

# Middletown Springs Town Plan

**Adopted, March 7, 2017**

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**Statutory Authority and Requirements**

This Plan is being adopted following the procedures set forth in the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act  
(Title 24, VSA, Chapter 117)

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## Introduction:

Middletown Springs is unique among Vermont towns in both electing its Planning Commissioners and adopting its Town Plan by public vote. A Town Plan accepted at the polls indicates acceptance by the voters regardless of the amount of time they can contribute to the development of the Plan and whether or not they are comfortable expressing their opinion at public meetings. The people of Middletown Springs believe that extensive citizen involvement in planning by residents is preferable to state or regional directives. To survive as a rural agrarian town with its many benefits, it is important to continue the process of sound planning. The people's voice and vote provide direction.

Citizen input is a critical component of effective community planning and the planning process has a history of successfully not only engaging the public, but also developing a plan responsive to their unique visions. Past versions of the Town Plan have all included citizen input from either surveys or public meetings or both.

The most recent version of the Town Plan was adopted on March 6, 2012. That Plan was reviewed and accepted by the Rutland Regional Planning Commission. This new Town Plan has incorporated their comments as well as input from a town-wide survey conducted in October, 2016.

The ongoing task of the Planning Commission is to follow the direction of the citizenry by proposing appropriate amendments to this Plan and by facilitating continued discussion of topics where broad consensus does not currently exist.

The Planning Commission would like to thank the various commissions, organizations and individuals that contributed to the preparation of this Plan. Without their efforts the Plan would not reflect the hopes and visions that the townspeople have for Middletown Springs.

**All who read this plan should keep in mind that the goals and strategies presented herein are not mandates.** They express what the Town would like to achieve but there is no guarantee that the Town will be able to achieve them. The Town shall not be held liable if it fails to implement these goals and policies.

Respectfully submitted,

Middletown Springs Planning Commission

# Chapter I: Town Background Information

## A. The Past, Present and Future

**The Past:** Middletown Springs is a small, rural town in Rutland County. It was originally formed in 1784 when citizens of Ira, Poultney, Wells, and Tinmouth petitioned the Vermont legislature to create a town bounded by the ridges that prevented them from attending meetings and worship services in their original towns. Thus it is one of Vermont's uniquely shaped communities and defined by its encircling mountains. At 23 square miles, it is slightly smaller than the average Vermont town.

The Poultney River and its tributaries have been prominent in Middletown Springs' history. They provided one of the original reasons to settle here; water for agriculture and power for mills. By 1800 the Town had 1,066 people, seven mills, distilleries, clothiers, mechanics' shops, taverns, and stores. Then in 1811 a heavy downpour caused floods that wiped out all but one of the mills. Jobs perished, commerce declined, and people moved away.

For several decades only agriculture remained strong. By 1835 there were 3000 sheep in the Town and in the second half of the century dairy and cheese making thrived. Industry returned when A. W. Gray began manufacturing horsepower treadmills and related agricultural equipment. By 1867 Gray employed 30 men and supported loggers, sawyers, teamsters, and others.

Gray also rediscovered mineral springs that the 1811 flood had buried. Soon Middletown waters were bottled and widely distributed and in 1870 the luxurious Montvert Hotel began catering to visitors to the springs.

By the early twentieth century the internal combustion engine had largely replaced the Gray horsepower machines and the Montvert Hotel was failing. A disastrous fire in 1920 destroyed four prominent buildings in the center of Town and further demoralized the populace.

Again, agriculture sustained the Town. The Buxton and Copeland farms were especially large and modern and in 1940 a creamery was built in the neighborhood of the old Gray horsepower factory. The creamery processed milk from as many as 140 Vermont and New York farms but declined as farmers began selling directly to bottlers.

Today's technology and farming agribusiness culture favors large dairy enterprises. Neither Middletown's hilly terrain nor its town culture favors such. The result has been a steady decline in large-scale agriculture. It remains to be seen if specialty farming with niche markets and farming on a smaller scale can revive Middletown Springs' agricultural focus.

**The Present:** The village green in Middletown Springs lies at the heart of the village, surrounded by one of the Town's two churches, fine old houses, a country store, the old cemetery and an upscale take-out restaurant. One of the historic buildings is owned by the Middletown Springs Historical Society and houses the Middletown Springs Historical Museum and the Town Office. The three roads that lead into the Town from the East, the South, and the West meet there at the green, along with a local road to the North that was once the main road to Rutland.

Middletown Springs' rich history has left a legacy of elegant buildings along these roads. In 1984 much of the village was added to the National Register for Historic Places. Later, 31 additional sites outside the village were added to the Vermont State Register of Historic Places. (See *Land Use, Village Area* below for a further description.)

The largely hilly rural surroundings are connected by winding country roads fringed by trees and stone walls. Until the middle of the twentieth century these areas were home primarily to those engaged in agriculture; they are now dotted with rural residences, the majority of them tucked into the hills.

| Year       | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 |
|------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Population | 381  | 426  | 603  | 686  | 823  | 745  |

The 2014 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau shows an estimated population of 731 for Middletown Springs with 432 housing units. Of the population included in the survey, 18% were 19 or under, and 24% were 65 or over. Females made up 51% and the median age was 49.5. Ninety-seven percent of those reporting one race were white. These numbers show a slight decline in total population since 2010 and an increase in the average age of the population.

Historically, declines in population have occurred in a number of decades between 1920 and 1980. While the largest extended increase in population was from 1960 to 2000, 2010 found a significant reversal in population growth.

Middletown Springs is right in the middle of the range of population and density of its neighboring towns as shown in the following table based on 2010 census data.

| <b>Area Towns<br/>For Comparison</b> | <b>2010<br/>Population</b> | <b>1990-<br/>2010<br/>Percent<br/>Change</b> | <b>Housing<br/>units<br/>2010</b> | <b>Median<br/>Family<br/>Income<br/>2010</b> |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Ira                                  | 432                        | -.05   | 193                               | 69,167                                       |
| Tinmouth                             | 613                        | +.08   | 328                               | 43,458                                       |
| <b>Middletown<br/>Springs</b>        | <b>745</b>                 | <b>-9.56%</b>                                | <b>486</b>                        | <b>47,500</b>                                |
| Wells                                | 1,150                      | +.025  | 927                               | 48,000                                       |
| Poultney                             | 3,432                      | +.05   | 1670                              | 44,775                                       |

Source: [www.housingdata.org/profiles/results](http://www.housingdata.org/profiles/results)

Middletown Springs has a remarkable number of professional musicians, writers, artists, craftspeople and other home-based business operators. Currently, efforts are underway to develop programs to assist and encourage these residents and other small businesses under the concept of a "Creative Economy".

Most of the residents of Middletown Springs work elsewhere but of the people working in Town a significant percentage also live here. More Middletowners work in Rutland City than any other place. The mean travel time to work is 30 minutes, which has implications for the economics of our households.

**The Future:** The general goal of the residents of Middletown Springs is to preserve the sense of community, rural lifestyle and appearance of the Town while providing community services, recreational and cultural opportunities, quality education, and protection of the environment as well as economic growth opportunities, specifically small businesses, agriculture and forestry. The resident survey showed that most residents indicated a preference for the Town to remain the same while asking for improvement in the appearance of the entrances to the village part of the Town. The majority of residents are in favor of refining the Town's land use map and are open to the idea of regulating ridgeline and higher elevation development in order to protect the environment and landscape beauty. Many are ready to accept some technological advances, e.g. cell towers and residential solar panels

provided they do not disrupt the rural beauty of our surrounding hills or the environment.

Many recognize the inadequacy of the Town office to protect Town records and feel a plan for funding a new Town office should continue to be pursued.

The most frequently stated features that should change in the future are: 1) lowering property taxes, 2) cleaning up junk vehicles, 3) acquiring cell service, 4) building a new town office and 5) regulating commercial wind and solar installations.

#### Action Goals:

The following actions address the means to achieve this:

- Promote the health, safety, civility and general welfare of the Town
- Preserve unique and/or valuable natural, cultural, and historical areas
- Plan for development that is consistent with the Town's character, and that meets recognized needs
- Promote sustainable agriculture and forestry
- Preserve property values
- Promote high quality education for community residents.
- Participate in Act 250 hearings on developments that may affect safety, town character, property values, or the geographic distribution of taxes in Middletown Springs. If a proposed development is inconsistent with this Plan, then the Town may negotiate changes or shall oppose the development.

These policies are addressed to varying degrees in this plan. The following pages describe the townspeople's vision for the future in more detail.

## **B. Surrounding Towns**

Middletown Springs, because of its location, was carved out of neighboring towns. It is a town largely bounded by steep ridgelines resulting in geographic isolation. A direct result of this geography is that visually, developments in Middletown Springs have limited impact on neighboring towns, and vice versa. Regardless, a review of the Town Plans of adjoining towns shows great similarity in goals and substantial compatibility. Similarly, a review of the Rutland Regional Plan shows no inconsistencies with this Plan.

An exception to Middletown's isolation is the Poultney River. Middletown Springs' boundaries encompass much of the upper watershed of the Poultney River, which originates in Tinmouth. Preservation of the Poultney River corridor is an important concern of the Town's residents. To maintain the high quality of the Poultney River for the benefit of the people of Middletown Springs and those downstream, the Town will continue to cooperate with the

Poultney-Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District in its Watershed Basin Planning and improvement projects.

A second exception is the three main roads leading into the town. Traffic generated in Middletown Springs can affect surrounding towns through which those roads pass, and traffic passing through the Town can affect the peaceful, rural atmosphere that Middletown wants to preserve.

## **C. Social Capital: The People Who Live Here**

A town's social capital is at least as important as its physical capital in land, other natural resources, roads, structures, and facilities.

We define social capital as the benefits, such as cooperation, influence and reciprocity that accrue to those who share the same norms and values resulting from shared knowledge, experience, and skills. Shared social capital shows when individual Middletowners put forth their productivity and cooperation into cultural and civic organizations, and willingly participate in activities benefiting the town, and in their self-identification as members of the Middletown Springs community.

According to the US Census 2014 American Community Survey, among the population over the age of 18, ninety-three percent have a high school diploma or higher level of educational attainment. Thirty-six percent of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher and sixteen percent have a graduate or professional degree.

Among the population over the age of 16, 32% work in occupations related to management, business, technology, healthcare or the arts; 28% work in service related occupations; with sales and office occupations. Another 17% were involved in construction (maintenance or repair occupations); 16% were employed in government work and 19% were self-employed. A great many of the self-employed are artisans specializing in one of the many arts and crafts as well as small scale farming, horticulture and household services. (<http://factfinder.census.gov/service/>)

In 2014 4% of residents age 65 and over were below the poverty line and almost 10% of children under 18 fell below the poverty line. This represents a significant increase since 2010 over the number of children under 18 living below the poverty line.

It is the policy of the Town of Middletown Springs to recognize, support, and further develop its social capital. It can do this in a number of ways, including but not limited to the following:

- Voter-approved aid to local civic and cultural organizations through the town budget.
- Financial support for the biannual *Middletown Springs Telephone & Business Directory*.



- Increased efforts by the Select Board to enlist members of the community to serve on the various committees and boards that are necessary to efficiently run town government.
- Support for school board and allied efforts to enlist seniors and other Town volunteers in enrichment activities for and with our elementary school students.
- Select Board and Planning Commission support for the efforts of volunteers to increase awareness of the work of Town artists, artisans and tradespeople.
- Continued financial and technical support for the Middletown Springs website, designed for interactive use by townspeople and elected officials.
- Local and regional showings of videotaped interviews with and narration about MTS artists, artisans, craftspeople, small business owners and long term residents, produced by local volunteers with the help of state and/or private grants.
- Town support for festivals, parades, concerts, exhibits, and other cultural events and activities carried on by Middletowners, especially those that promote the Town's cohesion and solidarity. The Select Board, School Board, Planning Commission, and other official bodies should help seek funding for these events and activities and offer them the use of Town and school facilities. When voters agree, they should be supported through the Town and school budgets.

## **Chapter II: Land Use**

### **A. Overview**

Land settlement patterns in Middletown Springs have created a Village Area clustered around the general store, churches, and amenities in town; a rural residential, forestry, and agricultural area surrounding the Village center, and sparsely populated steeper hills at the edges of town (also used for forestry practices). This settlement pattern has existed since before the town was founded with many of the current roads following the exact path of their wagon-rutted antecedents.

The people of Middletown Springs want the town to keep its traditional rural character and believe that the preservation of agriculture, the protection of scenic ridgelines, and a compact village hub are integral to the town's character and that future land use should maintain these qualities. In fact, one of the highest scoring categories in every town survey is the positive response to questions about conserving agriculture in town, and support for more refined land use guidance maps and land use regulation for select activities is rising.

Following precedent from past town plans, the rural areas in Middletown Springs are defined as the lands around the village, extending to slopes too steep for agriculture. They include all farmland, residential lots outside the village, and forestland. Many older properties are listed in the Vermont State Registry of Historic Places. Agricultural uses include but are not limited to dairy, beef, horses, small ruminants, crops, maple syrup, fruit, and logging.

