The Bennington Regional Plan

Adopted November 21, 2024

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development of municipal plans and helps to ensure that those individual plans are consistent with each other and reflect a regional consensus. In turn, the regional plan may be amended in response to changing conditions and needs identified as municipal plans are updated. By defining specific regional policies and priorities, the regional plan also can be used to assure that state agency plans and projects, and other major public investments, are consistent with the interests of local communities in the Bennington region.

Regional planning commissions are statutory parties to state land use (Act 250) regulatory proceedings and participate in many public utility (Section 248) hearings as well. An effective regional plan ensures that projects subject to those reviews support regional development and conservation objectives. The regional plan also can be used as an important educational and reference document, providing important information about the region, a vision for the future, and practical information about strategies that can help realize that vision.

This plan is organized into three main categories covering the **People, Landscape,** and **Infrastructure** that together shape and define the region. The section on **People** includes separate chapters dealing with the region's history, population demographics, economy, education and childcare, and housing. Chapters on land use, flood resilience, and natural, scenic, and historic resources comprise the **Landscape** section of the plan. The **Infrastructure** section considers the region's transportation systems, utilities, facilities, and energy resources. The unique "Shires" aspect of the region is present as a unifying theme throughout, and there is, of course, some overlap between the various chapters because of the many interrelationships present.

The regional plan should be a living document, used by the BCRC, local governments, state agencies, private developers, and citizens to help shape decisions that support state planning goals as outlined in statute (24 V.S.A. § 4302) through policies and actions that are deemed most appropriate for the communities of this region. Effective implementation of the plan will result in enhanced quality of life for residents by promoting community resiliency, equity, and prosperity; by maintaining and developing welcoming, affordable, safe, convenient, and healthy communities; and by protecting the resources that make the Bennington region an outstanding place in which to live.

2 VISION AND GOALS

2.1 Vision Statement

The regional plan is intended to provide direction for the region as a whole and for its seventeen unique communities. To be effective, it is important that the plan presents a clearly articulated vision. The following statement is based on aspirations and values that are common to the entire region:

> ***The Bennington region will be a place where all residents have an opportunity to enjoy an outstanding quality of life through an emphasis on its distinctive sense of place. The essential elements of that place include its natural, scenic, cultural, and historic resources; its compact villages and urban centers surrounded by rural open spaces; an active and engaged citizenry; outstanding school systems; efficient and responsive public services; an efficient, safe, and convenient transportation system; a range of housing options that are pleasant and affordable for all residents; and a place where a strong, diverse, and sustainable economy offers opportunities for all residents.***

2.2 Goals

Specific goals provide focus and direction to the policy statements and recommended actions set forth in each chapter of the regional plan. These goals are consistent with the fourteen statewide planning goals set forth in 24 V.S.A.§ 4302.

A. Planned development that reinforces the historic settlement pattern of well-defined urban and village centers surrounded by rural countryside.

Most new growth should occur in these compact centers and be consistent with the historic character and form of those areas. Mixed use development that encourages walking, healthy lifestyles, and efficient delivery of services should be emphasized. Development in rural areas should respect the need to protect important natural resources and scenic landscapes. Dispersed auto-dependent development outside of compact mixed-use centers and in strips along highways is costly, inefficient, and unhealthy, and should be strictly limited. The forest lands in the Green and Taconic Mountains and at other steep, high elevation, and remote locations should remain free from permanent development and be reserved for forest and recreation uses.

B. A vibrant, welcoming, and accessible community where residents feel a sense of belonging and participate in their governance.

Opportunities for all community members to live, learn, work, and recreate, should abound regardless of age, ability, or origin. Addressing the needs of young people to support them to choose the region as their lifelong home should be a particular focus. Providing services and activities for retirees and other seniors should

also be a priority. New residents of all ages and backgrounds should be welcomed into the region's communities integrating into the workforce, education system, governance and civic institutions.

C. A strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities while maintaining high social and environmental standards.

Coordinated development strategies for the Northshire and Southshire that recognize the importance of a diversity of economic enterprises will be important tools for guiding and promoting commercial activity within the region. The use of local resources and assets to support general economic prosperity and sustainable development practices should be prioritized.

D. Outstanding educational and vocational training services that meet the needs of residents and area businesses.

Maintenance of high academic standards and provision of an environment and instructional services that allow students to excel is essential. Efficiency in the provision of these services is essential so that costs to taxpayers are not excessive nor quality compromised. To ensure that regional economic development needs are met, it is critical that close relationships between educational providers and the local business community are facilitated and maintained. Access to higher education through advanced telecommunication systems is critical. Opportunities for active participation by area colleges in local projects through partnerships between colleges and local governments, organizations, and businesses should be pursued.

E. A safe, convenient, and efficient transportation system that includes a well-maintained network of roads and bridges and expanded opportunities for walking, bicycling, public transportation, and rail and air transport.

A physical environment that encourages walking, bicycling, and use of public transportation supports the vitality of downtowns, village centers, and neighborhoods and contributes significant public health benefits. Improved access to intercity passenger rail service, rail freight services, and regional air transport services will provide long-term economic benefits to the region. Prioritizing the development of facilities that support a transition to a vehicle fleet that is powered by electricity and other alternative fuels will also lead to economic and health benefits for the region.

F. Protection of natural, scenic, and historic resources that contribute to the unique character of the region and support environmental, recreational, public health, and economic development objectives.

Public investments, regulation, and creative development techniques should be employed, as appropriate, to protect valuable open spaces, air quality, water resources, wildlife habitat, fragile natural areas and critical ecosystems, scenic views, and historic sites, structures, and districts. Utilization of local natural resources should support

regional economic and renewable energy development while ensuring that such development, including any resource extraction, is accomplished in an environmentally sensitive manner. The region's agricultural and forest resources should be conserved and developed in a responsible manner to support economic and quality of life goals.

G. Conservation of energy, implementation of efficient technologies, and appropriate utilization of renewable energy resources.

Conservation should be the principal consideration in energy planning across all sectors. Opportunities for diversification of energy choices should be pursued along with strategies that reduce reliance on fossil fuels for space heating, transportation, and operation of machinery and equipment. Solar, hydroelectric, biomass, wind, and geothermal energy resources should be accessed to meet a significant share of the region's energy needs. Deployment of advanced technologies and a smart grid will support energy conservation and efficiency objectives. Refer to the Bennington Regional Energy Plan for comprehensive discussion of this goal.

H. Enhanced recreational opportunities for residents and visitors that provide public health, quality of life, and economic benefits.

Natural resource based recreational opportunities and developed public and private recreational facilities are important to the region. Public recreational lands and facilities should be maintained and acquisition of new conserved lands and development of new or expanded facilities should be pursued to meet identified needs. The transportation system should be maintained and improved to encourage physical activity and provide safe and convenient access to recreational facilities. Actions should be taken to remove existing, or potential future, impediments to access to important recreational lands or facilities. Conflicts between recreational users and impacts from recreational activities on natural resources should be studied and strategies to minimize those conflicts and impacts should be implemented.

I. A supply of housing sufficient to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups available in all communities in the region.

A variety of housing types should be available, including single-family, two-family, and multi-family, with options for ownership and rental. New housing should be concentrated in existing compact centers and adjacent areas planned for relatively dense development where a mix of land uses and transportation options supports community public health objectives. Housing development in rural areas must be carefully planned to protect rural character and natural resources and to avoid placing excessive demands on transportation facilities and public services.

J. Public utilities and community facilities and services sufficient to support a growing resident population and the economic needs of the region.

Public utilities must be maintained in good condition and any extensions or

neighborhoods, the adequacy of public roads, soil conditions, and the availability of public water and sewer infrastructure. Local land use regulations for existing and planned village areas should be structured to encourage mixed-use development while protecting the character of the community through carefully adopted provisions for site plan review, performance standards, and when appropriate, historic preservation and design control standards.

8.4 Historic Districts and Properties

Preserving the region's historic, archeological, and cultural resources is an important prerogative for the Bennington region. The region's urban centers, villages, and hamlets contain numerous historic structures that reflect the rich history and architectural heritage of its communities. Several historic village centers – Dorset, Manchester Village, Old Bennington, Bennington, North Bennington, and Arlington – have achieved special recognition by being placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, many historically significant structures and sites are found throughout the rural countryside in the region.

Preservation of the region's historic resources has many benefits. The area's historic rural character, in large part attributable to those early sites and structures, is a key ingredient driving the success of tourism-related businesses in the region. The unique historic character of each community also provides residents with an important sense of their heritage and link with the past, thus promoting a sense of community identity and pride.

An important first step in any effort to preserve historic resources is to identify them. Fortunately, the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, with support from local residents and historical societies, has completed comprehensive inventories of historic and archaeological sites and districts in the region. These inventories document historic sites and architecturally significant structures in several identified historic districts and cover individual sites and buildings throughout the region. Communities may wish to expand upon or refine these inventories so that they better serve local planning purposes.

Regulatory tools can help towns preserve historic resources. The Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act (V.S.A. Title 24, Chapter 117) enables towns to protect their historic resources by designating historic districts and landmarks under their municipal land use and development (i.e., zoning) regulations. When a local historic district regulation is in place, approval of the municipality is required before new construction may occur and before modifications are made to the exterior appearance of an existing structure within the district. Plans involving the demolition or movement of an historic structure are also subject to such local review and approval in these historic districts.

Design review districts, which may be created to give towns some control over

Landscape of the Shires

8 LAND USE

8.1 Regional Landscape

The landscape of the Bennington region is predominantly rural in character with relatively compact centers of development lying among rural and agricultural valleys. The forested slopes of the Green and Taconic Mountain Ranges provide a natural backdrop to these valleys, creating a diverse landscape of open and forested lands (Map 8-1). One of the central objectives of both Vermont state land use policy and this regional plan is to reinforce this development pattern, directing most new growth into discretely bounded urban centers and villages while preserving the open rural lands between those centers. The regional land use plan was developed in concert with local land use plans and regulations. It is intended to provide a clear framework for regional growth and redevelopment while ensuring that municipal land use plans are consistent with its overall policy and compatible with one another.

Maintaining clear demarcation between centers of compact development and the surrounding rural landscape is a particularly important, and challenging, component of this land use strategy. If development sprawls outward from the Bennington and Manchester “urban centers” and the mixed-use villages that form the heart of many of the region’s towns, the intervening open lands will be compromised and the area will have lost much of its unique character. If sprawl were to become pervasive, it would draw vitality from downtowns, urban neighborhoods, and villages, making it more difficult for those critical community centers to thrive and, in turn, attract additional desirable development. A dispersed development pattern also reduces the ability of towns to provide efficient and economical services and leads to unnecessary and excessive energy use. All of the land use policies and strategies discussed in this chapter, therefore, should be considered in light of the central goal of encouraging new mixed-use development in compact village and town centers and protecting the natural and scenic quality of the rural landscape.

The regional land use plan is organized around four main land use districts: Urban Centers, Villages, Rural Areas, and Upland Forests. Characteristics, opportunities, and limitations specific to each district, and policies to guide various types of development activity are presented in the following sections of this chapter. This plan also includes guidelines related to special land use planning areas, including historic districts and sites, shopping centers, and other areas. Tools and techniques for land use regulation, including open space design, form-based codes, performance standards, and other ideas are presented throughout the chapter.

distant from established business centers can damage the vibrancy of existing commercial businesses. Consequently, shopping center development should be used to reinvigorate existing commercial areas rather than to create new ones.

Shopping centers initially were developed to be primarily accessible by auto, with the resulting development patterns emphasizing parking lots and vehicles over community character and people. To produce a more desirable physical environment, new and redeveloped shopping centers should include design elements such as those contained in the Town of Bennington's design guidelines for projects located within the town's "planned commercial district" and the Town of Manchester's design guidelines for its commercial and historic districts. Those standards include placement of buildings closer to the road with parking areas to the side and rear of the lot, attractive building design, landscaping, application of access management principles, and provisions of pedestrian facilities accessing the center and within the center.

Community and regional shopping centers often contain large "big box" retail spaces, with single tenants that may occupy 50,000 to 200,000 square feet, or more, of floor space. Although these large retailers provide jobs and offer consumers a variety of often low-priced goods, concerns persist about the relatively low-wage and low-benefit nature of most of these "big-box" retail jobs as well as the impacts of these large retailers on smaller and locally owned businesses in the community. The potential impacts of such developments should be considered carefully, therefore, and should be permitted only if they include exemplary building and site design and are determined to have a net beneficial impact based on an independent economic and community impact study that may be requested by the town or the BCRC.

8.3 Villages

The region's villages are historic centers of community life that are key to properly focusing growth and development outside of urban centers. Villages provide rural communities with a unique sense of place and contribute to the historic and scenic quality of the entire region. While differing in size and extent, villages generally include compact centers with residential densities higher than the surrounding countryside, some commercial development, and important community facilities such as town halls, churches, schools, and post offices. A small network of public roads is generally present and some, but not all, villages are served by a public water supply system and, less commonly, by a public sewer system.

Vermont has developed a system for designating important village centers that form the historic cores of its rural communities. This designation affords designated village centers with significant benefits in terms of historic preservation funding, enhanced opportunities for grants and tax credits, and other community development benefits and financial incentives. Village centers have been designated in Arlington, Dorset, Manchester, North Bennington, Peru, Pownal, Rupert, Shaftsbury, Stamford

the appearance of discrete areas of historical, architectural, or cultural significance, or other areas in which there is a concentration of community interest, also can help to protect historic resources and community character. A design advisory board may be created to assist the local planning commission or development review board in evaluating design proposals for new or altered buildings in those districts. Several towns and villages in the region currently have design control ordinances in effect. Performance standards covering the siting and design of buildings in site plan and conditional use review can also support re-enforcement of historic development patterns and forms within these districts. State land use permit review (Act 250) also allows municipal input on the design of major development projects.

Nonregulatory approaches to historic preservation are of equal importance. Local historical societies provide research, documentation, education, and advocacy on behalf of local historic resources and preservation. Developers can be encouraged to incorporate historic structures and important architectural details into their project planning. The adaptive reuse of old buildings that no longer serve their original function is often preferable to the destruction and replacement of those buildings. There are opportunities for historic preservation grants and investment tax credits for developers or property owners who wish to rehabilitate historic structures. Public acquisition and use of particularly important historic buildings may be appropriate when new or expanded public facilities are needed.

Despite the available incentives and regulatory tools, maintaining the viability of historic structures remains a serious challenge in many of our communities. A combination of strategies is necessary to effectively preserve and utilize historic assets. The region's historic preservation objectives can be summarized as follows:

- Maintain each community's special historic and cultural heritage and preserve a sense of place and pride for local residents.
- Maintain those historical and aesthetic qualities that are economic assets to the region and promote the economically viable reuse of historic structures.
- Ensure that the renovation and alteration of existing structures, and the construction of new structures, is done in a manner consistent with the character of the historic district in which they are located.
- Achieve overall visual compatibility within each district through careful attention to architectural, landscape, and site development details.
- Save historic structures whenever possible.

8.5 Rural Areas

Most new development should be directed to established urban centers and villages, but some development has occurred, and will continue to occur, in rural areas outside of villages and urban centers. Such growth must be planned to avoid impacts on the region's rural character and environmental quality and must not result in excessive

costs to municipalities. Historically, rural homesteads were established in conjunction with farms, sawmills, or other businesses associated with the working landscape. In addition, small settlements sprang up at many rural crossroads and other locally convenient sites. These “hamlets” consisted of a small cluster of homes and perhaps a school, church, store, or some other public building. Many rural hamlets are still evident today. These areas are important as focal points for local communities and contribute to the diversity of the rural landscape. For the most part, hamlets have no public water supply or sewage disposal systems, and most of the buildings are located along one or two roads. Hamlets in the Bennington region include the Landgrove and Sunderland town centers, East Rupert, South Dorset, Richville and Barnumville (in Manchester), West Arlington, and North Shaftsbury.

In recent decades, residential subdivisions have created new concentrations of settlement in rural areas. These developments are generally entirely residential, with self-contained road networks and on-site wells and septic systems (some subdivisions, particularly those with multifamily or clustered units, may have community water supplies and wastewater disposal systems). Subdivisions in rural areas range in size from a few to several dozen lots and may consist of single-family homes on parcels of one to ten or more acres, clustered single-family homes on smaller lots, or multi-family condominiums. A few examples of the many rural subdivisions in the region include Dorset Orchard (Dorset), Bromley Brook Woods (Manchester), Wilcox Road (Arlington), the Bacon Hollow/Flynn Hollow area developments (Sunderland), and Hidden Valley (Shaftsbury). Subdivisions must be carefully planned to provide a desirable living environment for residents and to ensure that the rural character and natural resources of the area are protected. In areas containing important natural resources, including productive agricultural soils, proposals for residential developments must retain the integrity of those resources.

Significant amounts of scattered development in remote areas with poor access to town centers can be avoided by promoting development in and around urban and village centers and by using regulatory and non-regulatory techniques to maintain rural open spaces. In addition, municipal plans and bylaws can be structured to require that new developments in rural areas reflect historical settlement patterns. New subdivisions can be planned to incorporate the positive characteristics of earlier rural settlements, such as community identity, public open spaces, and preservation of important resources. Many of these objectives can be realized by clustering lots to create a hamlet-type character around the homes, while setting a significant percentage of the project area aside as open space reserved for agriculture, forestry, or public recreation. Such clustered developments are economically efficient because roads and other infrastructure are less extensive or and therefore less costly to construct and maintain than conventional subdivisions.

Agriculture, forestry, recreation, and other land uses that rely on the region's

natural resources are appropriate uses in rural areas. Certain small-scale industries, especially those related to the region's agricultural and forest resources (e.g., dairy products, sawmills), may be compatible with, and most appropriate in, outlying rural areas. Properly planned residential development may be developed at overall densities of up to two acres per dwelling unit in valley areas where there are few physical or economic impediments to growth. Residential densities of three to twenty-five acres per dwelling unit are appropriate in rural areas that are more remote, at high elevations, have other physical limitations, or which lie in agricultural zones (where clustered development to preserve open land also may be required). Rural developments also must comply with local and state regulations pertaining to water supply and wastewater disposal to ensure protection of public health and the environment. In any case, rural development must not be widely scattered throughout the countryside but should occur as relatively compact and cohesive units that serve to reinforce, rather than to replace, the region's rural character.

A limited amount of commercial development, properly planned and sited, also can be accommodated in rural areas. The "country store" is, after all, a characteristic feature of rural Vermont. Although shopping centers (as defined in this chapter) clearly are not appropriate outside of villages or urban centers, small general stores, service stations, and similar uses that provide goods and services for nearby residents may be located in rural areas. These businesses should be sited only in hamlets or as part of rural planned unit developments. Small-scale or low-density lodging accommodations catering to outdoor recreation-oriented tourists may also be appropriate in rural areas. Municipalities should limit the number and size of such establishments to prevent a proliferation of scattered commercial development that does not serve the needs of the community.

Occupations that are customarily practiced in residential areas, and which do not affect the character of those areas, are another form of small-scale commercial use common in rural areas. Small professional offices, antique shops, and craft studios are examples of such “customary home occupations.” These home-based businesses are protected by state law, and most municipal land use regulations (i.e., zoning) allow them and clearly define the parameters within which they may operate.

Roadside Commercial Development

In the past, more extensive commercial development was planned for and sited in certain rural areas that lie alongside principal state highways. These areas are found in current or former “roadside commercial” zoning districts that were established specifically in response to a perceived need to cater to tourists traveling by car. The area along Route 11/30 east of Manchester’s downtown is an example of such roadside commercial development in the region. Towns should not pursue new roadside commercial designations because additional development in these areas would

appropriate in the upland forests.

Some of the high ridgelines and mountains of the upland forests also offer ideal locations for wind energy turbines and related electricity transmission lines as well as telecommunication installations. These facilities may become increasingly important to the region and can be sited in upland forests provided that sites are developed with proper environmental controls. While disturbance of high elevation lands during construction is inevitable, plans to mitigate damage and restore sites to stable conditions following construction must be developed and followed. Such facilities are, of course, visible over a wide area, so planning studies should be undertaken to ascertain locations that are both economically viable and acceptable to residents of the region. The amount of wind energy generation developed in the region should be limited so that it is not out of proportion with the energy demands of the region. This is discussed further in Chapter 13. The number of telecommunication facilities at high elevations should likewise be limited to the extent possible through co-location of antennae on single towers and, whenever possible, use of multiple transmitters at lower, less prominent locations.

8.7 Land Use Policies and Actions

1. **Centralized, Concentrated Development.** New development should be concentrated in and around established urban centers and villages. Scattered development that is remote and has little relationship to existing settlement patterns should be avoided. Distinctive edges between urban and village centers and rural countryside should be maintained. Municipal plan policies and zoning regulations should strive to retain a clear boundary between the urban centers and villages and the countryside.
2. **Urban Centers.** A variety of residential, commercial, industrial, cultural, and recreational uses, at relatively high densities, is appropriate and encouraged in urban centers. Public investments in infrastructure and public services, and private development activities, should seek to support the development or redevelopment of established urban centers rather than the creation of new concentrations of development. Such new development should be pedestrian-oriented and accommodate bicycle and transit infrastructure. Urban center development must not sprawl into surrounding rural areas.
3. **Villages.** A variety of residential, commercial, industrial, cultural, and recreational uses is appropriate in villages, but at a significantly smaller scale and lower density than in urban centers. Public investments and private initiatives should support growth in existing or planned village areas. New development should respect the small scale and historic character of existing village development and include pedestrian-oriented features and infrastructure.
4. **Rural Areas.** In rural areas, emphasis should be placed on the conservation and

use of natural resources, and the avoidance of costly scattered development that is disruptive of the region's rural character. Low-density residential, small-scale commercial, and compatible recreational uses are appropriate in rural areas. Development should reflect historic settlement patterns and preserve important resources, including productive agricultural soils. Creative land use techniques, including clustered development with open space protections, should be used to retain the integrity of special natural resources.

5. **Roadside Commercial Areas.** Planned commercial or mixed uses within existing roadside commercial zoning districts must be developed carefully to avoid sprawl, traffic congestion, and safety hazards. Roadside commercial areas should not be expanded and should be retracted when feasible and appropriate.
6. **Forests.** Land use in forested areas should emphasize the conservation and wise use of natural resources. The development of permanent improvements and structures for year-round use is generally not appropriate in upland forest areas, although certain important public service facilities may be permitted with proper controls. Forestry and outdoor recreation also are appropriate activities in these areas, and facilities associated with national or state parks are consistent with these uses. Special care must be exercised in areas where the elevation exceeds 2500 feet because of the fragility of the environment. Acquisition of important forest parcels by the United States Forest Service for incorporation into the Green Mountain National Forest is encouraged.
7. **Historic Areas & Features.** Important historic sites, structures, districts, and archaeological sites should be preserved. New development in historic areas should be architecturally compatible with its surroundings. The adaptive reuse of historic buildings is encouraged, and renovation work should maintain the architectural integrity of historic structures.
8. **Residential Development.** The following policies apply to new residential development:
    - Residential development should be concentrated in urban areas and villages and density should be maximized in areas served by water and sewer infrastructure.
    - Outside of areas served by water and sewer infrastructure, the density of residential development should be appropriate to natural conditions and limitations, and consistent with historic rural character.
    - Residential development should be accomplished in a manner that protects soils and mitigates other environmental disturbances where predominant natural slopes exceed 15 percent; residential development should not be permitted where slopes exceed 20 percent.

- Residential projects in rural areas should utilize open space planning techniques by including designs that cluster development in relatively small areas to preserve contiguous open land.
- Residential development in village and urban centers should use a traditional grid street system whenever possible to improve vehicular and pedestrian connections.
- Residential and mixed-use developments should include sidewalks, open space areas, and where possible, areas for recreation and community gardens. These developments should be linked to neighboring developments where possible via roads, trails, and common open space. An efficient utility network should be provided.
- During construction of new residential development, all appropriate measures should be taken to minimize soil erosion.
- Natural vegetation, landscape features, and historic landmarks should be preserved to the greatest extent possible and incorporated in the design of new residential development. Streams, ponds, and wetlands should be maintained in their natural state, appropriate setbacks maintained, and access to these and other open spaces should be provided for residents.
- Prior to any large-scale residential development, a road system capable of handling traffic in a safe and efficient manner must either exist or be planned for immediate construction. The road system should be designed to safely accommodate vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists, and to provide an attractive streetscape.
- Development which exceeds a town's planned growth rate, or which causes substantial economic hardship to a town because of the increased demand for facilities and services, is inappropriate and shall not be permitted.

