ROCKINGHAM TOWN PLAN

The Rockingham Meeting House, a National Historic Landmark

Hearing before the Rockingham Planning Commission – July 6, 2016
Submitted to the Select board – July 7, 2016
Copy to the Town Clerk – July 7, 2016
Select board changes – August 2, 2016
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PHOTO CREDITS:
Alan Fowler, Jim Mullen, Richard Ewald, Paula Sagerman, Municipal Staff, Residents, Connecticut River Transit, Bellows Falls Historical Society
INTRODUCTION

The Connecticut River borders Rockingham along its east side and provides a beautiful background for a community composed of both very urban and very rural areas. The river has not been a barricade as the residents of the communities in Vermont and New Hampshire readily travel up and down both sides of the river whether for business or pleasure.

The Town is located in the northeast corner of Windham County and bordered by the towns of Westminster, Athens, Grafton, Chester and Springfield. The western portion of the town is the most rural. Bellows Falls, the largest village, is located in the southeast corner of Rockingham at the junction of the Connecticut and Saxtons Rivers. Saxtons River Village is located along the southerly boundary with Westminster, a location brought about by the early use of water for power.

While the Rockingham Village area around the historic Rockingham Meeting House was once the center of the community, the need for power directed growth to the rivers resulting in the village centers. There was no plan for this. It just happened due to need.

Originally the automobile and upgraded highways brought change to Vermont with some areas of the state seeing significant growth which impacted formerly rural areas and small communities. Now it is the Internet and the ability to telecommute which may impact how our communities change in the future. While this Plan is being put together when the national economy is of major concern, residents continue to recognize the need to guide future land use and development within all areas of the community. The cost of not planning ahead can be a detriment to the future residents.

It is the purpose of the Town Plan to chart a course for the community which will be in the best interest of the Town, including the villages of Bellows Falls and Saxtons River. It sets forth policy statements to direct the community and recommendations to achieve the vision of our future town.

This Plan is a technical update from the 2011 Town Plan. A technical update is made up of minor narrative changes, data updates, and wordsmithing. There are no changes to goals, policies, and action steps unless those items have been completed since 2011.

There are two exceptions where the Planning Commission had to go beyond a simple technical update. In 2015, the Rockingham Select board adopted a revised Economic Development Chapter which clarified language on the downtown and village center designations. That updated chapter is included in this technical update. In 2016, the Planning Commission developed a completely new chapter on Flood Resiliency. Changes in state law require this chapter in all Town Plans.

All maps were completed by the Windham Regional Commission.

Once adopted, the Plan and its policies will serve as a guide for the Select board, Planning Commission and other municipal officials. It will also serve as the foundation for existing and future by-laws which may be adopted, and as a guide for the District Environmental Commission.
in reviewing development projects under Act 250. Where there is a conflict between the language in the Town Plan and the Zoning Bylaw, the Zoning Bylaws are controlling.

This plan is also available on the Town’s web site: www.rockbf.org. See Important Municipal Documents.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Rockingham Town Plan is presented in fifteen elements, separated for ease of presentation and planning. Rockingham recognizes that these elements are interrelated, and that activity within one element can affect other elements within the plan. The planning elements addressed herein include:

- Housing
- Transportation
- Energy
- Education
- Economic Development
- Agriculture
- Forestry-Wildlife/Earth Resources
- Historic Resources
- Recreational/Cultural Resources
- Scenic Resources
- Utilities and Facilities
- Land Use
- Neighboring Towns
- Municipal Government & Services
- Community Services
- Flood Resiliency

For each element, the plan presents introductory text which outlines key attributes and concerns regarding the element, followed by goals, policies, and action steps.

**Goals** are broad statements of the Town's objectives within each element. The goals set the tone and direction for the policies and action steps to follow.

**Policies** describe how the goals are to be achieved within the Town, e.g. how will the Town apply the broad goals to ongoing and planned programs and activities.

**Action Steps** identify specific activities which should be accomplished in order to implement the policies. The Action Steps are classified as “high priority” (e.g. Action Steps to be completed within the time frame of this plan) or “no priority” (e.g. Action Steps that are important to the town, but are not assigned a schedule for completion). Responsibility for the Action Steps is assigned to various municipal boards, private organizations and citizens in order to best use resources and implement the plan.

Planning is an ever-changing process and the Plan must reflect that reality. What may be considered a priority today may well diminish in order of importance in the future due to other changes within the community. This document does not attempt to set a precise order of priority for each element. The Town recognizes that such order is not attainable given changes to the Town's economy and influencing factors beyond the control of the community.

