

Introduction



PREAMBLE

The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) was created in 1967 under Vermont Statute Title 24, Chapter 117, to provide planning assistance to municipalities within the Region and create a forum for addressing those issues which transcend municipal boundaries. This same piece of legislation requires Regional planning agencies to prepare plans which are consistent with statewide goals and compatible with the plans of their member municipalities and adjoining Regions. This document seeks to satisfy that mandate.

CVRPC is not a part of state government, but is a creature of State Statute and bound by that Statute. Representatives appointed by the legislative bodies of its member communities govern the Commission's activities and policies.

OVERVIEW OF THE REGION

The Central Vermont Region is comprised of 23 municipalities in Washington and Orange Counties. As its name implies, the Region lies at the geographic heart of the State. Accordingly, it embodies many of the most celebrated qualities of Vermont's



Located along the northern spine of the Green Mountain range in the Central Vermont Region, Camels Hump, elevation 4,083 feet, is the highest undeveloped mountain in the state.

culture and landscape, and serves as its political hub, as well. Unfortunately, our problems are also typical of those in evidence throughout the State: a sluggish economy, inefficient use of resource lands, stressed infrastructure, and increased energy costs and consumption, among them.

Physically, the Region is transected by several north-south running mountain chains (e.g. Green Mountains, Northfield Range, Worcester Range, Irish Hills, Woodbury Mountains, and Groton Range) separated by fertile river valleys. The valley of the Winooski River is the exception to this pattern cutting across the mountains as it flows west to Lake Champlain. (See map: Topography)

It was in the valleys where early settle-

ment began where population, commerce, and infrastructure have historically been concentrated in compact hamlets, villages, and cities. Often the surrounding countryside and wilderness supplied the raw materials (e.g. lumber, granite, wool, grains, milk, etc.) for the manufacturing concerns of these centers.



Robinson sawmill, Calais, constructed 1803, is the oldest standing sawmill in Vermont.

In recent decades however, people, and to a lesser extent, commerce has shifted into the countryside. As a result of this trend, many of Central Vermont's rural municipalities have doubled their population while our largest cities have not grown at all, and even declined.

The reasons for shifting land use and habitation patterns are several: the emergence of commuter lifestyles, a population seeking rural environs, and the growth of resort areas and second home development, among them. All of these have been enabled by the advent and subsequent dominance of the automobile.

The fact that much of the Region's new growth has occurred along transportation corridors is no accident, and is often encouraged by land use regulations. Not until very recently have we noticed the more disturbing aspects of "strip development" and suburban sprawl.

Still, while Central Vermont is no longer immune to the perils and pitfalls of life in modern America, it remains a place of unique beauty, character, and promise. We are not yet "just like everywhere else." In fact, Central Vermont is diverse beyond its size. We are home to a golden dome, and an interstate highway, remote logging roads, covered bridges, fast food restaurants, a culinary institute, a military college, road houses, opera houses, ski condos, hunting camps, conservatives, liberals, farmers, artisans, lawyers, activists, teachers, bureaucrats, politicians, merchants, the unemployed, the elderly, and perhaps most importantly, children.

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Title 24 VSA Chapter 117 Section 4347 "Purposes of Regional Plan" states:

"A Regional plan shall be made with the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, efficient and economic development of the Region which will, in accordance with present and future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, order, convenience,

prosperity and welfare of the inhabitants as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development. This general purpose includes, but is not limited to recommending a distribution of population and of the uses of the land for urbanization, trade, industry, habitation, recreation, agriculture, forestry and other uses as will tend to:

- (1) create conditions favorable to transportation, health safety, civic activities and educational and cultural opportunities;
- (2) reduce the waste of financial, energy and human resources which result from either excessive congestion or excessive scattering of population;
- (3) promote an efficient and economic utilization of drainage, energy, sanitary and other facilities and resources;
- (4) promote the conservation of the supply of food, water, energy and minerals;
- (5) promote the production of food and fiber resources and the reasonable use of mineral, water, and renewable energy resources; and
- (6) promote the development of housing suitable to the needs of the Region and its communities."

While the above language outlines the purposes of the Plan from a statutory standpoint, CVRPC views the Plan primarily as a means to enhance the lives of the Region's residents. Accordingly, the preservation and enhancement of the "quality of life" for all Central Vermont residents is the guiding principle of this Plan and the work of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC).

The term "quality of life" encompasses an array of factors that influence the level of satisfaction and enjoyment we are able to achieve in our day-to-day lives. As such, any analysis of quality of life must address both our basic needs and our desires and aspirations. Among these are:

- 1) A Safe Environment - Central Vermonters desire clean air, water and land, a safe multi-modal transportation system, and access to quality health care and emergency services;

- 2) Job Opportunities - We desire meaningful, secure jobs paying livable wages.