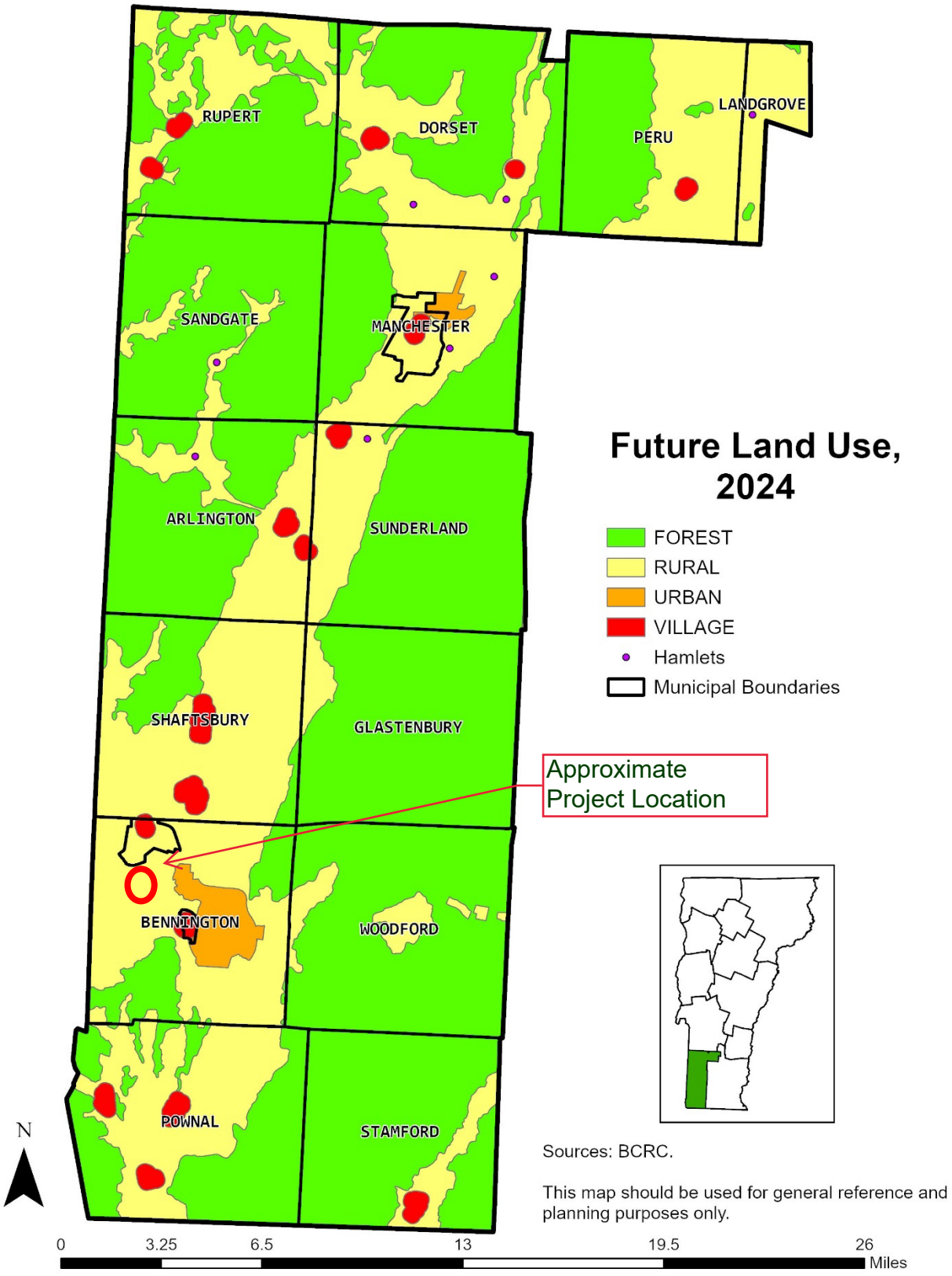
9. **Commercial Development.** The following policies apply to new commercial development:
   - Commercial development should be concentrated in urban areas and villages and density should be maximized in areas served by water and sewer infrastructure.
   - Outside of urban centers and villages, the intensity of commercial development must be consistent with the character of the surrounding area, the capacity of adjacent infrastructure, and capability of the land to support it.
   - Commercial developments should include an architectural and landscape design plan that complements the surrounding environment.
   - Space and amenities for public use (e.g., pedestrian pathways, landscaped

areas with benches, bike racks, restrooms) should be provided.

- The amount of noise, glare, and lighting observable from off-site locations must be minimized.
- Adequate parking and loading spaces should be provided and sited with screening to minimize visibility from streets and neighboring residential areas.
- Safe and efficient vehicular ingress and egress to new commercial development must be provided. Access onto roads where steep grades exist or within 400 feet of a major intersection should be avoided. Adjacent commercial developments should use combined curb cuts and connect parking lots and sidewalks internally whenever possible.
- Safe and convenient facilities for pedestrian access and circulation shall be provided for new commercial development.
- Commercial uses that generate large numbers of traffic turning movements should be avoided along sections of highway with low sufficiency ratings, unless located within an established urban or village center.
- Small convenience shopping centers, reflecting the character of the surrounding community, are appropriate in villages. Urban centers may contain convenience, community, and regional shopping centers as defined in this plan, but shopping centers are not appropriate in rural areas.
- Efforts should be made to improve the appearance, traffic flow, and pedestrian friendliness of existing shopping centers so that they enhance the region's urban centers.
- Careful planning should be conducted to ensure that any new shopping centers do not detract from existing commercial areas or appear out of character with the community.
- Large-scale ("big box") retail stores may be permitted in urban centers only if they exhibit exemplary architectural and site design and are shown to be in the best interest of the community after completion of a comprehensive economic/community impact study.
- Projects should provide for a mix and balance of uses; site optimization including compact building groupings with parking located behind and to the sides of buildings, an architectural design that enhances the streetscape, and transportation facilities to accommodate and encourage access via public transportation, bicycling, and walking. Efforts must be made to minimize adverse impacts on existing highway operations and safety.

10. **Industrial Development.** The following policies apply to new industrial developments:

Map 8-2. Future Land Use Map for the Bennington Region.



9 NATURAL RESOURCES

9.1 Overview

The natural resources of the Bennington region are integral to its landscape and way of life. The contrast between agricultural valleys and forested mountainsides provides the overall visual context for the region while farm and forest-related industries offer great economic potential. The streams, rivers, wetlands, lakes, and ponds of the region represent another critical component of the region's natural beauty and provide important recreational opportunities and habitat for fish and wildlife. Much of the region relies on another water resource—ground water—for domestic use and commercial and industrial applications. The region has a long economic and social history related to earth resources, particularly marble, slate, and sand and gravel. The most ubiquitous natural resource, and one that is particularly crucial to the health of the public and the prosperity of the region, is clean air. These natural resources are extraordinarily important assets, contributing to the health and quality of life of residents while also playing an important role in supporting economic prosperity and future development.

It is the combination of all of these resources, together with the human activity that happens among them, that gives the region its unique character. Wise management and planning is needed to ensure that we benefit from our natural resources today, and that they are conserved so that those benefits and more can be realized by future generations. Although all of the region's natural resources are interconnected and dependent upon each other, the principal resources are discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

Conservation and wise use of these resources is the primary focus of the regional plan, but effective planning for future land use, economic development, and public investments must be considered as well. The information, policies, and recommendations presented in this chapter should be considered in combination with those other factors, as discussed in other parts of this regional plan.

9.2 Water Resources

The quality of surface and ground water resources is vitally important to residents of the region and to the economy. Clean, pure, and abundant water is essential for drinking supplies, agriculture, recreational activities, fish and wildlife habitat, and the scenic quality of the region's landscape. Protection of these resources is an important goal of this plan and is preferable to costly remedial actions that may become necessary following some form of contamination. Several types of water resources, each with special attributes and requiring distinct conservation strategies, are discussed in this section.

region. Similarly, “greenhouse gases” such as carbon dioxide and methane that are released during the production and burning of fossil fuels contribute to the warming of the earth’s climate regardless of their source. While cooperation at a national and international scale will be necessary to address such global pollutants, it is important for communities in the Bennington region to participate in efforts to reduce pollution levels. The region also should participate, through the BCRC, in any regulatory proceedings involving industrial point sources that may affect air quality in the region.

9.4 Agricultural Lands

Agriculture is a vital part of the Bennington region’s rural heritage and economic future. The working agricultural landscape maintains the region’s rural character, contributes an essential element to its scenic quality, and is an important component of the regional economy. The characteristic mix of open fields and woodlands also provides habitat necessary to sustain a large and diverse wildlife population. Productive agricultural soils are found throughout the region in lowland valleys (Map 9-2). Although some level of farming activity occurs in every town in the region, significant concentrations of farms and actively harvested cropland are found in Pownal, Bennington, Shaftsbury, and in the Mettawee Valley in Rupert.

The USDA Agricultural Census documents changes in agriculture every five years and reports findings by county. Table 9-2 shows numbers of farms, farm acreage, and value of agricultural products sold for 2002, 2012, and 2022. In the first ten-year period, the number of farms increased accompanied by a small increase in the total amount of farmland while average farm size declined as did the total amount of cropland. However, in the last ten years the number of farms fell back toward 2002 levels and the total amount of farmland also fell while farm size rebounded a little bit and total cropland fell significantly. These trends can be explained by the fact that many people now farm part-time and are involved in more diverse and specialized products. For example, the number of dairy cattle in the region declined by 25 percent between 2002 and 2012 while there was a 25 percent increase in the amount of land devoted to production of fruits, vegetables, and berries. The same time period also saw significant increases in raising poultry (for eggs and meat), cattle, and hogs. The total value of agricultural products sold in the region nearly doubled and the average sales per farm increased by almost 50 percent. These trends continued in the last ten years with a 50% increase in the total value of agricultural products sold and average sales per farm increasing by more than 80 percent.[11]

Maintaining the potential for the region’s best agricultural soils to be used for growing and raising agricultural products is a statewide and regional priority. Many people prefer to obtain food from local sources and, in fact, more robust local food

[11] United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, County Summary Highlights for Vermont, 2002, 2012, and 2022.

systems will become increasingly necessary as food from distant sources becomes more expensive and difficult to obtain due to rising costs, climate-induced production declines, and other environmental concerns. Moreover, the Vermont Farm to Plate Strategic Plan points out that approximately two billion dollars are spent on food in the state every year (close to $100 million dollars in the Bennington region) so local production of food has the potential for lending strong support to the regional economy.

Table 9-2. Agricultural Land Use and Production in Bennington County, 2002 - 2022. Source: USDA Census of Agriculture.

	2002	2012	2022
Total Number of Farms	228	305	251
Total Farm Acreage	41,126	41,387	37,248
Average Farm Size (acres)	180	136	148
Total Cropland Acreage	13,379	11,165	7,114
Total Value of Agricultural Products Sold.	$7.8 million	$15.1 million	$22.5million
Average Value of Agricultural Sales per Farm	$34,292	$49,421	$89,830

Preserving agricultural land and expanding local production also contributes to environmental quality in a number of ways. Utilization of prime agricultural soils for food production ensures that those lands remain open and part of the working landscape. Properly managed farmlands—as outlined in the state's Accepted Agricultural Practices—maximize use, reuse, and recycling of local natural resources, thus limiting waste and pollution. Those same practices reduce the need to use petrochemical fertilizers, while increased local production reduces fossil fuel use related to transportation and processing.

Many approaches can help preserve important agricultural lands. Encouraging development in and around existing village and urban centers relieves the pressure to develop in outlying agricultural areas. Public investments and regulatory incentives should encourage growth in villages and urban centers. Conversely, land use policies and regulations in rural areas containing productive soils should permit only those uses, density levels, and development patterns that will not detract from rural character or substantially reduce the viability of current and future agricultural use. Public investments in roads and other infrastructure in the rural countryside should focus on public safety rather than facilitation of new development. Local zoning and subdivision regulations should provide for innovative practices such as transferable development rights and planned unit developments that require or encourage preservation of important agricultural soils.

Non-regulatory strategies also can be effective in preserving agricultural lands in the region. The Vermont Use Value Appraisal program allows owners of farmland to be taxed based on their property's use for agriculture rather than on its development potential. Acquisition of development rights to agricultural lands, through gift or

purchase, by a qualified land trust or other conservation organization is another proven way to preserve agricultural land. The Vermont Land Trust has conserved a large amount of agricultural and forest land in the region. The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board's Farmland Preservation Program is a significant source of funding for these preservation efforts.

Supporting the economic viability of farming in the region will make it easier and more desirable for owners of good agricultural land to maintain those resources as part of the working landscape. The Walloomsac (Bennington), Manchester, and Dorset Farmer's Markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) farms, and programs to ensure that locally produced foods are available in local stores and offered in area restaurants are essential to ensuring that strong markets exist for foods that derive from the region's agricultural lands. Improved food storage, processing, and distribution systems also will support local farmers and help to maintain the agricultural component of the region's working landscape.

Conserved Lands in the Bennington Region

A significant percentage of important agricultural and forest lands in the Bennington Region have been conserved through a variety of techniques (see Map 9-3).

- Public land ownership, principally by the US Forest Service (although local governments and the state also own several important parcels), allows for multiple use management of key resource lands.
- Other lands are protected by private organizations such as the Equinox Preservation Trust, Mount Anthony Preservation Society, the Merck Forest and Farmland Center, the Fund for North Bennington, and the Nature Conservancy.
- Many farm and forest properties, especially in the Taconic Mountains and in agricultural valleys, are enrolled in the state's Use Value Appraisal (or "Current Use") program.

9.5 Forest Lands

The forests that cover much of the region's landscape represent an important part of the area's history, contribute to the unique character of our communities, and represent a significant economic asset. The Landscape-Based Forest Stewardship Plan (BCRC, July 2012) for the Bennington region includes a comprehensive description of regional forest resources, issues, and conservation strategies. That plan, and any amendments to it that are adopted by the BCRC, are incorporated into and considered an integrated part of this regional plan.

Extensive unbroken forests cover much of the high elevation and remote areas in the Green and Taconic Mountain ranges, while woodlots, wooded riparian corridors, and other forested landscapes are found throughout the region's valleys and lower

on the health of fisheries by affecting the stream's substrate and by creating barriers to fish passage, thus restricting access to spawning and refuge areas. Bridges and bottomless plate arches are preferred because they minimize habitat disturbance and are not a barrier to fish passage. When other structures are used, it may be appropriate to minimize impacts to fish habitat by over-sizing the culverts, installing baffles, or burying the culvert below streambed level.

Invasive species also can affect water quality and fish habitat. The Agency of Natural Resource's Aquatic Invasive Species Program has information regarding aquatic invasive species, nonnative species whose introduction can cause environmental or economic harm or harm to human health, and nuisance species (native species that reach proportions of abundance that may cause economic harm or harm to human health). Priority species of concern at this time include Eurasian watermilfoil (a significant problem in Lake Paran), purple loosestrife, didymo, water chestnut, alewife, and several other species.

9.8 Unique Natural Features

The waterfalls, caves, glens, rock outcroppings, mountain summits, and other unique geological, botanical, and hydrological features of the Bennington region's landscape contribute to its special character and should be protected from incompatible development. Many of these landscape features are recreational draws and also contribute to ecological diversity in the region. An inventory that includes many of these features has been compiled and mapped by the BCRC (see Map 9-7 and accompanying Table 9-3), and more information on these resources is available through the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

9.9 Scenic and Recreational Resources

Scenic Resources

The scenic quality of the landscape is one of the region's most important assets. The visual appearance of the natural and built environment of our towns and villages, and the quality of life that it represents, is important to residents, tourists, businesses, and to future economic development.

The region is characterized by its expansive valleys that have been able to support a rich variety of rural and urban development. That development has occurred in close proximity to distinctive upland features which have themselves limited and channeled the direction of such growth. The varied nature of the valley landforms and built environment juxtaposed with natural green mountainsides gives the Bennington Region its unique sense of place.

Many individual factors come together to create these special visual landscapes. Particular scenic elements reflect both characteristics that are unique to the region and individual communities as well as certain features that are widely recognized as adding

visual interest to a landscape. Bennington, Manchester Village, and Peru have completed scenic resource inventories and assessments that discuss each of these elements in detail: open fields, mountains, water, distant views, gateways, scenic roads and public places, historical sites and districts, and other unique local features. The scenic resource studies also discuss how those features are organized in the landscape to create pleasing views. The visual qualities of landscape contrast, order and harmony, focal points, spatial quality, and intactness that make a particular view special and unique to the community must be protected to retain the integrity of the resource.

The scenic quality of a landscape can be affected, positively or negatively, by change. A number of landscape features are particularly sensitive to change, among them: views across open fields, prominent ridgelines or hillsides, historical buildings and districts and gateways to those districts, and scenes that include important contrasting elements such as water.

Municipal land use plans and regulations can reinforce the scenic quality of the landscape by focusing development in historical village centers and by preserving the rural character of the outlying countryside. Several local communities have adopted special regulations that preserve scenic resources by requiring aesthetically sensitive design of subdivisions and commercial buildings. In addition, zoning regulations can establish very specific standards and review procedures for new and altered buildings in designated historic design review districts.

Nonregulatory tools also can be used to protect identified scenic resources. Towns and villages should work with conservation organizations such as the Vermont Land Trust to acquire properties, or conservation or scenic easements to properties, that have particular scenic significance to the community. Local and state designated scenic roads, including the region’s three state designated byways, can help provide support for preserving and promoting scenic roadway corridors.

Special attention should be given to visual gateways: points of transition along a public highway where it is evident that the traveler is arriving at a unique place. Gateways are located at entry points to historical downtowns and village centers and at places along rural highways where significant visual elements of the landscape first appear. These features can be improved through effective planning of adjacent land uses and integration of site features such as landscaping and careful placement of historic district signs.

Recent interest in development of renewable energy resources raises a number of important issues. Commercial-scale wind turbines will be highly visible and should be located only in locations approved by local communities. Commercial-scale solar energy facilities occupy large open areas and should not be sited at important gateway locations or in the foreground of viewsheds that have been identified by communities as being of particular value. Biomass (wood) heating and electric generation involve

significant tree harvesting and may include plants with smokestacks and visible plumes of steam. The environmental and scenic impacts of those operations must be considered. Finally, small-scale hydroelectric generation can impact stream water quality, fish habitat, and aesthetics; restricting development to existing dam sites will greatly minimize any such concerns.

Outdoor Recreational Resources

The region's natural environment provides a wide variety of outdoor recreation experiences; camping, hiking, running, hunting, fishing, road and mountain biking, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, downhill and cross-country skiing, and swimming and boating are enjoyed by both residents and tourists. Many of these outdoor recreational pursuits rely on the willingness of landowners to allow access to private lands. While public recreational use of private lands is important, vandalism, littering, and a general disregard for private property can lead to more and more land being restricted. Landowners must feel confident that their land will be respected by the public if these areas are to continue to be used for recreational activities.

The Bennington region also contains extensive public land and land owned by nonprofit organizations that are widely used for recreation. Portions of the Appalachian Trail, Long Trail, Catamount Trail, Taconic Crest Trail, and the D&H Rail Trail all traverse the region. The Green Mountain National Forest occupies much of the upland forests in the region, and three state parks, several wildlife management and fishing access areas, and a number of town-owned parks and forests mean that recreational opportunities on public land are never far away. These public and conserved lands are economic assets and contribute to the quality of life of the region's residents. Acquisition of additional land well suited for outdoor recreation by local, state, or federal agencies, and by private conservation organizations, can be beneficial to the region. In general, publicly owned lands should include areas that are managed for multiple uses to accommodate a variety of recreational activities.

Local trail networks, sidewalks, bike paths, and bike lanes also are important outdoor recreational resources. Towns and villages should seek opportunities to develop new bicycle and pedestrian facilities and connect them to form networks and to provide access to existing trail networks and outdoor recreational sites. New developments can be planned to include facilities that encourage walking and should be designed to allow for continued use of existing trails in the area.

The region's rivers and lakes offer opportunities for swimming, fishing and boating, all of which require public access for parking or boat launching. Emerald Lake, Lake Shaftsbury, and Woodford State Parks, the Hapgood Pond Recreation Area in the Green Mountain National Forest, and the recreation center at Lake Paran all offer facilities for recreation on small lakes, and their geographic distribution ensures that no resident of the region is far from one of the parks. Public fishing access areas are

available on the Mettawee River, Batten Kill, Walloomsac River, and Hoosic Rivers, and public access for boating and swimming have been developed in certain areas along these rivers as well. Recreational use of these resources, and access to them, must be managed to ensure that excessive or inappropriate use does not damage the environment or result in conflicts among different user groups.

It is important that public parks and conserved natural areas remain accessible to the public throughout the year. While maintained park facilities generally are open only for a few months in the summer, these outstanding resource areas offer outstanding opportunities that should be available to residents throughout the year. Local officials should work with state and federal resource managers to ensure that residents have year-round access to these lands and waters. Municipal plans, such as the Woodford Town Plan, can include specific references to off-season use at parks located within their borders.

9.10 Natural Resource Policies and Actions

1. The natural characteristics and values of the region's surface water resources must be preserved. Techniques such as maintenance of an undisturbed buffer, generally at least 50 feet in width, between developed areas and rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, or wetlands are advisable to ensure the protection of water quality and natural ecosystems. Greater buffer distances often are needed based on topographic conditions and the affected waterway. Agricultural and forestry activities should follow prescribed best management practices to minimize degradation of water quality. The density and type of new development in shoreland areas should be controlled to prevent environmental damage and protect resource values.
2. Recreational uses such as fishing, boating, and swimming are appropriate in natural settings in and along rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and wetlands. Development planning should include provisions for public access to these resources. The intensity of use and access points should be limited in particularly fragile ecological areas.
3. Construction of in-stream ponds and other activities that disturb aquatic ecosystems or degrade water quality are strongly discouraged. Existing dams that no longer serve a useful purpose, and which do not have significant potential for energy generation, should be removed.
4. River corridor plans should be developed by towns and villages, with assistance from the BCRC, and implemented to allow the natural hydrological functions of waterways to occur without damaging natural ecosystems, public infrastructure, or private property.
5. Water quality should be maintained through comprehensive watershed

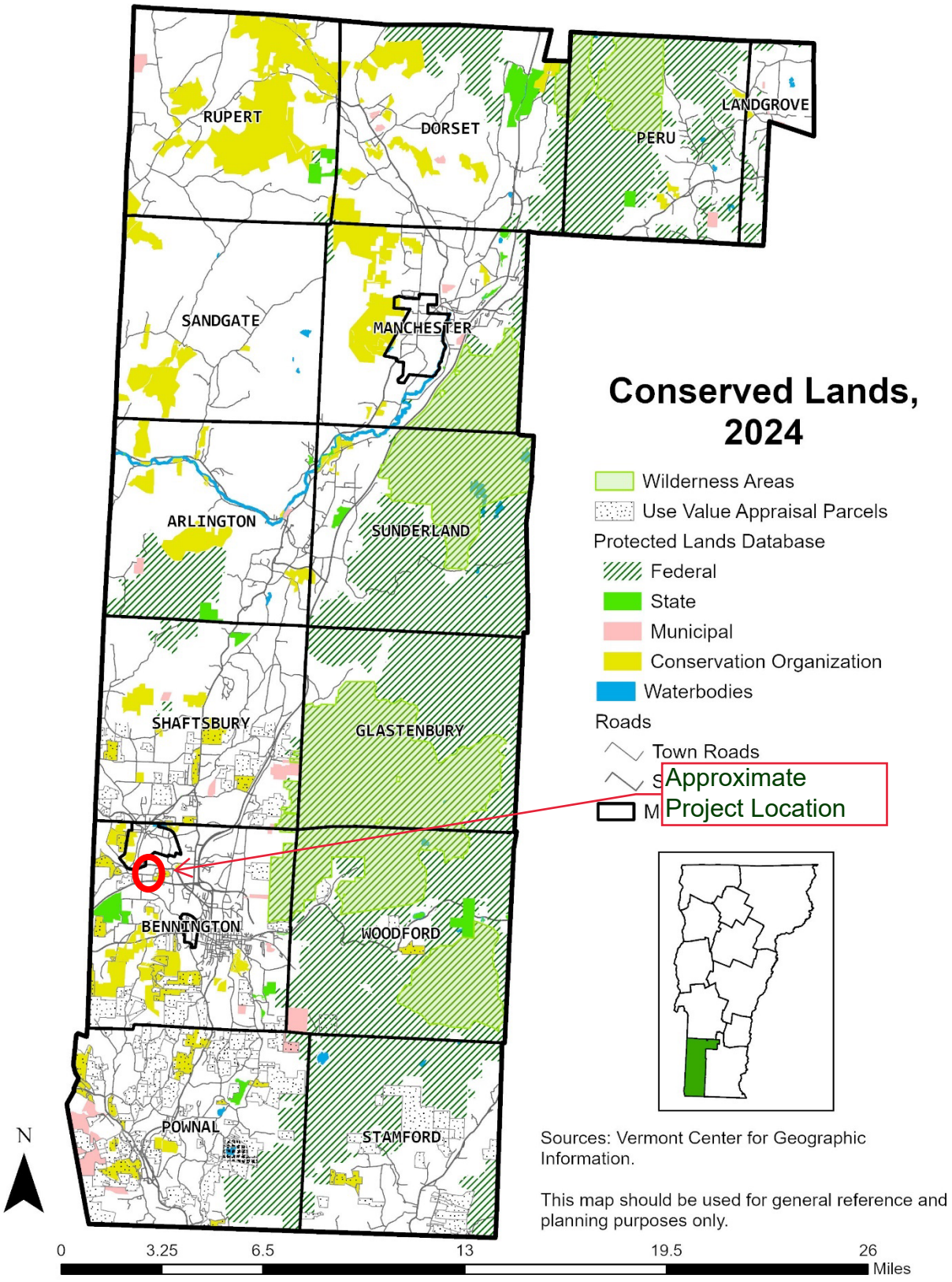
management activities, including enforcement of appropriate standards for stormwater discharges, and direct and indirect discharges from highway maintenance and land development.

