds.

g. Road Network

It is also worth recognizing the importance of our state and local road networks for recreational uses, which are perhaps the most frequently used resource for routine recreation by residents. Roads are used for walking, jogging, bicycling, equestrian and other uses. With the advent of fat bikes and electric bicycles, bicycling is becoming a year-round recreational activity and more difficult routes are accessible to a greater number of people. The region's scenic gravel roads make it well situated to take advantage of these developments. MARC has published maps and descriptions of bicycling routes in the region on the Ride Windsor County webpage at <https://ridewindsorcountylvt.weebly.com/>.

Variable widths of the existing roadway shoulders on paved routes may limit recreational uses. Many class 4 town highways and legal trails are used for snowmobiling, snow shoeing, and cross-country skiing; however, their use is subject to local rules and restrictions. In accordance with Vermont's Complete Streets Law (Act 34, 2011), accommodating all modes of travel (i.e. walking and bicycling) is to be considered in all state and municipally managed transportation projects on paved roads.

h. Water Access

The Connecticut River forms the eastern boundary of the area, providing the towns of Springfield, Weathersfield, and Windsor with ample river-based recreational activities such as canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and swimming. In addition to the Connecticut River, the region also is home to two other major rivers, the Black River and Williams River, and various streams and ponds that contribute to water-based recreation. Many informal swimming holes also exist along the network of streams and rivers in the region. According to the Basin 10 Management Plan, the Black River hosts Twenty-Foot Hole on the North Branch in Reading, and Buttermilk Falls in Ludlow, on Branch Brook. Also on the Black River are Tolles Hill Dam, a USACE recreational area in Perkinsville, and Flat Rock, opposite Mill Road just north of the Route 106 river crossing in Perkinsville. For more information on water-based recreation, please see the [Connecticut River Joint Commission's Recreation Plan](#), the [Basin 10 Water Quality Management Plan](#), and the [Connecticut River Paddlers' Trail Guide](#).

i. Events



Black River, Source: MARC

In addition to the resources listed above, the region is also host to several events devoted to outdoor recreation. The Vermont 100 and Vermont 50 are two long distance races that are very popular, utilize the forests, and are a boon to the local economy. The Vermont 100 is the last ultra-marathon to host both humans and horses on the same track. The Toonerville trail hosts several marathons and is being actively promoted to become a venue for the marathon circuits. There are many smaller events held in towns throughout the region such as Old Home Days, July 4th firework shows, outdoor concerts, ducky derbies, and many more.

3. Key Priorities

The list of key priorities included below was taken directly from the State of Vermont's 2019-2023 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. Towns and regions should be aware of these priorities when conducting planning for recreational opportunities.

a. Stewardship of Natural Resources and Recreational Assets

Conserving Vermont's natural, cultural, and recreational assets ensures that the opportunities we enjoy now will continue to be available for future generations. By monitoring, restoring, and maintaining healthy soil and forests, clean water and air, high-quality habitat and biological diversity, we promote healthy, functional ecosystems while creating a foundation for sustainable access and recreation.

b. Stakeholder Communication, Coordination, and Engagement

Vermont boasts a broad array of public, private, and non-profit partners who play active roles in supporting outdoor recreation across the state (and beyond it in some cases -- the Appalachian Trail, Northern Forest Canoe Trail, and Lake Champlain, for example). These independent but

interdependent organizations plan for, provide, and manage land and water resources, human resources, and equipment, programming, and recreational infrastructure.

c. Participation and Access for All

While Vermont provides exceptional recreation opportunities, access is not consistently available and not all Vermonters are able to participate. Vermont has the opportunity to bridge this gap through, among other strategies, continued support of recreation access and opportunities in Vermont's downtowns, villages, and neighborhoods.

d. Community Connections, Health, and Wellness

Supporting and building connectivity between neighborhoods, community facilities, trail networks, and recreation infrastructure within communities will provide greater opportunities for promoting health and wellbeing. Focusing on the role of outdoor recreation in fostering livability can lead to benefits for multiple audiences, including the significant projected population increases for older adults.

e. Economic Vitality & Tourism

Vermont's landscape of forests, farms, and human communities and their associated outdoor recreation opportunities are major reasons why people visit and live in Vermont. Outdoor recreation contributes to sustaining vibrant rural economies and strengthens the state's position as a premier tourism destination.

For additional information regarding the priorities, please see the [2019-2023 Vermont Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#).

H. Policies

Water, Sewer and Electricity Policies

1. Extensions of service infrastructure should take place in areas proposed for development by town plans and local bylaws and should not lead to sprawl or strip development or service use that exceeds existing or planned system capacity.
2. Water conservation techniques should be used in new development, and in the rehabilitation of existing development, to lengthen the life of wastewater treatment facilities and slow the depletion of groundwater resources.
3. Careful facility siting, landscaping and other mitigation techniques should be employed to minimize aesthetic impacts of transmission line projects.

Solid Waste Facilities Policies

1. Promote efforts within or among the Region's towns to reduce waste production, reuse, recycle, and compost. The hierarchy, as described in the Vermont Solid Waste Management Plan, of "reduce, reuse, recycle" should form the basis for all solid waste planning in the Region.
2. Land application of sludge¹⁰ in the Region is encouraged provided that it does not pose a risk to human health or have negative impacts on aesthetics or the natural environment.
3. When measuring the economic viability of solid waste reduction or recycling programs, avoided costs of solid waste production and disposal, and of environmental cleanup, shall be considered as economic benefits.