Based on recent land use changes in neighboring towns, with construction of large solar farms on agricultural fields, and the (low level, but ever-present) threat of commercial wind projects altering our ridgetops, there is concern in Middletown Springs that we need to proactively preserve the rural and agricultural heritage of the town. The newly-passed Statewide energy policy calling for use of 90 percent renewable energy in Vermont by 2050 has created friction between the desire to conserve the rural character of the town and the desire to create sustainable energy for local consumption. The newly-enacted Act 174 will help address some of the solar siting concerns expressed by residents and the planning commission will work closely with the Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC) to develop strong and thoughtful solar siting guidelines for lands in town. If appropriate, the Planning Commission will consider recommending land-use regulations to preserve attributes valued by the residents.

As a general principle, development of any type should not occur in protected areas (such as state-identified wetlands) and sensitive areas (ridgelines, steep slopes, winter deer habitat, and prime agricultural lands). Because the Town lacks a formal zoning ordinance, future development can legally occur in most locations without formal Town review. Vermont Act 250 provides review for larger development projects, while state wastewater regulations

govern the siting of well and septic systems, State wetlands regulations control alterations of wetlands, and the Stream Alterations Permit governs the size of stream crossing structures and the type and time of year that work can occur in streams. In lieu of zoning ordinances, the language contained in this Town Plan should guide the Town's position regarding proposed new development.

At present there is no broad consensus on the best means to maintain the historic settlement pattern, a compact village surrounded by open countryside, though interest in refining our land use maps and exploring zoning for specific areas in town and/or industries is growing. Declining economic viability of dairy farming has placed economic pressures on landowners to sell parcels of land for individual residences. At the same time, the lack of an economically viable plan to provide municipal sewer and water facilities has limited new residential construction within the village. In lieu of formal land use restrictions, the goals below describe the desired outcomes for future land use.

### **Overall Land Use Goals:**

1. Continue the historic pattern of a compact village surrounded by open countryside.
2. Maintain and promote the siting of municipal and cultural institutions and small scale commercial activity in the village area.
3. Work to preserve and protect agricultural land by identifying land most suitable for farming and encouraging its use for same.
4. Identify and protect areas of ecological significance and preserve the mosaic of forest and meadow that surrounds the Town center with special emphasis on maintaining open space.
5. Protect ridgelines and river corridors from development for aesthetic, ecological, and safety reasons.

### **Strategies:**

1. Support current-use taxation of agricultural land.
2. Support Right-to-Farm legislation.
3. Foster awareness of private or foundation funding to purchase conservation easements and development rights of prime agricultural and scenic lands.
4. See "*Working Landscape*" and "*Natural Areas*" for additional strategies to address the above goals.

## **B. Village Area:**

The village area is an area of compact development in the center of the Town. It is not a governmental entity with defined boundaries but an undefined area extending in all four directions from the intersection of Routes 133 and 140 until open fields are encountered (See "*Utilities and Facilities*" map for a rough boundary of the village area). The Village Area includes virtually all community-wide facilities including the Town Office, the Volunteer Fire Department, the Town Library, the Middletown Springs Elementary School, the U.S. Post Office, two churches, small retail establishments, and Mineral Springs Park with a re-creation of the 19th century spring house and a picnic area. The solid waste transfer station and storage facilities for sand, road salt, and road maintenance equipment are also located in the center of Town.

In past town planning cycles, survey results documented concerns about the location of the transfer station and storage of town equipment, sand, and salt. Concerns included the proximity to the historic town center and the potential for impacts to North Brook, located just east of these town facilities. Our 2012 Town Plan notes that, "Continued effort should be made to resolve the issue of the location of the recycling/transfer station and to improve the appearance of the village center."

The survey administered to town residents in 2016 resulted in the Recycling Program and the Transfer Station receiving the highest scores for resident satisfaction. This should be interpreted as approval for the operation of these services rather than their location. Other high-scoring services were also located in the village center and included the library, the Fire Department, town snow removal services, and First Response. (See "*Town Background Information*" in Chapter I above for further description of the village area.)

In June, 2014, the Vermont Downtown Development Board approved the application of Middletown Springs for the Village Center Designation. This approval followed a year-long effort by the Planning Commission and the Selectboard with assistance from the Rutland Regional Planning Commission. The designation is part of a program run by the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development which is intended to recognize and support local revitalization efforts in designated municipalities. The "Village Center" is defined by a map approved by the Downtown Board, copies of which are available at the Town Clerk's office and on the Town website. Businesses within the Village Center are eligible to apply for tax credits for improvements to historic structures and to bring buildings up to code standards. In addition, the Town receives priority consideration when applying for Municipal Planning Grants, VTrans Bicycle/Pedestrian Grants and Community Development Grants. The designation is in effect for five years, after which time it must be renewed. Adjustments to the area defined by the Village Center map may be requested at any time as circumstances change.

**Goals:**

1. Maintain a traditional, compact village center consisting of residences and appropriate services and businesses.
2. Promote the growth of businesses in the town center that support local farmers, artisans, small business owners, etc.
3. Integrate existing town services into a Facilities Plan, focusing on improving the aesthetic, structural integrity, and environmental impacts of these town controlled areas.

**Strategies:**

1. Continue the ongoing search for available land to relocate the solid-waste transfer station and road maintenance facilities to an area that is convenient for the people of the town but not necessarily in the heart of the village. If such a location is found, bring the issue of moving the facility before the Town's voters. (See section on "*Solid Waste Disposal*" in Chapter III, "*Town Facilities and Utilities*" below.)
2. Explore options for designing and installing appropriate transfer station facilities in the current location.
3. Explore options for designing and installing appropriate covered sand and salt storage areas in the current location.
4. Explore options for designing and installing appropriate town garage and equipment storage areas in the current location.
5. Allow the development of compact growth within the village to the extent that such development provides for adequate and safe drinking water supplies, stormwater infiltration and management, and appropriate waste and wastewater disposal. (See "*Utilities*" below.)
6. Encourage the use of the Village Center Designation by businesses located within the designated area and by the Town when considering whether to apply for state grants.
7. Support and Implement beneficial strategies developed in the Creative Economy work group.

**C. Working Landscape: Agriculture and Forestry**

Agriculture has been the center of much attention recently across Vermont. Both as the land use and economic sector that we consistently report is the most important to maintaining our ongoing rural character, and as the sector that has been the center of much focus related to high phosphorus levels in Lake Champlain. Residents of Middletown Springs consistently tout agriculture as one of the highest-ranked aspects of our town, yet we have no formal method of supporting agricultural pursuits.

The 2005 town plan discussed the history of dairy production and sheep herding along with the results of a study that indicated the future of rural areas was heading in the direction of small privately-owned horse farms and niche farms, such as specialty crops and artisan foods. The predictions made by that study have come true in part as we have seen increased numbers of homeowners with horses, the growth of small, specialty farms, and an increased interest in permaculture practices.

While, farming trends in Vermont are beginning to echo the changes of modern agriculture across the country, promoting large, consolidated farms and marginalizing family-run sheep and dairy farms, there is a strong interest in maintaining local farms in Middletown Springs. Farms helped carve the rural character that attracts residents and outsiders to Middletown Springs and they provide fresh, local food and other materials. Natural catastrophes, such as Tropical Storm Irene that isolate communities, underscore the importance of locally available foods.

Middletown Springs has two active dairy farms, who also sell grass-fed beef and maple syrup. There are increasing numbers of garden market farms, as well as a winter vegetable production business. Local agricultural food businesses include maple syrup and related products, lamb production, chicken, goat milk and cheese production, bread and local grain production, as well as use of historical apple trees in cider-making and apple products. The town should support the local food movement and farm-to-plate and farm-to-school initiatives to assist local farmers, as well as promote good nutrition and eating habits of our residents.

The town should encourage the public's commitment to support a diverse farming economy, with large and small operations to support the community. The town should also encourage the maintenance and conservation of ag lands to produce agricultural products, promote soil conservation practices that protect the long-term productivity and viability of agricultural soils, and promote sustainable farming and sound forest management practices

**Goal:**

Preserve and enhance small-scale, local farming operations, enabling them to provide agricultural products to local and regional markets.

**Strategies:**

1. Support local farms, through planning and land use guidance that emphasizes maintaining the rural character of the town through specific protections and guidelines in heavily agricultural and forested areas.
2. Include local farms in the Creative Economy movement in town, encouraging utilization of the Village Center as a location to promote and develop the local products market.

3. Create a map which designates prime agricultural soils and current farm operations, making available baseline information about current agricultural activities
4. Ensure that any future guidelines or siting requirements preserve the existing agricultural lands in our town and consider the value of potential agricultural lands that are currently undeveloped.
5. Development of prime ag soils should be planned in such a way as to preserve the future agricultural uses of land.
6. Where possible, facilitate and promote the efforts of local agriculture-related groups and/or economic development groups that support agriculture, such as the Rutland Area Farm and Food Link, Farm-to-Plate, and Middletown Springs Creative Economy.
7. Support the local production of food through Farmers' Markets, CSA's, Co-operatives, Community Gardens, and Farm Stands.
8. Explore establishing a community agricultural committee to review future agricultural business opportunities with the Vermont Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Agricultural and forestry practices often occur on the same properties and the Vermont Use Value Appraisal (UVA; Current Use) Program provides tax incentives for management of working landscapes and preservation of larger parcel sizes. Marginal farm lands and higher elevation lands are often managed as a mix of low-density residential, agriculture, and forestry land. This mosaic should be protected and growth limited to lands that are appropriate for such practices. Many of the properties participating in forestry activities are also part of larger forest and habitat blocks that extend beyond the property boundaries. Future land use planning in Middletown Springs should include consideration of these known forest and habitat blocks and their importance to overall future resiliency.

Agricultural and forestry practices are renewable and, optimally, sustainable, but are potential sources of pollution and negative impacts on soil health and water quality, if not practiced with skill and respect for the natural resources involved. Agricultural and forestry practices should at minimum follow Required Agricultural Practices and Accepted Management Practices, respectively. In addition, high-quality timber lands, less common natural communities such as dry oak-hickory, cliff areas, and hemlock stands, should be delineated and protected to some extent through planning maps and guidelines.

Consideration should be given to compact subdivisions and planned unit developments to protect agricultural and forest lands.

**Goals:**

- 1) Increase public knowledge of forest stewardship concepts related to forest resilience (through changing climate conditions), silvicultural practices that promote birds, wildlife, clean water, flood resiliency, and other well-documented co-benefits.
- 2) Maintain an adequate land base to support present and future forestry and agriculture. Reduce impacts from urban/rural interactions by ensuring that natural resource management is an integral part of local and regional planning.

**Strategies:**

- 1) Support enrollment and participation in the Use Value Appraisal program.
- 2) Support local industries that source locally-produced food and forest products.
- 3) Encourage seasonal recreation and diversification of farms.
- 4) Protect agricultural resources/prime soils, forest blocks.
- 5) Include development of alternative agriculture in planning for economic opportunities.
- 6) Promote conservation easements to protect working lands.
- 7) Create Middletown Springs landowner stewardship guide with resources for new residents.
- 8) Work with schools to identify career opportunities in agriculture and forestry fields.
- 9) Prepare an open space inventory for the town that identifies parcels with one or more natural resources. Establish a process for setting conservation priorities in town with a focus on scenic rivers, active farms, large tracts of farm/forest lands, undeveloped forest lands and open fields.
- 10) Provide information to residents about the importance of undisturbed vegetated buffers along the edges of water bodies. Identify patches of contiguous forest, those that are relatively large, in good condition (e.g., relatively unfragmented or undeveloped). Include a map of contiguous forest patches in the town plan and include language stressing the importance of contiguous forest in conserving the town's natural heritage.
- 11) Explore establishing a community agricultural committee to review future agricultural business opportunities with the Vermont Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.



## D. Natural Areas and Resources

**Ecological Features:** The native plants, animals, natural communities, landscapes, and ecosystem services of Middletown Springs are an important part of the Town's heritage. They contribute to the aesthetic appeal of Middletown Springs and provide numerous opportunities for recreation, hunting, fishing, and spiritual and emotional renewal. By protecting the diversity of species and ecosystems, important ecosystem functions are maintained such as pollination, carbon storage, flood and erosion control, and maintenance of soil, water, and air quality.

A recent inventory of wildlife habitat was conducted by the Poultney-Mettowee Natural Resource Conservation District (PMNRCD Habitat Report, available in the Town Office) to identify ecologically important areas and conservation priorities in the region (Source: Doyle, K. 2011. *Final Report: Inventory and Assessment of Wetland and Upland Wildlife Habitat in the Upper Poultney River Watershed including portions of Middletown Springs, East Poultney, Tinmouth, Wells, and Ira, Vermont*, Poultney Mettowee Natural Resource Conservation District, Poultney, VT). The inventory provides updated information and maps of significant wetland functions and values, and wetland and upland natural communities, wildlife corridors and blocks of unfragmented habitat, and thus is an important resource for conservation planning in Middletown Springs. Nonetheless, not all areas of the Town were inventoried and additional surveys are needed to identify additional conservation priorities.

**Wildlife Habitat:** The variability in terrain, hydrology, vegetation patterns, and other natural features creates a diversity of wildlife habitats in Middletown Springs. Town residents appreciate the variety of wildlife that exists in the area. Many local citizens participated in a 2010 survey of local wildlife sightings that documented a variety of large mammals including deer, turkey, bear, moose, bobcat, red fox, mink, fisher, and coyote in Middletown Springs (See PMNRCD Habitat Report). Notably, a 2004 survey indicated that 97% of Vermont residents feel it is important to protect fish and wildlife resources, habitats, and lands, and the opportunity to participate in wildlife-related recreation (Source: *Conserving Vermont's Natural Heritage*, pp. 8-9, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, 2004).