Some of the recommended implementation mechanisms are in place and may be revised and supplemented to realize the purposes of this Plan. In general, methods for implementation include:

1. Establishment of capital budgets and programs for the Town, Bellows Falls and Saxtons River villages and the school district, and annual review of same.
2. Review and update as necessary the zoning bylaws, flood hazard regulations, and subdivision regulations.

3. Annual review of the Town Plan.

4. Land acquisition via purchase, lease, easements, development rights, or gift.

5. Voluntary action on the part of property owners and developers in meeting the objectives of the Plan and provision of information regarding alternatives for development.

6. Improvement of communication between municipal, school, committees and private organizations.

7. Public education to create awareness of the benefits and impacts of decisions affecting the community.

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY**

The Rockingham Town Plan updates the Town Plan adopted in 2011.

The authority to prepare and implement the Plan is granted to the Town through the Vermont Planning and Development Act (the Act), Title 24, Vermont Statutes Annotated, Chapter 117. Plans expire every eight years.

This Plan addresses the 14 planning goals listed in Chapter 117, section 4302 and includes the 12 elements required of town plans. (Refer to the Appendix for excerpts of Vermont Statutes.) In addition to the required elements, the Plan addresses economic development, municipal government and services.

This Plan becomes effective upon adoption by the Select board after required public hearings held first by the Planning Commission and then by the Select board.
CHAPTER 1
HOUSING

Housing in Rockingham ranges from rural locations to small hamlets and villages to more urban. More recently, single family home construction has occurred in the more rural areas of the community, including off some class 4 town highways. There is a significant amount of rental housing in large, older homes in Bellows Falls Village, and most open available lots for single family home construction have been developed. The housing stock in Saxtons River Village has remained stable with no significant growth in the number of housing units. Saxtons River Village provides a combination of single family and multiple home dwellings. The hamlets of Cambridgeport, Bartonsville and old Rockingham Village are primarily single family residential development. The existing housing in these areas is clustered, and many residences are on small lots. While these areas are suitable for future cluster development, there may be limitations on denser development due to reduced suitability of soil for wastewater disposal, particularly in the Cambridgeport area.

Much of the residential area of Bellows Falls is on the National Register of Historic Places. Many owners have worked to restore the beauty and detail of the Victorian homes and neighborhoods. The majority of Saxtons River Village, including the older residential areas, is also on the National Register of Historic Places.

During discussion of the housing element of the Town Plan, the creation of owner-occupied housing units was voiced as the most important goal for the community, along with the need to provide a more diversified housing stock. It is felt that the community has too few owner-occupied units in comparison to rental units and statistics indicate that the community has a high proportion of rental housing. (Refer to Charts #1 & 2 following which indicate the proportion of owner-occupied versus rental units. Also refer to Appendix C, Tables 2-4, which indicate that Rockingham has a high percentage of rental units in comparison with neighboring communities.)

An increase in owner-occupied housing stock is seen as a benefit to the community, associated with improved neighborhoods, increased occupancy and quality of housing, community pride and a better balance for the residential tax base as it applies to the school system. The need for “more single family living opportunities and incentives to convert from renting to owning” was listed as one of the top five issues of concern in the Final Report of the Rockingham Community Visit of 1998 sponsored by the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

There are currently over 40 single family homes on the market and prices have come down somewhat in the current economy, however first-time home buyers are still struggling to obtain homeowner status. Some programs assist the first-time home buyer, but the community must look to all resources in order to keep local residents in the buyer’s market, and this includes encouraging banks to view mortgage applications favorably.

While this issue is one which is reflected in many meetings and discussions within the community, the Town recognizes the role that existing rental housing plays in the overall economy of the Town, and providing housing to local workers who cannot afford a single family
residence. The Windham Regional Plan of 2014 provides valuable information on the cost of housing in the region and the inability of many residents to purchase homes.

The Community Visit Final Report also included the need “to access and improve health and safety issues at rental units” as an area of concern. The existence of poorly maintained housing has a negative effect on the immediate neighborhoods and the community. It is in the best interest of the community to see that deficient units are upgraded and to continue to seek funds and sources which will assist in improving living conditions.

Rockingham, particularly in the Bellows Falls Village area, is already providing a substantial amount of assisted housing for its citizens. Units which are deficient should be brought up to code via rehabilitation programs and code enforcement. Assisted housing includes elderly housing, permanent rental subsidies including elderly, HUD Section 8 Certificates and Vouchers, and units utilizing public funds in grant or loan programs which restrict tenancy to certain income levels.