6. Aquifers and groundwater recharge areas, including all source protection areas, must be protected from activities or development that would adversely affect the quantity or quality of these waters. Municipal subdivision and health ordinances, and state regulations, must be strictly enforced to protect individual water supplies.
7. Land development and other activities that would significantly degrade local or regional air quality, or that would impede economic development in the region, should be prohibited. Compact development patterns and alternative transportation systems that reduce the use of motor vehicles should be supported. Efforts to limit damage to the region's air quality that may result from pollution sources beyond the region also should be supported.
8. To discourage the loss or fragmentation of important agricultural and forest lands, public sector planning and investments should promote growth in planned compact centers and should discourage scattered development in outlying areas.
9. Land development occurring on or near important agricultural or forest soils should be planned to preserve the viability, or potential viability, of the site for farming and forest resource-based activities.
10. Land suitable for community gardens in or near villages and urban centers should be identified.
11. Support agricultural and forestry-based business in the region and the development of local and regional markets for primary and value-added products.
12. Developments should be planned and permitted in a manner that will not preclude the future utilization of important earth resources.
13. The extraction and processing of earth resources and the disposal of wastes must not have an unduly harmful impact on the environment or surrounding land uses and development. Upon completion of extraction and processing, the site should be restored and left in a condition suited for an approved alternative use.
14. An activity or development in the vicinity of important natural areas, fish habitat, or wildlife habitat must be carefully planned to avoid adverse impacts to the resources. The objectives of maintaining protective riparian and shoreland buffers, wildlife corridors, and avoiding habitat fragmentation should guide natural area planning in the region.
15. New building construction on visually prominent shorelines, hillsides, mountains, and ridgelines should include provisions for siting and screening structures to

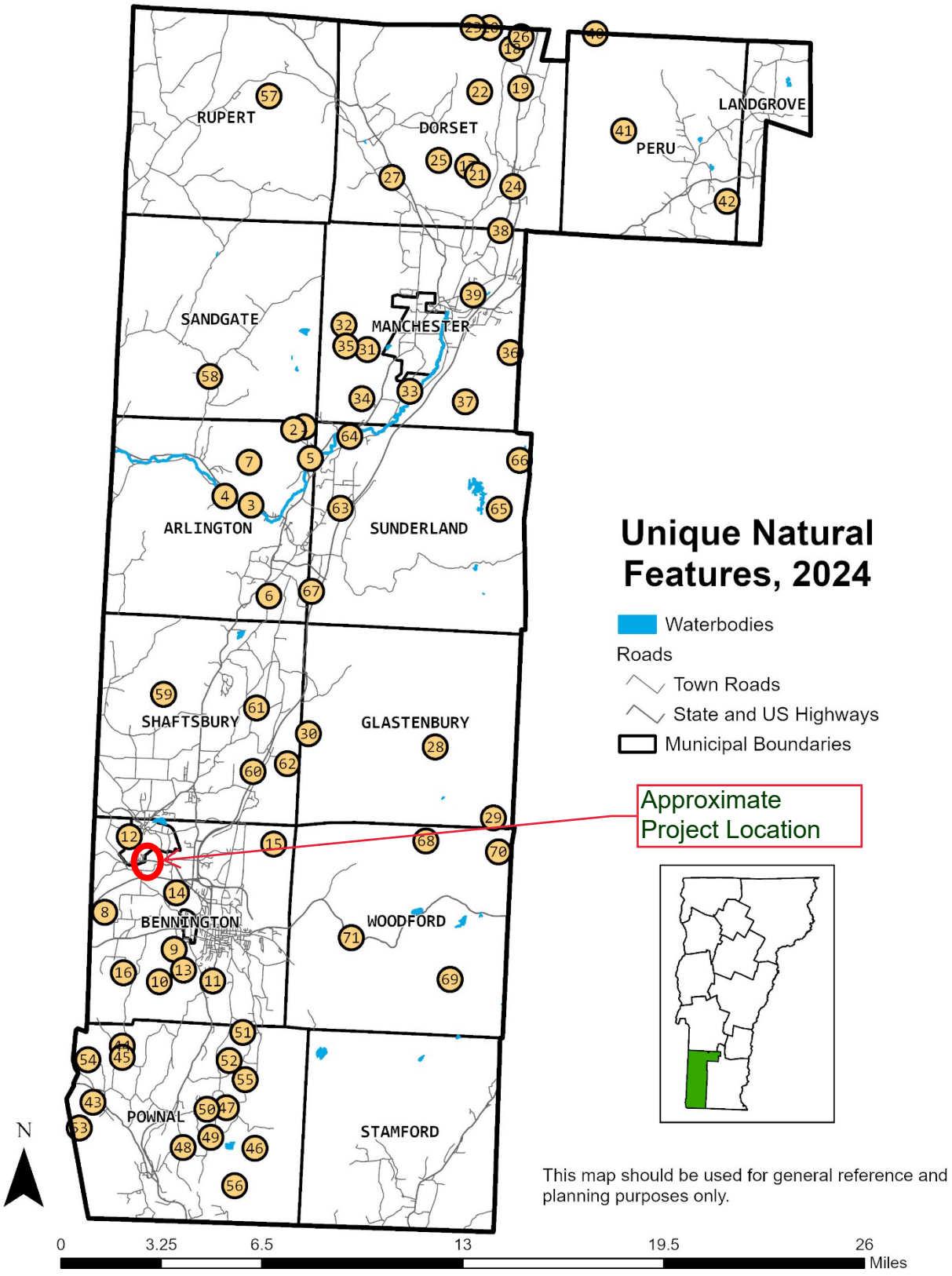
protect important scenic values. Municipalities are encouraged to adopt appropriate ordinances to ensure that locally significant scenic resources are protected.

16. Wind generation and telecommunication facilities on mountains and ridgelines may be appropriate to meet identified public needs but should be avoided when construction would destroy critical natural resources or degrade a viewshed identified as essential to maintaining the unique character of a community or the region.
17. Maintaining and improving public access to important outdoor recreational areas and sites in rural areas is a priority for the region. Redevelopment of waterfront properties in developed areas for residential, commercial, or recreational use is appropriate and must consider incorporating flood safety measures as appropriate.
18. Owners of valuable agricultural and forest lands should consider participation in the Vermont Use Value Appraisal Program.
19. The BCRC should continue to participate in cooperative planning for regional natural resources. Such planning may consider issues related to environmental quality, public health, recreational use and public access, fish and wildlife habitat, agriculture and forest productivity, and scenic values, and should involve representatives of local governments, special interest groups, and other interested parties.
20. Acquisition of important forest lands by the U. S. Forest Service, following consultation with affected local governments, is a valuable way to maintain and enhance resource values and opportunities.
21. Acquisition of valuable resource lands by local and state government, land trusts, or private conservation organizations, also can be an appropriate and effective conservation strategy.

Map 9-3. Conserved Lands in the Bennington Region.



Map 9-7. Unique Natural Features of the Bennington Region.



Town	Number	Natural Feature
Arlington	1	Kents Cave
	2	Falls on Red Mountain Stream
	3	Arlington Folds
	4	Batten Kill
	5	Canfield Pines
	6	Warm Brook Pond
	7	Hidden Falls
Bennington	8	Whipstock Hill
	9	Everett Cave
	10	Mount Anthony
	11	Jewett Brook Marsh
	12	McCullough (Mile-Around) Woods
	13	Bennington Tulip Trees
	14	Silk Road Alluvial Forest
	15	Stratton Brook Falls
	16	Pit of Misery
Dorset	17	Green Peak (Mount Aeolus)
	18	Emerald Lake Natural Bridge
	19	Emerald Lake Beach
	20	Dorset Peak Caves
	21	Dorset Bat Caves
	22	Ketchum Meadows
	23	Dorset Mountain
	24	Dorset Dikes
	25	Owl's Head Mountain
	26	Falls Cliff and Tallow Caves
	27	Dorset Marsh
Glastenbury	28	Glastenbury Mountain
	29	Castle Meadows
	30	East Mountain Red Spruce
Manchester	31	Cook Hollow
	32	Equinox Mountain
	33	Batten Kill
	34	Dyer Quarry
	35	Skinner Hollow Cave
	36	Downer Glen
	37	Lye Brook Falls
	38	Bullhead Pond
	39	Barnumville Punch Bowl
Peru	40	Griffith Lake
	41	Mad Tom Notch
	42	Mud Pond
Pownal	43	Kreiger Rocks
	44	The Tubs on Bathtub Brook
	45	Hemlock Gorge
	46	The Dome
	47	Barber School Meadows
	48	Chalk Pond
	49	Swamp of Oracles
	50	Cranberry Bog
	51	Maple Grove Swamp
	52	Middle Pownal Road Swamp
	53	Pownal Mount Laurel
	54	Peckham Hill
	55	South Stream Waterfowl Area
	56	Pownal Red Pines
Rupert	57	Merck Forest
Sandgate	58	Green River Valley
Shaftsbury	59	West Mountain
	60	Shaftsbury Cobbles
Sunderland	61	Trumbull Mountain
	62	Basin Brook Falls
	63	Beaver Meadows
	64	Batten Kill
Woodford	65	Branch Pond
	66	Bourn Pond
	67	Beaver Valley
	68	Little Pond
	69	Stamford-Woodford Plateau
	70	Mill Pond Meadows
	71	Bennington Road Cut

Table 9-4. Inventory of Unique Natural Features in the Bennington Region.

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11 TRANSPORTATION

11.1 Overview

Safe, convenient, and economical transportation is essential to the people and economy of the Bennington region. A variety of transportation modes exist in the region. A network of town and state roads and bridges serves through traffic, provides access to residential properties, and supports the area's commercial and industrial businesses. The Vermont Railway traverses the region from North Bennington to Dorset and a busy freight corridor runs along the Hoosic River in Pownal. The W.H. Morse State Airport in Bennington provides facilities for light aircraft. The Green Mountain Community Network operates local fixed-route and commuter bus service, and an intercity bus service connects stops in the region with points north and west. Pedestrians and bicyclists use roadways and the sidewalks and pathways found in and near downtowns, village centers, and residential neighborhoods. Each element of the region's transportation infrastructure will be discussed in this chapter, with an emphasis on support for regional development goals. This plan also will identify current transportation improvements.

An understanding of how transportation is related to regional land use, public health, energy, environmental quality, and economic development objectives is fundamental to this plan. While it is critical that transportation infrastructure provides safe and convenient access for residents and businesses, it is equally important to ensure that the underlying land use pattern supports and encourages efficiency and the use of alternative modes of transportation. Growth concentrated in compact urban and village centers facilitates efficient transportation.

11.2 Highway System

The purpose of the region's network of roads and bridges is to provide for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods, supporting healthy communities, and structuring future growth and development (see Map11-1). There are over 650 miles of state and local roads in the region (Table 11-1). The principal north-south travel route through the region is provided by Routes 7 And 7A. Six state highways branch off from this central corridor and provide access to rural areas and village centers to the east and west. Town maintained road networks serve urban and village centers as well as lower-density and rural areas in the valleys. Except for a few minor roads (often extending into unmaintained public rights-of-way and legal trails) that follow streams up into mountain hollows and some US Forest Service roads, there are no public roadways in the region's mountainous upland areas. Privately owned and maintained roads in the lowland areas exist primarily to serve individual residential developments. Private logging roads provide access into some upland forest areas for forest resource and

studies.

Parking

Safe, convenient, and attractive vehicle parking areas are a necessary component of the transportation system. In many areas, adequate parking can be provided through on-site facilities. The location of these parking lots on a site and the layout and design of the lots are important to their proper functioning and to the aesthetic values of a community.

Parking areas should be well-landscaped and placed at the side or rear of lots to ensure that a sea of asphalt and vehicles are not prominently visible from public roads. Parking lots should include sidewalk linkages that provide for safe pedestrian movements to and through these areas. Landscaped islands and borders improve aesthetics, provide shade, and allow for infiltration of stormwater runoff. It is important that parking lots provide adequate space for the number of vehicles that typically use the site, but lots with excessive parking spaces are not appropriate.

Because of space limitations and the importance of maintaining a compact development pattern, on-site parking often is not available or appropriate in downtowns or village centers. On-street parking may provide a significant amount of vehicle storage in these areas while also calming traffic. Public parking lots and parking garages should be located behind, but convenient to, main business streets. Those public parking facilities should include the same design elements as on-site private lots as well as clear and attractive sidewalk or pathway connections to commercial and residential destinations. If sufficient public parking is developed in downtowns and village centers, it may be possible to eliminate some on-street parking and expand sidewalks and adjacent areas for additional public spaces that could be available for enhanced landscaping, outdoor dining, art displays, sitting areas, and similar uses. Properly sited and planned public park-and-ride lots help to encourage carpooling; such parking facilities should include features like those described above.

Scenic Roads and Historic Bridges

The region’s landscape is most often viewed from its public places, and the most visited public places in a community are its roads. As such, public highways are extremely important to the region’s overall scenic character. Key points along principal highway corridors serve as important visual gateways to villages and other historic areas. Roadways also provide visual access to near and distant scenic views. Of course, roads can be scenic features in and of themselves: a winding country lane lined by a stone wall and a village street passing under a canopy of mature trees are distinctive scenic resources.

While many, or most, of the roads in the region can be considered scenic, several characteristics clearly contribute to the aesthetic appeal of a roadway. In

general, narrow local roads that blend harmoniously with the surrounding countryside are more scenic than wide roads that don't follow natural or historic elements of the landscape. Landscape features adjacent to a roadway become part of the road corridor: without stone walls, fence lines, trees, and similar elements, the overall scenic value of a roadway can be greatly diminished. Some scenic roads also draw the traveler's eye along the centerline of the road to a unique view or distinctive landscape feature in the distance.

These roadside views are often as important as the scenic character of the road. Some local roads offer delightful forays into deep forests while others bring motorists, bicyclists, and other travelers to views of fields, farms, mountains, or historic buildings. In these instances, scenic viewpoints are open to the principal view and are not blocked or disrupted by incompatible structures or other objects in the foreground. At the same time, an attractive foreground can greatly enhance roadside views.

Municipalities can formally designate local scenic roads and adopt ordinances to protect their character by requiring special consideration before the roadway dimensions, surface, or roadside vegetation located within the public right-of-way are changed. New developments in areas served by scenic roads should be planned to minimize heavy use of those roads that would lead to subsequent demands for widening or other changes to the roads. In addition to any locally established scenic roadways, the region's three state-designated scenic byways are important economic assets for local communities. Continued cooperation between the BCRC, local governments, and state agencies will ensure that these scenic state highway corridors will continue to be important regional resources.

Historic bridges are particularly important components of the region's transportation system. There are five historic covered bridges in the region. The Silk, Paper Mill, and Henry bridges cross the Walloomsac River in Bennington, the Chiselville bridge in Sunderland sits high above the Roaring Branch, and the West Arlington covered bridge spans the Batten Kill in a particularly scenic setting just off Route 313. In addition, two historic truss bridges cross the Batten Kill, one in Arlington at Benedict Crossing and another in Sunderland restored as a pedestrian bridge at a state fishing access site as part of the Vermont Historic Bridge Program. The bridge preservation initiative is a cooperative effort among the Vermont Agency of Transportation, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the Federal Highway Administration, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The program is designed to work in partnership with towns and villages to preserve historic bridges, either for continued highway use or for some other public use. The program maintains an inventory and resource guide for historic covered and truss bridges, including active bridges and bridges in storage, and can aid with education and development of preservation plans and documents.

13 ENERGY

This chapter of the regional plan constitutes the BCRC Energy Plan. BCRC's energy plan aims to guide the region's energy development for the next eight years in support of Act 174, aligning with Vermont's 2022 Comprehensive Energy Plan (CEP), and Vermont's 2021 Climate Action Plan. To meet state energy and climate goals, Vermont is planning for a major shift away from fossil fuels in the transportation and heating sectors to renewable sources of energy, efficiency in all sectors, and increase in-state renewable energy generation. Equity and justice must be integrated into all aspects of the energy planning and policy process; and as regional goals, objectives and actions are considered and implemented, the decision-making process will be guided by the following questions:

1. Who is helped/who benefits from the policy or objective?
2. Who is harmed by the policy or objective?
3. Who is missing from the conversation on the policy or objective?

This energy element of the Bennington Regional Plan is intended to provide residents and municipal officials with information and strategies needed to plan for an energy future that maintains a vibrant community as the energy sector evolves to reduce consumption and lower costs. This energy plan promotes energy conservation, conversion to more efficient technologies, and local renewable energy development, all of which will better protect the environment and strengthen the local economy.

What is a BTU?

A BTU, or British Thermal Unit, is a measure of energy value or heat content.

One BTU is the amount of heat required to raise the temperature of one pound of water by one degree Fahrenheit at a constant pressure of one atmospheric unit.

1 MBTU = 1,000 BTU

1 MMBTU = 1,000,000 BTU

Much of the data presented in this plan comes from Low Emissions Analysis Platform (LEAP) model projections. The LEAP model is a tool used by the State of Vermont to analyze and project energy demand across multiple sectors at the state and regional levels for the years 2015-2050. The projections come from the Vermont Pathways Model, a specific model within the LEAP model that was developed by the Vermont Department of Public Service and the Stockholm Environmental Institute. The LEAP projections for each sector include two scenarios: baseline energy demand and a "CAP Mitigation" energy demand. The baseline scenario, or business-as-usual scenario, was developed to estimate regional energy demand under normal policy and programmatic conditions. The Climate Action Plan (CAP) Mitigation scenario was

Large regional facilities that may be good candidates for biomass CHP projects include NSK Steering Systems and the Vermont Veterans Home in Bennington, Equinox Golf Resort and Spa and Burr and Burton Academy in Manchester, and Bromley Mountain Ski Resort in Peru (see Appendix A for a more expansive list). Potential biodigester projects could be located at the wastewater treatment plants in Bennington and Manchester, or large farming operations in the region.

B. Thermal Energy Networks

A thermal energy network (TEN) is an emerging technology that can help to decarbonize Vermont's thermal sector and provide affordable heating and cooling to Vermonters. According to Vermont Community Thermal Networks (VCTN), a "thermal energy network is an umbrella term that can include networked geothermal and other systems that use water to capture, re-use, and share thermal energy between buildings." VCTN worked with the Energy Action Network to create a guide to developing thermal energy networks in Vermont communities. The potential exists to develop efficient TENs in the region's compact downtown and village centers. The BCRC will work with municipalities to explore the possibility of TENs in their communities.

C. Energy Storage

Electricity storage is technology that has the potential to dramatically improve access to electricity produced by intermittent renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, by making it available for use when it is most needed. The American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE) provides a technical brief exploring energy storage systems as an emerging opportunity for increasing the energy efficiency of residential and commercial buildings.

Energy storage is rapidly expanding in Vermont and the Bennington region. According to data from the Department of Public Service, at the end of 2023, Vermont had 55 MW of installed storage with an additional 30 MW in development. The Bennington region had 2.2 MW of installed storage. Furthermore, storing energy, often in the form of a battery, can play an important role in emergency preparedness and resiliency, as it can provide a source of energy in the event of a power outage. Green Mountain Power has developed home energy storage programs to help reduce the amount of power needed during times of peak demand. EV to grid, in which energy is stored in the battery of an electric vehicle and then fed back into the grid during times of peak demand, is another method of energy storage that can improve grid resilience.

13.3.8 Increasing Access through Local Generation

For communities to thrive, local leaders should look to programs and policies that encourage locally generated and managed fossil-fuel-free energy, while prioritizing

Additional methods of outreach and participation could include surveys, small-group conversations, and pop-up tabling in public places.

5. Identify barriers to public participation in decision-making and planning processes and take appropriate steps to remove those barriers to the greatest extent possible. For example, this may involve offering childcare or transportation to and from meetings.
6. Other tools and frameworks that may be useful for the development and evaluation of equitable policies and programs include:
    a. Transportation Equity Framework
    b. Vermont Health Equity Planning Toolkit
    c. Vermont Municipal Climate Change Vulnerability Indicators Tool

13.5 Energy Actions

The following list of goals and actions will guide the region's energy policy.

GOAL – Reduced regional energy burden and fossil fuel pollution in support of Vermont's climate and energy goals.

ACTIONS:

1. Empower municipal energy committees to engage with residents and municipalities about opportunities to reduce energy burden and switch to affordable renewable energy sources. Additionally, continue to collaborate and partner with organizations (including municipalities, educational institutions, businesses, and non-profits) to help meet the State's energy and climate goals.
2. Support a wide variety of renewable energy generation types, including, but not limited to, sustainable uses of biomass for heating, passive solar building design, biodigesters for electricity generation, photovoltaic solar, agrivoltaics, wind turbines, and optimizing the energy potential for existing hydro-electric dams in the region.
3. Work with landlords, developers, and businesses to raise awareness about the importance of weatherization, non-fossil fuel-based heating systems, and EV charging.
4. Support changes in federal, state, and local policies to achieve Vermont's goals related to the Comprehensive Energy Plan, Climate Action Plan, and Environmental Justice Law.
5. Encourage the Vermont legislature to adopt laws and increase incentives and rebates that reduce energy burden for the region's residents, businesses, and institutions.

5. Adequately fund the maintenance and preservation of our existing transportation assets including roads, bridges, walkways, bike paths, and park-and-ride facilities.
6. Promote and support rail infrastructure as a cost-effective transportation resource.
7. Encourage EV adoption and the development of electric vehicle supply equipment (EVSE), including Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 charging stations, in downtowns, village centers, and opportunity zones, as well as along key interstate and state highway corridors.
    a. Assist communities with planning for and securing funding for EVSE.
    b. Educate individuals on the benefits of EVs with an emphasis on gasoline superusers.
    c. Promote workplace charging to regional businesses.
    d. Assist municipalities and businesses with fleet electrification through grant support and technical assistance.
8. Support the expansion of electric powered buses and vans among the public and private transportation providers serving the region, including school districts (EPA Clean School Bus Program).
9. Work with cycling advocacy groups such as the Bike Hub, and Local Motion to host safe on-road cycling workshops and raise awareness about the viability of micro-mobility (such as electric bikes and scooters).
    a. Provide training to local planning commissions to require infrastructure for alternative transportation in new developments.
    b. Provide technical and grant writing assistance to municipalities to plan for multi-modal transportation and better connectivity with alternative transportation modes.