**Habitat Blocks:** Maintaining large areas of unfragmented habitat contributes to the region's value for wildlife and the perpetuation of other natural processes like maintenance of air, water, and soil quality. Large blocks of unfragmented habitat can support a variety of natural communities and contribute to the overall biodiversity of an area through the variety of environmental conditions that exist within them. The Vermont Monitoring Cooperative, a partnership between UVM, the US Forest Service, and other

researchers, has shown changes in forest composition related to long-term weather pattern changes and warmer winter conditions. Large habitat blocks can help provide areas for forest species to shift their distributions over time and increase their resiliency to climate change.

Fragmentation caused by development and roads and the resultant loss of interior habitat are linked to the decline of some 'species of greatest conservation need' in Vermont (Source: Kart, J., R. Regan, S.R. Darling, C. Alexander, K. Cox, M. Ferguson, S. Parren, K. Royar, B. Popp, editors. 2005. Vermont's Wildlife Action Plan. Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, Waterbury, Vermont. [www.vtfishandwildlife.com](http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com)). Recent habitat block and connectivity analyses completed by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Vermont Land Trust show that important blocks of contiguous habitat, unfragmented by roads and development, encompass parts of Middletown Springs. Notably, one unfragmented block of habitat that includes the northern part of Middletown Springs and extends north to Route 4 encompasses over 23,600 acres and is the second largest block of contiguous habitat in the Taconic Mountains. A second sizable habitat block (10,896 acres) includes Spoon Mountain and extends southeast into Tinmouth and beyond. A third habitat block (8,385 acres in size) includes Coy Mountain and Morgan Mountain in Middletown Springs and extends to the south and west into Wells and Poultney. In all, eight blocks of contiguous habitat over 500 acres are found completely or partially within Middletown Springs (See PMNRCD Habitat Report).

**Wildlife Corridors:** Roads and development create barriers for the movement of wildlife as they cross the landscape to access habitat, breed, disperse, reproduce, and find food, water, and shelter. Wildlife corridors refer to the areas wildlife use to access other habitat areas. The forests in the southern portion of Middletown Springs have been identified by the Staying Connected Initiative as a regionally-important East to West corridor connecting core forests in the Adirondack and Green Mountains. Recent evaluation of potential opportunities for wildlife to move across the landscape has been conducted by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (Source: Austin, J., C. Alexander, E. Marshall, F. Hammond, J. Shippee, E. Thompson, and VT League of Cites and Towns. 2004. *Conserving Vermont's Natural Heritage: A Guide to Community-Based Planning for the Conservation of Vermont's Fish, Wildlife, and Biological Diversity*. Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department and Agency of Natural Resources, Waterbury, VT). Based on the VFWD assessment, it is clear that Routes 140 and Route 133 in particular as well as some minor roads and their associated patterns of development present substantial obstacles to wildlife movement. However, segments still exist along these roads where there appears to be better potential for wildlife movement (See PMNRCD Habitat Report).

**Local and State Significant Natural Communities:** Natural communities encompass the plants and animals that live in an area, the physical environment and the natural processes that affect them. The Vermont Fish

and Wildlife Department has developed a system of classifying natural communities, and criteria for identifying state-significant examples based on how commonly the natural community is found in Vermont, and the size, landscape context, and condition of the natural community occurrence (See: Thompson E. and E. Sorenson. 2000. *Wetland, Woodland and Wildland: A Guide to the Natural Communities of Vermont*. The Nature Conservancy and the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife. University Press of New England, Hanover, NH). Multiple examples of state-significant oak, hickory, and pine-dominated forests, natural community types which are relatively rare in Vermont, have been documented in Middletown Springs (PMNRCD Habitat Report). These forests are more frequent in warmer regions of the state such as the Taconic Mountains and so their occurrence in Middletown Springs as well as in surrounding towns is not surprising. In addition, high quality wetland natural communities including floodplain forests and a seepage swamp forest have also been identified in Middletown Springs. These areas are considered locally-significant based on the important functions and values they provide and potentially state-significant based on natural community characteristics. It is likely that further survey efforts will identify additional examples of locally- or state-significant natural communities in Town. It is important that landowners be informed about the significant natural communities found on their land and appropriate management practices for sustaining these ecosystems.

**Threatened and Endangered Species:** The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife's Natural Heritage Information Project maintains data on species that are on the State Threatened and Endangered Species List. Currently there are no threatened or endangered species identified in Middletown Springs. Their absence is very likely a result of inadequate survey and reporting.

## Highland Conservation Areas

Middletown Springs is defined by the steep, forested ridgelines that occur near the boundary of the town including Coy Mountain, Spruce Knob and Spoon Mountain, and the ridge above Train Brook. The ridgelines of Barker Mountain, Morgan Mountain, Barber Mountain, and Spaulding Hill, as well as a number of other unnamed ridges also contribute to the rugged topography of Middletown Springs. As the place names indicate, the ridgelines hold historic and sentimental value to residents. They are also important ecologically and aesthetically. With the exception of a small number of residences, the ridgelines and higher elevation areas are undeveloped. Because of their shallow soils and steep slopes, the ecosystems at higher elevations tend to be fragile and susceptible to damage. Many of these areas support a variety of less common natural communities such as forests dominated by oak, hickory, and pine, which have affinities to forests that occur further south. Many of the ridges that are accessible to logging equipment are periodically logged. While there are no existing local

restrictions on development or use of these areas, it is important that citizens understand the fragile nature of these ecosystems and are aware of measures that will help maintain the distinctive natural communities.

## **Lowland Conservation Areas**

The surface waters and wetlands found in Middletown Springs are associated primarily with the upper reaches of the Poultney River and its tributaries. The entire town, with the exception of a small amount of land in the southwest and northeast corners, falls within the upper Poultney River watershed. Surface waters and their associated riparian zones and wetlands provide a number of important functions and values including floodwater storage; surface and ground water quality protection; fish and wildlife habitat and travel corridors; opportunities for education, research, recreation and economic benefits; open space and aesthetic value; erosion control; and may support rare, threatened, and endangered species, as well as exemplary wetland natural communities. These functions and values provide numerous benefits to wildlife and people and contribute to the overall health of the environment.

**Wetlands:** Wetlands are areas where the ground is flooded or saturated long enough each year so that wetland soils develop and the dominant plants are those adapted to growing in saturated conditions. The State of Vermont is charged with identifying and protecting significant wetlands and their functions and values such that there is no net loss of wetlands and their functions and values are maintained. The Vermont Significant Wetland Inventory (VSWI) maps depict the approximate location and configuration of the state's regulated wetlands. All wetlands on the VSWI are subject to Vermont Wetland Rules. In addition, wetlands that have significant function and value, even if they do not appear on the VSWI map are under the regulatory jurisdiction of the Vermont Wetlands Rules.

In 2010, a new Vermont State Wetland Inventory (VSWI) map was released which includes substantially more acreage of wetlands as a result of updated aerial photography interpretation completed by the National Wetlands Inventory. A wetlands map completed during the Wildlife Habitat Inventory by the PMNRCD in 2011, includes some wetland areas not included on the VSWI as well as a wetland function and value assessment of all mapped wetlands. Since small forested wetlands, vernal pools, seepage wetlands on slopes, and temporarily flooded wetlands are difficult to detect remotely, wetland mapping is an ongoing process.

**Surface Waters and Riparian Zones:** There are inherent risks to life, property and ecosystems resulting from building within flood and erosion hazard zones. Information on flood and erosion hazard boundaries is available from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation, Water Quality Division.

Low lying areas near wetlands, streams, and rivers are valued for growing crops and pasturing animals. Agricultural and forestry practices, however, can contribute significantly to non-point sources of water pollution. Recognizing the need to protect and improve water quality through improved agriculture and forestry practices, the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets created an Agricultural Nonpoint Source Pollution Reduction Program and developed Accepted Agricultural Practices (AAPs) and Best Management Practices (BMPs). The *Accepted Agricultural Practices* include recommendations on erosion and sediment control, animal waste management, fertilizer management, and pesticide management. In addition, the Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation administers Accepted Management Practices for maintaining water quality on logging jobs. Middletown Springs recognizes the need to adhere to these practices in order to balance the need for water quality improvement with the need to sustain a healthy, economically-viable agricultural and forestry industry. In addition, it is important that water flowing into Lake Champlain not exceed the nutrient levels necessary to meet the phosphorus goal for South Lake B, as cited in the Vermont Water Quality Standards.

### **Goals:**

1. Preserve biological diversity, including all currently-existing native species and types of natural communities, with focus on local and state significant natural communities and threatened and endangered species.
2. Maintain large areas of contiguous, unfragmented forest with natural streams, wetlands, cliffs, and ridge tops to insure habitat for all naturally-occurring species and to maintain viable natural communities.
3. Maintain riparian and upland habitat corridors to connect large areas of contiguous forest and allow unhindered movement of animal populations between the Green Mountains and the Adirondacks.
4. Preserve natural, forested highlands and ridgelines and the ecosystems they support.
5. Protect streams, wetlands, vegetated riparian areas, and floodplains to insure high surface and groundwater quality and minimize flood danger.

### **Strategies:**

1. Create a map that outlines significant ecological areas, wildlife corridors, river corridors, wetlands, and other significant natural features valued by the residents of Middletown Springs. This map would represent areas in Town that the residents wish to protect from development, communications, energy, and other project siting types.
2. Create a map of important, historic, and iconic views and viewsheds in Middletown Springs that residents wish to protect from development, communications, energy, and other project siting types.
3. Support efforts to cooperate with landowners to conduct natural heritage inventories in Middletown Springs with an emphasis on state-significant

natural communities, ridgetop ecosystems, and threatened and endangered species.

4. Support efforts such as those by **The Staying Connected Initiative** (<http://stayingconnectedgreensadks.wordpress.com/related-events/>) to learn more about wildlife movements and help make animal crossings safer for wildlife and people.
5. Support efforts to maintain and restore habitat connectivity across Routes 133 and 140 and minor roads.
6. Support the efforts and coordinate with the Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District to promote conservation measures and to improve water quality.
7. Encourage protection and/or planting of riparian buffers and protection of viable flood plains. Promote the use of state and local river corridor easements, where appropriate.
8. Support continued efforts to protect wetlands, especially state and locally-significant wetlands through site visits and landowner outreach.
9. Seek funding, such as Better Back Road Grants to maintain roads, ditches, and culverts to protect water quality, habitat connectivity, and streambed integrity and prevent the spread of invasive species.
10. Manage the use of herbicides and road salt to protect water resources from pollution or destruction.
11. Support efforts to assist landowners in obtaining information, grants, and assistance for such projects as bank stabilization, best agricultural practices, sustainable logging practices, sustainable energy sources, road construction, recreational use, protection of state-significant natural communities, forested wetlands, vernal pools and conservation easements.
12. Ensure that state and federal regulations to protect soil and water resources are followed in development, road building and maintenance, agriculture, and logging activities.
13. Maintain existing Flood Plain Regulations to protect property and adopt the state-recommended River Corridor overlay to protect sensitive areas along rivers and streams from new development.
14. Support efforts such as The Vernal Pool Mapping Project (VPMP) ([www.vtecostudies.org/VPMP/background.html](http://www.vtecostudies.org/VPMP/background.html)) to encourage citizens to report the location of vernal pools and to field-verify pools that have been mapped remotely.
15. Continue current efforts to control invasive species on public lands and work with landowners to control invasive species on private lands.

## **E. Rural Areas:**

The rural area is defined as the lands around the village, extending to slopes too steep for agriculture. (See "*Future Land Use*" map) It includes all farmland, residential lots outside the village, and forestland. Many older properties are listed in the Vermont State Registry of Historic Places. Agricultural uses include but are not limited to dairy, beef, horses, small ruminants, crops, maple syrup, fruit, and logging. In the 2016 Town survey, residents indicated support for preserving these rural lands, including ridgelines and high elevation areas but were split on the best ways to accomplish this.

**Goal:** Maintain attractive countryside with large tracts of open land in diversified agricultural uses.

### **Strategies:**

1. Support current-use taxation of agricultural land.
2. Support Right-to-Farm legislation.
3. Foster awareness of private or foundation funding to purchase conservation easements and development rights of prime agricultural and scenic lands.

## **F. Housing**

Middletown residents rated the need for affordable housing a below-average concern, according to the 2016 Planning Commission Survey. The following represents a statistical snapshot of housing in Middletown Springs.

- In 2013, the latest year for which numbers are available, 65% of the housing units in Middletown Springs were owner-occupied (a 2% increase over 2010) and 16% were renter-occupied (a 44% increase over 2010). The remaining 83 units were either seasonal or unoccupied (a 19% decrease from 2010), reflecting a decrease in the rental vacancy rate.
- Of the 430 housing units in Middletown Springs 83% were single-unit detached structures, 3% were attached or multiple units, and 14% were mobile homes or other unattached units. These numbers do not represent significant changes from 2010.
- The median value of owner occupied units from 2009-2013 was \$255,000, a 27% increase over 2005 - 2009 and 44% higher than the Rutland County median, reflecting a general recovery in the housing market. The average total property taxes for 2015, for a median value home, would have been \$5,582 for residents and \$5,146 for non-residents, increases over 2011 of 33% and 23%, respectively.