3) Natural Beauty - We place a high value on the scenery and resources the landscape provides.

4) Educational Quality - Central Vermonters of all ages should have access to affordable, quality educational opportunities to enrich their lives and improve their skills.

5) Low Crime Rate - Central Vermont residents should live safe from crime.

CVRPC hopes this Plan reflects our desire to live in a Region that will be a model of health, wealth, knowledge, beauty, culture, and community for many generations to come. It is a goal of CVRPC to define, quantify, and track these elusive concepts over the next five year planning period.

IMPLEMENTATION

This Plan presents the most recent demographic and statistical data available during the period over which it was written. Much of this information comes from the 2000 U.S. Census; however, a variety of other sources are used, as well, including state and local reports. In addition, demographic projections ("Economic and Demographic Forecast, Central Vermont Regional Planning Region 2000 to 2020") were developed for CVRPC by Economic & Policy Resources, Inc. These projections are incorporated by reference as an appendix to the Plan. Data sources have been identified for all charts and tables cited in the text.

In the course of preparing this Plan, CVRPC agreed to compile data that is not included in the body of the 2003 Plan, but which may be significant or useful in identifying and understanding important Regional trends in the 2008 Plan. CVRPC intends to track these indicators over the life of the Plan (and beyond) in order to monitor changes in the Region's quality of life and help identify meaningful policies and programs for the future.

Throughout this document are specific policies, recommendations, strategies, offers and proposals designed to reflect the values of Central Vermont residents and help realize the goals of this Plan. It is primarily through the statutory functions and obligations of CVRPC, and the initiative of the Region's municipalities, that these and other aspects of the Plan will be implemented. Title 3 Section 4021 of the Vermont Statutes also stipulates that State agency plans must be compatible with Regional plans, as well as approved municipal plans. In this regard, CVRPC believes that the definition of growth centers used by State agencies should be compatible with that

of the Regions. A six point implementation program is highlighted in the following passages:

- CVRPC will review this Plan in preparing its annual work program, and in all of its internal decision making, so as to ensure that our actions are consistent, defensible, and purposeful. In addition to the work plan required by the Department of Housing and Community Affairs, there will be a Regional Plan implementation schedule which will establish priorities of key Plan goals for implementation followed by an annual review to evaluate progress, analyze current data, re-assess priorities, and consider possible amendments to the Regional Plan.
- CVRPC will continue to provide technical assistance to member municipalities in the areas of community planning, bylaw development and administration, capital budgeting, community development, and GIS in accordance with our membership services policies. We will do so upon request and in support of those policies of this Plan which encourage action at the municipal level. In addition, CVRPC will continue to provide local officials and interested citizens with information and training on the complete range of topics and issues presented in this Plan. We will do so through periodic workshops, newsletters, public forums, and the provision of materials and information upon request.
- CVRPC will review State agency plans and programs to assure that they are consistent with the goals and policies of this Plan and those of member towns.
- When requested, CVRPC will review municipal plans for consistency with this Plan.
- CVRPC will maintain and strengthen its commitment to Regional and inter-municipal issues and programs in accordance with, and in support of, this Plan. Specifically, we will continue our technical support services for the Mad River Valley Planning District, the Wrightsville Beach Recreation District and the Mad River Solid Waste Alliance. In addition, we will continue to provide Region-wide transportation planning services. Finally, we will respond to inter-town conflicts or opportunities with mediation or technical assistance services, where appropriate.
- CVRPC will continue to participate in Act 250 proceedings in accordance with our adopted guidelines for the purpose of advancing the goals of this Plan.

The goals and policies of this Plan should be reasonable and uniformly applied. No specific goal or policy of the Plan should be construed or applied in isolation from

the other goals or policies of the Plan. The implementation of these goals and policies will not be contrary to the public interest or the doctrine of private property rights.

COMPATIBILITY STATEMENT

It is the Commission's belief that this Plan is compatible with the plans of our neighboring Regions and with those of municipalities within the Central Vermont Region. In other words, and in accordance with Chapter 117 mandates, this Plan "as implemented, will not significantly reduce the desired effect of the implementation of the other plan(s)."

It can be seen that almost everywhere the Central Vermont Region abuts other Regional commissions' jurisdictions, land uses are either very low intensity or near wilderness in nature as significant mountain ranges bound us to the west and east. In addition, most human activity is focused toward the center of the Region. Because of this geography, opportunities for land use (or other conflicts) with neighboring Regions are limited.

There was a conscious effort in the writing of this Plan not to usurp the authority or planning functions of Central Vermont's municipalities. This is made clear in the Plan's purpose statement, and elsewhere, in policies which support local initiatives and offer Commission assistance in the realization of the same.