GOAL – Support the development of new, community-scale renewable energy generation that is affordable, equitable, and respects the natural environment.

ACTIONS:

1. Support the development and siting of renewable energy, storage, transmission, and distribution resources on state and regionally preferred (and potential) locations, as identified by BCRC's Act 174 Energy Maps.
2. Investigate public benefits provided to communities either directly from renewable energy developers or as a condition of a Certificate of Public Good. Assess if the current system is equitable to all municipalities impacted by a renewable generation facility, or if the current system can be improved to provide

Bennington Town Plan

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TOWN PLAN
Bennington, Vermont

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Chapter 1 - A Vision for Bennington's Future

1.1 VISION STATEMENT

The Town Plan is part of a process that is intended to guide the community in a particular direction. For that process to be effective, it is imperative that a clearly articulated vision for its future be set forth and accepted by the town. The following statement is based on aspirations and values that are central to Bennington.

As Bennington promotes its standing as an ever more important economic center, it will continue to provide opportunities for its residents to enjoy an outstanding quality of life by dedicating itself to its distinctive sense of place—a place characterized by its natural, scenic, cultural, and historic resources; its historic settlement pattern; its active and engaged community with a true sense of civic pride; an outstanding school system; efficient and responsive municipal services; an efficient, safe, and convenient transportation system; pleasant, efficient, and affordable housing—and a place where all citizens have the opportunity to participate in a diverse, sustainable, and resilient economy.

Bennington as seen from the White Rocks lookout on Bald Mountain east of town.

1.2 GOALS

Specific goals provide focus and direction to the policy statements and recommended actions set forth in each chapter of the Town Plan.. These goals also are consistent with the 14 specific goals of 24 V.S.A. Section 4302.

1. **Support and strengthen Bennington's role as an economic center**. Continue to develop an economy that is based on businesses that provide satisfying and rewarding employment while maintaining high social and environmental standards. Provide public investment and support as appropriate to create a competitive business environment.

   Promote the use of local products and resources in a manner that supports development of a sustainable local economy.

   Recognize the importance to the community of a variety of economic enterprises. Support emerging new technology and service oriented businesses, traditional manufacturing, agricultural, and forestry-related businesses. Provide the infrastructure necessary to support desirable new technology-driven industries.

2. **Plan development to maintain the town's historic settlement pattern** of a well-defined urban growth center surrounded by rural countryside. Provide incentives for investment in the downtown and ensure that new development is consistent with the area's historic character and form. Support efforts to strengthen and revitalize existing residential neighborhoods near the town's center.

   Development in rural areas shall respect the need to protect the town's natural resources and scenic landscapes. Sprawl–dispersed, auto-dependent development outside of compact urban and village centers, along highways, and in rural countryside–is costly, inefficient, and unattractive and will be strictly limited. The forest lands on the steep slopes of Mount Anthony, Whipstock Hill, and the Green Mountains must remain free from development and be reserved for forest and recreation related uses.

3. **Recognize the importance of significant natural, scenic, and historic resources**. Make use of public investment, regulation, and creative development techniques to protect open spaces, natural and fragile areas, scenic views, and historic sites, structures, and districts that are significant to the community.

   Support appropriate utilization of local natural resources for economic and renewable energy development while ensuring that any resource extraction is accomplished in an environmentally sensitive manner.

4. Support policies, public investments, and projects undertaken by both private and non-profit developers that help **ensure the availability of an adequate supply of housing that is affordable and desirable** for all of the town's residents. Single and multi-family opportunities all must be available in sufficient quantity in the community. Efforts should focus on increasing the percentage of owner-occupied housing. Concentra-

tions of new housing will be located near employment and community centers. Promote rehabilitation and reuse of existing sites and structures near the town's center for housing development.

Housing development in rural areas must be carefully planned to protect the town's rural character and to avoid placing excessive demands on public transportation facilities and utilities.

5. **Provide a safe, convenient, and efficient transportation system** that includes a safe and efficient system of roads and bridges and facilities and services that encourage and accommodate other modes of travel, including bicycle/pedestrian and public transit.

   Recognize the importance of convenient and well-planned parking and pedestrian facilities to the vitality of the town and provide support for their development.

   Support expansion of freight and passenger rail service and bus service for the town and region and ensure that airport facilities and services are adequate to meet the needs of businesses.

6. **Ensure that community facilities and services are sufficient to support a growing resident population and the economic needs of the community**.

   High quality educational, vocational, and child care opportunities must be available to meet the needs of all residents and businesses.

   High quality medical services must continue to be available to meet the needs of all residents.

   Municipal utilities shall be maintained in good condition and any extensions or expansions coordinated with the town's land use plan and growth objectives.

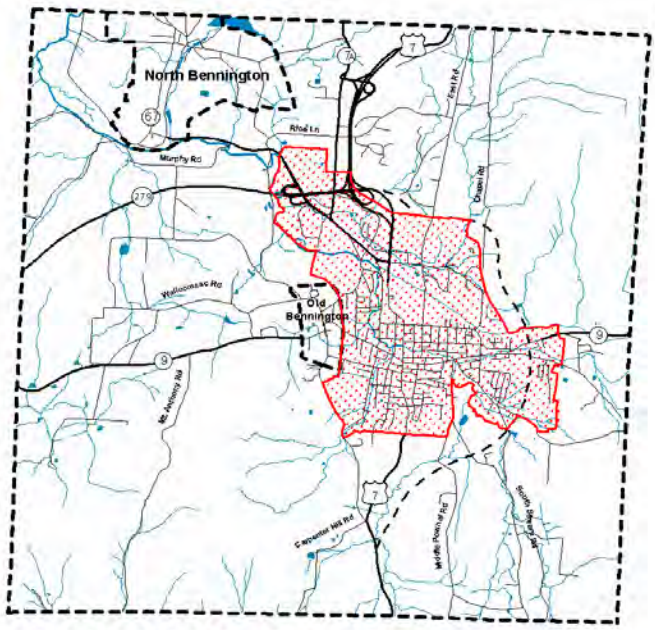
   A variety of recreational facilities and services must be available for residents and visitors. Support efforts to maintain or provide public access to outdoor recreational opportunities - such as forests, trails, streams, and safe bicycling routes - that are important to the community.

   Continue efforts to minimize solid waste generation and ensure that safe and cost-effective disposal methods are available.

7. **Promote the safe and efficient use of energy and utilization of renewable energy resources**. Support efforts to develop renewable energy facilities, a smart grid, and other technologies that will help the area meet a significant share of its energy needs. Pursue efforts to reduce overall energy use in all sectors and minimize the energy required to operate municipal buildings, vehicles, and other facilities and equipment.

Although development will occur outside of this area, it will be much less concentrated and shall not include new commercial uses because such uses are incompatible with the rural character of the area. These outlying rural areas also contribute important historic and scenic qualities to the town, and new development in these areas must be carefully planned to protect those resources.

As noted, the downtown is located in Bennington's historic business center. It is an important regional retail and service center as well as a civic center, with town, state, and federal offices. The town has made a commitment to maintaining a strong and vital downtown to preserve the community's unique character and to support economic development.



Map 3-1 The shaded area represents Bennington's Urban Growth Area. The greatest density and diversity of land uses are to be restricted to this area. A formally designated "Growth Center" has been approved and lies entirely within the Urban Growth Area.

Bennington's downtown is recognized as a designated downtown and Bennington has established a designated growth center. Downtown designation provides tax credits, grants, training and technical services to help preserve and revitalize historic downtowns and create strong communities. Growth center designation recognizes municipalities that demonstrate a capacity to plan and invest in vital, walkable, mixed-use centers. Currently, Bennington is one of six municipalities with a state designated growth center.

These state designations, offered through a program of the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, provide regulatory, financial, and other incentives to encourage compatible development within their boundaries. Bennington's designated downtown and designated growth center are shown on Maps 3-3A and 3-3B.

The historic villages of Old Bennington and North Bennington are separately incorporated municipalities, but lie within the town's boundaries. Both of these unique villages add a mix of residential, commercial, and institutional uses at a smaller scale than found in Bennington's downtown.

3.2 Land Use Plan

The town seeks to direct growth and development in a way that reinforces the existing settlement pattern of a concentration of mixed uses within the Urban Growth Area surrounded by open rural countryside. A sufficient amount of land must be available to support new growth and economic development opportunities. At the same time, policies and regulations must be implemented to ensure that new development enhances the town's unique character and furthers this Plan's Vision Statement and Goals.

The following **overall objectives** of this Land Use Plan will guide the specific policies and recommendations for each land use, or zoning, district:

- Encourage relatively dense and diverse development within the Urban Growth Area and ensure that there is a clear demarcation between urban and rural areas at the Urban Growth Boundary.
- Require new development to strengthen and support the town's existing land use pattern and historic and scenic qualities.
- Provide development opportunities that allow for continued high quality economic development that will support Bennington's position as the regional growth center.
- Support Bennington's historic downtown as the commercial, civic, and cultural heart of the community. Necessary retail services, including groceries, should be provided within this area to serve surrounding residential areas.
- Expand opportunities to create an adequate supply of a variety of housing types.
- Maintain the rural character of the outlying countryside and support agriculture, forestry, and recreational uses in these areas as well as carefully planned low-density residential uses.
- Plan development in a manner that avoids commercial or residential sprawl and which is consistent with the efficient provision of municipal services and the protection of important natural, scenic, and historic resources.
- Maintain the integrity and quality of established residential neighborhoods.

These objectives are implemented through the municipal Land Use and Development Regulations (LUDR) which divide the town into a number of zoning districts. Each district has a unique set of allowed uses and dimensional requirements, and some have special design or resource protection standards. The LUDR also includes the regulations that govern the subdivision of land.

Although the LUDR has served the town well, it is rather lengthy and complex and relies on a traditional method of segregating uses and specifying density levels to achieve the planned community character and development type. It may be possible to achieve the town's land use objectives with a simplified "form-based" land use ordinance.

A form-based ordinance such as the "Smartcode" model integrates zoning and subdivision regulations, public works standards, and architectural controls, much like the current LUDR, but with simplified land use districts. The form-based regulations focus on the physical form of buildings and areas while promoting a vibrant downtown, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods, conserved rural open lands, housing diversity and alternative transportation options. The ordinance also can be used to restrict costly and inefficient sprawl and to promote redevelopment of areas that currently diverge from the town's land use vision.

The Planning Commission should review ordinances like Smartcode, evaluate their effectiveness in communities similar to Bennington, and consider developing a comprehensive form-based ordinance to replace or complement the current LUDR.

Land Use Districts

The Municipal Land Use and Development Regulations are based on the following land use district designations and descriptions. Those Regulations identify specific use and dimensional standards for each district. The lo-

Significant open space shall be preserved in any PUD and the design must maximize preservation of important agricultural land and other natural resources. Density bonuses may be permitted to encourage open space preservation and provision of affordable housing.

The design of new subdivisions is especially important in ensuring the retention of an efficient and attractive land use pattern in these rural areas. Any new subdivision must be planned to preserve important agricultural land and natural and scenic resources, and all major subdivisions must meet standards for Planned Unit Developments.

Rural Conservation District (RC)

Rural Conservation Districts are located in valley areas outside the Urban Growth Area which have retained their rural and open space character. Considerable acreages of agricultural land exist in these areas, along with extensive woodlands and low density residential development. The purpose of the Rural Conservation Districts is to preserve this distinctive rural character and working landscape while accommodating very low density residential development in a manner that avoids the need for public water supply and public sewer systems.

A typical scene in one of Bennington's RC Districts; this view looks across Pleasant Valley.

Agriculture, forestry, very low density single-family residential development, and certain limited uses that are suitable in rural areas are permitted in the district. Zoning regulations shall maintain large blocks of working agriculture land and productive forest lands. Additional standards apply to college buildings, cultural institutions, and the adaptive reuse of historic structures as bed and breakfasts. Subdivisions must protect important agricultural land, natural, and scenic resources; major subdivisions must meet the standards for residential Planned Unit Development.

Connections of any building to the municipal wastewater treatment system may only be approved if the Development Review Board finds a compelling public health threat, and such connection cannot be used to expand the use.

Specific design standards shall apply to new development in the Rural Conservation Districts in recognition of the existence of a concentration of agricultural and forest lands and to protect the extraordinary scenic resources such lands and uses provide. Any use in the Rural Conservation District, including single-family dwellings, shall require approval under those regulatory guidelines. Development in this area cannot be sited in prominently visible locations on hillsides or ridgelines, shall utilize earth tone colors and non-reflective materials on exterior surfaces of all structures, and must minimize clearing of natural vegetation.

The Public Open Space Districts include the newly-created Walloomsac Headwaters Park as well as several existing public open spaces: Willow Park, Memorial Park, Beech Street Park, Stark Street Park, the "Y Woods," the Leonard J. Black property, and the Bradford-Putnam Wetlands. The purpose of the district is to recognize the existence of the major community open spaces and to provide for their continuation. Permitted uses are restricted to public park, recreation, conservation facilities, and associated public utilities.

The town must maintain these properties and ensure their continued availability to the public, and should consider acquisition of additional lands for public open space as appropriate.

3.3 Land Use Policies and Recommendations

1. The overall land use policy of the Town Plan is to reinforce the existing pattern of compact development within the Urban Growth Area surrounded by rural countryside. To support this policy, the town should retain the designated growth center status for the urban area. Moreover, the historic character and central importance of the downtown must be preserved. The Municipal Land Use Regulations shall reflect the purposes of the individual land use districts as stated in this Plan and all development activity shall conform to the requirements and restrictions on uses, densities, and dimensional, design, and special standards as indicated in those Regulations.

2. The town shall ensure that municipal regulations and public investments support the land use policies of this Plan. Consideration should be given to developing a form-based land use ordinance to simplify implementation and further these policies.

3. **Downtown** will remain the commercial, civic, cultural, and residential heart of the community. The town should maintain the state designation for this area and continue to pursue investments and actions facilitated by this downtown program that will provide needed facilities and amenities to allow this area to prosper. Historic resources in the downtown shall be protected and new building and site development shall be compatible with the historic character of the area.

4. The **Central Business District** shall provide a variety of appropriate businesses and services in a concentrated area at the core of the downtown area. Residential uses are beneficial to the district and shall be encouraged in the upper stories of buildings. Public and private planning and development shall provide attractive landscaping, pedestrian facilities, street lighting, signs, and similar amenities.

5. Existing small scale buildings in the **Office and Apartment Districts** shall be retained and used as offices, single-family residences, apartments, and other compatible uses. New development shall be compatible with the residential character of these areas.

6. The **Village Commercial Districts** shall include a range of commercial and residential uses that reinforce the vitality of the nearby Central Business District. The scale of existing buildings shall be retained and new development shall be compatible with the residential origins of these areas and with adjacent residential neighborhoods. Site development shall maintain attractive entrances to the downtown and shall be planned for efficient and safe vehicular access. Development that would compete

with the downtown, or extend the downtown along entrance corridors, shall not be allowed in the VC Districts.

7. A full range of residential uses, at relatively high densities served by public water and sewer, shall be provided in the **Mixed Residential Districts**. Neighborhoods shall be linked to each other and to nearby commercial areas by sidewalks or pathways.

8. **Village Residential Districts** shall provide for moderately high densities of residential development, and other compatible uses, served by public water and sewer. Efforts should be made to enhance the desirability of these residential areas by providing amenities such as parks, pathways, and well-maintained sidewalk systems.

9. The **Village Industrial District** will provide for industrial uses in a central location near the downtown. Industrial uses in the district shall be planned and operated in a manner that does not adversely impact nearby residential neighborhoods.

10. Creative redevelopment shall occur in the **Urban Mixed Use District**. A mix of industrial, professional, retail, and residential uses shall be encouraged in this district. Building and site design shall preserve the historic character of the area. Public and private development shall provide an attractive streetscape, pedestrian amenities, and safe and efficient management of vehicular movements. This area should develop as a mixed use district, and not become dominated by retail uses, so that the downtown remains as the town's retail center.

11. Bennington's **Institutional and Professional Districts** shall continue to support regionally important health care and educational facilities. Expansions to major institutional uses shall be based on approved master plans and shall not adversely impact the character of adjacent residential or mixed use neighborhoods.

12. The town will work with the Bennington County Industrial Corporation and other organizations to ensure that uses in **Industrial Districts** shall have the infrastructure and resources they need to be successful. Industrial uses shall not have an adverse impact on the environment or residential properties.

13. The **Planned Commercial District** provides for a wide range of businesses such as retail stores, restaurants, lodging establishments, and automotive uses. Commercial uses shall be planned to be compatible with adjacent uses and shall share parking, access, and pedestrian facilities whenever possible. Building and site design shall be consistent with the Planned Commercial District Design Standards.

14. New development in the **Route 7A Corridor Overlay** shall retain the rural character of the area and not adversely impact traffic flow or safety on this historic approach to Bennington. Strictly limited commercial uses are permitted in accordance with design and dimensional standards that preserve open space, scenic resources, and the rural character of the area. Uses that would contribute to sprawl or commercial strip development shall be prohibited.

15. The **Planned Airport District and Airport Approach Overlay District** provides the land that is necessary for continued effective operation of the WH Morse State

Airport and incidental commercial and professional uses. Development in the area shall not lead to unsafe conditions or inhibit effective use of the airport.

16. The **Rural Residential Districts** shall provide for relatively low density residential development just outside the area of more compact development. New residential development in the area shall be carefully planned to protect important agricultural land and other natural and scenic resources. Major subdivisions shall meet the standards of a residential Planned Unit Development (PUD) to protect Bennington's traditional rural and agrarian landscape.

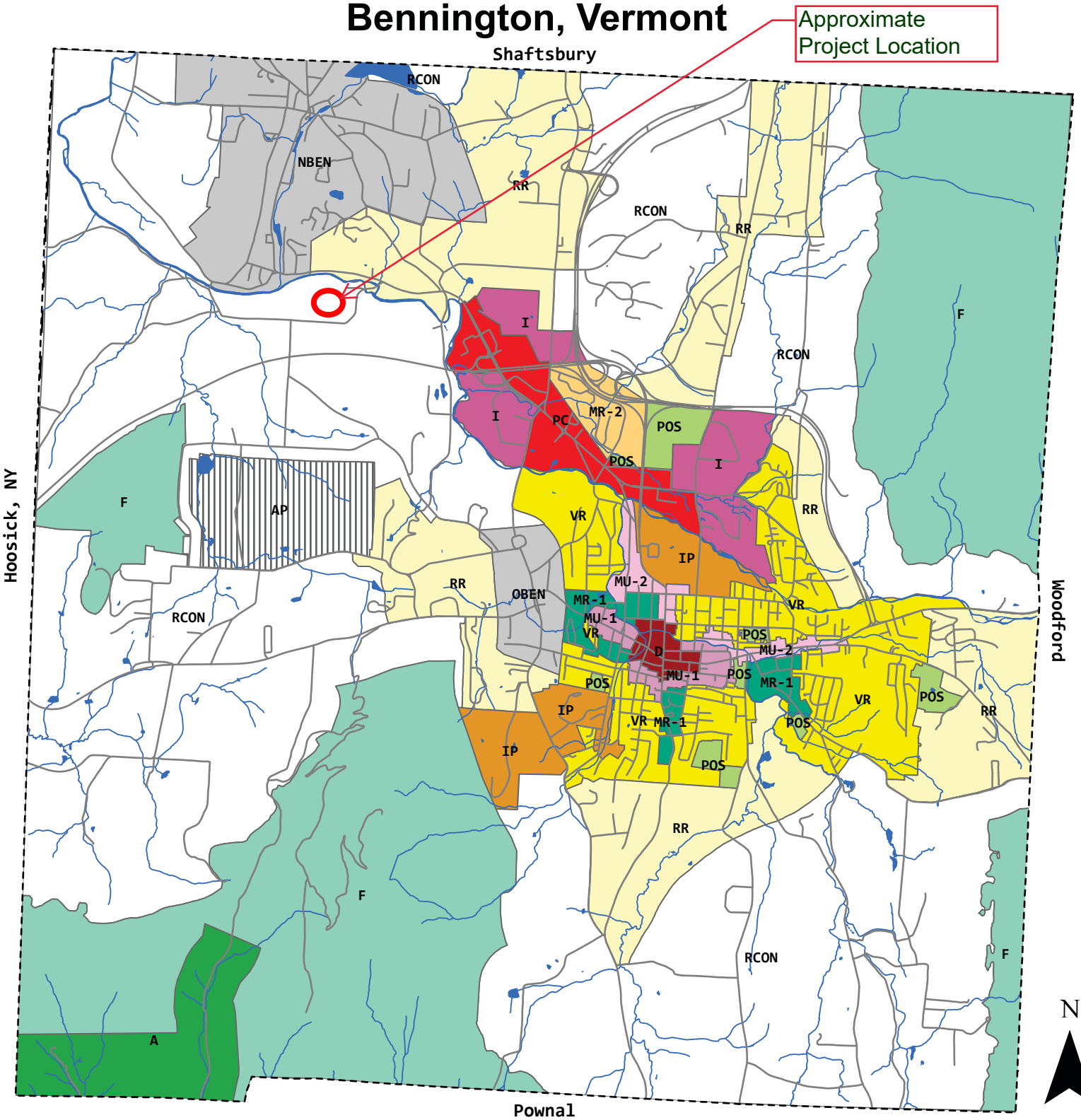
17. **Rural Conservation Districts** shall continue to support traditional low density rural and agricultural uses. Extension of municipal water supply and wastewater disposal lines to these areas shall be prohibited. New residential development in the area shall be carefully planned to protect agricultural land, forest land and other natural and scenic resources. Subdivisions shall meet the standards of a Residential Planned Unit Development (PUD) to protect Bennington's traditional rural and agrarian landscape.

18. The rural character of the **Agriculture District** shall be maintained. Maintenance of agricultural uses in the area shall be supported and any residential development shall be of a very low density and carefully planed to avoid adverse impacts on agricultural potential.

19. The **Forest Districts** shall remain free of development. Forestry and recreational uses are appropriate in this area. Seasonal camps and telecommunication facilities are permitted provided adverse impacts on the environment and scenic resources are avoided. Conservation initiatives involving property tax relief for private owners or acquisition of important resource lands by the United States Forest Service shall be supported by the town.

20. The parks and open spaces of the **Public Open Space Districts** shall remain available for the enjoyment of the public in perpetuity. The town shall provide adequate maintenance of these properties and consider acquisition of new park and recreation lands if deemed appropriate.

Map 3-2
LAND USE PLAN
Bennington, Vermont



- Downtown
- Planned Commercial
- Industrial
- Mixed Use 1
- Mixed Use 2
- Mixed Residential 1
- Mixed Residential 2
- Institutional and Professional
- Village Residential
- Rural Residential
- Rural Conservation
- Agriculture
- Forest
- Public Open Space
- Planned Airport
- North Bennington
- Old Bennington

0 0.75 1.5 3 Miles

Map produced September 2024 by Bennington County Regional Commission | For planning purposes only

Chapter 4 - Natural, Scenic, and Historical Resources

4.1 Overview

Bennington's location and history have combined to create a community that is rich in a variety of resources. The town's natural resources are important to the area's economic vitality and have played an important role in shaping the character of the community. Many of those resources also now provide for exceptional outdoor recreational opportunities.

The scenic quality of the landscape, including both its natural and man-made features, is another important community resource. Views of rural fields and farmsteads, waterways, mountains, and historical structures enhance the quality of life for residents and are important for tourism and future economic development.

Settlement of Bennington began in the mid-1700s and the early pattern of relatively densely developed village centers surrounded by rural countryside is still evident today. The town's historic districts and their distinctive architecture represent irreplaceable resources that further define the community's character and support economic development.

This section of the Plan will identify and discuss the preservation and wise use of important natural, scenic, and historical resources.

4.2 Natural Resources

Bennington's natural resources always have played an important part in the life of the community. Early settlers in the area farmed the lowland agricultural soils and harvested trees from the mountainsides. Streams provided power for early industry, sand and gravel deposits were mined for roadway and building construction, and abundant wildlife roamed throughout the hills and valleys.