It should be noted that while Rockingham is within Windham County it has very close ties with the adjacent Town of Springfield in Windsor County, and the community of North Walpole, across the Connecticut River in New Hampshire. Rockingham does not stand alone in respects to concerns about assisted housing and impacts on the community. We recognize that this community's concerns regarding the high proportion of rental housing are similar to those of our neighbors to the north and east.

Vermont law requires consideration of housing subsidy covenants in the estimation of property values for tax assessments. The Town of Rockingham took the position that subsidized housing may impact the community’s tax revenue. The Towns of Rockingham and Essex won a Vermont Supreme Court decision that clarified that listers only had to “consider” the covenant when arriving at a fair market taxation value. The 2014 Legislature changed the law eliminating the option to “consider” the impact the covenant may have on the assessed value. Effective January 1, 2015, towns hosting owner-occupied housing that is subject to a housing subsidy covenant (sometimes referred to as “perpetually-affordable owner-occupied housing”) will be mandated to set the valuation of such units at not less than 60 nor more than 70 percent of what the fair market value of the property would be if it were not subject to the housing subsidy covenant.

Downtown housing is attractive to some residents and several projects have restored or created apartments in the upper floors of downtown buildings. This includes the historic Exner Block on Canal Street, the Howard Block on the Square, and the Edward Arms Block on Westminster Street are examples of projects combining historic preservation and rehabilitation, downtown revitalization and housing. While the street level of buildings should remain as storefronts, upper floors should be rehabilitated to provide affordable downtown apartments once again. Downtown housing does not generally have on-site parking, and downtown merchants have concerns regarding the impact on available parking for customers. In addition, this can impact parking available for those working in the downtown. Actual statistics for downtown residential parking needs are not known.
The future of the Island area, just east of downtown Bellows Falls, has been discussed at several downtown forums including whether housing should be an allowed use. The Island area is zoned Industrial allowing a mix of industrial and commercial uses. Current uses include a fuel storage facility, auto repairs, rail yard, and hydroelectric plant. The Rockingham Planning Commission has indicated concerns with mixing housing with heavy industrial uses and keeping area within the community open for noisy but necessary uses such as auto repair. After an analysis of housing in the Town, it was determined that there was more than sufficient area available for housing, while areas for commercial and industrial development were limited. The Plan did not recommend housing on the Island.

Affordable housing is needed throughout the region and should not be concentrated within a few towns or regional centers. Rockingham has actively participated for many years in seeking out programs to upgrade low-income housing and to provide for special needs housing. This has included housing rehabilitation programs sponsored by the Town Development Office, and promotion of the Rockingham Canal House and Riverview Apartments for elderly housing, and working with Housing Vermont, Inc. on the Exner and Howard Block rehabilitation.

**Windham-Windsor Housing Trust**

The Windham-Windsor Housing Trust offers property rehabilitation loans to income eligible homeowners in Windham County. The low-interest loans from this program can be used for rehabilitation to resolve health and safety issues such as roof, plumbing, electric, and heating repairs, well and septic repair or replacement, rehabilitation needed to meet Housing Quality Standards or correct municipal or state code violations, and access modification for elderly or disabled homeowners through collaboration with the Vermont Center for Independent Living. Given the limited supply of funds, allocation to the most needy or appropriate properties is critical. The Town recognizes that it is important to encourage rental unit owners to provide well-managed and well-cared-for rental units.

The Housing Trust staffs a Neighbor Works Home Ownership Center that is dedicated toward expanding homeownership opportunities as well as to helping local homeowners remain in their homes. They provide perspective home buyers workshops on money management, pre-purchase counseling, financial assistance for home purchases, as well as delinquent intervention and foreclosure prevention.

The Housing Trust has purchased and renovated multi-family rental properties and single family properties. The first project completed was renovation of four adjacent structures on Williams Street in Bellows Falls. This was followed by renovation projects on Pine and South Streets. Most recently, the Housing Trust is examining properties on Atkinson, Church, and Rockingham Streets. The Housing Trust assists buyers in purchasing single family homes by offering workshops to new home buyers, and sharing in the overall purchase cost. The Housing Trust purchases the land while the home owner purchases the house. The overall cost to the buyer is reduced since the land cost does not factor into the purchase price paid by the homeowner. The Housing Trust retains ownership of the underlying land, granting a long term lease to the homeowner for use of the
land. Other projects included new small single family homes on Clace Drive, and purchase and renovation of the Evergreen Trailer Park. The Housing Trust has also participated with Housing Vermont, Inc., a non-profit affordable housing developer, in renovations and management of the Saxtons River Family Housing, and the Exner Block in Bellows Falls.