- The average selling price of a primary residence in 2010 (total of 5 sales) was \$192,500 (includes one mobile home with property).
- The average selling price of vacation homes sold in 2010 (total of 2 sales) was \$271,450.
- There is not enough data available for 2015 to make meaningful comparisons.

More detailed statistics can be found at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov) or [www.housingdata.org](http://www.housingdata.org).

In the past, housing prices and development of new housing stock have been left entirely up to economic forces with the following results:

- \* No subdivision development involving multiple housing units has been built on speculation.
- \* A few large parcels have been subdivided into smaller parcels, often requiring many years to sell.
- \* New rural residential construction has occurred both along existing roads and power lines and on sites where excavation and sewage disposal are possible by conventional, economic means.

Middletown Springs does not prohibit specified types of housing in specified areas. The 2016 resident survey revealed an overwhelming preference for the development of single-family housing units as compared to other types of housing. Since the Town has no zoning ordinance, residents are free to build and remodel their homes much as they see fit, so long as they meet state requirements for drinking water and septic systems.

With both the population and the housing stock rapidly aging, the need for other types of housing may change in the future. The development of accessory apartments, either within or attached to existing single-family homes, is a possible solution to meeting the town's need for affordable housing for relatives, the disabled and the elderly.

### **Goal:**

1. Provide attractive safe, affordable, and healthy housing for all residents.

### **Strategies:**

1. Refrain from enacting ordinances and bylaws that increase housing costs for reasons other than public safety.
2. Work with not-for-profit housing organizations, government agencies, private lenders, developers, and builders in pursuing financial incentives to meet the affordable housing needs of current and prospective Middletown Springs' residents for affordable housing, including both rental and owner occupied residences.
3. Assist the Town's neediest residents, where feasible, to overcome the various obstacles they face in the housing market, including the



maintenance of their homes, by encouraging the use of programs offered through the USDA and Neighborworks of Western Vermont. Brochures describing these programs are available in the Town Clerk's Office.

4. Identify land suitable for affordable housing and assist landowners in making lots available for such housing through sale or donation.

## **G. Economic Development**

Residents strongly value the Town's rural character, natural beauty, and desire to protect it. It is also important to recognize that a certain critical mass of population is undoubtedly necessary for economic development, a strong tax base to support town services, and a ready supply of resident volunteers who have proven vital to the life of this town. Our non-profits, e.g., churches, the historical society, friends of the library, fire protection and first responder, to one degree another depend on a good economy for donations and volunteer support. The convergence of these interests has led to strong support for existing agriculture and local artists, artisans, and small businesses and provides support and guidance for future economic development.

During 2015 and 2016 with the support of the Select Board, Planning Commission and a grant from the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the community established the Creative Economy Project. The project working with numerous individuals and town organizations discussed, examined, and explored the future economy of Middletown Springs and resulted in a plan for the future.

In the 2016 Town Plan Survey residents expressed their support (71%) for the Creative Economy Project to be the focus of future economic development efforts in the town. The findings include:

**MISSION STATEMENT:** To build the economic vitality of Middletown Springs as a great place to live, work and visit, our community-based group fosters linkages between individuals, businesses and community groups, creating a platform for community cohesion and strength.

**VISION STATEMENT:** A vibrant, welcoming community of diverse, creative people that all contribute to the economic and community well-being of Middletown Springs.

Also the survey respondents supported (80%) a future economy strategy focused on the Town's economic resources including agricultural, artists, artisans, specialty food providers, cafes, and small home businesses.

Although many wage earners work outside of the town, the town's business directory, included in the town's phone directory and the town's website, contains over 100 businesses highlighting the entrepreneurial and creative nature of the people and businesses in Middletown Springs.

Creativity in Middletown Springs comes in all sizes and shapes from nationally recognized artists and artisans to specialty food producers, cafes, and our agricultural heritage. These same people are strong resources and potential mentors for attracting like-minded individuals to work and live in Middletown Springs.

To pursue future economic development goals, town survey respondents firmly support (87%) a joint effort by volunteers and town officials. To this end, a volunteer creative economy team working with the Planning Commission will endeavor to carry out the plan outlined herein.

### **Goals:**

#### **MARKETING PLAN WITH THREE KEY OBJECTIVES:**

1. Attract visitors (potential customers) to Middletown Springs.
2. Bring consumers to Middletown Springs' businesses for increased revenue in person or virtually (on-line).
3. Attract potential new residents and/or businesses to Middletown Springs.

### **Strategies:**

1. Continue the Creative Economy Project with a combination of town officials and community volunteers.
2. Explore working with the Rutland Economic Development Corporation and their recently announced Regional Marketing Plan which goals are similar to Middletown Springs.
3. Expand the use of the Town's website for economic development to highlight and provide information on local artists, artisans, and agriculture.
4. Explore establishing a community agricultural committee to review future agricultural business opportunities with the Vermont Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. See also, "*Agriculture*" above.

## **H. Transportation & Access Management**

A high priority cited in the resident survey indicated a desire to improve the quality of the road system, (surface and drainage). Improving roads can also lead to development pressure. The Town should maintain the existing roads

while providing economical means of moving goods, services, and people at a safe speed within and through Middletown Springs via a modest network of roads.

Transportation in Middletown Springs relies primarily on a network of paved and gravel town highways. Maintaining a safe and efficient road network for all modes of transportation, while preserving the rural character of the back roads, is the overarching goal of the transportation plan.

**Road Network:** The State uses four classifications of roads to distribute financial aid to towns for road repair. State aid to a town decreases on a per mile basis from Class 1 to Class 3. The cost of maintaining the Town highways is the highest expenditure in the Town budget. The Town also has completed a current inventory of the network infrastructure (culverts and roads) and adopted codes and standards. This is helpful for capital planning as well as enabling the Town to participate in the incentive program where the match on local road projects is reduced from 20% to 10%.

The roads and their respective classifications are:

1. **State Highways** are major roads with state route numbers entirely maintained by the state. The only state highway is VT 133, totaling almost 6 miles, extending east from Tinmouth and south to Tinmouth and Pawlet, and passing through the village center.
2. **Class 1** Town highways are extensions of a state highway route with a state route number. Middletown Springs has no Class 1 Town highways.
3. **Class 2** Town highways serve through traffic from one community to another and function as major and minor collectors. The town maintains 3.2 miles of Class 2 highways. VT 140 extends west to the Poultney town line from the village center.
4. **Class 3** Town highways are all the other 24 miles of Town roads that are maintained year-round.
5. **Class 4** Town highways are not maintained by the Town except for bridge and culvert repairs, and occasional grading. The Town receives no state funds for maintaining its 4.26 miles of Class 4 roads.
6. **Legal Trails** are Town rights-of-way, usually former Class 4 roads. They are no longer maintained and may be restricted to non-motorized use.
7. **Discontinued highways** were previously Town roads but their rights-of-way have been transferred to adjoining landowners. Neither the public nor the Town has any residual rights in discontinued highways.
8. **Ancient Roads** The town submitted a grant to locate these “ancient roads/unidentified corridors” but was not successful in obtaining funds to conduct this research. After 2015, all unidentified corridors are automatically discontinued, and become the property of adjoining land owners. (See “*Transportation*” map.)

There is no mass transit system, airport, rail or bus system, or municipal parking facility within the Town. The only public parking is on the street.

The Town lacks extensive facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians, although a grant was received from the Safe Routes to School Program which enabled the construction of sidewalks and a safer access drive for Schoolhouse Road. The area is also frequented by bike tour groups as well as local riders. Bicyclists travel through Middletown Springs on the roads. More work needs to be done to upgrade sidewalks on the main roads around the Town green. This was considered a medium/low priority in the 2016 survey.

**Connections to Surrounding Towns:** Transportation to and from the Town is primarily via routes 140 and 133; secondarily via McIntyre Road, and potentially via Dayton Hill Road, Mountain Road, and North Street (class 3 and 4 roads). The remaining roads do not cross into adjoining towns.

**Current Road Policy:** Middletown Springs has an adopted Road Policy that covers classification of highways, general policy, acceptance procedures and specifications, and is available for inspection at the Town Office.

**Private Roads:** Private roads or driveways can be a concern for three reasons. First, the intersection of private roads with town roads must be safe and not cause damage to town roads. The sight lines must allow for the speed limit on the road. Ideally, the intersection angle should be as close to 90° as possible, and the elevation and grade of the private road, relative to the town road, should be designed to prevent water erosion damage to the town road. All new driveways accessing state roads require an Access Permit, which is issued by VTRANS after it reviews the proposed plans.

Second, new private roads should be constructed so that emergency vehicles are able to reach residences and businesses year-round. Many towns have regulations setting minimum standards for construction of private roads, particularly the maximum grade and minimum width.

Third, if new roads are poorly designed, they can have a negative impact on the natural resources and scenic beauty of the Town. Soil erosion, disturbance of wetlands and wildlife habitat, and infringement on ridgelines or viewsheds are some of the potential impacts of poorly designed roads.

**Facilities:** The Town's highway department consists of a town garage and equipment. The garage is rented space with no sanitary facilities and trucks and equipment are stored outside. Salt is stored under a shed with no impervious floor. Sand is stored outside. This poses a risk to the environment and is a loss of investment.

**Goal:** A well-maintained, safe and efficient system of roads that meets the needs of residents, accommodates Town growth, maintains the Town's rural character and is compatible with surrounding towns while minimizing the tax burden on residents.

**Strategies:**

1. Develop a capital plan for transportation infrastructure and equipment to ensure the efficient use of funds.
2. Promote bulk purchasing of materials to maintain roads and equipment.
3. Seek federal and state funding for public works and road projects.
4. Favor long-term life cycle economies over immediate cost considerations when improving and maintaining roads as part of the long-term plan for road base improvements.
5. Work with neighboring towns, the Rutland Regional Planning Commission and Vtrans to promote an efficient transportation system, plan improvements and control access to public roads using appropriate standards.
6. Seek input from abutting landowners when planning road improvements.
7. Assure that town-maintained roads are always passable by emergency vehicles.
8. Promote improvements to state-maintained roads through Middletown Springs for the purpose of enhancing their safety but not the reconstruction or expansion of such roads for the purpose of increasing their traffic carrying capacity unless it can be shown that such an increase would not diminish the rural character of the Town, the residential character of the village area, or property values.
9. Protect the rural character of the Town and the residential character of the village from being negatively impacted by an increase in truck traffic that is not engaged in commerce within Middletown Springs or neighboring towns.
10. Develop a plan to enhance the safety of pedestrian and bicycle traffic in Town.
11. Consider construction of an environmentally sound salt storage facility and town garage in a suitable location.

**I. Recreation**

The community playground and athletic field at the Middletown Springs Elementary School and the hiking trail in the Sullivan Woods are the only publically-owned and supported recreational facilities in Town. The multi-purpose room at the Elementary School is available on a limited basis for indoor recreation activities.

The community playground and athletic field on the Elementary School grounds are available for all Town residents. Adults and children participate in informal recreation events at this location. Private, for profit, classes in fitness, dance and other activities have been occasionally been offered by Town residents and others. There are no structured athletic leagues or teams within the Town, other than through Elementary School programs, so residents must go to other towns to participate. The Town gives some financial support to the Poultney Little League.

The Middletown Springs Conservation Commission serves as the steward of the 14-acre Sullivan Educational Woods on Fitzgerald Road. Volunteer work crews maintain the trail and the Commission sponsors periodic community nature hikes. A kiosk with information about the trail and hikes is maintained at the site.

The Middletown Springs Historical Society maintains a reproduction springhouse in the Springs Park located within the village and also maintains a picnic area for use by residents and visitors.

Much outdoor recreation, such as running, bicycling and walking, requires the use of the public roads. However, most outdoor recreation within the Town takes place on private land. This requires the cooperation of landowners and respectful use of the land and facilities by individuals and groups. Locally popular recreational pursuits that can benefit from access to private land include hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, ATV riding, hiking, snowshoeing, mountain biking and cross country skiing. Balancing the needs of recreational users with the concerns of landowners is vital to the continued success of this type of use.

In recent years, Middletown Springs residents interested in hiking and cross country skiing have enthusiastically supported organizations that seek to make private lands available for public use. These organizations have relied on landowner agreements and community-based sweat equity to lay out and maintain trails that would be available to town residents. A network of such trails would seek to give community residents access to all parts of their community and to strengthen community ties across demographic groups. One such group sought a grant to conduct a study of a possible trail network in Town, however, the grant was ultimately refused due to concerns about matching costs and excessive infra-structure changes.

**Goal:**

A community with recreational facilities and outdoor recreational opportunities that meet the needs of residents.

**Strategies:**

1. Encourage cooperation with individuals and groups willing to develop recreational facilities and outdoor opportunities to meet community needs.

2. Provide information to residents on the facilities and programs that are available both within and outside the Town.
3. Plan for recreational facilities, parks, and trails utilizing the community's resources, both natural and man-made, to meet current and future residents' needs.

## **J. Flood Resilience**

### **Causes of Flooding**

Flood events are Vermont's most frequent and costly type of natural disaster. There are two types of flooding that impact communities in Vermont: inundation and flash flooding. Inundation is when water rises onto low lying land. Flash flooding is a sudden, violent flood which often entails fluvial erosion (stream bank erosion). The combination of flash flooding and fluvial erosion cause the most flood-related damage in the state. According to the Vermont Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, with Tropical Storm Irene alone, the state incurred costs of more than \$850 million. Recently, Vermont has experienced more frequent and severe flooding which will likely continue in the future.