Furthermore, the Regional Planning Commission does not believe there are any significant conflicts between this Plan and any municipal plan that has received the approval of this Commission. Should a conflict arise between this Plan and a municipal plan approved by this Commission, such conflict should generally be resolved at the most locally appropriate level. As such, the municipal plan should take precedence on impacts that are local in scope, while the Regional Plan should prevail where "substantial Regional impact"¹ may result. Individual projects may have aspects that fall under either jurisdiction. For instance, a large, new commercial de-

¹ Development projects of substantial Regional impact are those that will have substantial and ongoing impact on two or more municipalities, including the host municipality. Among the development projects of substantial Regional impact are those that will likely impact on a resource within the Region which is widely used or appreciated by people outside of the locality in which it is located. Development projects of substantial Regional impact are those which may affect settlement patterns to the extent that the character or identity of the Region (or its sub-Regions) is significantly affected. Development projects of substantial Regional impact are those that are likely to alter the cost of living, availability of choices, access to traditional way of life or resources widely used or appreciated by Regional residents. In addition, because CVRPC has defined housing as a critical need for the Region, CVRPC will participate in the Act 250 review for any project which proposes to: increase the total number of year round housing units (according to the most recent U.S. Census) in its host municipality by more than 2%; or create more than 30 housing units of any type; or create more than 5 "affordable" housing units, as defined by VSA Chapter 117 Section 4303.

velopment could have transportation impacts that extend beyond the host community, but have aesthetic concerns that are purely local. It should also be noted that, in accordance with CVRPC's Act 250 Review Policies, the Commission's position on any Act 250 project shall be based solely upon those aspects of a project that may have Regional impact.

CVRPC also recognizes that it is possible that even where the Regional Plan and the local plan appear to be compatible, differences in the interpretation and application of plans can and do occur. CVRPC will attempt to identify such discrepancies as early as possible in any relevant review process and notify the affected municipality accordingly. CVRPC will offer to meet with representatives of any municipality with which it may have a disagreement in an attempt to resolve any differences prior to issuing a final position or decision. However, CVRPC will retain its statutory right to reach independent judgment in any and all such instances.

Copies of the proposed Plan have been sent to neighboring Regional planning commissions and all Central Vermont municipalities in order to solicit feedback, comments and suggestions

STATEMENT OF BASIC POLICIES

The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission is charged with promoting mutual cooperation among its member towns in the planning and development of sites and infrastructure necessary to meet the future needs of the Region's residents. This Plan is intended to guide future growth and development, infrastructure investment and environmental protection in Central Vermont by providing a framework within which the basic human needs of clean air and water, access to employment, food and shelter, and emergency services sufficient to provide personal safety can be satisfied. In doing so, it strives to promote a healthy natural environment, quality educational systems, and broad access to recreational and cultural opportunities. Although this Regional Plan has a statutory life of only five years, it is written using the year 2008 as a bench mark while keeping an eye toward the even more distant future.

Attainment of goals set by this Plan will require a commitment to a vision of the Region as a community. In planning for the long term public interest of the Region, CVRPC can play a vital role in assessing the strengths and opportunities by finding and building solutions to those issues that transcend town boundaries. Towns no longer function as self-sufficient islands in providing services, employment and education. The interrelationships and interdependence between towns within the Region are clear.

The goals and objectives of each element of this Plan implement the following broad policies of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission:

- CVRPC in cooperation with its member municipalities and neighboring Regions seeks to guide the future of development to gain the maximum benefit for the least cost.
- CVRPC is dedicated to the promotion of the economic, social and educational well being of the Region and its residents by supporting the creation of opportunities for self-improvement while protecting individual rights and liberties.
- CVRPC encourages planning that identifies, respects and preserves our important historic, natural, cultural, and recreational resources.
- CVRPC promotes housing availability to meet the needs of people of all socio-economic levels.
- CVRPC seeks to maintain a healthy environment and to respect the Region's historic settlement patterns.
- CVRPC promotes diversified economic development and the creation and/or maintenance of sufficient jobs for all residents.
- CVRPC encourages development patterns which result in more energy efficient transportation patterns.
- CVRPC encourages investment in public facilities and services in areas of population and economic growth.
- CVRPC supports the identification and utilization of economic growth centers as a method of achieving development patterns that are mutually advantageous to the environment and the socio-economic needs of the Region's towns.

(The use of the word "encourage" in this Plan is intended to mean "to foster or give support to" and is not intended to indicate any mandates.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF CHANGING CONDITIONS

By law, Regional plans in Vermont have a statutory life of five years. The information and policies presented in this document represent CVRPC's best effort to present an accurate and useful picture of conditions in Central Vermont at the beginning of a planning period starting in the summer of 2008. We recognize, however, that we live in dynamic times and that some of the facts, issues, and concerns presented here may change over the life of this Plan. If conditions warrant amendments to the Plan prior to its expiration date, the Commission will respond accordingly.