**Other Housing**

Two senior housing complexes are located in Bellows Falls Village: Riverview and the Canal House. Riverview is within a portion of a former National Guard Armory and addition. This is located on Westminster Street about two blocks from the downtown business district. The Canal House, a rehabilitation/conversion of an old hotel building, is located on Rockingham Street in the business district. While Riverview and the Canal House provide a distinct "urban" style elderly housing, there is a need to provide another type of senior housing for those who desire more greenspace, open and garden area than available at the existing units. Such a development should also consider units for seniors who wish to sell their home and downsize to a smaller single family unit.

Special needs housing, such as elderly housing, may impact provision of municipal services. The two incorporated villages within the Town provide services to their village areas. Any further concentration of special needs housing in either of the two villages must be considered in view of additional burdens placed on these two entities which are not shared by the Town at large. This is not the case in the two nearby "urban" communities of Brattleboro and Springfield.

Mobile home parks provide needed affordable housing. Park densities may be higher than conventional housing (e.g. one residence per acre) and water and sewer needs are correspondingly critical. Existing mobile home parks in Rockingham have had infrastructure limitations affecting both available potable water and sewage disposal. In one instance this resulted in the eventual closure of a park. These infrastructure requirements make it imperative to site mobile home parks where such facilities are available. This does not limit the development of individual lots for multifamily housing, mobile homes, modular housing and other forms of prefabricated housing which can be accommodated by individual rather than community potable water supplies and on-site wastewater disposal systems.

Density allowances vary in different areas of the community. These range from allowing one residential unit per five acres to one unit per 2,500 square feet of area. In the village areas which allow for greater density, many lawns have been converted to parking, reducing play area for children and eliminating landscaping. Village residents have expressed concerns about density levels which have resulted in a significant number of vehicles per lot, lack of play area, unattractive to nonexistent landscaping, and increased noise levels.

Some older homes in the Saxtons River and Bellows Falls Village area have carriage barns (attached and detached). Several of these carriage barns are considerably larger than what is typically required for garage use. While some carriage barns may be suitable for housing development, this is dependent upon lot size and density requirements. Owner-occupied carriage house conversions would increase the percentage of owner versus rental housing in the Bellows Falls Village area.

Both Bellows Falls and Saxtons River Villages have many large homes. Many of these have existing apartments, while others have remained as single family homes. Given the rising cost of fuel oil to heat homes, more residents may look to creating apartments within the large buildings in order to defray the high costs of heat.
GOALS

1. To provide safe, energy efficient, clean and convenient housing for its citizens.

POLICIES

1. Encourage the maintenance and/or upgrade of existing rental units to minimize living costs through high quality design, efficient construction, and energy efficiency.

2. Consider selective demolition of substandard housing and redevelopment as single family housing appropriate to the neighborhood architectural style, or sale of the land to adjoining property owners to increase available greenspace.

3. Encourage owner-occupancy of dwelling units with particular emphasis on single family homes, and alternatively, owner-occupied rental housing.

4. Encourage more diversity in the location and type of housing (specifically, owner occupied housing) and reduce or stabilize the disproportionate share of rental housing existing currently. See Charts #1 & 2 following.

5. Discourage the creation of additional rental units unless owner-occupied in order to increase the proportion of owner-occupied versus rental units relative to other communities in the region.

6. Convert multi-family residences to single family residences where appropriate working with banks and utilizing tax breaks and revolving loan funds to assist in remodeling costs.

7. Housing projects should pay their fair portion of property taxes, and projects which would pay a reduced share due to stabilization of value or caps on equity should not be encouraged if they would result in a greater burden on other properties.

8. Encourage the land trusts to finance renovation and/or ownership of existing two to three-family owner-occupied houses.

9. Encourage lending institutions to make special provisions which are supportive of owner-occupied affordable housing projects and which help to meet the financing needs of low income home-owners within the limits of the Town Plan.

10. Assure that new housing is compatible with and has year-round access to potable water, sewage disposal, transportation, school, and emergency response services.

11. Assure that the creation of housing should not be to the detriment of farmland preservation or detriment of storefronts and office space on first floor levels of buildings in commercial areas.