### **Lands Which Help Prevent Flooding**

Riparian buffers, wetlands, and upland forested hillsides are important features in town that naturally filter and store stormwater and help to prevent flooding. Riparian buffers reduce flood hazards and stabilize stream banks, attenuate floods, provide aquatic and terrestrial habitat and wildlife corridors, filter runoff, absorb nutrients, and shade streams to keep them cool. Wetlands also prevent flood damage and are a vital component for maintaining the ecological integrity of land and water. Upland forests also moderate and attenuate flood impacts. Steep slopes, on the other hand, can be a detriment during flooding by amplifying water volume and velocity in rivers and streams.

### **Climate Change**

Climate change will likely exacerbate flooding in Vermont. According to the Vermont Climate Assessment, published by the University of Vermont, precipitation has and will continue to increase, particularly in the winter months. Weather stations across Vermont show increasing precipitation, averaging an increase of 1.0" per decade since 1941. Since 1960, average annual precipitation has increased 5.9 inches; almost half (48%) of this change in rainfall has occurred since 1990. Rainfall records also show that heavy rainfall events are becoming more common and pose increasing threats of flooding (Galford et al., 2014, Gund Institute for Ecological

Economics and the Rubenstein School for Environment and Natural Resources).

Because precipitation will likely occur in shorter, more intense bursts, it will also likely produce rainfall that runs off the land rather than filters into it. This may mean more inundation and flash flooding and a greater risk of flood-related damage. Also, according to the atmospheric research report entitled, *Climate Change in Vermont*, the expected increase in precipitation during the winter may lead to added snowmelt and flooding in the spring (Betts 2011).

Records across Vermont show that “flashy flows” are increasingly common in Vermont rivers. These large pulses of water in small river valleys may threaten development located in floodplains. Particularly vulnerable to the effects of floods are mobile home parks and their residents. These parks are often located in floodplains and can be catastrophically destroyed by just one to two feet of flood water (Galford et al. 2014).

### **Mapping Flood Hazard Areas & NFIP Participation**

Maps are essential to meet the new state requirement of identifying flood hazard and fluvial erosion areas and designating areas to be protected. Middletown Springs received a flood hazard boundary map in the late 1970s and joined the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) in 1985. Flood insurance rates are based on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) or Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (DFIRMs) which delineate areas of the floodplain likely to be inundated during a flood. These are identified as a Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) with a 1% chance of flooding (100-year flood) each year. However, it is estimated by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) that in Vermont, two thirds of flood damages occur outside of federally mapped flood areas. As of January, 2017, Middletown Springs has two flood insurance policies through the NFIP. Currently there are 29 structures in the high hazard zone (Zone A) that do not have flood insurance.

Vermont’s River Corridor and Floodplain Management Program, developed by the ANR, delineates areas subject to fluvial erosion. River corridor maps are designed with the recognition that rivers are not static. A certain amount of erosion is natural when Vermont floods because of the state’s relatively steep terrain and frequent storms. Development in the river corridor and stream channel management over time has decreased channel stability. While these management practices may create the illusion of stability, these engineered channels, when tested by a high flow such as a flood, cannot be maintained. Special mapping and geomorphic assessments can identify fluvial erosion hazard areas along rivers, more comprehensively defining high hazard areas. Stream Geomorphic Assessments and River Corridor Plans have been completed for most streams in Middletown Springs, including the Poultney River and many of its tributaries. These studies identify areas subject to normal channel erosion processes and help towns and landowners avoid loss



of floodplain functions. The assessments also collect data on the long-term function of stream crossing structures, such as bridges and culverts, and predict the potential for future flood-related failures at these sites.

### **History of Flooding in Middletown Springs**

Middletown Springs has a history of flood-related damage along the Poultney River. The main example is the repeated flooding of the Mineral Springs Park, located in the Poultney River floodplain. Roughly twenty-nine buildings stand in floodplains in town and are potentially subject to flooding, though flooding events in Middletown Springs are relatively rare. During Tropical Storm Irene (8/28/2011) North Brook flooded Burdock Avenue and the homes along that road were evacuated. A tributary to North Brook washed out several hundred feet of North Street, cutting off access to a number of homes. The work to replace the damaged, undersized culvert cost approximately \$250,000, underscoring the need for ongoing planning and budgeting to replace potentially vulnerable culverts found on town roads.

### **Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and Local Emergency Operations Plan**

Middletown Springs Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) was adopted in 2009 and is currently expired. The LHMP identifies known hazard issues in town and allows the town to seek FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance funds to reduce current risk levels. The LHMP lists potential hazards and records damages from recent storms and events. Local stream assessments and other landscape data should be incorporated into the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.

The Middletown Springs Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP) is current and is reviewed annually. The LEOP encourages flood preparedness and identifies a process for response planning.

### **Current Conditions**

**Land Use Bylaws (including Flood Hazard Regulations):** Middletown Springs does not currently have Land Use Bylaws. Under its current flood hazard regulations, Middletown Springs does not qualify for favorable (17.5%) state reimbursement rates after disasters as established in the Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF) rules.

**Development in Flood Hazard Areas:** E-911 mapping, as of 2015, indicates twenty-nine (29) structures are within the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA). These structures are located in the 1% annual chance flood hazard areas. (See Table 1 provided by RRPC, 2016, from e911 address locations).

| E-911 Structures   | 1 %<br>(SFHA) |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Accessory Building | 8             |
| Commercial         | 2             |
| Mobile Home        | 5             |
| Multi-Family       | 1             |
| Other Commercial   | 1             |
| Single Family      | 12            |
| Total E-911        | 29            |

Table 1: Existing Structures in the Mapped Flood Hazard Areas

## Other Flood Hazards

There is a dam located in Middletown Springs and the Emergency Action Plan should address dam failure. (Dam Hazards <http://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/anra/>). The Emergency Action Plan related to the dam should be integrated into the Town's Local Emergency Operations Plan (Emergency Action Plan for Dams <http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/fed/dss.htm>).

The effects of ice jams are not incorporated into FIRMs, but should be included in the Middletown Springs Local Emergency Operations Plan or the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (CRREL Ice Jam Database <http://icejams.crrel.usace.army.mil/>).

## Goals:

1. To use sound planning practices, informed by relevant data, to address flood risks and protect the citizens, lands and property, economy, and the quality of the town's natural resources.
2. To recover from flooding quickly and in a manner that recognizes and addresses past vulnerabilities and improves long-term flood resilience.
3. To encourage development in town in a manner that does not increase vulnerabilities from flooding in Middletown Springs or in towns located downstream of Middletown Springs (e.g. Poultney).
4. To seek increased levels of state reimbursement for flood damages through the Vermont Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund.
5. To understand and protect natural river functions in Middletown Springs.

## Strategies:

1. Explore Implementation of Select Land Use Bylaws  
Explore bylaws to reduce future conflicts in flood hazard areas and river corridors through standards similar to those found in the current Vermont flood hazard area regulation model #6, intended for towns with no existing bylaws. The Middletown Springs Planning Commission should work with the Rutland Regional Planning Commission and with

other local natural resource groups to utilize information generated during recent geomorphic assessments and River Corridor Plans into potential standards.

2. Encourage Green Infrastructure Techniques:  
New buildings, especially new town buildings, should implement on-site green stormwater practices to increase infiltration and decrease runoff to the Poultney River and its tributaries.
3. Explore Funding Sources for Stormwater Management and Storm Damages:  
Explore the opportunities to raise State and Federal funds for stormwater management projects, including examining the steps that must be taken to qualify for increased reimbursement levels from the Vermont Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund.
4. Consider Regional Watershed Stormwater Management with Other Area Jurisdictions:  
Coordinate with Tinmouth and Poultney on regional stormwater management planning and implementation projects. To protect the residents and lands in Middletown Springs and Poultney, new connections to the existing stormdrain system in Middletown Springs should be discouraged in favor of on-site stormwater treatment.

## **Chapter III: Town Facilities and Utilities**

### **A. Education**

The latest available census data (2000), shows that of the population in Middletown Springs aged 3 or more, 153 were enrolled in school. Of these 17 were in nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten, 76 were in grades 1-8, 51 were in grades 9-12, and 9 were in college or graduate school. Of those aged 25 or older, 90% had completed high school or higher and 35% had a bachelor's degree or higher. (The 2010 census did not ask these questions and therefore can't be used as a basis for comparison.)

Elementary students are educated at the Middletown Springs Elementary School located in the village. The Elementary School enrollment (pre-K thru grade 6) was 71 students for school year 2016-2017. Junior and senior high school students attend the school of their choice, with State averaged announced tuition for non-religious State-approved schools paid by the local school district. Breadth of access to educational and vocational training is assured by this policy. Middletown Springs School District (MSSD) does not provide transportation to or from the elementary school. While MSSD does not provide transportation to secondary schools either, several area schools do send buses to pick up attending students.

The current elementary school facility was renovated in 1997 and has a capacity of 115 students and staff. The staff is made up of 5 classroom teachers, one Title 1 teacher, and 1 Special Education teacher as well as part-time art, music, and physical education teachers, a part-time librarian, and 2 para-educators. Pre-Kindergarten serves three and four year-old children and is not compulsory. There are combined classrooms for grades 2-3 and 4-6. Kindergarten and first grade stand alone.

A major component of the renovation was the addition of a multi-purpose room. This room is used for physical education, serving lunch, and educational programs and community events. The multi-purpose room is also used by groups and organizations within the community. Considering the current school enrollment, the capacity of the school should serve the needs of the elementary population well into the future.

Preparing children for life and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a priority. Over the last 15 years the school has leveraged various grants and federal funds to maximize the technology in the building. The school is using Chromebooks and has 1-1 capacity for students in all grades. The teachers and students take advantage of smartboards, digital resources, and other interactive technologies. The school has started to incorporate opportunities for students to develop skills in computer coding. With the ever-expanding impact of technology on future jobs, it is important that students have a broad understanding of technological applications.

The Friends for Education (FFE) is composed of community members who are interested in using the social capital of Middletown Springs to benefit the students and the community. FFE works to link the students, families, and the community together and to provide enriching events and opportunities.

For many years Middletown Springs has had a significant number of independent-minded, resourceful families who have chosen to teach their children at home. The healthy acceptance and cooperation between home-schoolers, the elementary school, and the local community have given the town a reputation for being home-school-friendly, and this, in turn, has attracted several additional families to the town and inspired others to start home-schooling. The Elementary School welcomes local area home-schoolers to participate in a wide variety of programs offered at the school.

The Elementary School has developed the following Mission, Vision, and Educational Beliefs:

Mission: The mission of the Middletown Springs Elementary School is to develop successful learners and well rounded, responsible citizens in a mutually respectful environment.

Vision: The vision of the Middletown Springs Elementary School is to become a sustainable and innovative model of a community school. As a community of learners, we will collaboratively nurture a positive environment that promotes and celebrates lifelong learning. We will use current, well-researched practices that focus on the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional well-being of the whole child.

Educational Beliefs:

1. All students can learn.
2. Students should develop the capacity to learn, reason, and solve problems as well as acquire a broad foundation of knowledge.
3. Each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs.
4. Collaboration and communication with families as partners in the education of their children is essential to the success of our school system.

**Goals:**

1. A quality education for all children of this community.
2. Continued community involvement with the school.

**Strategies:**

1. Continue to support local elementary school education.
2. Conduct an academic program that exceeds accepted standards for specific grade levels.

3. Encourage and stimulate students to achieve the highest level of which they are capable.
4. Provide for health education and recreation; model examples of a healthy lifestyle.
5. Make the school environment inviting, enriching, and challenging.
6. Continue to financially support junior and senior high school students attending the State approved non-religious school of their choice.
7. Continue to cooperate with families choosing to educate their children at home.
8. The School Committee will continue to seek expert advice and community input in trying to arrive at the best solution for the school system under the recently passed Act 46.

## **B. Library**

The Library is integral to the community life of the Town. As the “living room” of the community, it offers intellectual, educational and cultural resources to the residents of Middletown Springs as well as a place for people to gather, discuss, and play. The library of a town connects people to the wider world through wireless, high speed internet, public computers, and an ever-changing collection of books, videos/DVDs, and audiobooks, as well as free downloadable audio- & e-books. The Library also links patrons to over 500 continuing education classes for both personal and professional pursuits. A number of story hours and adult programs such as talks, movies, activity and reading groups are available free of charge to the public. The Library is open 21 hours a week.

The Library meets the mandates and standards of the Vermont Department of Libraries, annually, giving access to statewide Inter-Library Loan, On-line Database of Periodicals, Large Print and other books on extended loan from the Vermont State Library. In Fiscal Year 2016, there were 1872 unique visits to the library; 4,222 items circulated from the collection of over 6,800. The library received a town allotment of \$17,150. Additional revenue of \$6,285 was generated by donations, grants, and book sales. There are 475 active registered patrons (approx. 64% of the town's population).

There are five elected trustees charged with overseeing the library's finances and setting its policies. A part-time librarian, a part-time assistant librarian, and an enthusiastic group of dedicated volunteers accomplish the day-to-day work of the library.

**Goal:** The Library's mission is to be a community doorway to reading, resources, and lifelong learning; and to be a center for people, ideas, and culture.