Those same natural resources continue to provide economic benefits to the community while also supporting important recreational activities for residents and tourists. Wise use and conservation of these resources will ensure that future generations will benefit from them as well. The objectives and specific policies set forth in this section should be read in conjunction with those of the corresponding land use districts.

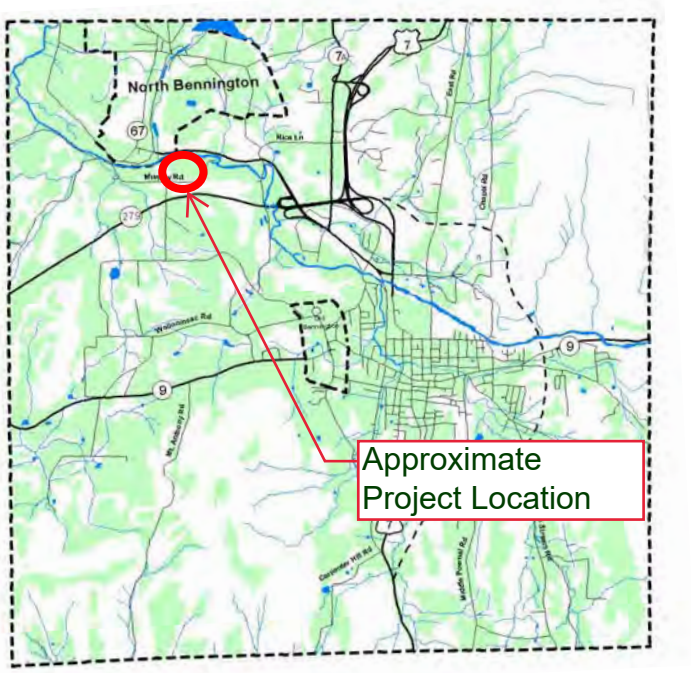
Agricultural Land

Bennington contains some of the most extensive valley lands in southern Vermont and many of the soils lying in these lowland areas are very productive for agricultural use (Map 4-1). Because prime agricultural soils are often the same soils that are best suited for development, the potential for loss of much of this resource is considerable. Conserving agricultural land benefits the community in a number of ways, including:

Bennington's agricultural and forest lands provide numerous benefits to townspeople.

- Support for a diverse economic base while ensuring the future viability of local agricultural production;
- Maintenance of the town's rural character and agricultural heritage;
- Preservation of open space, scenic vistas, and ecological resources.

Although the number of active farms in Bennington has declined, there are still 30 farming operations in the community. Recent trends (county data, 2007 US Census of Agriculture) indicates a continuing reduction in the number and size of farms, although the value of products sold has increased substantially. There has been some diversification from traditional dairy and crop farming, as apple orchards, Christmas tree farms, and other specialty producers also are now found in rural areas. Public policies and private development shall seek to conserve prime agricultural soils and the potential for agricultural production in the town's rural areas. Because the town seeks to direct growth to the Urban Growth Area while protecting rural open space in outlying areas, loss of agricultural soils to alternative uses in the center of town is expected and appropriate.



Map 4-1. The shaded areas represent prime agricultural soils, as mapped by the Natural Resource Conservation Service. These areas cover much of the valley land in the town. With the exception of the Urban Growth Area, most of these areas retain the potential for supporting a variety of agricultural uses.

Local agriculture will become increasingly important as energy constraints affect the supply and transport of food. A strong emphasis must be placed on preservation of productive soils and support for local farms. Initiatives such as the Bennington County "Farm to Plate" program and the Bennington Farmer's Market should be supported by the town.

Agricultural land conservation will be encouraged by requiring that development remain at a relatively low density in rural areas and by requiring that new subdivisions be planned to preserve open space and the use potential of agricultural soils. When development is planned adjacent to an existing agricultural operation, the project shall be designed to minimize conflicts between the different uses.

Owners of agricultural land are encouraged to consider use of programs that reduce the property tax burden on open lands. Acquisition of agricultural land or the development rights to such land by organizations such as the Vermont Land Trust is an effective way to preserve these resources, often while providing considerable benefits to the landowners and enabling continued viability of the farming operation.

Forest Land

Much of Bennington is covered in forests, particularly on the slopes of the Green Mountains and Mount Anthony. Numerous smaller woodlots are found throughout the valley areas. All of these woodlands help to prevent soil erosion and flooding, contribute to air and water quality, and support valuable timber, wildlife habitat, recreational, and aesthetic resources. Protection of forest resources is an important objective of this Plan.

The extensive forests covering the mountain slopes have not been developed because

of their remoteness and limited access. With the withdrawal of agricultural uses from marginal hillsides and reduced demand for local timber in the 20th century, the amount of forest land in Bennington actually increased. However, experiences such as the unsuccessful effort to create residential lots over much of Mount Anthony serve as a reminder that active efforts to conserve these resources are necessary.

Most of Bennington's high elevation forest land is zoned to permit only forestry, recreation, and other uses that will protect the value of the resource. Property tax reduction programs, appropriate land use planning, and acquisition of land or development rights by a land trust or other conservation organization are appropriate techniques for preserving forest land.

The Green Mountain National Forest covers a large amount of land on the town's eastern side and in the nearby mountain towns. Its recreational resource base offers tremendous potential for attracting tourists from around the country and the world. Better information, directions, and facilities at trailheads and other access points would be helpful. A compelling suggestion was made recently that the establishment of a Green Mountain National Park, perhaps carved out of a portion of the national forest near a particularly scenic natural area, would be a sure way to promote interest in the area's natural beauty and recreational opportunities.

Lands acquired by the Forest Service remain accessible to the public; all of these properties should be actively managed for multiple uses including recreation, timber production, and wildlife. The town should participate in National Forest planning activities and should coordinate forest planning with other nearby towns, especially with Woodford. Particular attention should be given to planning for the wise and environmentally sound use of forest trails and roads. Unrestricted access by all-terrain vehicles, trucks, and other motorized vehicles can result in severe damage to these travelways and cause erosion and water quality degradation; consequently, use of these vehicles should be allowed only on public lands and trails when proper environmental safeguards are in place.

Water Resources

Bennington contains a wide variety of water resources, including ponds, wetlands, rivers and streams, floodplains, and groundwater (Map 4-2). The quality of these resources is essential to the health of residents and to the local economy. Effective planning for water resource protection requires consideration of activities that occur throughout a watershed. Construction, stormwater runoff, road building and maintenance, and agricultural and logging activities all can increase the flow of sediments, nutrients, or other pollutants into waterways. Appropriate land use and environmental regulations (including Vermont state stormwater regulations), adherence to accepted best management practices and erosion control procedures, and public education contribute to protection of these vital resources. In addition, the Town should develop effective stormwater regulations to ensure the protection of water resources.

<u>Lake Paran</u>

Lake Paran covers approximately 40 acres with a shoreline shared by Bennington, North Bennington, and Shaftsbury. The lake is an important recreational resource that is used for swimming, boating, and fishing. Because

Lake Paran is an important water resource in the northwestern part of town.

production of local pottery, brick, and in papermaking. At the present time, the only significant earth resource extraction operations involve sand and gravel deposits that are used for roadway construction and concrete aggregate.

Important earth resources should be identified and land development planned so that these deposits remain available for future use. In addition, because extraction operations potentially can have adverse impacts on the environment and nearby properties, any new or expanded quarrying and extraction is subject to special review by the Development Review Board. Any new extraction operation must demonstrate that it will not unduly impact the environment or the value of neighboring properties, and must include a plan for rehabilitation of the site once the operation is complete.

Earth resource extraction operations in adjacent towns also can affect Bennington, as is the case with the gravel pit off Burgess Road in Woodford. The town should participate in any appropriate environmental reviews of such projects to ensure proper resource management and site reclamation.

Air Quality

The quality of the air in Bennington is generally excellent and efforts should be made to ensure that it remains clear and clean. Threats to air quality may come at a number of levels. A serious local environmental health issue involves the illegal burning of domestic refuse, so-called "backyard burning." Such activities discharge dangerous amounts of airborne particulate and toxic and carcinogenic products of combustion. Local and state regulations that prohibit such practices must be strictly enforced.

Economic development in Bennington has emphasized "clean industries" that do not emit dangerous amounts of air pollution and this approach should be continued. Of course, airborne pollutants often originate from well beyond a municipality's borders so the town must remain aware of potential pollution sites, especially to the west in New York State, and work with the state to make sure that local air quality is not degraded.

Emissions from motor vehicles can have significant local and regional impacts on air quality. Efforts to reduce vehicle miles traveled through efficient land use planning should be continued and opportunities for alternative transportation enhanced to reduce congestion and emissions. The town can also promote clean air by requiring planning for energy efficiency in new developments and by promoting the use of fuel-efficient vehicles.

Fish and Wildlife

As noted in the earlier sections of this chapter, the diverse natural environments of the town provide habitat for a wide range of fish and wildlife species. Streams, ponds, and wetlands support popular sport fish such as rainbow and brook trout, as well as the invertebrate species they rely on for food. These water bodies also serve as critical habitat elements for waterfowl, amphibians, and many mammals (e.g., otter, beaver, bear, moose, and deer) that feed and travel along the shorelines. It is important to maintain natural vegetative covers along streambanks and to prevent the introduction into water bodies of sediments and harmful nutrients that encourage algal growth.

The black bear is one of several large mammals that live in and around Bennington.

The whitetail deer is an important part of the local ecosystem and is a popular game animal for resident and visiting sportsmen. While deer are found throughout rural areas of the town, certain wintering yards are particularly important to the health of the herd. These habitat areas are often associated with a high degree of softwood cover having a southerly or westerly aspect, and are free from human disturbance. Important deer yards have been identified on Mount Anthony and Whipstock Hill (Map 4-3) and shall be protected from development activities that would degrade them. The population of the deer herd does need to be carefully managed because an overabundance of deer can result in damage to natural vegetation and crops.

The black bear is another distinctive animal that requires specific habitat elements to thrive. Large tracts of undeveloped forest land, including the high elevation forests in the Green and Taconic Mountains in Bennington, are critical to the survival of a viable population of black bears. Large expanses of forest, and bear travel corridors that connect such forested areas, must be maintained. The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife has identified areas that are likely to support black bear populations (Map 4-3) and within these larger areas are "critical habitats" that must be preserved, including beech and oak stands, wetlands, and the aforementioned travel corridors.

Unique Natural Areas

There are several unique natural areas in Bennington that deserve special mention and

Table 4-1 Unique Natural Features in Bennington

1. **Whipstock Hill**: Exposure of the rock type Wildflysch Conglomerate, illustrating the development of the Taconic Mountains.
2. **Everett Cave:** Solution cave with dripstone formations in Mt. Anthony.
3. **Jewett Brook Marsh:** Scenic pen water marsh providing important habitat for many plants and animal species.
4. **Tuliptrees**: Large two-stemmed tuliptree and several smaller ones on Mt. Anthony.
5. **Mount Anthony**: Scenic landmark whose synclinal nature is well-exposed around its northern end.
6. **Silk Road Alluvial Forest**: Canopy of elm, sycamore, and eastern cottonwood, also containing a shrub swamp.
7. **Silk Road Woods**: Wooded area containing uncommon species.
8. **Pit of Misery**: Open pit on the lower slopes of Mt. Anthony
9. **Stratton Brook Falls**: Scenic falls along Stratton Brook descending from Bald Mountain.
10. **Wetland Plant Community**: A rare sedge, Carex schweinitzii, growing in this wetland is found in fewer than 10 sites statewide.
11. **Serendipity Fen**: Rich fen within a 100+ acre wetland.
12. **McCullough Woods**: Mixed northern hardwoods forest of old growth white pine, sugar maple, beech, elm, and red oak.
13. **Bald Mountain:** Boreal outcrop community with areas of talus.
14. **Cemetery Meadows**: Meadow containing the rare plant, arrow-leaved aster (Aster sagittifolius).


Whipstock Hill Exposure


Jewett Brook Marsh


Talus slope on Bald Mountain

protection. The Vermont Natural Heritage Program has identified rare plant and animal species and unique natural communities in the area. Information on other significant natural areas, including geologic features such as caves, waterfalls, and rock outcroppings has been separately complied by the Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Bennington Country Regional Commission. These areas and the lands immediately around them must be protected from incompatible development. The locations of the resources identified in Table 4-1 are displayed on Map 4-3.

In addition to these natural areas, a number of important individual tree specimens are found in Bennington. The Department of Natural Sciences at Castleton State College compiled a registry of Vermont's largest trees and five of those state champion trees are in Bennington. All of these trees are in residential areas and the owners have been made aware of their presence. Special efforts should be made to protect these trees and other attractive mature trees in the community. Site plans for new developments shall identify and preserve these important trees.

4.3 Scenic Resources

The scenic quality of the landscape is one of Bennington's most important assets. The visual appearance of the town's natural and built environment, and the quality of life that it represents, is important to residents, tourists, businesses, and to future economic development.

Bennington is characterized by its expansive valley that has been able to support a rich variety of rural and urban development. That development has occurred in close proximity to distinctive upland features which have themselves limited and channeled the direction of such growth. The varied nature of the valley landforms and built environment juxtaposed with wild and abrupt mountainsides gives Bennington its unique sense of place.

Bennington's natural and built environment combine to create a truly unique sense of place with outstanding scenic qualities.

Many individual factors come together to create Bennington's special visual landscapes. These "scenic elements" reflect both characteristics that are unique to Bennington and certain features that are widely recognized as adding visual interest to a landscape. The town's Scenic Resource Inventory (December 2004) discusses each of these elements in detail: open fields, mountains, water, distant views, gateways, scenic roads and public places, historical sites and districts, and the Bennington Battle Monument.

The Scenic Resource Inventory also discusses how those features are organized in the landscape to create pleasing views. The "visual qualities" of landscape contrast, order and harmony, focal points, spatial quality, and intactness that make a particular view special and unique to the community must be protected to retain the integrity of the resource.

The scenic quality of a landscape can be affected, positively or negatively, by change. A number of landscape features are particularly sensitive to change, among them: views across open fields, prominent ridgelines or hillsides, historical buildings and districts and gateways to those districts, and scenes that include important contrasting elements such as water.

The town's land use plan and regulations are designed to reinforce the scenic quality of the landscape by focusing development in historical village centers and preserving the rural character of the outlying countryside. Special regulations also have been adopted that preserve scenic resources by requiring aesthetically sensitive design of subdivisions and commercial buildings. In addition, zoning regulations establish very specific standards and review procedures for new and altered buildings in the town's designated historic design review district.

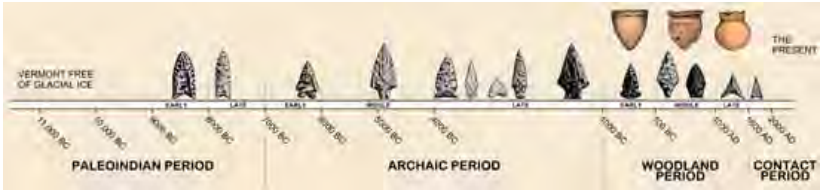
Nonregulatory tools also can be used to protect identified scenic resources. The town should work with conservation organizations such as the Vermont Land Trust to acquire properties, or conservation or scenic easements to properties, that have particular scenic significance to the community. Local and state designated scenic roads, such as Route 9, the "Molly Stark Byway" can help provide funding and impetus for preserving and promoting scenic roadway corridors.

Special attention should be given to visual gateways: points of transition along a public highway where it is evident that the traveler is arriving at a unique place. Gateways are located at entry points to the historical downtown and at places along rural highways where significant visual elements of the town's landscape first appear. These features can be improved through effective planning of adjacent land uses and integration of site features such as landscaping and careful placement of historic district signs.

Recent interest in development of renewable energy resources raises a number of important issues. Commercial-scale wind turbines will be highly visible and should be located only in locations approved by the community. Biomass (wood) heating and electric generation will involve significant tree harvesting and may include plants with smokestacks and visible plumes of steam; the environmental and scenic impacts of those operations must be considered. Small-scale hydroelectric generation can impact stream water quality, fish habitat, and aesthetics; restricting development to existing dam sites (Paper Mill Village) will greatly minimize any such concerns. Finally, the scenic impacts of commercial scale solar energy generation facilities must be considered.

4.4 Historical Resources

Bennington's historical structures, districts, and archaeological sites are important resources that provide residents with a sense of their heritage and a link with the past, promoting a sense of community identity and pride. Those same resources add to the aesthetic qualities of the town and provide an interesting context that makes the community attractive to tourists



Native American artifacts uncovered in Bennington reveal a long history of settlement and activity in the Walloomsac Valley—U. Maine at Farmington Archaeology Research Center.

and to people and businesses seeking to relocate.

Details of some of the earliest human history of the Bennington area have been gleaned from archaeological sites excavated along the Walloomsac River. Careful inventories of prehistoric Native American sites adjacent to the river have revealed artifacts and evidence of 6000

years of human occupation and use of the area. These sites and others which are likely to contain materials from Native American and early colonial settlements should be protected from development that would destroy the artifacts. If development is to occur in these areas, professional archaeological investigations should be undertaken and any artifacts and findings should be documented and displayed in the area.

Bennington was chartered as a town in 1749 and evidence of its long history since that time exists in the layout of local roads, architectural styles of buildings identified with specific periods, and groups of buildings and structures in commercial, industrial, and residential districts. A comprehensive inventory is a necessary first step in understanding and protecting historical resources. Fortunately, several inventories and assessments of local historical resources have been completed. The most comprehensive is the Vermont Historic Sites and Structures Survey for the Town of Bennington which contains information on more than 3,000 properties in Bennington, Old Bennington, and North Bennington. Several historic districts and individual structures also have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places (Table 4-2).

Table 4-2. Sites in Bennington Included in the National Register of Historic Places

Downtown Bennington Historic District
Old Bennington Historic District
North Bennington Historic District
Furnace Grove Historic District
Carrigan Lane District
Ritchie Block
Silk Road Covered Bridge
Paper Mill Covered Bridge
Henry Covered Bridge
Bennington Railroad Station
William Henry House
Holden-Leonard Mill Complex
Frederick Squire House
U.S. Federal Building (current Bennington Police Station)
Everett Mansion
Park-McCullough House
Cora B. Whitney School (converted to affordable housing)
Shires properties on South Street and Benmont Avenue

There is a concentration of important historic structures in the Downtown Historic District; the former Federal Building is in the foreground of this photograph looking up South Street.

Of particular interest and concern to the town is the Downtown Bennington Historic District. This area includes a concentration of historical commercial, civic, and residential structures at the center of the community that, more than any other area, gives the town its unique sense of place. A design review district (Map 3-4) has been established to ensure that the historical integrity of this important area remains intact.

Inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places may enable property owners to receive federal tax advantages for historically appropriate improvements. In addition, Bennington is a Certified Local Government (CLG) - under a program developed by the National Park Service to encourage preservation of locally important historical resources. As a CLG the town is able to access certain funding and technical support resources that facilitate stated preservation goals. The Bennington Historic Preservation Commission was established in response to requirements of the CLG program and this Commission now oversees many historic preservation activities and programs in the community.

The Historic Preservation Commission has developed preservation guidelines to protect the character of historic districts that it has identified. Many of those guidelines and recommended actions are contained in its publication, Time and Place in Bennington, A Handbook for the Central Bennington Historic District. This document is available, with its comprehensive set

of design guidelines, on the town's website.

No single tool can ensure a successful historic preservation program. A combination of regulatory design controls, public funding for site and building improvements, and incentives for adaptive re-use of historical structures is necessary, and the town supports each of these techniques to achieve its historic preservation objectives, which can be summarized as follows:

Many of Bennington's historic structures are located along its waterways, such as the three covered bridges over the Walloomsac River.

- Maintain the community's special historical and cultural heritage and preserve a sense of place and pride for the town's residents;
- Maintain those historical and aesthetic qualities that are economic assets to the community and promote the economically viable reuse of historical structures;
- Require that the renovation and alteration of existing structures, and the construction of new structures, is done in a manner consistent with the character of the historic district in which they are located;
- Achieve overall visual compatibility within each district through careful attention to architectural, landscape, and site structure details;
- Save historical structures whenever possible.

The town will continue to pursue funding opportunities that support these objectives. Ongoing historically appropriate streetscape improvements in the downtown funded through the Transportation Enhancements Program have been particularly effective in this regard. Development of historical properties in Bennington, or of any property in designated historic districts, shall comply with the town's preservation guidelines and the applicable regulatory design standards. Consideration should be given to "landmark status" for especially significant historic buildings and sites and to preservation of unique and historically important interior spaces.

4.5 Policies and Recommendations for Natural, Scenic, and Historical Resources

1. The town should continue to work with conservation organizations and the Vermont Land Trust to preserve lands that contain productive agricultural soils and to support economically viable farming operations.

2. Land development in rural areas shall be designed to preserve as much prime agricultural soil as possible. Within the Urban Growth Area, preservation of agricultural soils is not required.

3. High elevation forest lands shall remain free from development and shall support appropriate uses as defined in the municipal zoning regulations. Conservation of important tracts of forest land through tax incentives or acquisition by conservation organizations or the Green Mountain National Forest is encouraged. The Town should promote the creation of the Green Mountain National Park from a portion of the Green Mountain National Forest.

4. Surface water resources shall be protected through comprehensive watershed planning that includes erosion and storm water control and by maintaining undisturbed buffers between development and stream banks and shorelines.

5. The town should seek opportunities to focus community interest toward and along waterways through development of linear parks, pathways, and safe and adequate public access and parking locations.

6. Development in regulatory floodplains and fluvial erosion hazard zones shall be strictly regulated according to the municipal flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard regulations.

7. The quality and quantity of groundwater resources used for residential, commercial, and industrial consumption shall be protected through strict adherence to state and local environmental and health regulations.

8. Development planning shall consider the need for future extraction of important deposits of earth resources. Earth resource extraction operations shall be conducted in a manner that does not harm the environment, the value of nearby properties, or future development of the site.

9. Air quality must be maintained by prohibiting discharges of unhealthy pollutants from industrial, commercial, or residential sources.

10. Critical fish and wildlife habitat areas and unique natural areas shall not be damaged by incompatible development. The town should work with conservation organizations when opportunities arise to acquire such areas.

11. Development of renewable energy resources should consider both the need for locally produced energy and the need to protect natural and scenic resources.

12. New development shall be sensitive to scenic resources and shall be planned in a manner that preserves the visual integrity of critical scenic elements and visual qualities.

13. The town should work with conservation organizations to permanently protect important viewsheds through purchase of properties or scenic easements. The town should continue to participate in and support local and state scenic roads programs.

14. Protect and enhance existing visual gateways to the community and downtown, and seek opportunities to establish new gateways at appropriate locations.

15. Strict adherence to design guidelines and standards for additions or alterations to historical properties and for any construction or building alterations within the Historic Bennington Design Review District is required.