12. Encourage use of the "cluster" housing concept. Clustering should concentrate buildings in specific areas on the site to allow the remaining land to be used for recreation, common open space, and preservation of environmentally sensitive features. It may or may not include a reduction in lot area, coverage maximums or an increase in density.
13. Require that seasonal homes meet the same site planning, building requirements and year-round access to services as permanent homes. However, at the same time, vacation homes should not be discouraged as they contribute tax dollars to the community, and yet do not result in a higher cost to the school tax base.

14. Coordinate housing plans with the School Board to be sure adequate educational facilities are available and to assure that the type of housing created would have the least impact possible on the school system.

15. Encourage the effective use of green and open space in residential areas as an important part of decent housing, providing play area and landscaping which improves aesthetics and decreases the perceived impacts of noise.

16. Encourage local participation in home ownership seminars, such as those sponsored by local land trusts, and educate citizens, local officials, and the Town Development Office about purchase and rehabilitation programs through Rural Development, VHFA, Freddie Mac, FHA, and the Veterans’ Administrator, and the land trusts.

17. The architectural style of in-fill housing in the villages of Bellows Falls and Saxtons River should be compatible with the existing style in the neighborhood.

18. Condemnation of privately-owned housing should not be done in order to promote private or commercial development, unless abandoned or derelict and located in zoning district appropriate for such development.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While considered high priority, there is no ranking.

1. The Town will continue to participate in regional housing revolving loan funds.

2. Continue Town participation, through the Development Office, in housing rehabilitation programs (grants or loans) to improve the existing housing stock so as to meet or exceed the minimum standards for quality housing, and to promote owner-occupied housing through loans for purchase and rehabilitation.

   Further, tie any rehabilitation grants for housing units to interior improvements and continued maintenance, exterior renovations and site maintenance. These grants shall be targeted toward long-term affordability of owner-occupied housing.

3. Encourage assisted living facility development and other types of housing which is limited to seniors only. Allow a greater density for this type of restricted use development.

4. The Planning Commission will propose revisions to the Planned Residential/Unit Development sections of the Zoning Bylaw.
A developer, public or private, who wishes to maximize the density of a development in order to reduce costs, should be given serious consideration within the context of revised Planned Development regulations. Consideration should be given to proximity to public water and/or sewer.

5. The Planning Commission will establish a citizen based community-wide committee to meet with local banks. The Committee will address the poor condition of housing on which local banks hold mortgages, and explore issues relating to easier financing of owner-occupied two to three-family properties with the purpose of increasing the amount of owner-occupied housing in the community.

6. Municipal boards, including the Select board, Boards of Trustees, Planning Commission, the Development Office and an affordable housing advocate will work with appropriate local, regional and state organizations to develop a "fair share housing study" aimed at providing measurable criteria for determining "fair share" standards for all towns within the area. After such study is completed and evaluation criteria are available, assess the status of housing in Rockingham as it relates to the fair share and ensure that Rockingham is within its fair share determination. If it is above or below its fair share, take appropriate steps to alleviate the discrepancy.

7. The Planning Commission will conduct an annual walking tour of various neighborhoods in the villages to assess the condition of housing and hear the concerns of residents. The Select board, Village Trustees, and local lending institutions will specifically be invited to participate in the walking tour.

8. The zoning administrator will investigate and report to the Planning Commission on the appropriateness of a local ordinance similar to that adopted in Burlington, Vermont, to deal with poorly maintained buildings and yards which do not amount to health hazards.

9. The Planning Commission will designate and map residential growth areas where connection to public water and sewer is feasible and access is adequate. Careful site specific evaluation will be required, although site specified plans will not be prepared.

10. The Planning Commission will hold a forum to receive input on appropriate locations for housing in the community.

11. The Planning Commission will consider amendments to the Zoning Bylaw which require larger lots for greater density of housing units, including increasing the lot area requirement per residential unit to 4,000 square feet in the Residential 7 zoning district.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. There is no ranking of priority for these steps and no schedule assigned for their completion.

12. The Planning Commission will propose amendments to the Zoning Bylaw to allow for reduction in minimum lot area for new development in areas where public water/sewer is available and accessed and for projects aimed at owner-occupancy.

13. Schedule joint meetings between the Planning Commission and area land trusts in order to discuss ways to encourage cooperative/condominium ownership for existing multi-family
residential units via private organizations such as land trusts. Aim to support projects which would provide this housing for current town residents.