¹⁰ Sludge, also known as biosolids, is a byproduct of wastewater treatment. For more on biosolids and their potential uses, see the EPA webpage: <https://www.epa.gov/biosolids/basic-information-about-biosolids>.

Community Health and Safety Resources Policies

1. Expansion or creation of health and safety facilities is encouraged in locations selected for the efficient delivery of services and as necessary to meet the current and future demand.
2. Existing or proposed correctional facilities should be sited, maintained, and managed in a manner which ensures the safety and security of local residents.
3. The impact of existing and potential development on public health and safety facilities and services should be evaluated prior to new development.
4. New nursing homes and assisted living facilities should be located in close proximity to services or along public transportation routes in order to provide efficient access to services for residents.

Communication Facilities Policies

1. Support the development of broadband communication networks Region-wide.
2. New or expanded wireless communications services must collocate on existing facilities or be sited on existing structures, where feasible, and shall minimize negative visual impacts.
3. New communications facilities must minimize impacts on wildlife habitat and corridors, forest blocks, wetlands, rivers, streams, ridgelines, and other natural, scenic, and aesthetic resources, and should comply with the following standards
 - a. Protecting view corridors from highways, residential areas, historic districts, public use areas, and outdoor recreation areas such as hiking trails, rivers, lakes, and ponds should be paramount in the design and siting permitted.
 - b. All new wireless communications facilities sited on a ridge should be located below the ridge so that the tops of any such facility are below the site lines of persons using the highways or in the residential areas and historic districts. At a minimum, the tops of such facilities must not exceed the elevation of the immediate ridge.
 - c. New access roads should be designed for minimal ground disturbance and clearing, follow the land contours, and avoid open land to minimize visual and ecological impact.
 - d. If new wireless communications facilities are added to existing wireless communications facilities on peaks or ridges, such existing facilities should be retrofitted or maintained in a manner to minimize any negative visual impact.

- e. At the site of wireless communications facilities, the existing vegetation and tree cover should be maintained to the maximum extent possible.
 - f. Prior to the application hearing, a demonstration of the visual impact of the tower must take place to inform the public (by simulating the silhouette of the facility by raising a dark colored balloon to the height of the top of the proposed facility, or other reasonable simulation).
4. Decommissioned wireless communications facilities or portions of facilities must be removed and the site restored and reclaimed to its original condition. All roads and accesses to the site which are no longer needed should be reclaimed and restored.
5. Permits for communications facilities should require a performance bond or other financial security ensuring the reclamation and restoration of the site should the facility be abandoned or rendered obsolete by technological advances. The performance bond should take inflation into account as many years may elapse between construction and removal of the facility.
6. The development and use of alternative technologies to serve the industry is encouraged. These include, but are not limited to, "stealth" designs for wireless communications facilities or complete coverage of such facilities within existing buildings and structures, and satellite technology, which would reduce the need for new, and allow for the removal of existing, wireless communications facilities.

Educational Resources Policies

1. Expansion or restructuring of academic, vocational, recreational, and cultural education facilities and resources to meet the needs of all residents will be supported, where communities show need and/or where existing facilities are inadequate.

Child Care Policies

1. Town plans should assess current and future local needs and supplies of child care services, including whether local barriers exist for the provision of these services.
2. Member towns should periodically review land use regulations to identify unnecessary barriers to childcare facilities and mechanisms to promote the development of childcare services in appropriate locations convenient to local services and densely populated areas.

Recreation Policies

1. High impact recreational activities such as horseback and ATV riding shall be located outside of ecologically sensitive areas, which are defined as natural features that contribute to the survival and/or reproduction of wildlife or are more susceptible to damage from human activities. For the purposes of this chapter those areas include: wetlands and vernal pools; concentrated black bear feeding habitat (mast stands); rare, threatened, and endangered species habitat; significant natural communities; riparian areas and surface waters; prime agricultural soils; slopes greater than 25%; ledge, talus, and cliff habitat; land in excess of 2,500' in elevation; and habitat as identified by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife as either significant wildlife habitat or necessary wildlife habitat in accordance with 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a)(8)(A).
2. Multi-use and multi-season trails are preferred over single-use and single-season trails, provided that the various uses can be accommodated without undue risks to health and safety.
3. Public access to major water bodies and watercourses should be maintained and expanded in accordance with local goals and the area's capability to handle increased traffic without undue adverse impact on the natural or cultural features of the area.
4. Expansion of public access to ecologically sensitive areas is generally not encouraged. Where it is demonstrated that increased public access to ecologically sensitive areas is important for educational or experiential needs a management plan that addresses preservation and protection of the sensitive area should be prepared.
5. Development that could threaten the quality of recreational waters should be discouraged and alternatives sought.
6. Planning and construction of recreational opportunities on sites of public utilities or public works facilities (e.g. incorporation of trail networks into public utility corridor planning) is encouraged as it will help to achieve more efficient and productive use of these lands.
7. The development of multi-purpose trails using abandoned railroad beds, Class 4 roads, and other public rights-of-way is supported.