**Strategies:**

1. Continue to build the collection in both depth and breadth.
2. Continue to offer and expand child and adult programming.
3. Continue collaboration with the elementary school, and other town organizations and groups.
4. Increase computer literacy: provide training to volunteers to enable greater support for patrons.
5. Increased physical space to allow for:
  - greater depth and breadth in the Collection
  - room for patrons to study, read, and use the computers
  - separate meeting space to allow for meetings & events during library open hours.
6. Facilitate community information sharing via a monthly town newsletter and periodic updates to the town website.

**C. Utilities**

Middletown Springs has no municipal sewer or water facilities. Property owners rely on individual septic systems for sewage disposal and private wells for water. Considering the size of individual lots in the village, and the potential for contamination of wells from leach fields, the situation is not ideal. However, an economically viable plan to provide these facilities has not been found.

**Goals:**

1. Continue to search for an economically viable and politically acceptable means to provide one or both of these services in the village area.
2. Make the most effective and efficient use of existing utilities and facilities before adding new capacity, or initiating new construction.

**Strategies:**

1. Coordinate land use and development with the availability and capacity of facilities, and utilities, in order to ensure a high level of public safety.
2. Plan and coordinate utility work--including highway, gas, water, sewer, and electric--to minimize the costs of construction and impacts
3. Place appropriate fiscal burden of facilities and utilities on the users.

## **D. Solid Waste Disposal**

Middletown Springs and ten other regional towns participate in the Solid Waste Alternative Committee (SWAC) for the purpose of planning and arranging for disposal of the Town's solid waste in a cost effective manner, in conformity with applicable laws.

The Town currently has a Select Board approved Solid Waste Implementation Plan and an ordinance regulating the separation, collection and disposal of solid waste. The Town's transfer station is certified by the Vermont State Agency of Natural Resources. The Town has changed to a single-stream recycling operation which eliminates the need for residents to source separate recyclables (in single stream, all recyclable materials are placed in one container). The Town also collects over-sized trash and metal/white goods on publicized days. Twice a year SWAC holds collection days for Household Hazardous Waste. The collections are held at each town on a rotating basis.

The current interim transfer station site is too small, lacks an impervious surface and operates on a conditional use permit as it is inappropriately sited in a residential area, less than fifty feet from the property line, which does not meet current permit conditions. In the resident survey, the majority of respondents (54%) would prefer to see the station remain in its present location, so retrofitting it to meet the permit conditions and environmental standards should at least be explored. See "*Land Use, Village Area*" above for corrective steps.

The Select Board has pursued alternative sites for the transfer station but has yet to find a suitable replacement area. The town-owned West Street property was considered, however, ruled out due to being located in the flood plain.

### **Goal:**

Ensure residents have safe and economically viable means of solid waste disposal throughout the Town.

### **Strategies:**

1. Provide a facility for the healthful and non-polluting disposal of solid waste.
2. Increase public participation in recycling efforts.
3. Enforce existing laws on trash burning and dumping.



## **E. Town Office**

Located within a historically significant wooden structure on the Town green, the Town Office encompasses a 400- square-foot room that serves the Town Clerk, Treasurer, Property Listers, Road Commissioner, and meeting room for the Select Board, Planning Commission and other Town Boards. Land records are stored in the attached 8-foot by 10-foot closet, which are at risk of loss due to fire, water and humidity. This space is rented from the Middletown Springs Historical Society.

Opinion surveys conducted in preparation for the 2007 and 2012 Town Plans showed that moving the Town Office was rated as one of the top priorities by residents. The Middletown Springs Building Committee, which was formed by the Select Board in 2010, evaluated various properties in Town and recommended that Parkers Service Station, located at One South Street, be purchased as the site of a future Town Office. Since the site was a recognized "brownfield", environmental engineers hired by the Rutland Regional Planning Commission performed a variety of assessments on the site to determine the nature and extent of the contamination.

Voters approved the purchase of the Parker site in March of 2012 based on prior negotiations between Parker's and the Select Board. The Select Board commissioned a land survey to identify the property boundaries. The Building Committee was tasked with enrolling the site in Vermont's Brownfields Reuse and Environmental Liability Limitation Act (BRELLA) program prior to the property purchase. This program affords the town ongoing liability protection, access to financial assistance through the state's Brownfields Revitalization Fund, exemption from the state's hazardous waste transport tax, and other benefits. The town was deemed eligible and accepted by the VTDEC in July 2012. The property title officially changed hands on November 7, 2012.

The Town was awarded several brownfields cleanup grants which were applied for by the Building Committee on behalf of the Select Board. The Committee then oversaw preparation of the cleanup specifications, contractor selection, bidding and several phases of cleanup which included removal of the underground fuel storage tanks and piping, PCB contaminated soil, lead contaminated soil and building components, wood framed building, and asbestos contaminated contents of the basement. Cleanup work was completed in late November 2014 and a Certificate of Completion was issued by the VTDEC in June 2015. Total project cost was \$293,640 of which \$281,390 was paid by the Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development, the Rutland Regional Planning Commission, and a re-grant of unused federal funds by the Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission. Middletown Springs covered the balance of \$12,250.

Concurrent with the brownfield cleanup work, the Middletown Springs Building Committee and Select Board accomplished the following:

- 1) An assessment of the historic village green and surrounding buildings performed by architect Tom Keefe which was used to guide the building and site design,
- 2) Engaged Long Trail Engineering to prepare a site plan identifying the locations of the proposed water well and wastewater disposal systems,
- 3) Coordinated the removal of remaining surface debris from the site and the planting of grass and a perennial flower bed,
- 4) Conducted field trips to evaluate numerous other recently built or renovated town offices in Vermont,
- 5) Held a public "visioning session" coordinated by a professional facilitator to identify the needs and desires of the community,
- 6) Coordinated the installation of a public WiFi hotspot on the village green with a grant from the Vermont Council on Rural Development,
- 7) Held three public information meetings in 2013 and 2014,
- 8) Organized and hosted four Town Meeting Food Sales from 2013 through 2016 complete with extensive information displays,
- 9) Produced and evaluated eight versions of preliminary building designs between March 2014 and January 2016 before unanimously agreeing that the final version best fulfilled the list of requirements,
- 10) Made the chosen design available for review by the public,
- 11) Compiled information on potential grant and funding opportunities,
- 12) Provided regular progress updates through public channels such as the Middletown Magnet newsletter, Front Porch Forum, town website and current Middletown Springs Newsletter,
- 13) Applied for and received a state permit to drill a water supply well and coordinated with Parker Water Wells for its installation which is planned for January of 2017,
- 14) Requested, received and evaluated proposals from various consultants who will participate in an Efficiency Vermont sponsored workshop aimed at developing an energy efficient design and streamlining the preparation of construction documents and,
- 15) Maintained a regular schedule of twice-monthly committee meetings that are open to the public.

Voters have shown support for the project by approving appropriations in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016, each of which placed money for the project into a Municipal Facilities Reserve Fund which was established for that purpose in 2013.

**Goal:** To have a safe and secure facility for town records and committee meetings.

**Strategy:**

Continue activity of the Building Committee and Select Board in planning and building a new Town Office and bring to a reality as soon as practical.

## **F. Emergency Services**

**Police:** The Town elects one local constable although the position hasn't been filled for several years. Recently the Town has contracted with the Rutland County Sheriff's Office for several hours of coverage per week. The Vermont State Police and County Sheriff's Office, accessed through "911", provide professional protective services from headquarters in Castleton Corners and Rutland. These services have adequately met the needs of the Town however this was one of the three areas in which respondents were least satisfied.

**Fire Protection:** The Town is well served by the Middletown Springs Volunteer Fire Department which is a member of both the Rutland County Fire Association and the Washington County (N.Y.) Fire Control with radio and pager dispatch. The Department has 15 volunteers and 5 vehicles (1 engine, 1 engine/tanker, 1 rescue truck, 1 ladder truck and attack mini-pumper) and access to four-wheelers and other equipment as needed. Mutual aid agreements supplement the local capabilities. The firehouse is equipped with a standby generator.

The Department's operating expenses are paid by property taxes, dues, donations, and fund raising activities including support from the Auxiliary. The Town is NEIRA rated "Class F" for fire insurance purposes. An effective, well-trained, volunteer fire department is an essential component of the Town's public safety program.

**Emergency Medical Services:** Emergency medical services are provided to the citizens in a tiered system. The Middletown Springs First Response provides immediate care prior to arrival of the Poultney Rescue Squad. Advanced life support and paramedic service are available from the Regional Ambulance Service Inc. of Rutland. Emergency "911" service is available for emergency medical needs.

**Goal:** Ensure that residents have access to adequate fire and police protection, medical and emergency services.

### **Strategies:**

1. Continue municipal and community support for the Middletown Springs Volunteer Fire Department and First Response, Poultney Rescue Squad, and Rutland Regional Ambulance Service.
2. Help train and maintain an effective volunteer fire department and first response service, and encourage new membership and development of a junior member program.

## **G. Child Care**

Currently there is one state-registered daycare provider in Middletown Springs. They are open Monday through Friday, 7:00 AM through 5:00 PM and serve pre-schoolers and toddlers. There are several other unregistered providers in Town. The elementary school has a 5 day, half day pre-kindergarten program for 3 and 4 year olds and the kindergarten program has expanded from a half day to a full school day. There is an after school program at the elementary school which serves children from kindergarten through 6th grade. This program operates from 3:05 PM to 5:30 PM. In addition there is supervision provided at the elementary school in the morning before school starts from 7:15 to 7:45 AM.

Affordable childcare is a constant challenge for area residents often limiting parents' ability to have two incomes that are need to sustain households. Since Middletown Springs is largely a community of commuters, families often find childcare in areas closer to where they work.

**Goal:** To have childcare services available to residents in safe and convenient settings.

### **Strategies:**

1. Continue to support home-based childcare operations.
2. Continue to monitor the needs of the townspeople in supporting additional childcare operations.

## **H. Emergency Management**

Middletown Springs has an Emergency Committee that meets periodically to co-ordinate emergency preparedness efforts town-wide. Participants include representatives from the Fire Department, First Response, Road Crew, as well as the Town Constable, the Emergency Management Coordinator and members of the Select Board.

In accordance with State requirements, the Town has developed a Basic Emergency Operations Plan. The appointed Emergency Management Coordinator works with the key players to revise and adopt the plan on an annual basis as well as to coordinate with other towns and regional emergency planning efforts.

The primary potential hazards faced by the Town include floods and the subsequent erosion, mudflow problems and damage to roads, culverts and bridges. Power outages related to various storm events are another concern. The Fire Department maintains a back-up generator that will provide enough power for the fire station to operate as an emergency operations center as well as a shelter in the case of an extended power outage. The fire station also has a large commercial kitchen that can be used to serve food under similar circumstances. The other emergency shelters in town do not have back-up power at this time.

In addition to preparedness and response efforts, Middletown Springs has an All-Hazard Mitigation Plan in place that contains hazard mitigation strategies and measures. These strategies and measures, when implemented, may reduce the frequency of occurrence or avert the hazard by redirecting the impacts by means of physical structures or land treatments; adapt to the hazard by the modification of structures or standards; avoid the hazard by stopping or limiting the development in hazardous areas.

The Select Board, with the assistance of the Town Emergency Committee, reviews and adjusts the Town's All-Hazard Mitigation Plan every five years to stay current according to FEMA's standards and to incorporate changing local needs and priorities.

**Goal:** A community that responds quickly and effectively to emergency situations of all types, anticipated or unanticipated.

### **Strategies:**

1. Plan for coordinated response to emergency situations in the Town.
2. Prioritize and pursue resources to implement strategies in the All-Hazards Mitigation Plan.

## **I. Telecommunications Facilities**

Telephone services are provided to Town residents by the Vermont Telephone Company (Vtel). Internet connections are currently available to all residents and businesses through Vtel or Comcast. Cell phone service is not currently accessible in most parts of Town, however, the activation of a cell tower currently existing on Spoon Mountain will bring service to many additional areas.

Middletown Springs adopted a bylaw in 1998 governing the construction of telecommunications towers and similar facilities. The by-law is quite restrictive and designed to discourage the development of

telecommunications facilities. Both telecommunications technology and the public demand for modern telecommunications have been advancing rapidly. Parallel to these advances, communities throughout the country have developed thoughtful controls over the construction of such facilities. As technologies advance, the Town should have the mechanisms in place, within the Town bylaws, that will clearly present the guidelines for development of new telecommunications facilities.

**Goal:**

Middletown Springs will have modern telecommunications services while preserving the rural and aesthetic character of the Town, property values, natural environment and the ridgelines.

**Strategies:**

1. Remain informed of the current state of telecommunications technology, public demand, and effective control legislation.
2. Amend or replace the existing bylaw as necessary to describe the guidelines under which new facilities can be constructed or implemented to improve the quality of wireless service to all areas of the Town, consistent with the goals and policies of this Plan and residents' needs.
3. Plan for telecommunication services that are visually and environmentally unobtrusive including cellular services.
4. Encourage the activation of the existing cell tower on Spoon Mountain.

## **J. Energy**

**Introduction:** Energy use in Middletown Springs parallels patterns throughout the region and the state. Transportation, heating, and lighting are the primary draws on fuel and electricity. Fuel costs, especially for home heating and transportation, are of prime importance to community members because of the cold winters and the town's rural settlement, both of which drive the demand for and reliance upon fuel for heat and automobile travel. In both of these areas Vermonters utilize substantially more than the national average. Nationally 22% of energy use is residential (heat and electricity) versus 30% in Vermont, and transportation consumes 27.5% nationally as opposed to 32% in Vermont.