16. The adaptive reuse of historical buildings, rather than their demolition and replacement, is required whenever such reuse is practical and appropriate. Historical struc-

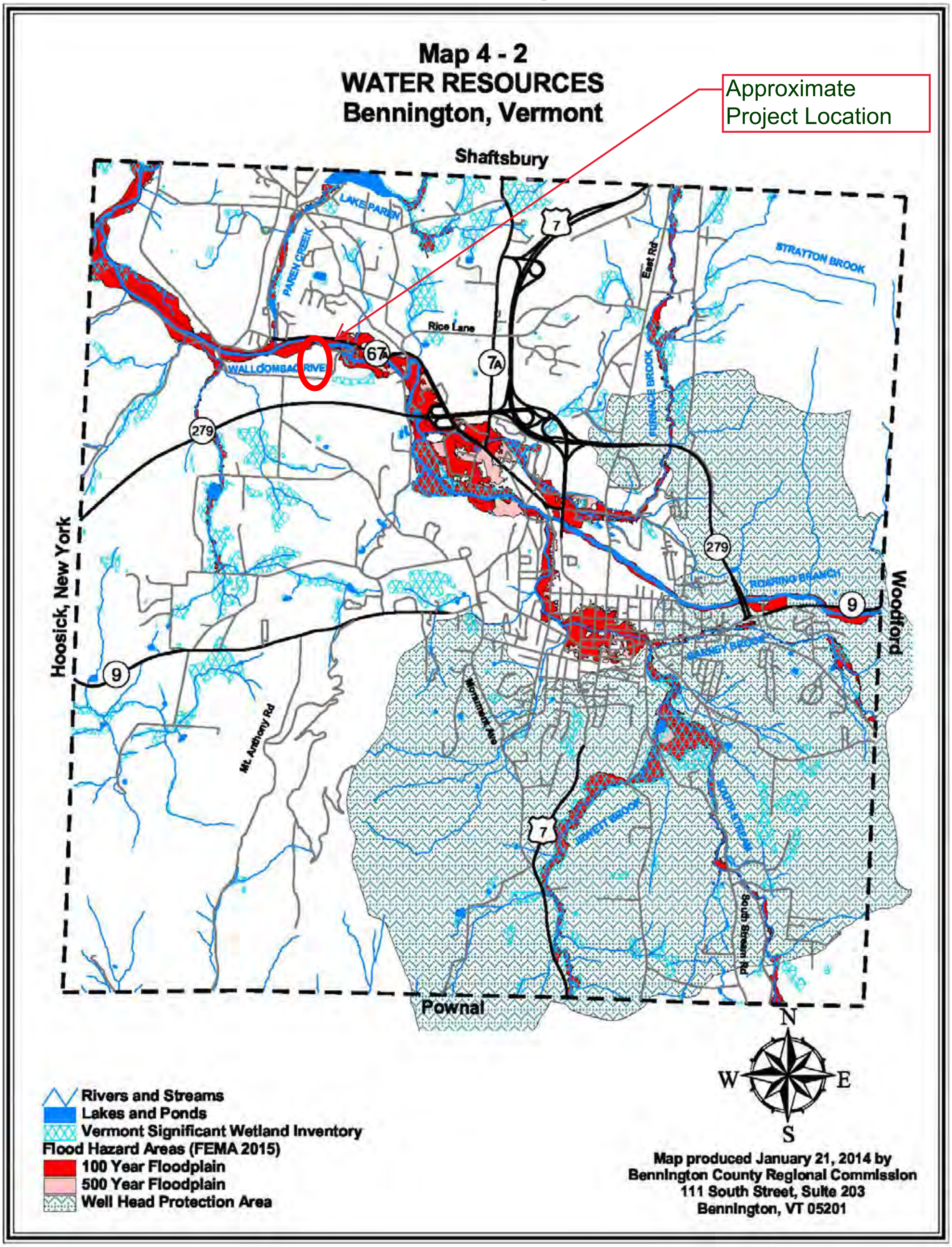
tures shall be incorporated into site plans for new developments.

17. The Historic Preservation Commission shall continue to serve in an advisory role to the Planning Commission and the Development Review Board when regulations and development proposals affecting historical sites or districts are being considered.

18. Explore and pursue opportunities for funding and financial incentives (Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credits, CLG, National Trust, etc.) that will support historic preservation efforts by the town and private property owners.

19. Support efforts by the Historic Preservation Commission, the Chamber of Commerce, the Better Bennington Corporation, and other organizations to increase awareness of historical resources through displays, walking tours, and other means.

20. The town should develop an inventory of irreplaceable natural, scenic, and historical resources - "Landmarks" - that must be protected. These landmarks include, but are not limited to, features such as the Bennington Battle Monument, the covered bridges, the Hotel Putnam, Mount Anthony, and similar features that are of fundamental importance in establishing Bennington's unique character.


Map 4 - 2
WATER RESOURCES
Bennington, Vermont
Approximate
Project Location
Shaftsbury
Hoosick, New York
Woodford
Pownal
LAKE PAREN
PAREN CREEK
WALLOOMSAC RIVER
STRATTON BROOK
Rice Lane
East Rd
FURNACE BROOK
ROARING BRANCH
Mt. Anthony Rd
Monument Ave
JEWETT BROOK
SOUTH STREAM
South Stream Rd
7
7A
67A
279
9
N
S
E
W
Rivers and Streams
Lakes and Ponds
Vermont Significant Wetland Inventory
Flood Hazard Areas (FEMA 2015)
100 Year Floodplain
500 Year Floodplain
Well Head Protection Area
Map produced January 21, 2014 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
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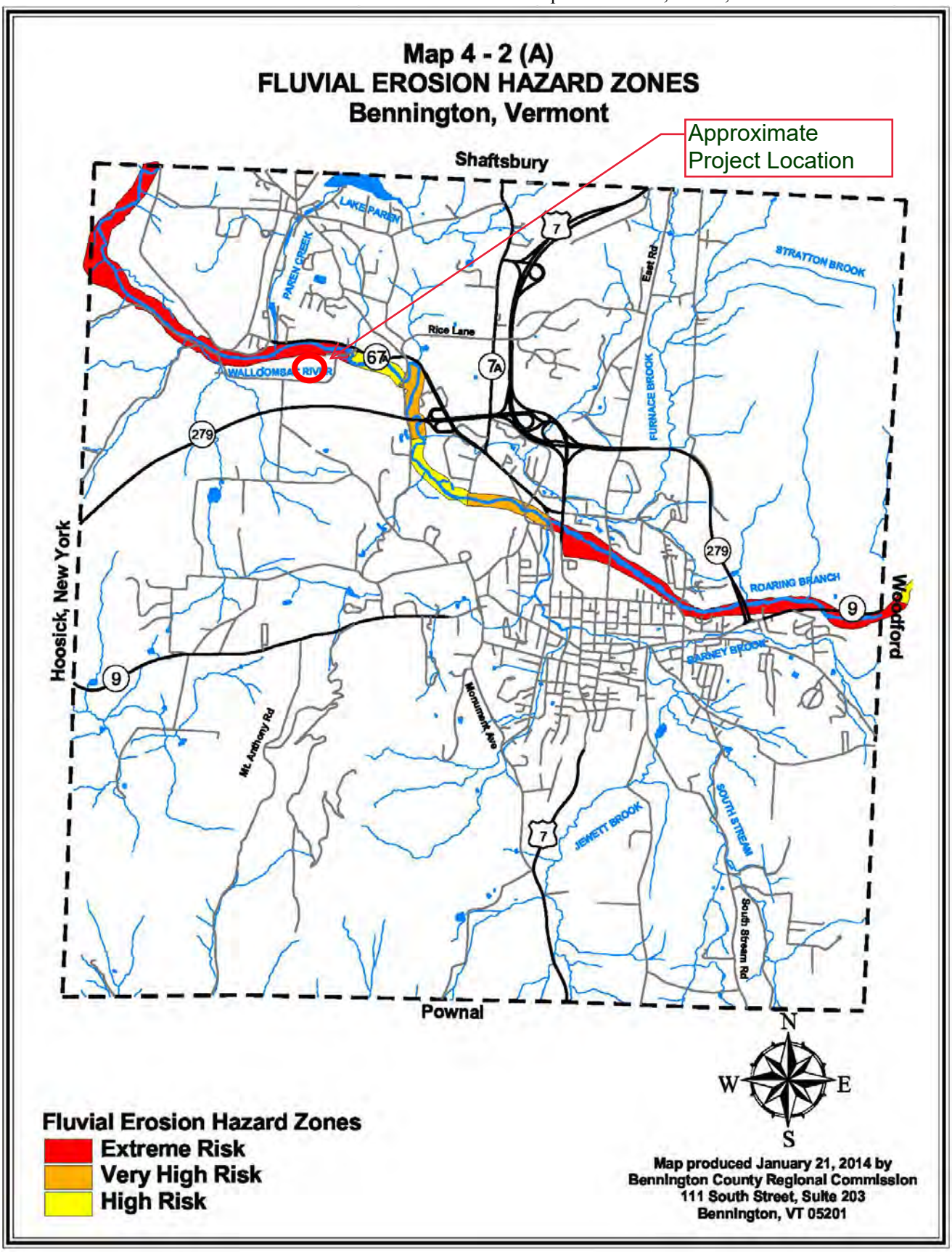
Map 4 - 2 (A)
FLUVIAL EROSION HAZARD ZONES
Bennington, Vermont
Approximate Project Location
Shaftsbury
Hoosick, New York
Woodford
Pownal
LAKE PAREN
PAREN CREEK
STRATTON BROOK
East Rd
Rice Lane
WALLOOMSAC RIVER
FURNACE BROOK
ROARING BRANCH
BARNEY BROOK
Monument Ave
Mt. Anthony Rd
JEWETT BROOK
SOUTH STREAM
South Stream Rd
7
7A
67A
279
9
N
W
E
S
Fluvial Erosion Hazard Zones
Extreme Risk
Very High Risk
High Risk
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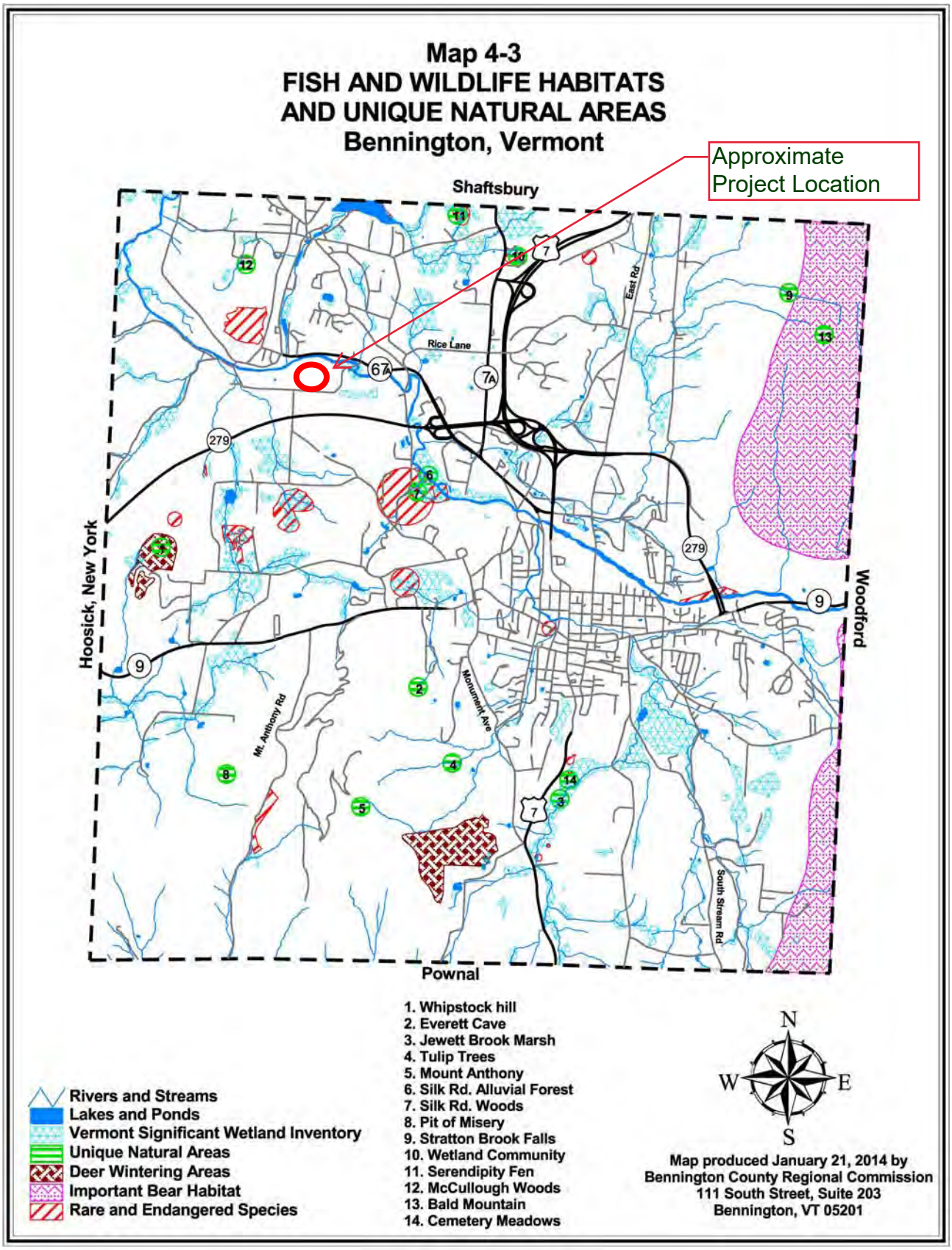

Map 4-3
FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITATS
AND UNIQUE NATURAL AREAS
Bennington, Vermont
Approximate
Project Location
Shaftsbury
Rice Lane
East Rd
Hoosick, New York
Woodford
Pownal
Mt. Anthony Rd
Monument Ave
South Stream Rd
279
9
7
7A
67A
1. Whipstock hill
2. Everett Cave
3. Jewett Brook Marsh
4. Tulip Trees
5. Mount Anthony
6. Silk Rd. Alluvial Forest
7. Silk Rd. Woods
8. Pit of Misery
9. Stratton Brook Falls
10. Wetland Community
11. Serendipity Fen
12. McCullough Woods
13. Bald Mountain
14. Cemetery Meadows
Rivers and Streams
Lakes and Ponds
Vermont Significant Wetland Inventory
Unique Natural Areas
Deer Wintering Areas
Important Bear Habitat
Rare and Endangered Species
N
W
E
S
Map produced January 21, 2014 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
111 South Street, Suite 203
Bennington, VT 05201

This renovated historic building houses Vermont state offices and the Community College of Vermont.

located off North Street houses several social service agencies and the Bennington County District Court. Additional state offices are located in a renovated building in the downtown that also houses the Community College of Vermont. The town supports locating public service agencies and associated offices in the downtown where they are accessible to residents while adding business and vitality to the area.

The Bennington County Superior Court is located on South Street, adjacent to the town Office Building. The town clerk, assessor, planning, zoning, community development, and town manager's offices are located in this historic building that has housed the municipal offices for many years.

The town Highway Department operates from three public works facilities: on Depot Street, Willow Road, and Grant Street. The delivery of services and overall efficiency of the Highway Department would be enhanced if operations could be consolidated at a single site.

7.12 Radio, Television, and Newspapers

A daily newspaper, the Bennington Banner, serves the town and surrounding communities. The newspaper is an important source of local, state, and national news, provides a forum for public opinion, and is a useful advertising medium for local businesses. In addition to social media, the Banner has an on-line edition that provides ready access to local information from anywhere the internet can be accessed.

Vermont Public Radio (VPR) maintains an FM transmission facility in Bennington. VPR offers a variety of state and national public affairs programming. An AM station (WBTN) operated by a nonprofit organization provides an outlet for local news, information, and entertainment. Cable and satellite television services are available throughout most of the town, in addition to broadcast signals from commercial stations in Albany and Vermont public television.

Catamount Access Television (CAT-TV) is the local public access television station. It provides coverage of local events and public meetings as well as information on happenings and local organizations throughout the community. Residents can take courses in video production technology and produce their own programming for presentation to the community. The CAT-TV offices and studios are located in a historic building on Main Street.

7.13 Recreation and Open Space

Open Space Recreational Resources

Bennington's undeveloped open space—forests, fields, and parkland—are important natural and scenic assets and also support a wide range of recreational activities. Developed parks and other facilities add to the recreational opportunities available to residents and visitors. It is important that these open lands and facilities be maintained, expanded where appropriate, and properly managed. The Town's Park and Open Space Plan, an inventory and assessment of

parks, recreation facilities, and open space resources, should be consulted when considering improvements to existing facilities, development of new facilities, and acquisition or preservation of open lands. An important objective of the plan is creation of a comprehensive pathway network that provides access to the town's natural and historic resources.

The town includes extensive publicly owned forest land, most notably the nearly 1,000 acres that are part of the Green Mountain National Forest on the slopes of Bald Mountain. These National Forest lands continue into adjacent towns, offering a vast reserve of public land for hiking, fishing, hunting, swimming, boating, skiing, and other sports. The Forest Service is authorized to purchase land anywhere in Bennington County, and additions to the National Forest in Bennington should be supported for contiguous lands that would ensure public access to important recreational areas.

Several other tracts of forest land and open fields are either publicly owned or provide for public access to natural resource based recreational opportunities. Southern Vermont College and the Mount Anthony Preservation Society each own substantial amounts of land on Mount Anthony that include a number of recreational trails. The McCullough Woods and Fields in the northwestern part of town (partially in North Bennington) is a large area of conserved land with well-maintained public use trails. The "Y-Woods" on Morgan Street and the Bradford-Putnam Wetlands off Burgess Road are town-owned properties that both include short trail systems through interesting woodlots. Much of Whipstock Hill is owned by the State of Vermont. Efforts to maintain these lands and ensure continued public access to them should be supported.

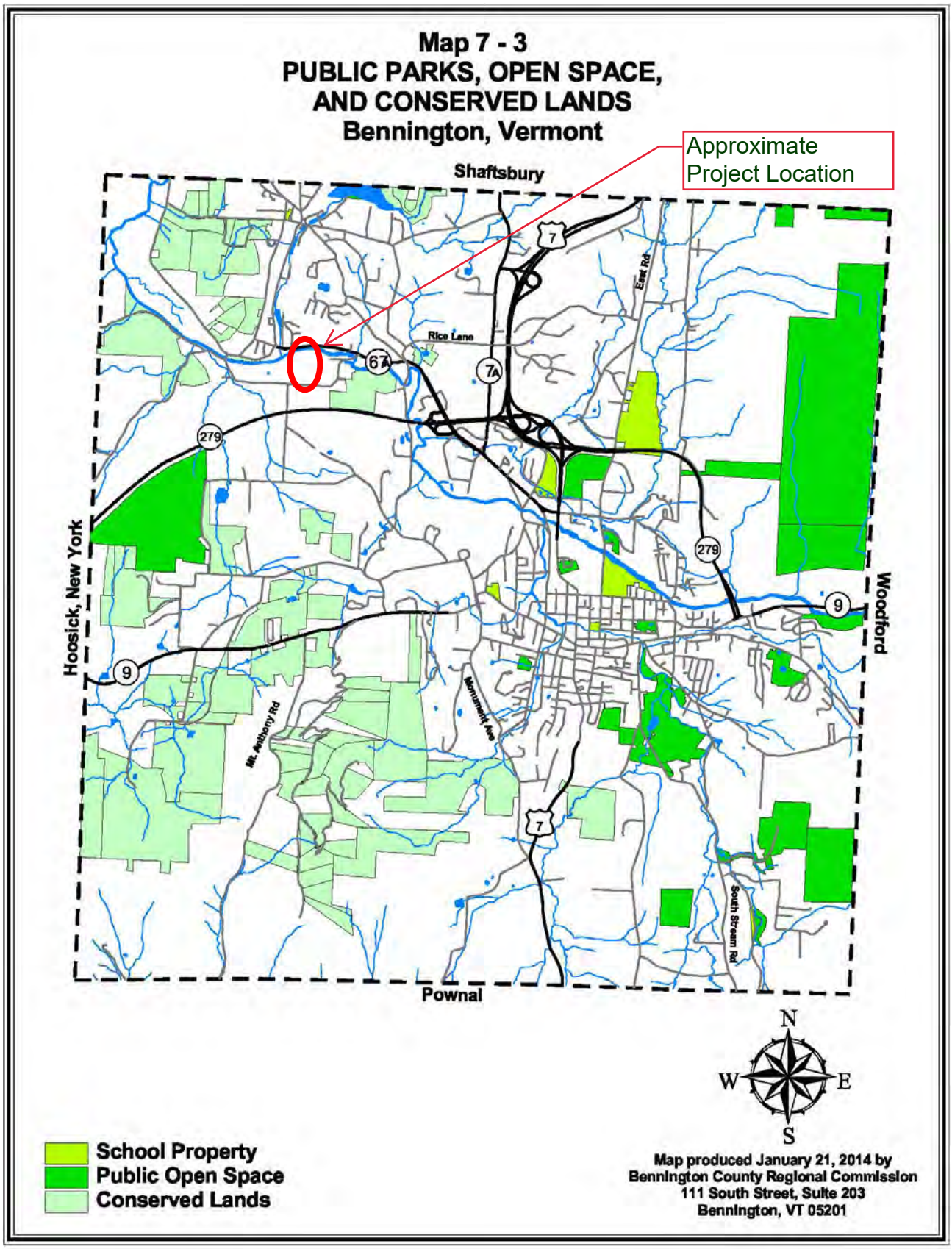
A trail through the Green Mountain National Forest.

The Norman and Selma Greenberg Reserve, south of the center of town, is owned by the New England Tropical Conservatory, which has developed a trail system, conducts outdoor educational activities, and plans to develop additional facilities. The lowland and upland portions of the reserve are bisected by the proposed southern leg of VT 279; a legal and safe pedestrian access between the two sections of the reserve should be secured, if the southern leg is constructed.

The Walloomsac River is an especially important recreational asset. The town should seek opportunities to provide secure public access to the river at appropriate locations and should pursue development of a pathway along the river that connects its three covered bridges.

Some important open spaces used for hiking, fishing, hunting, and other recreational pursuits are located on large tracts of private land that are accessible to the public through the generosity of the landowners. Recreational users should always obtain permission before entering these lands and must be careful to not cause any disruption or damage. If particularly important privately held recreational lands become available, acquisition of the land or easements by a conservation organization would allow continued public access to the land.

As noted in the Transportation chapter, the network of town and state roadways and the developing pathway system in the community are very important recreational, as well as transportation, facilities. Development and maintenance of these facilities shall recognize the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians as well as motorists. A pathway parallel to the eastern leg of VT 279 would be an outstanding resource for bicyclists and pedestrians while connecting existing sidewalks and trails. The town should ensure that rights-of-way along the highway/utility line corridor can be made available for such a facility.


Map 7 - 3
PUBLIC PARKS, OPEN SPACE,
AND CONSERVED LANDS
Bennington, Vermont
Approximate
Project Location
Shaftsbury
Hoosick, New York
Woodford
Pownal
Rice Lane
East Rd
Mt. Anthony Rd
Monument Ave
South Stream Rd
7
7A
67
279
9
N
W
E
S
School Property
Public Open Space
Conserved Lands
Map produced January 21, 2014 by
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111 South Street, Suite 203
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Chapter 8 - Energy

8.1 Introduction

The Town of Bennington recognizes that it is necessary to work toward a sustainable energy future in a manner that minimizes environmental impacts and supports the local economy. The purpose of this energy element is to further those goals and recommended actions by increasing public awareness of energy issues, assessing local energy use and conservation opportunities, reducing the number of energy-related dollars exported from the town, and evaluating the potential for utilization of various renewable energy resources to meet the town's stated goals of:

- Reducing our dependence on non-renewable and imported energy sources;
- Promoting energy conservation and efficiency in residential, commercial, and industrial structures and operations;
- Reducing energy consumption in all taxpayer funded buildings and operations; and
- Developing sustainable, local renewable energy resources.

These goals are consistent with Vermont's energy goals and policies, including:

- ◊ Obtaining 90% of energy for all uses from renewable sources by 2050;
- ◊ Reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 50% below 1990 levels by 2028 and 75% by 2050;
- ◊ Relying on in-state renewable energy sources to supply 25% of energy use by 2025;
- ◊ Improving the energy efficiency of 25% of homes by 2020;
- ◊ Meeting the Vermont Renewable Energy Standard through renewable generation and energy transformation.

A thorough understanding of energy and a plan to address future challenges is essential because energy is critical to every aspect of our lives. At the most basic level, we need the energy we obtain from food to survive. And it is the energy contained in oil, propane, and wood that heats our homes and the energy in gasoline and diesel fuel that moves our vehicles. Energy also generates the electricity that runs our appliances, machinery, computers, and telecommunication systems.

Most of the energy that we use, and have come to rely upon, is derived from "nonrenewable" fossil fuels and, to a lesser extent, nuclear fuels. This energy has been abundant and cheap, but supplies are becoming scarcer and oil, natural gas, coal, and uranium will become increasingly expensive to obtain. Moreover, serious and longstanding environmental concerns with coal mining, offshore oil drilling, acid rain, and other pollution resulting from fossil fuel use are now overshadowed by potentially catastrophic global climate change that is driven by the release of tens of millions of years of stored carbon in just a few decades.

Fortunately, alternative energy sources such as solar, wind, hydroelectric, and biomass-based fuels can provide significant amounts of clean energy well into the future. Developing these resources is extremely important, but the total amount of energy that can be extracted from such resources is markedly less than what we currently obtain from fossil fuels. To maintain a good quality of life, vibrant communities, and prospering economies, we will have improve energy efficiency and transition to the widespread use of renewable energy.

