

Williamstown Town Plan

NOTE: Once the information from the 2010 Census is released, the town plan population data can be updated.

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CHAPTER I

PURPOSE

A. Why Plan?

Town planning is required by law. The town plan is a major component of the information used by Act 250 commissioners in making decisions. A town plan is NOT zoning and zoning is NOT required by law.

Planning is the act of designing a strategy, in advance, to avoid errors and seize opportunities. Land use decisions made without a clear direction can result in haphazard, inefficient development. Unplanned growth can cause conflicts between neighbors, engender unnecessary public expenditures, cause environmental damage, erode the character of a community and generally reduce quality of life for residents. This document makes recommendations about how Williamstown residents and town officials can support the overall health of our town. Williamstown can achieve great things by planning, learning, growing, and prospering together.

B. Required goals and elements

Two major pieces of legislation and amendments have determined the structure for planning in Vermont. Act 250, Vermont's development review law regulates new development projects over a certain threshold size, The Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning Act (aka 24 VSA, Chapter 117) enables municipalities to adopt local plans and land use regulation and provide guidelines for the development, adoption and enforcement of the same. Amendments to the Act in 1988, known as Act 200, included provisions designed to help agriculture and forestry remain viable by encouraging new growth to be developed in conformance with the historic settlement pattern of compact villages and towns surrounded by countryside. Act 200 also offered incentives to towns for drafting comprehensive plans that are consistent with the state's recommendations.

C. Implementation

A municipal plan is a guidance document. It is generally not legally binding. However, the Town Plan can provide a town with a legal framework for any municipal ordinance. In addition it has legal standing in the Act 250 process. Williamstown intends to use this Plan for the following purposes over its five year statutory life:

- Informing residents and others about Williamstown
- Guiding the community towards its short (5 year) and long-range goals by assisting town officials in making smart and responsible decisions for community development
- Providing the town with a unified voice in the Act 250 and Act 248 proceedings and a framework for evaluating development projects
- Ensure the continuing viability of the community's cultural, historical, and rural character
- Helping the Town qualify for, and prepare, state and federal planning grants
- Prioritizing and planning for public expenditures
- Providing strategies for the revitalization of Williamstown Village
- Balancing competing interests and demands in a fair and equitable manner that recognizes the rights of individual and protects the welfare of the general public

D. The Planning Process

The Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning Act (24 VSA, Chapter 117) states that municipal plans must be re-examined, updated, and readopted every 5 years. This document replaces Williamstown's previous plan, adopted on June 11, 2005. During the development and preparation of that plan, members of the Williamstown Planning Commission met with the community to gather information through focus groups, individual interviews, and surveys. They also held a public map display and a workshop on land use. Answers to open-ended questions reflected a wide range of views and provided valuable insights. During this same time-period, the newly developed Economic Development Committee also distributed a survey. The information gathered identified a community vision and the results were incorporated in the plan.

Among the common values and themes expressed in the surveys were:

- Protecting the lifestyle and traditions of the community
- Promoting good citizenship
- Revitalizing the villages
- Preserving the Town's rural character
- Improving the business climate
- Providing citizens with a good education
- Protecting the public health, safety and welfare

Furthermore, residents wanted all of these goals accomplished in a cost effective manner and with minimal infringement on individual land rights. The current planning commission believes these ideals still reflect the opinions and desires of the community. As such, they will be guiding principles for this, the 2010 Plan, as well.

E. Vision Statement

Williamstown is changing whether we like it or not. Some of the changes we deem to be good, others not so good. You can't see into the future and how the town looks now is nothing that residents could have foreseen 50, 25 or even ten years ago.

A town plan is a way for us all to visualize what we want Williamstown to be in 5, 10, 25 or perhaps 50 years from now. It's where we want to be living in that short-term and where our children will be living. Will the town simply be a bedroom community to Barre and Montpelier with mostly homes and little in the way of business? Will it have a vibrant village center with an outlying landscape of open farm lands and forests?

No one knows for sure but your planning commission feels that the road toward that future landscape starts now, with this plan. We hope you will join us in envisioning the town's future.