The need is simple: reduced costs for and use of fuel. The solutions are more complex as cutting costs will entail conservation measures such as more fuel efficient vehicles, combining trips to save on fuel, better insulating homes, improved public transportation and pedestrian facilities.

The Rutland Region is a net importer of energy. Electricity and the fuels for heating and transportation overwhelmingly originate outside the region's boundaries. Although local sources of electrical generation have increased

and wood plays a growing role in heating buildings, the region remains reliant on national and international energy delivery systems.

**Overview:** The Town is located within the service territory of Green Mountain Power Corporation, which provides electric service to the Town. GMP power is generated from a mix of sources including substantial contracts for hydro power from Hydro Quebec and small local hydro-generators, small amounts of oil and gas, and a small but growing portion through solar, wind, biomass, and methane.

The two major energy uses in town are heating and transportation. In Middletown Springs about 60% of households are heated primarily with fuel oil or kerosene, 28% with wood, 10% with LP gas, and 2% with electricity ([www.housingdata.org](http://www.housingdata.org)). Many households also use wood or wood pellets for supplementary or emergency heat.

A significant use of energy in Middletown Springs is for transportation. Annual per capita use in Vermont is 570 gallons of gasoline; the 6th highest in the country. Because of the town's rural setting and the general lack of commerce and local business, most residents must travel to get to work, secondary school, grocery stores, and services located outside the community. One option to reduce transportation energy consumption may be a park and ride facility. This item is under consideration by the Town Office Building Committee to be a part of the new town office site design. This concept already has the Rutland Regional Planning Commission support.

Another catalyst for expanding carpooling is the increase in social media use. Digital community bulletin boards, such as Front Porch Forum, Facebook, and similar sites allow drivers and riders to connect more easily than ever before.

**Energy Efficiency and Renewables:** Energy efficiency continues to be a community focus. In the 2016 Town Survey respondents identified energy efficiency in public buildings and homeowner programs for efficiency to be a high priority. Many residents have participated in the NeighborWorks Heat Squad Program and two public buildings (the Town Office and Town Library) have installed heat pumps. The Town Office located in the Middletown Springs Historical Society building worked with Efficiency Vermont and area contractors to insulate and air seal the space thereby reducing heat loss and improving the entire building envelope. The Library also installed a heat pump thereby reducing the use of fossil fuels for heating and provided air conditioning comfort for patrons. This energy efficiency project also provided climate control for the library's book collection.

Vermont has established ambitious renewable energy goals and is enacting standards and regulations to guide municipalities in meeting the goals. The State's primary goal is to achieve 90% of the State's energy needs from renewable resources by 2050. This goal drives interest and investment in

solar and wind projects both in the residential sector and large commercial projects.

The renewable standards and guidelines require Regional Planning Commissions and town planning commissions to develop policies and language including land use maps to identify sites suitable for solar and wind as well as protected sites and areas. Middletown Springs has applied to the Rutland Regional Planning Commission to partner with them as a “pilot town” for this purpose. If accepted, the work will start in late 2016 and continue into 2017.

Modest and steady support for residential solar continues in town and the recent town survey voiced continued support for residential solar while supporting land use planning guidelines for commercial solar and wind projects (see “*Land Use*” section above for additional information).

The 2016 Town Survey has provided the Planning Commission some guidance and direction on this matter. Seventy percent of respondents support working with the RRPC, 64% favor developing land use maps for siting energy projects, and 54% felt this should be a priority for the town.

The acclaimed SolarFest project was founded in Middletown Springs in 1995 by a group with a passion for renewable energy, education and music. For twenty years, SolarFest has been a pioneer in renewable energy and sustainability education. SolarFest presently continues its annual festival at the Southern Vermont Art Center in Manchester, Vt. Additionally the Town Business Directory identifies five independent firewood suppliers and several solar consultants/architects and land use consultants.

### **Energy Goals:**

1. Reduce energy use for transportation.
2. Reduce residential energy use.
3. Reduce energy use in public buildings.
4. Reactivate the Town’s Energy Committee.
5. Establish renewable energy siting guidelines for the Town.
6. Establish the strongest voice practical for the Town in renewable energy siting decisions before Vermont regulators.

### **Strategies:**

1. Create a Park and Ride facility in conjunction with a new Town Office building site.
2. Provide more information to homeowners and public building officials regarding energy conservation and efficiency programs available to them.



3. Coordinate with key supporting agencies such as Efficiency Vermont and NeighborWorks of Western Vermont.
4. Support the Building Committee's work to construct a net zero energy efficient building for the new Town Office.
5. Work with the Select Board and former energy committee members to restaff and revitalize the Energy Committee.
6. Partner with the Rutland Regional Planning Commission as a "pilot town" to establish renewable energy siting guidelines during 2017.

## **Chapter IV: Implementation Program**

By adopting this Plan, the Select Board and the Planning Commission, on behalf of the Town, accept the goals and strategies set forth and, in conjunction with other Town commissions and organizations, will work toward its implementation.

Following adoption of the Plan, the Planning Commission will, when appropriate, recommend to the Select Board and other commissions and organizations, specific steps to implement the strategies included in the Plan. The Planning Commission will base the timing of its recommendations on the priorities established by the results of the Town Plan Survey.

Following adoption of the Plan, the Planning Commission will continue to foster community-wide discussion of goals and strategies to determine whether there is consensus among town residents for amendments to the Plan.

# **Appendix A: Summary of Town Plan Survey**

## **Introduction**

In October of 2016, a survey of Middletown Springs residents was designed and administered by the Middletown Springs Planning Commission. The purpose of the survey was to learn what the residents of Middletown Springs value about their town and to identify resident preferences for revising/updating the Middletown Springs Town Plan for 2016-17 (a legal requirement).

Participants were identified through town office records from the Grand List and Voter Checklist and were mailed a questionnaire inviting participation. A total of approximately 400 residents and landowners were mailed surveys and 99 responded to the mailing, a return rate of almost 25%. This compares to 158 responses out of 588 surveys mailed in 2011 or just under 27%.

The survey contained questions in 6 sections: Part 1 - Your satisfaction with the current level of services in Middletown Springs, Part 2 - Your opinions about living in Middletown Springs, Part 3 - Priorities for the new Town Plan, Part 4 - Your opinions about some important planning issues, Part 5 - Economic development options and Part 6 - Information about the respondents.

The following are some key findings from the survey.

## **General Findings**

1. Respondent characteristics. Approximately 25% of Middletown Springs voters and landowners participated in the survey. Seventy-six percent of respondents have lived in town over 10 years. Eight-five percent of respondent are over the age of 50. Over 89% of respondents had their primary residence in town and 100% owned their homes. Sixty-four percent described their living situation as a couple with no children at home while 22% were a couple with children. About 93% of respondents reported being aware of the Town Plan with over half of those stating they were familiar with the Plan. Ninety five percent of respondents reported having access to the internet in their homes
2. Quality of life in Middletown Springs. Residents were asked whether the town had become more desirable, less desirable, or stayed the same over the period of time they lived in Middletown Springs. Almost half of the respondents (46%) indicated the town had stayed the same, while 40 percent indicated the town had become less desirable, and 14 percent indicated the town had become a more desirable place to live.
3. Satisfaction with level of services in town. Residents were asked to rate the level of their satisfaction with town services. The highest rated

services , with average ratings above 4.2 out of 5, were the transfer station and recycling center, the library and fire protection. The lowest rated services, with an average below 3.2 out of 5, were education, recreation and police protection. All other services received average ratings between 4.2 and 3.2.

### **Priorities for the new Town Plan**

Residents were asked to rate their priorities for the new town plan from among 36 items related to economic development, education, energy, housing, town facilities, land use, recreation, telecommunications and transportation on a scale ranging from 1 (low priority) to 5 (high priority). Looking at average ratings for all respondents, three items emerged as high priority (4+); 1) preserving agricultural lands, 2) improving telephone service during power outages and 3) activating the existing cell tower. Eleven items emerged as medium-high priority (3.5-4): 1) protect school choice for MTS students, 2) encourage small businesses to locate in MTS, 3) increase energy efficiency in public buildings, 4) develop siting guidelines for commercial wind or solar installations, 5) encourage the use of homeowner programs to increase energy efficiency, 6) increase awareness of programs to help homeowners maintain their properties, 7) preserve wildlife habitat, 8) preserve scenic views, 9) preserve the Poultney River corridor, 10) regulate development on scenic ridgelines, and 11) improve the quality of the road system. All other items received an average rating in the medium to low priority ranges.

### **Preferences on planning issues:**

1. Zoning. Residents were asked to choose from 3 options for MTS to follow for zoning in the next five years: 1) No change, 2) develop a guide for land use, or 3) draft a zoning plan for inclusion in the town plan. About 30 % indicated a preference for “no change”, 22 % preferred a guide to land use, 42 % preferred either comprehensive zoning or specific zoning ordinances to improve eligibility for state funding. About 7 % offered no opinion.
2. Waste transfer station. Residents were asked about moving the waste transfer station to another location. 54% would prefer to see the station remain where it is. A combined total of 35% would prefer to have the transfer station moved, either to a new location near the village center or to some other location. The remainder had no opinion.
3. Ridgeline and higher elevation development. Residents were asked whether the town should adopt an ordinance to regulate development on higher elevation and steep slope areas. Over 49% favored adopting such an ordinance while over 43% felt there should be no change. The remainder expressed no opinion.
4. Renewable energy siting. Residents were asked whether the town should develop a land use map that would guide commercial energy project siting. 64% were in favor of developing such a map and over 70% felt

that the town should seek assistance from the Rutland Regional Planning Commission. 54% felt that this should be a priority for the town

5. Housing development. Residents were asked what types of housing they would prefer to see in town. Single family housing received by far the highest score (4.1 out of 5). Low income housing, condominiums and mobile homes all received score below 2. The rest received scores from 3.2 to 2.
6. Land use ordinances. Residents were asked their opinions about whether the town should consider adopting ordinances to regulate specific land uses. Over 70% of residents felt the town should consider ordinances to regulate heavy industry, commercial wind and solar installations, commercial signs, salvage cars, gas stations and unkempt properties. Less than 30% felt that ordinances to regulate farmland, residential solar installations and playgrounds should be considered. The remainder fell in a range from 40% to 70% who felt specific ordinances should be considered.

### **Economic Development:**

Residents were asked what types of economic development they favored for the town. Five areas received scores of over 4 out of a possible 5; agriculture, bed & breakfasts, artisans & craftspeople, restaurants & delis and home-based businesses. Renewable energy production received a score of just under 3 and heavy industry received a score below 2. All of the rest received average scores (in the threes).

Residents were asked about their awareness of and support for the Creative Economy Project. Almost 65% reported awareness of the project with a similar percent having a favorable opinion of the work that has been done. 72% felt that the town should adopt the findings of this project and over 80% felt that future economic development efforts should focus on strengthening and encouraging agriculture, artists, artisans and similar small businesses. 87% felt that future economic development efforts should be undertaken by a combination of community volunteers and town officials. Less than 50%, however, felt that town resources should be allocated to this effort.

### **Open-ended question responses:**

Residents were asked what features of Middletown Springs they wanted to stay the same and what features they would like to see changed in the future. The most frequently mentioned features of the town that should stay the same include: 1) natural rural setting with minimal development, 2) sense of community and 3) unobstructed ridgelines.

The most frequently mentioned features of the town that should change include: 1) decreasing property taxes, 2) cleaning up junk vehicles, 3)

acquiring cell service, 4) building a new town office and 5) regulating commercial wind and solar installations.