Municipal Government Energy Practices

31. Pursue energy audits at municipal buildings focusing on weatherization work at older buildings such as the town office building and old blacksmith shop and heating and electrical upgrades at the police station.
32. Consider alternative energy systems such as a small biomass district heat project to heat public buildings in the downtown, solar hot water production at the recreation center, and a demonstration project with liquid biofuels for some town equipment. Assess the potential for deploying air source heat pumps for heating and cooling in all municipal buildings.
33. Consider purchase of more fuel efficient vehicles, including electric vehicles where practical, for all departments; hybrid sedans and SUVs might be particularly effective for the police department, as would new anti-idling technologies.
34. Publicize the successful LED streetlight conversion and encourage business owners to make similar changes on their external lights.

Energy Use in Schools and Institutions

35. The public schools should regularly participate in the School Energy Management Program reviews and continue to work with Efficiency Vermont to obtain incentives for weatherization and efficiency improvements.
36. All schools should promote and encourage the use of school buses and walking and biking to school—including participation in the Safe Routes to Schools program—to reduce reliance on single-passenger vehicle transport.
37. The Southwestern Vermont Medical Center should continue to work with Efficiency Vermont to improve energy conservation at its campus and should continue to move toward utilization of locally sourced woody biomass fuel for use in its new central boiler plant.
38. Southern Vermont College should investigate development of a central biomass based district heating system for its campus.

General Electricity Conservation and Efficiency Measures

39. Support integration of advanced energy storage in the area through cooperation with utilities and review of town plan policies and land use standards.
40. Support full integration of "smart grid" technology throughout the town and region and use of "smart rate" pricing plans.
41. Cooperate with Green Mountain Power and VELCO to ensure that areas planned for new renewable energy generation are consistent with the capacity of the grid infrastructure and to ensure that any upgrades needed are implemented.

Renewable Energy Development

Biomass and Liquid Biofuels

42. The town should support efforts to develop appropriate cost-effective biomass energy resources and help promote combined heat and power biomass projects.
43. The town should support efforts to help farmers produce oil seed crops and liquid biofuels that can be used to operate equipment and machinery on their farms, and potentially supply other businesses and the town with renewable fuels.

Hydroelectric Generation

44. The town has added hydroelectric generation equipment at its water supply facility and has supported development of the 350 KW hydro generating facility at the "Paper Mill" dam site on the Walloomsac River. The town should continue to look for opportunities to develop small hydro projects to support efficient municipal operations. Additional commercial-scale hydroelectric generation is limited due to the fact that the only existing dam sites (other than the Paper Mill dam) are located on Paran Creek in North Bennington Village, between Lake Paran and the Walloomsac River (Figure 5). The town supports efforts by North Bennington, Bennington College, and involved property owners to develop the hydro potential at that series of small dams on Paran Creek.

Generation from Wind Resources

45. Bennington has limited potential for utility-scale wind energy development, as areas with sufficient access to consistent wind are restricted primarily to higher elevations on Mount Anthony and adjacent ridgelines. These areas are relatively close to established residences, and Mount Anthony has been specifically identified as a critical scenic resource for the town in its Scenic Resource Inventory. Development in that area would have a profoundly negative impact on critical viewsheds throughout the community, as the natural profile of the mountain forms an iconic backdrop from both in-town and rural valley locations. The town has consistently objected to and testified against development, including construction of larger telecommunication towers, on and near the summit and ridgeline of Mount Anthony. Because no other locations in Bennington have suitable wind resource, infrastructure availability, or are free from significant environmental constraints (Figure 6), no utility-scale (100 KW capacity or greater) wind energy facilities should be located n the town. Smaller scale wind projects, including residential-scale turbines (generally less than 10 KW) and turbines that may be installed at farms, institutions (such as college campuses), or small businesses, up to 100 KW, may be appropriate as long as noise from the turbines does not adversely affect neighboring residential properties and as long as they are not prominently visible from any town-identified historic district.

Solar Energy Generation

46. The town particularly encourages solar energy development, of any scale, on building rooftops.
47. The town strongly supports the development of small-scale (150 KW capacity or less) electricity generation from solar energy at homes, businesses, schools, and other institutions, as well as <u>community solar</u> projects.

<u>Community Solar Projects</u>

Community solar projects offer an opportunity for a range of people, who might not otherwise have access to the benefits of solar energy generation, to participate in a clean energy project. These individuals may include people who do not own property themselves or those who own buildings with limitations caused by shading or the size, orientation, or structural stability of a roof. Moreover, community solar projects offer efficiencies of scale that make individual investments more viable for people of moderate incomes.

Community solar projects, as discussed in this section, are group net metered solar energy installations between 15kW and 150kW in size, with shares in the facility sold to the site owner, neighbors, community members, nonprofit organizations, and local businesses. These energy users buy shares in proportion to their annual electrical usage. When construction is completed, power is fed directly into the grid, and a group net metering document is filed with the utility showing the allocation of shares among the various members. The utility then splits the output of the solar farm among the members in proportion to their share size, crediting their utility accounts.

Community solar projects, as described above, are encouraged and may be located anywhere in town not specifically identified as a "Prohibited (Exclusion) Area" in the Solar Facility Siting Criteria set forth in this section. Moreover, any community solar project located on a site that is not a prohibited/exclusion area shall be considered as being located on a preferred site and eligible for all of the regulatory and financial incentives associated with larger scale solar energy installations pursuant to Public Utility Commission Rule 5.100 and 30 V.S.A. Section 248. The town does encourage community solar projects to be located on sites identified as having high potential for electricity generation based on solar resource availability.

Siting and Design of Large-Scale Solar Powered Electricity Generation Facilities

Any larger scale solar development (greater than 150 kW capacity) shall be subject to the following Solar Energy Facility Siting Policy and Map, Solar Electric Facility Siting Guidelines, and the town's solar facility screening ordinance.

Solar Energy Facility Siting Policy and Map

The Solar Energy Resource Map (Figure 7) shall serve as a guide for developers wishing to identify land suitable for solar energy generation facilities within the Town of Bennington. This map identifies sites which have been determined by the Town of Bennington, through official action of the Select Board, to be suitable for solar facilities and sites which are preferred sites for solar energy generating facilities. Only sites identified as preferred sites on this map or located in a preferred area as defined in the Solar Facility Siting Criteria, below, may be developed with solar generating facilities in excess 150 KW of rated capacity.

The Solar Energy Resource Map (Figure 7) shall be used in concert with the Town's Screening of Solar Facilities Ordinance and the Solar Facility Siting Guidelines (incorporating the Community Standards and Siting Criteria) included in this section of the Town Plan to direct the development and design of solar facilities. Although solar energy development at these preferred sites and locations is an appropriate land use, all such development shall be carefully planned to limit adverse impacts to neighboring properties and to public viewsheds, giving consideration to The Town's Screening of Solar Facilities Ordinance and Solar Facility Siting Guidelines.

The sites indicated on this map as suitable for solar energy development were selected after a thorough analysis of available geographic data, including an assessment of access to solar energy as well as environmental, aesthetic, cultural, and related regulatory constraints. State-identified environmental constraints are discussed in more detail in the Bennington County Regional Energy Plan, and include the following resource areas:

- Class 1 and 2 wetlands, vernal pools, and hydric soils;
- Mapped river corridors and FEMA-defined floodways;
- Natural communities and rare, threatened, and endangered species;

- Federal wilderness areas;
- "Primary" and "Statewide" significant agricultural soils;
- FEMA-defined special flood hazard areas;
- Lands protected for conservation purposes;
- Deer wintering areas; and
- State-identified high priority "Conservation Design Forest Blocks."

Lands with one or more of the above constraints were excluded from consideration as preferred sites, while areas that did not have any state-identified constraints were carefully analyzed by the Town, and sites most likely to comply with the Town Plan's Community Standards and Siting Standards for Solar Facilities were identified as potentially suitable. Specifically excluded from consideration as sites suitable for development were land located in the Forest or Agriculture land use districts, privately owned land in the Rural Conservation land use district, land within 100 feet of public roads, land within 0.25 miles of any of the three covered bridges, Willow Park, and land within scenic viewsheds identified in the Scenic Resource Inventory of Bennington. Potentially suitable sites were determined to be appropriate for development only if they were likely to be developed with solar generating facilities based on property size, landowner interest, proximity to infrastructure, and community benefit.

Approximately 540 acres of land are shown on the Solar Energy Resource Map as being suitable and preferred for development of these facilities. Of the land within those parcels, over 340 acres do not have constraints that would prevent development. This acreage, together with projected future development on rooftops and other preferred locations, far exceeds the acreage needed to meet the town's solar energy generation target, 25 MW of capacity by the year 2050, identified in the Bennington County Regional Energy Plan. Moreover, that targeted level of generation includes residential, rooftop, and other small-scale generation that is expected to account for up to 10 MW of capacity by 2050. Therefore, all locations other than these mapped areas and land specifically identified as preferred areas in this Town Plan, are considered unsuitable for solar generating facilities in excess of 150 KW of rated capacity.

Solar Electricity Facility Siting Guidelines

The term "solar facility" shall have the following meaning: a solar electricity generation and transmission facility with a 150kW(AC) or greater capacity, including all on-site and off-site improvements necessary for the development and operation, and on-going maintenance of the facility.

The Town of Bennington has developed community standards and siting standards for the development of solar facilities for reference and use by facility developers and local property owners and for consideration in Section 248 proceedings (30 VSA §248). These standards are set forth below. In addition, The Bennington Planning Commission, in consultation with the Bennington County Regional Commission, has identified and mapped (Figure 7) those areas of Bennington that are most suitable for solar facility development based on facility siting requirements and municipal energy, conservation, and development policies and objectives set forth in the Bennington Town Plan, the Bennington Screening of Solar Facilities Ordinance, and the Bennington Land Use and Development Regulations.

Pursuant to 30 VSA Sec. 248, prior to the construction of a solar facility, the VT Public Utility Commission (PUC) must issue a Certificate of Public Good. A Section 248 review addresses environmental, economic, and social impacts associated with a particular project,

similar to Act 250. In making its determination, the PUC must give due consideration to the recommendations of municipal planning commissions and their respective plan(s). Accordingly, it is appropriate that Bennington's Town Plan address these land uses and provide guidance to town officials, regulators, and facility developers.

The Town of Bennington may participate in the Public Utility Commission's review of new and expanded generation facilities to ensure that local energy, resource conservation, and development objectives are identified and considered in proposed utility development. This may include joint participation and collaboration with other affected municipalities and the Bennington County Regional Commission for projects that may have significant regional impact. It is acknowledged that the PUC's primary focus is on administering state public policy and regulating actions that are directed at ensuring that utility services promote the general good of the state.

The Planning Commission, in consultation with the Bennington Select Board, should develop guidelines to direct local participation in Section 248 proceedings related to solar facilities located in Bennington or in neighboring communities which may affect the town. The guidelines should reflect levels of participation or formal intervention in relation to the type, location, scale, operation, and magnitude of a proposed project, and its potential benefits, detriments to, and impacts on the community.

The following Community Standards and Solar Facility Siting Criteria apply to all solar generation projects exceeding 15 kW capacity in Bennington.

Community Standards

The following community standards are to be considered in undertaking municipal solar electricity projects and programs, in updating Bennington's Land Use and Development Regulations to address solar facilities subject to local regulation, and in the review of any new or upgraded solar facilities in excess of 15 kW capacity, by the Town of Bennington and the Public Utility Commission (Section 248 review).

- Plan Conformance: New solar facilities and proposed system upgrades should be consistent with the Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan, the Vermont Long-Range Transmission Plan, and utilities Integrated Resource Planning (IRP).
- Benefits: A demonstrated statewide public need that outweighs adverse impacts to local residents and resources must be documented for municipal support of new solar facilities located within or which may otherwise affect Bennington. Facility development must benefit Town of Bennington and State residents, businesses, and property owners in direct proportion to the impacts of the proposed development.
- Impacts: New solar facilities must be evaluated for consistency with community and regional development objectives and shall avoid undue adverse impacts to significant cultural, natural, and scenic resources and aesthetic values identified by the community in the Bennington Town Plan and the Scenic Resources Inventory. When evaluating impacts of a proposed solar facility under the criteria set forth in this Town Plan, the cumulative impact of existing solar facilities, approved pending solar facilities and the proposed solar facility shall be considered. It is explicitly understood that a proposed solar facility which by itself may not have an adverse impact may be deemed to have an adverse impact when considered

in light of the cumulative impacts of the proposed solar facility and existing solar facilities and pending already approved solar facilities.

- Decommissioning: All facility certificates shall specify conditions for system decommissioning, including required sureties (bonds) for facility removal and site restoration to a safe, useful, and environmentally stable condition. All hazardous materials and structures, including foundations, pads and accessory structures, must be removed from the site and safely disposed of in accordance with regulations and best practices current at the time of decommissioning

Solar Facility Siting Criteria

Bennington supports development of solar energy generation facilities consistent with the policies and guidelines set forth in this plan. It recognizes that financial considerations require projects to be located in close proximity to electric power lines capable of distributing the load proposed to be generated and to have convenient access from major transportation networks for construction. However, the town desires to maintain the open landscape and scenic views important to Bennington's sense of place, tourism economy, and rural cultural aesthetic. Not all solar facilities proposed can meet this standard. Projects must meet the following criteria in order to be supported by this Town Plan:

- Siting Requirements: New solar facilities shall be sited in locations that do not adversely impact the community's traditional and planned patterns of growth, of compact (downtown/ village) centers surrounded by a rural countryside, including working farms and forest land. Solar facilities shall, therefore, not be sited in locations that adversely impact scenic views, roads, or other areas identified in the Scenic Resources Inventory, nor shall solar facilities be sited in locations that adversely impact any of the following scenic attributes identified in the Scenic Resource Inventory: views across open fields, especially when those fields form an important foreground; prominent ridgelines or hillsides that can be seen from many public vantage points and thus form a natural backdrop for many landscapes; historic buildings and districts and gateways to historic districts; and, scenes that include important contrasting elements such as water. The impact on prime and statewide agricultural soils currently in production shall be minimized during project design.

- Preferred Areas: The following areas are specifically identified as preferred areas for solar facilities, as they are most likely to meet the siting requirements:
    - ◊ Roof-mounted systems;
    - ◊ Systems located in proximity to existing large scale, commercial or industrial buildings;
    - ◊ Proximity to existing hedgerows or other topographical features that naturally screen the entire proposed array;
    - ◊ Reuse of former brownfields;
    - ◊ Facilities that are sited in disturbed areas, such as gravel pits, closed landfills, or former quarries;
    - ◊ Areas specifically identified as suitable for solar facilities on the Solar Energy Resource Map (Figure 7).

- Prohibited (Exclusion) Areas: In addition to those areas that do not meet the siting requirements set forth above, development of solar generating facilities shall be excluded from (prohibited within), and shall not be supported by the Town, in the following locations:
    - ◊ Floodways shown on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs);
    - ◊ Fluvial erosion hazard areas (river corridors) as shown in the Town of Bennington Land Use and Development Regulations;
    - ◊ Class I or II wetlands;
    - ◊ A location that would significantly diminish the economic viability or potential economic viability of the town's working landscape, including productive forest land and primary agricultural soils (as defined in Act 250 and as mapped by the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service);
    - ◊ Rare, threatened, or endangered species habitat or communities as mapped or identified through site investigation, and core habitat areas, migratory routes and travel corridors;
    - ◊ Ridgelines: Mount Anthony, Whipstock Hill, Bald Mountain (Green Mountains);
    - ◊ Steep slopes (>25%)
    - ◊ Surface waters and riparian buffer areas (except for stream crossings);
    - ◊ Topography that causes a facility to be prominently visible against the skyline from public and private vantage points such as roads, homes, and neighborhoods;
    - ◊ A site in proximity to and interfering with a significant viewshed identified in the Scenic Resource Inventory;
    - ◊ A site on which a solar facility project cannot comply with Bennington's prescribed siting and screening standards, including the screening requirements set forth in Bennington's Screening of Solar Facilities Ordinance;
    - ◊ A site that causes adverse impacts to historical or cultural resources, including state or federal designated historic districts, sites and structures, and locally significant cultural resources identified in the municipal plan. Prohibited impacts to historical and cultural resources include:
        - * removal or demolition;
        - * physical or structural damage, significant visual intrusion, or threat to the use;
        - * significant intrusion in a rural historic district or historic landscape with a high degree of integrity;
        - * significant visual intrusion into a hillside that serves as a backdrop to a historic site or structure;
        - * creating a focal point that would disrupt or distract from elements of a historic landscape;
        - * a significant intrusion in a rural historic district or historic landscape that has a high degree of integrity;
        - * impairing a vista or viewshed from a historic resource that is a significant component of its historic character and history of use;
        - * visually overwhelming a historic setting, such as by being dramatically out of scale;
        - * isolating a historic resource from its historic setting, or introducing incongruous or incompatible uses, or new visual, audible or atmospheric elements.

- Mass and Scale: Except for projects located on preferred sites, solar facilities larger than 10 acres, individually or cumulatively, cannot be adequately screened or mitigated to blend into the municipality's landscape and are, therefore, explicitly prohibited.

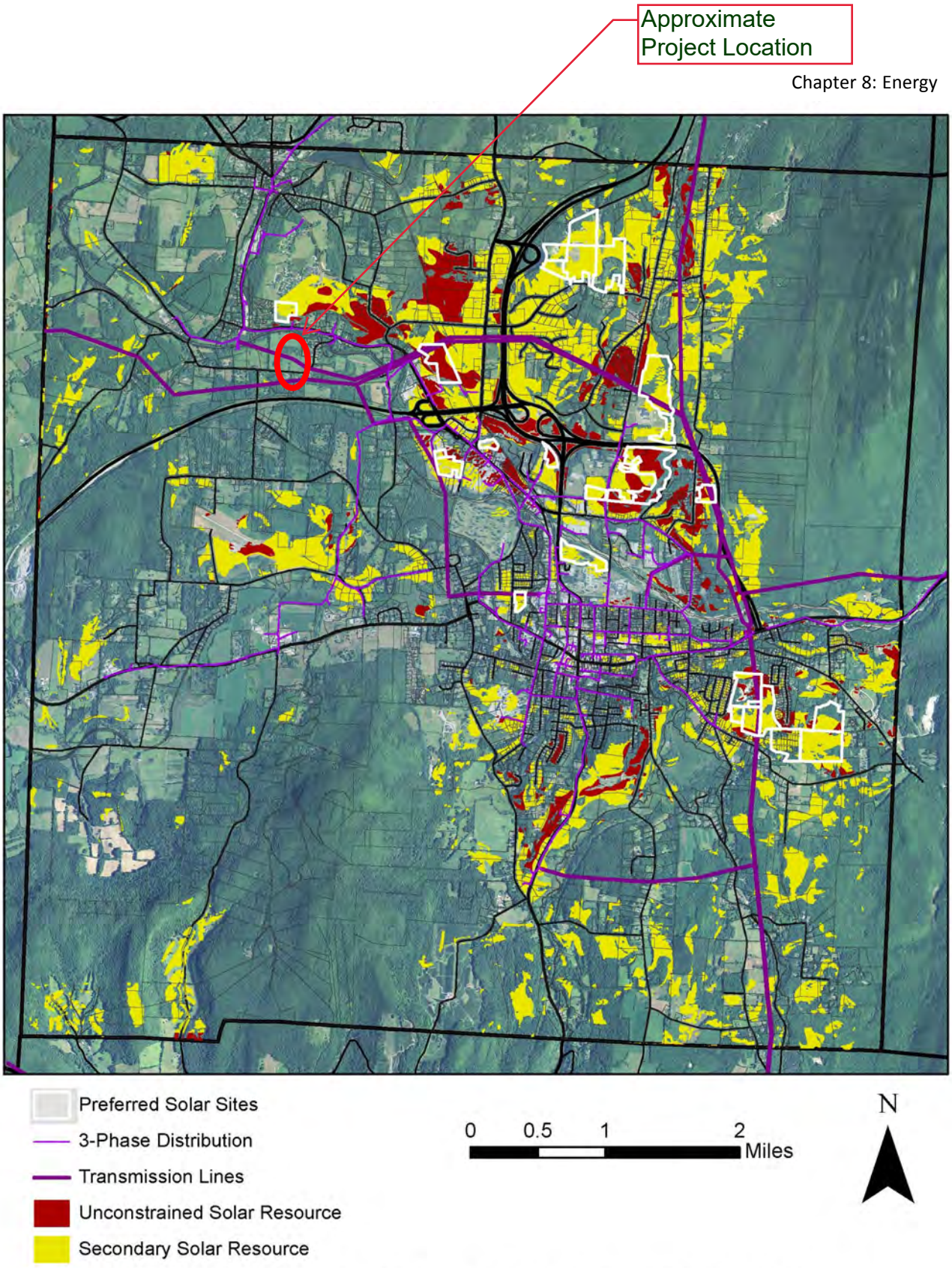
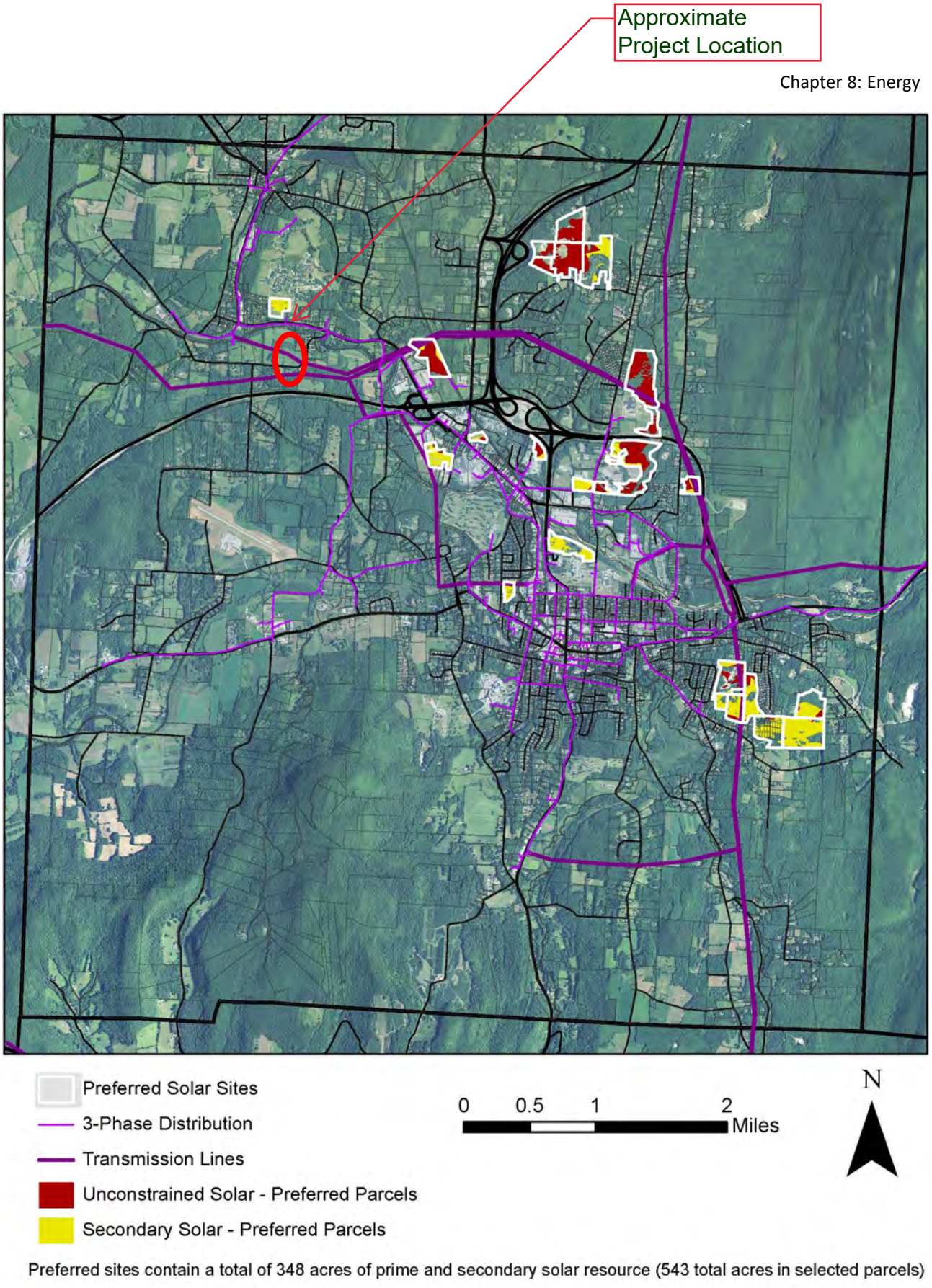


Figure 7. Solar Energy Resource Potential Map. Solar energy facilities in excess of 150 KW of capacity shall be restricted to preferred sites and to building rooftops and other locations specifically identified in this section as preferred areas for solar energy development; other sites are considered unsuitable for solar energy development in excess of 150 KW of capacity. All facility siting is subject to the specific Siting Guidelines set forth in this section of the Town Plan.