**Overall message:**

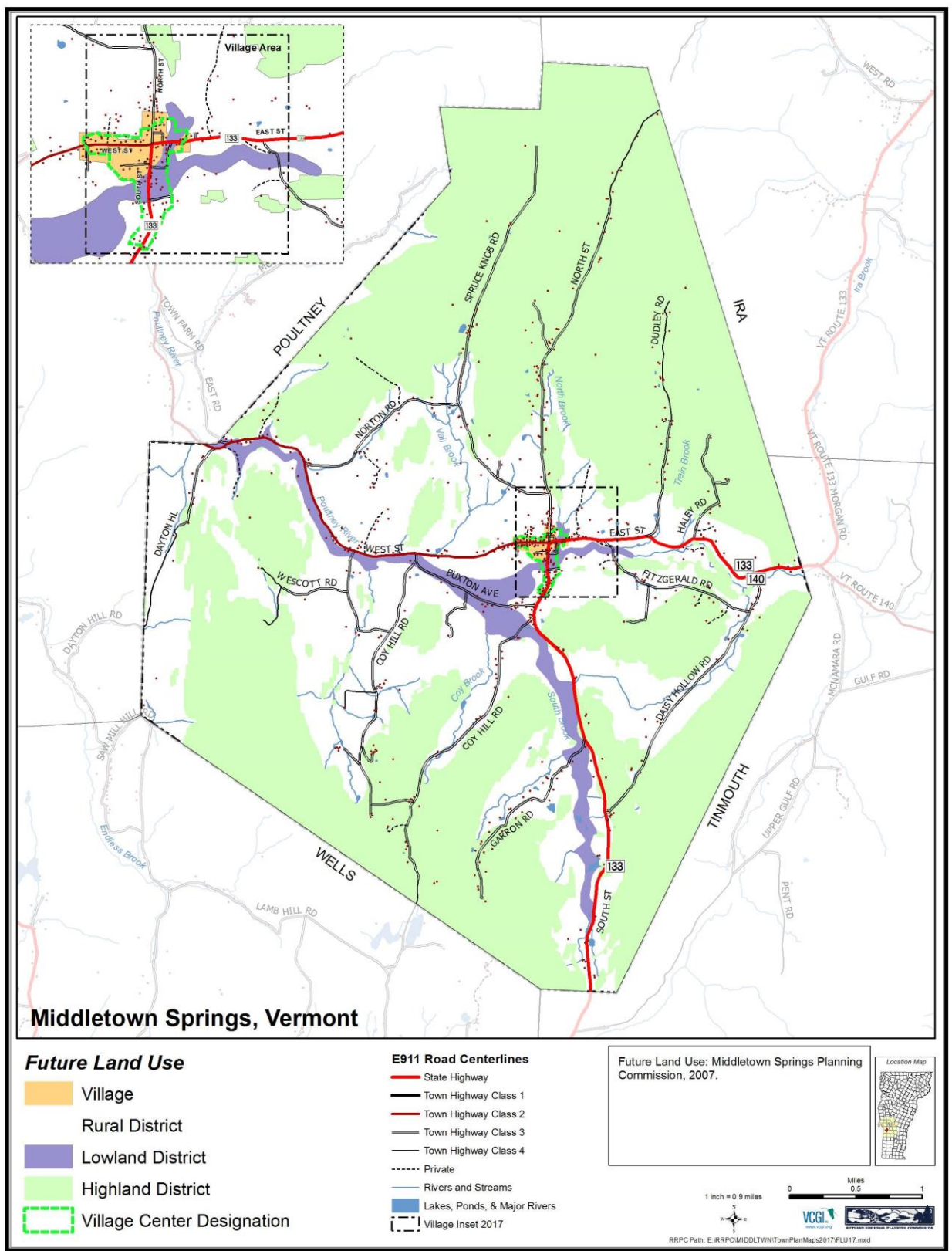
Middletown Springs residents like their town and the peaceful, rural lifestyle it offers. They do not want to see much change in the town's physical appearance with the exception of improving the appearance of the village part of the town, especially by cleaning up entrances to the village, limiting unregistered vehicles in public view and furthering private property maintenance when in public view. They would like to see new retail activity and services in the village center. They like the rural, agricultural character of the town and want to maintain the town's natural beauty, especially the ridgelines and open land. The majority of residents do not support a comprehensive zoning ordinance to regulate all land use but residents are open to the idea of exploring land use ordinances for specific purposes, particularly where they may protect the environment and scenery. Residents feel the property tax burden is too high and the perceived cost of operating the Middletown Springs Elementary School is the primary locus of this concern.

The Planning Commission thanks the respondents for their participation in this survey. We received many thoughtful comments and will attempt to take these into account as the new Town Plan is drafted.

## Appendix B: Maps

The following maps have been incorporated into the Town Plan. Larger, more readable, color copies of these maps are available in the Town Office.

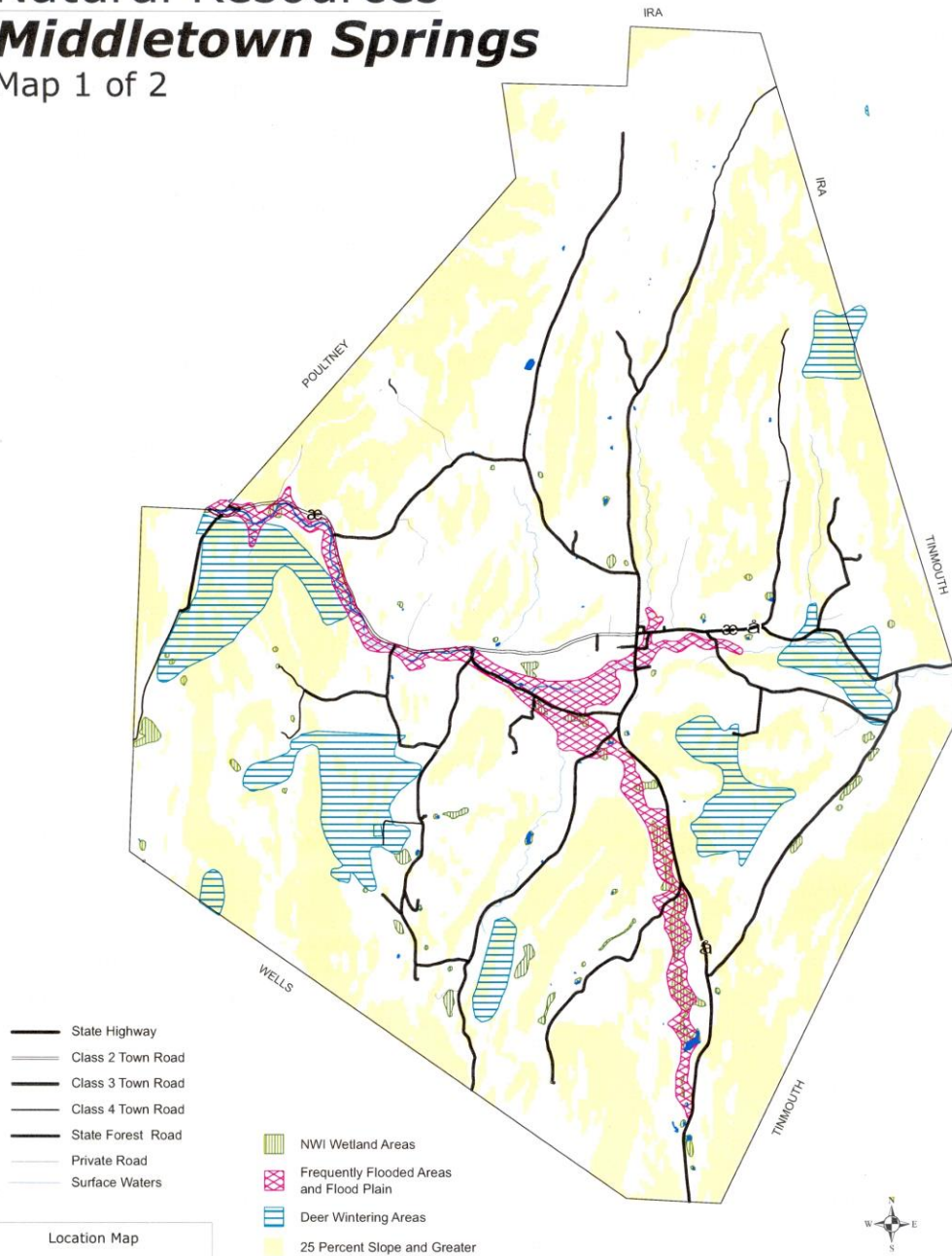
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# Natural Resources *Middletown Springs*

Map 1 of 2



- State Highway
- Class 2 Town Road
- Class 3 Town Road
- Class 4 Town Road
- - - State Forest Road
- Private Road
- Surface Waters

- NWI Wetland Areas
- Frequently Flooded Areas and Flood Plain
- Deer Wintering Areas
- 25 Percent Slope and Greater

Location Map



Map intended for planning purposes only.

For more information, please contact:  
Rutland Regional Planning Commission  
PO Box 965, The Opera House, Third Floor  
Rutland,



ROADS I: VCGI database TransRoad\_RDS, taken from VTRANS information, 2007.

SURFACE WATER: Data is from the Vermont Center for Geographic Information, Inc (VCGI), database Waterhydro\_VHD or the Vermont Hydrography Dataset, 2004. The VHD is a subset of the National Hydrography Data Set.

Wetlands: boundaries are derived from National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) and the Vermont Significant Wetland Inventory (VSWI) and are approximate. Wetlands less than three acres in size may not be shown. The wetlands depicted are those regarded as regulatory by the VT Water Resources Board.

DEER WINTERING AREAS: VCGI database EcologicHabitat\_DEERWN, taken from 1:24000 and 1:25000 USGS topographic quads, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, 1997.

FLOOD PLAIN: Digitized from FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps. Floodplains for planning purposes only. Refer to the VANR\_DEC, Water Quality Division, Floodplain coordinator for official floodplain determinations. (802) 241-3759.

SLOPE: Generated from 7.5 minute DEMs. Slope was calculated for 30 by 30 meter pixel, 1998.

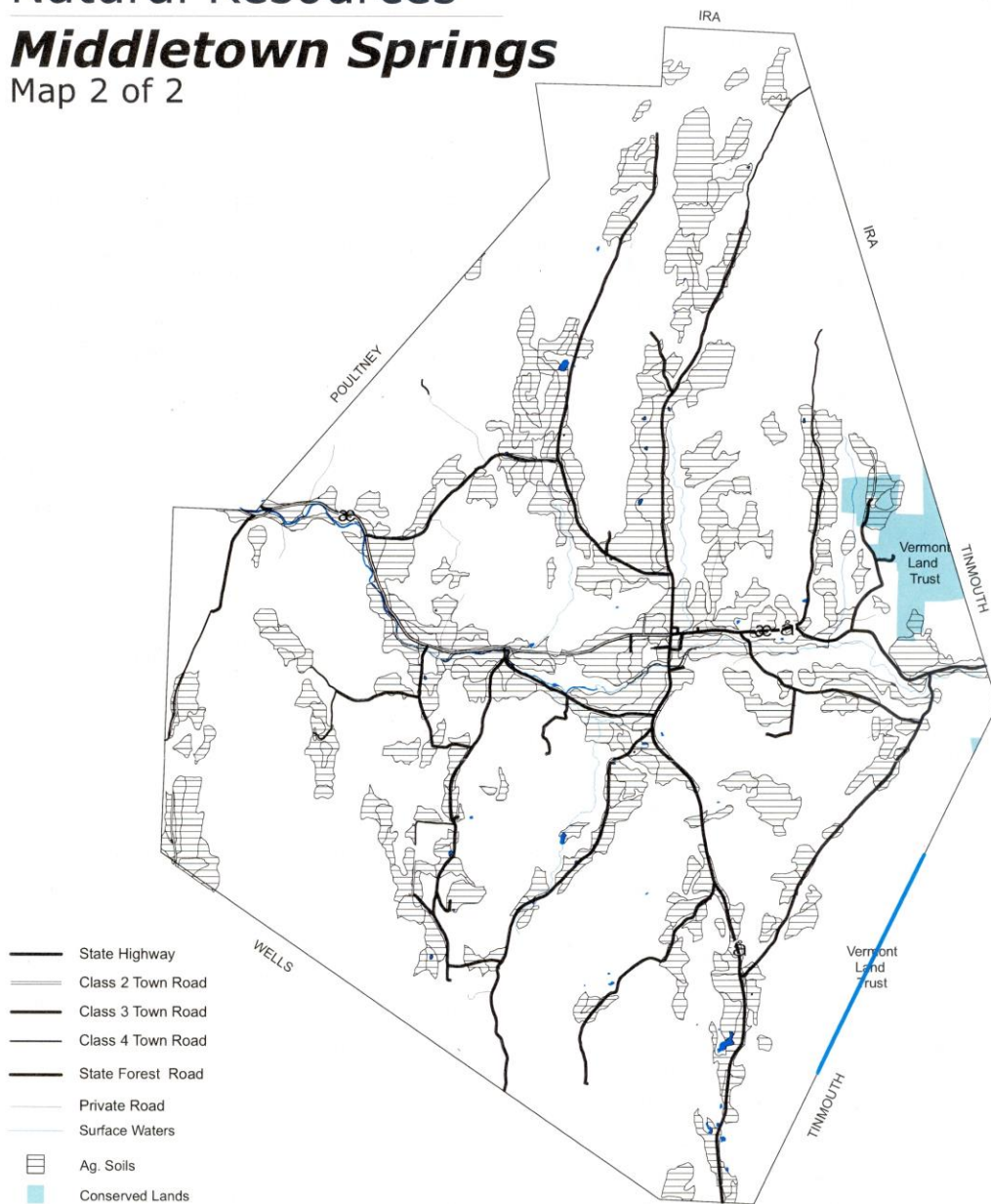
Copyright Rutland Regional Planning Commission  
This map (D:\RRRPC\MIDDLETOWN\MAPS & PROJECTS\TSM1.mxd)  
was produced on 4/9/2008



# Natural Resources

## Middletown Springs

Map 2 of 2



- State Highway
- Class 2 Town Road
- Class 3 Town Road
- Class 4 Town Road
- State Forest Road
- Private Road
- Surface Waters
- ▨ Ag. Soils
- Conserved Lands



ROADS: VCGI database TransRoad\_RDS, taken from VTRANS information, 2007.

AGRICULTURAL SOILS: from VCGI database GeologicSoils\_SO, 1998. Prime, statewide and local are VT primary agricultural soils for Town and Act 250 planning. Natural Resources Conservation Service soil data are accurate to a resolution of three acres, unmapped "inclusions" up to three acres may exist in some areas. This information is generalized. It should not be used for the evaluation of individual sites. Soils shown are based on national USDA-NRCS criteria and have good potential to support the growing of crops.

PRIVATE CONSERVED LANDS - land in full or partial ownership by 501(c)3 conservation organizations (VLT, TNC, GMC, and others), a subset of the Vermont Conserved Lands database, 1999.

SURFACE WATER: Data is from the Vermont Center for Geographic Information, Inc (VCGI), database Waterhydro\_VHD or the Vermont Hydrography Dataset, 2004. The VHD is a subset of the National Hydrography Data Set.