Map 7a. Preferred sites—suitable for development of small, community, and larger (utility) scale solar generation projects.

Town of Bennington, Vermont

Scenic Resource Inventory

December 2004

Prepared by the **Bennington Planning Commission**
with assistance provided by the Bennington County Regional Commission

Scenic Resource Inventory of Bennington, Vermont

This report was prepared by the Bennington Planning Commission with assistance provided by the Bennington County Regional Commission. All photographs were taken by Jim Sullivan, BCRC, between April and November 2004 using an Olympus Camedia C-50 digital camera. The aerial photo used as base map on page 2 is a composite of orthophotos obtained from the Vermont Department of Taxes, Division of Property Valuation and Review. Digital images are maintained at the Town of Bennington's Planning Department.

Understanding the particular qualities that make a view more attractive, and important, than others will help in subsequent efforts to preserve and enhance the Town's scenic resources. The publication, Vermont's Scenic Landscapes: A guide for Growth and Protection, identifies several specific attributes that make landscapes distinctive and appealing. Many of those features are displayed in the photographs displayed earlier in this report. In this section, scenic views will be presented that illustrate those qualities in the context of Bennington's overall scenic character.

Landscape contrast refers to the natural visual contrast between different elements in a view. Rural scenes may have contrasting types of vegetation or a mix of distinct foreground, middle distance, and background landscape features. Water creates a vivid contrast in any landscape, as do other natural features such as rock outcrops, wildflowers, or stands of a single tree species. In a more developed environment the contrast between structures and natural features, either in the background or as integrated landscape elements, can create pleasing visual effects.

While contrasting elements add interest to many scenes, it is important that the built environment retain a certain ***order and harmony***. A clear distinction between developed areas and open countryside helps promote this sense and is a defining characteristic of Vermont. Scenic qualities are enhanced in built environments when structures are sited in an orderly fashion, with architecturally related structures organized in traditional development patterns. Rural buildings and groups of buildings are more pleasing to look at when they are sited in manner that subtly complements the surrounding natural environment.

Visual ***focal points*** can add meaning and even dramatic effect to a scene. Important civic buildings or prominent natural features can serve as focal points, drawing attention through a wider scene to that particular point. In a rural setting, a distant mountain peak or a distinctive structure such as the Bennington Battle Monument can add important context to a scene that is otherwise quite ordinary. In the center of Town, attractive buildings situated at the end of a long straight street (such as the Old Mill at the end of County Street), important civic buildings, statues, or churches can serve as visual focal points.

Scenic views are enhanced by a ***spatial quality*** that includes contrasting elements which frame or define a view. An open space such as a field or view over a valley is more attractive when framed by contrasting elements such as a stonewall, wildflowers, or mature trees. Distant landforms such as mountains also can serve to frame a scene. Tree-lined streets often provide spatial quality for views in developed town and village locations. Historic buildings can provide an interesting contrasting element that frames a background view of the surrounding countryside.

A landscape that has preserved its traditional pattern and architectural forms can be considered to be visually ***intact***. A historic farmstead set against a background of hills and fields, with no intrusive modern buildings, has retained its character and is visually pleasing. A new house sitting in a clearing carved out of a hillside above such a traditional rural scene would significantly diminish its scenic quality. Along village streets, a row of similarly scaled historic buildings is visually appealing while a contemporary building that is inconsistent in scale or architectural style set among those buildings can disrupt the visual quality of the scene.

Attractive landscaping and signs can greatly enhance a commercial corridor such as Northside Drive. Extensive tree plantings in shopping plazas, such as at the Price Chopper plaza, can soften the appearance of the large buildings and parking areas and support overall visual quality of the developed landscape.

ton has been protected in this way.

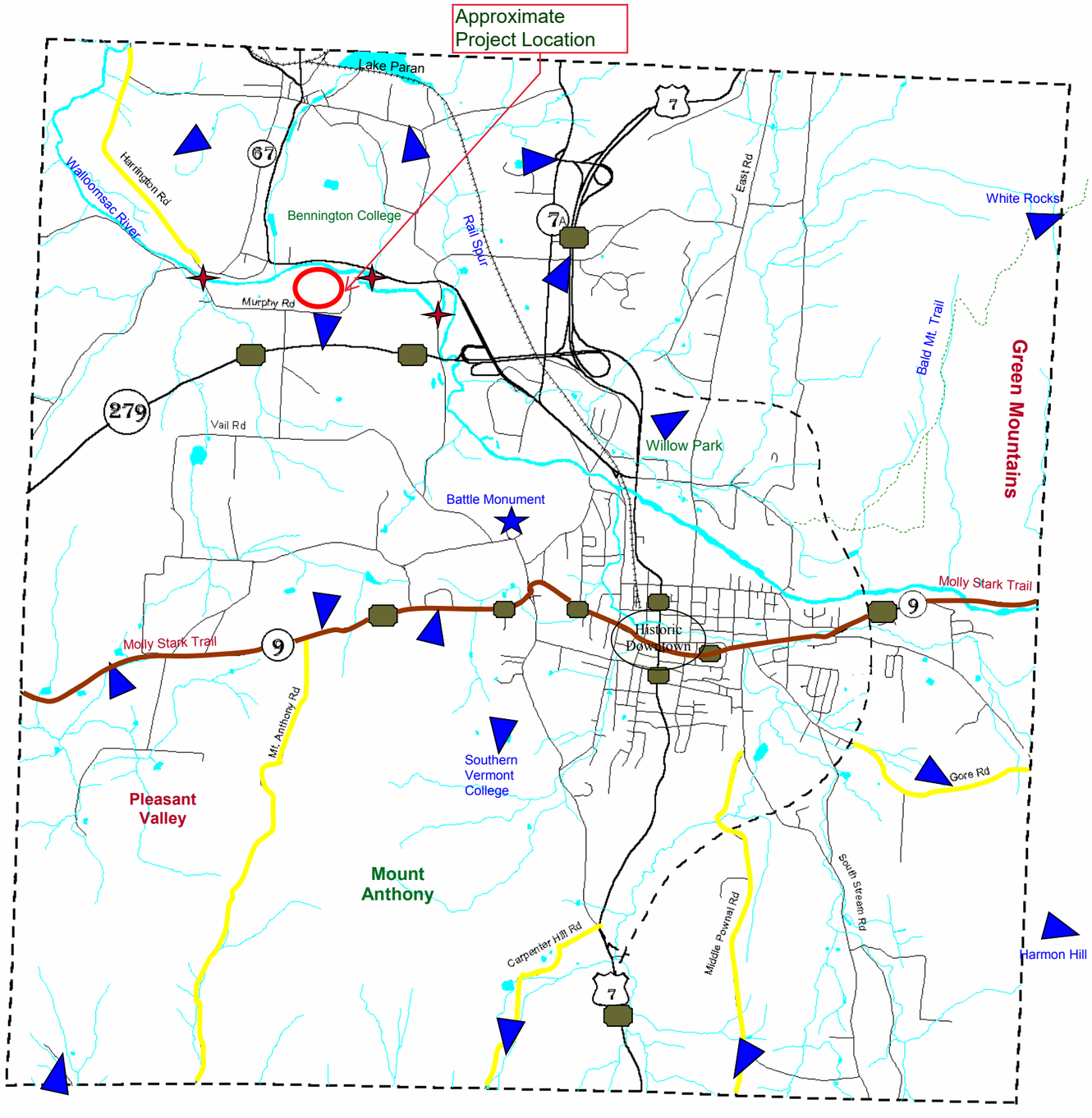
Land also can be **purchased in fee simple**; in Bennington this has been accomplished in large part by the United States Forest Service—a great deal of land along the Town's eastern border has been added to the Green Mountain National Forest. Of course, the Town's public lands at Willow Park, neighborhood parks, and at the schools provide access to important scenic views as well. The Town also is interested in formalizing public access along the state-owned, but idle, rail spur that runs between Bennington and North Bennington.

Scenic easements can be acquired, much like conservation easements, but are designed specifically to protect a particular view. Development may be precluded from land covered by a scenic easement or the location and size of buildings may be clearly delineated to ensure that incompatible development does not intrude on an important view. The Transportation Enhancements program, administered by the Vermont Agency of Transportation, provides funding for many types of projects, including acquisition of scenic easements for critically important views from public highways. Scenic easements may be an appropriate way to protect the valued views of Mount Anthony from Route 9 west, for example.

Towns also can formally identify **scenic roads**. Locally designated scenic roads cannot be substantially altered in a way that would damage their scenic character without a significant level of public review. In addition, a state and federal **scenic byway** program has been established to help communities identify ways to protect and promote important scenic or historic highway corridors. Route 9 has been legally designated a Vermont Byway—*The Molly Stark Trail*—through this program and a corridor management plan for it has been developed. The Town participates in the Molly Stark Trail Byway Council and will continue to work toward national designation and implementation of key elements of the management plan.

This newer home is set against the treeline and does not detract from the view of the mountain.

Roadway projects can and should include features that promote visual quality. It may be possible



Overview Map of Scenic Resources

This map identifies a number of especially important scenic resources in Bennington. The map is by no means all inclusive, nor do the symbols represent the exact or only locations of a particular scenic view or resource.

- Scenic View (arrow indicates direction of primary view)
- Gateway location (smaller symbols represent downtown gateways)
- Scenic Roads
- Covered Bridge
- Molly Stark Trail Scenic Byway

Bennington, Vermont

Park and Open Space Plan

February 2009

Prepared by the Bennington Planning Commission

Table of Contents

This Plan was prepared by the Bennington Planning Commission with assistance from the Bennington County Regional Commission. Funding for the project was provided by a Municipal Planning Grant administered by the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

Introduction

The Bennington Town Plan identified public parks and developed and undeveloped open spaces as critical resources that contribute to the quality of life for residents of the town. The Plan recommended existing parks and public open spaces be inventoried to assist in the assessment of whether an adequate number of these resources exist and to identify any issues associated with management of lands or maintenance of facilities.

Bennington's location in a broad valley at the base of the Green and Taconic Mountain ranges affords residents with a plethora of opportunities for outdoor recreation. The extensive forests in the area, especially those that lie within the Green Mountain National Forest on the slopes of Bald Mountain and the protected forests on Mount Anthony, offer a vast area for hiking, cross country skiing, and other sports. Rivers, streams, and ponds are important aesthetic features, recreational resources, and natural corridors for linear parks and pathways. Also important to the Town are the numerous parcels of private land that is protected from development; even though not always available for public access, these open fields and wooded hillsides are critical to maintaining Bennington's unique rural landscape.

Several parks and recreation areas owned by the Town and the local School Districts contain facilities that support a wide variety of recreational activities. These parks are convenient to centers of population and are valuable as centers of neighborhood recreation as well as the locations where most organized athletic teams practice and play.

Taken together, these parks and open space resources are critical in shaping the form and character of the community. Ideally, the town's parks and open spaces are varied, but also interconnected in a way that promotes access and contributes to overall scenic quality. This report includes a quantitative look at these resources in Bennington and a more general qualitative assessment of needs that should be addressed to meet the Town Plan's goal of making available "a variety of recreational facilities and services for residents and visitors" and of "maintaining or providing public access to outdoor recreational opportunities."

Park and Open Space Description and Standards

The number and size of parks and the extent of open space appropriate for any town are dependant upon the unique characteristics of the community and the desires of its residents. It is difficult, therefore, to establish specific standards that should be met, either for the amount of park and open space or for the recreational facilities provided within those lands. Nonetheless, it is useful to compare Bennington's existing park and open space resources with established standards, such as those promulgated by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), because other communities have used those standards as benchmarks. This section of the report will identify types of park and open space resources present in Bennington, compare them with the NRPA standards, and identify any evident shortcomings in either land area or facilities.

Types of Park and Open Space Areas

Community Parks serve an entire community and contain a variety of facilities and landscapes. A community park should be at least 20 acres in size, while a park of 40 or more acres is preferred as it can more easily accommodate the diversity of facilities and the number of people who may want to use the park at any one time. Good access for both vehicles and pedestrians is critical, and sufficient parking for cars and bicycles should be provided.

These parks should be large enough to include extensive open spaces that are not fully developed with recreational facilities. A trail loop through the park can provide access to both developed and undeveloped areas, and ideally will connect to a wider trail and greenway system. Community parks should contain picnic areas, shelters, and related facilities as well as playgrounds and some playing fields or courts as appropriate for the setting of the particular park and the overall need within the community. These parks also are suitable locations for winter activities such as ice skating, sledding, and cross country skiing.

Willow Park serves as Bennington's community park, and at 58.7 acres is large and diverse enough to meet the town's needs. It includes picnic areas and pavilions, attractive playgrounds, a trail loop and a connection to the multi-use pathway along East Road, playing fields, and a variety of other facilities as noted in the inventory.

Neighborhood Parks are smaller than community parks and provide the primary, and most easily accessible, recreational opportunities for residents. As such, it is important that a community have an adequate number of neighborhood parks and that those parks be distributed so that no area of the town is too remote from one. These parks should be at least three acres in size, with even greater opportunities possible when the parks extend over five or more acres. The typical service area of a neighborhood park is ½-mile (that is, the park serves neighborhoods within a ½-mile radius of the park). To ensure easy access, it is important that no part of the service area be interrupted by a barrier to pedestrian movement such as a limited access highway. Sidewalk or pathway connections to neighborhoods in the service area should be present.

Most recreation at neighborhood parks involves informal activities, although some will provide opportunities for youth team practices and occasional games. The emphasis clearly is on social interaction and a place for neighborhood residents to enjoy outdoor activities. These parks should include a play area with some playground equipment, open space for informal use and games, a basketball or tennis court or similar facility, benches and picnic tables, and possibly some facilities for winter sports. Neighborhood parks should provide for a small amount of

parking, but parking lots should not be so large as to significantly reduce the park space, as the emphasis in these parks is on pedestrian access. On-street parking often is sufficient. It is particularly important that neighborhood parks be well-maintained with suitable landscaping so that they complement their neighborhoods and attract people to visit.

Neighborhood parks in Bennington include the Stark Street Playground, the Leonard J. Black Park, and the Beech Street Field. Because of their location and facilities, Willow Park and the Bennington Recreation Center can serve a dual function as neighborhood parks. The town's elementary schools also have many attributes in common with neighborhood parks and can serve that function when school is not in session.

School Recreational Facilities (outdoor and indoor) are intended primarily to serve their student populations. These facilities are designed for sports and recreation at the youth level, with the type, size, and sophistication of the facilities dependant upon the grade level of the particular school. Because of this orientation, the playing fields and indoor gymnasiums are ideal for non-scholastic youth and community sports practices and games.

The facilities at Mount Anthony Union Middle School and Mount Anthony Union High School are best-suited for soccer, baseball, football, basketball, track, and other sports requiring specific standardized playing areas. The elementary schools, on the other hand, do not provide appropriate indoor recreational space for community use, but their outdoor playgrounds and open spaces serve much the same function as neighborhood parks and can service areas that may be underserved by Town-owned parks. In fact, the playground facilities at Bennington's elementary schools are generally more substantial and better maintained than those at the Town's three neighborhood parks.

Special Use Parks include a wide range of park and open space areas that vary from community to community. In Bennington, such parks include nature reserves, cultural and historic sites, downtown pocket parks and public gathering places, and (public and private) facilities designed for specific activities such as Little League Baseball, soccer, and golf. Because residents from throughout the Town and surrounding area will be using these parks, it is important that they have good access for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians, as well as adequate parking for the expected use of the parks.

Trails and Greenways include both developed "multi-use" paths such as the Bennington Pathway and public and public use footpaths (trails) such as those in the Green Mountain National Forest and the trails on Mount Anthony accessed from the Southern Vermont College trailhead. Multi-use paths should provide a safe and convenient route between major destinations (such as neighborhoods, schools, parks, and commercial areas) and should be clearly marked and surfaced to allow for use by pedestrians, bicycles, roller blades. Major trails and trail systems should have well-marked access points (trailheads) with vehicle parking.

Elements of a town's trail and greenway resources should form a network that allows non-motorized travel by residents seeking to reach specific destinations and for recreation. Bennington's Town Plan includes a detailed map of existing and possible future trails and greenways that form a comprehensive network throughout the town; however, at present the trail systems in the south, east, and northwest are not connected to each other and the only multi-use paths are the Bennington Pathway north of downtown and the paved pathway that extends up East Road past Willow Park and the Middle School.

Water Resources, especially streams, rivers, and lakes, provide important recreational opportunities including fishing, swimming, and aesthetic appreciation. Although streams and rivers, and most of the town's larger ponds and lakes, are publicly owned, access to them is often restricted by adjacent privately owned land. Public access points are, therefore, of great importance to a community, and may include access points such as the old road and bridge access to the Roaring Branch off Barney Road, a developed recreation facility such as the park at Lake Paran, or a streamside linear park like the developed portion of the Bennington Pathway and the greenway envisioned along the Walloomsac River.

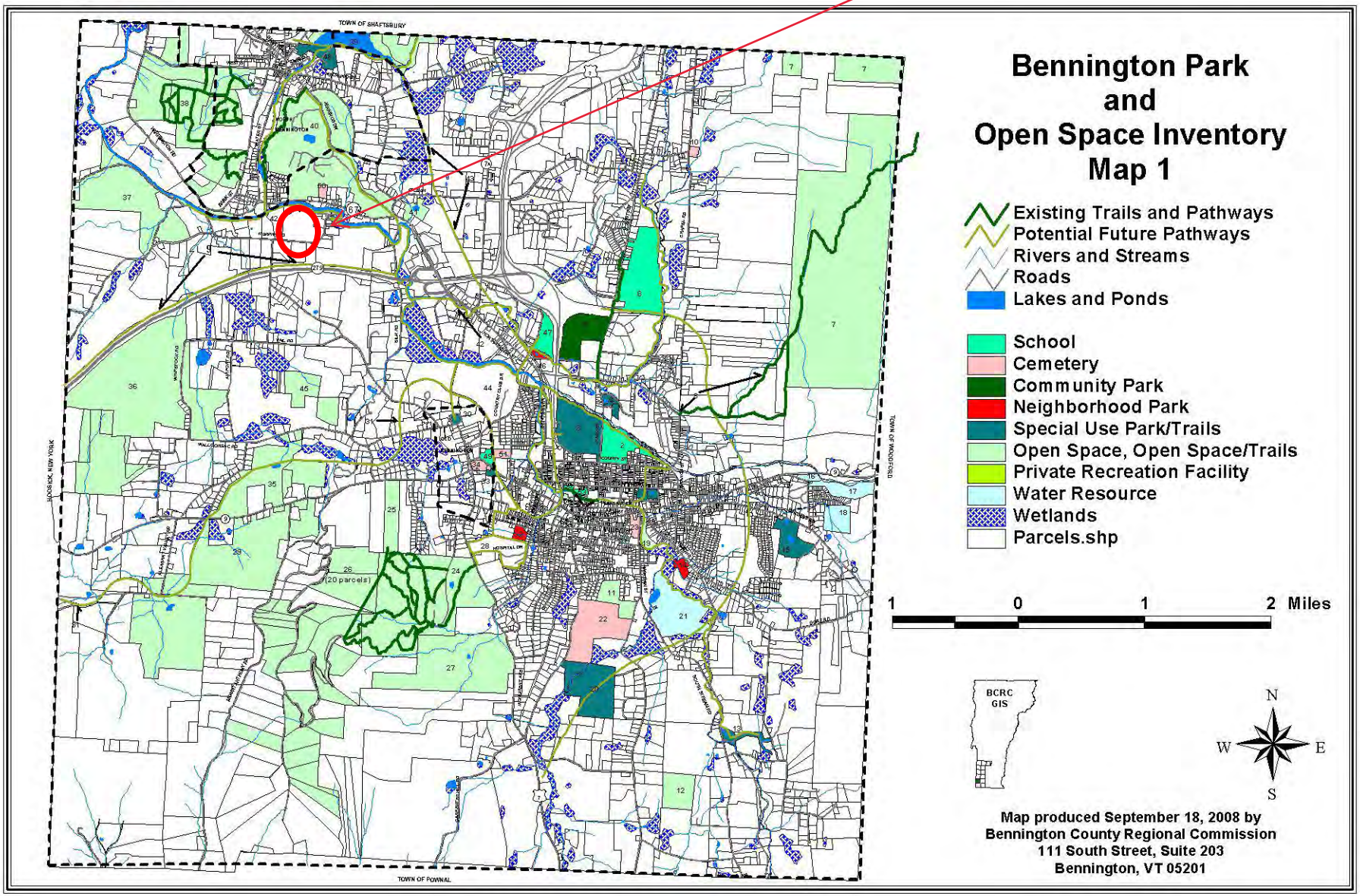
Conserved Open Space forms an important part of a town's park and open space inventory, contributing to the overall quality of the visual landscape and in some instances providing access to large tracts of rural land. Much of the conserved land in Bennington is privately owned farmland or other open space with no public access for recreation, but its importance in promoting a development pattern of a dense mixed-use core surrounded by rural open space is critical as is its natural visual appeal. Other rural open spaces, such as the Green Mountain National Forest, the Southern Vermont College trail system on Mount Anthony, and the extensive trail network in and around North Bennington Village serve those functions and also provide public access for hiking, cross country skiing, and other outdoor pursuits. Bennington's cemeteries also are important open spaces, serving important historical, cultural, and religious purposes in quiet and scenic locations around the community.

Parks and protected open spaces occupy over 5,600 acres of land in Bennington (Maps 1 and 1a), significantly exceeding the NRPA benchmark. The large acreage total is attributable to Bennington's rural location, considerable ownership of land by the United States Forest Service, and to the extensive land conservation activities that have taken place in the town. The number and size of developed recreational parks (neighborhood parks, school parks, community parks, and certain special use parks) is smaller, but still adequate for a town the size of Bennington. Furthermore, the distribution of these parks ensures that most neighborhoods within Bennington's densely developed "growth center" are close to a public park facility (Map 2).

The most significant need concerning location and park access has to do with the fact that Bennington's large community park (Willow Park), which contains its most extensive range of facilities, is relatively distant from the center of town and is separated from large residential developments by US Route 7, which is difficult, and unsafe, for pedestrians to cross. A pedestrian underpass that would resolve that access issue is planned as part of a comprehensive reconstruction of a segment of the Kocher Drive/Northside Drive corridor, but sufficient funding for that project has not yet been secured.

Other neighborhood and school parks in the town's center have generally good access along the local road and sidewalk system. Some of the parks are also connected to nearby neighborhoods by informal trails. Bicycle racks should be provided at all neighborhood, school, and community parks.

A related issue deals with the need to ensure access to recreational resources for people with disabilities. New facilities and upgrades to existing facilities should incorporate ADA standards (parking spaces, pedestrian routes, toilet facilities, and other necessary accessories) and the town should strive to have a reasonable number of accessible fields, courts, and other playing areas available to meet the needs of disabled residents. Scheduling for existing facilities should accommodate requests for accessible fields, player areas, and spectator seating to the extent possible.


Approximate
Project Location
Bennington Park
and
Open Space Inventory
Map 1
Existing Trails and Pathways
Potential Future Pathways
Rivers and Streams
Roads
Lakes and Ponds
School
Cemetery
Community Park
Neighborhood Park
Special Use Park/Trails
Open Space, Open Space/Trails
Private Recreation Facility
Water Resource
Wetlands
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Map produced September 18, 2008 by
Bennington County Regional Commission
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