14. Encourage the activity of the local land trusts with input from the Select board and Planning Commission upon determination that projects will benefit the community and further its goals of increased owner-occupied units, and improving the quality of existing rental housing before construction of new.

15. “Garden” style/townhouse apartment units for older citizens are needed to provide an alternative to the large downtown type apartment units. Such units would have either a common hallway or individual entrances.

The community has played a role in the past in encouraging development of housing for the elderly. The need for more elderly housing remains, but the type of housing encouraged should be different from the downtown type apartments provided at the two existing facilities. Quality senior garden-style housing in style similar to "Applewood" in Walpole, N.H. should be emphasized whether rental, co-operative, or condominium.

16. Discourage mobile home park construction unless connected to public water and sewer services.

17. The Planning Commission will encourage the use of conservation easements in cluster housing and subdivision developments to provide for recreation needs, common open space, and preservation of environmentally sensitive features through reduction in lot area, coverage maximums, increases in density, or other considerations.

18. The Planning Commission, through the health officer, will educate owners and residents to hazards of lead paint by provision of lead paint hazard brochures and other sources of information to applicants for projects involving older structures and by coordinating education efforts with state agencies, lending institutions, land trusts and others.

19. Encourage inspections of rental housing by state or local agencies to assure continued maintenance in compliance with minimum fire and safety codes, bringing enforcement actions as necessary.

20. The Development Office will identify housing which is marginal and substandard by federal, state, or local housing programs. Thereafter, the deficient structures should be renovated, or vacated and torn down. The resulting vacant lots should be used for in-fill housing (using vacant lots in built-up areas) or open space for adjacent properties. Renovation/demolition may be accomplished by public or private entities.

21. The Development Office will continue to seek funds via grant/loan programs for rehabilitation of deficient structures.

22. In zoning districts which allow multi-family dwellings, the Planning Commission will propose Zoning Bylaw amendments which increase minimum density requirements (e.g. reduce the allowable density of development) in order to provide adequate lot area for parking, landscaping and open space. New or converted housing projects should be carefully evaluated to meet these goals.
23. The Planning Commission will propose amendments to the Subdivision Regulations requiring that new developments provide for year-round access for emergency service vehicles.

24. The Planning Commission will propose amendments to the Zoning Bylaw requiring that carriage barn conversion to housing be a conditional use requiring owner-occupancy of either the carriage house or main house while meeting the dimensional and parking requirements for the district.
CHAPTER 2
TRANSPORTATION

Located at the junction of important north-south, east-west highway and railroad routes, Rockingham is subject to heavy through-traffic. It is a natural location for freight and passenger transfers, as well as a valuable area for industries which depend on transportation of products and materials. In considering the aspects of transportation, it is essential to keep in mind that four towns: Rockingham, Westminster, Grafton, and Walpole, and two states: Vermont and New Hampshire, are directly involved, as well as through-traffic on the Interstate highway and the railroad.

Road capacity has an impact on potential development throughout the Town and can influence where a Town does or does not want development to occur. In addition, where development occurs can have a significant impact on the highway budget. The Town must provide safe, efficient transportation facilities for movement of goods and people within, to, and from the town.

Additional detailed information regarding the various transportation systems and facilities including highways, bridges, classification, and parking, is to be found below in the Inventory section of this chapter. Facilities and state road classifications, bridges and culverts are also indicated on the accompanying maps.

The Island area of Bellows Falls has served the community's transportation needs for many years beginning with the canal in the early 1800's which transported boats around the "great falls" on the Connecticut River. It continues as a rail center off-loading to trucks and providing Amtrak passenger service both via train and bus. The three municipal parking lots located on the Island provide much needed parking for workers in the nearby Square business district. Continued full service by Amtrak is important to the community. Interstate bus service also stops on the Island, using the railroad station as a bus stop.

As development on the Island area continues, the perceived lack of connection between the activities and businesses on the Island and those in the Square should be evaluated. This may include working with owners of buildings to upgrade the rear facades of their buildings facing Canal Street, and upgrading the capacity and appearance of the Depot Street bridge to encourage pedestrians to walk to the other immediate areas of the community. As the Connecticut River Byway receives more attention, this same evaluation should extend to the interface between rail traffic and river recreational use.

Given its past history, facilities, and location, the Island is ideally situated as an intermodal transportation site including rail, truck, bus, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic. In 2003, the Town completed construction of the Connecticut River Byway Waypoint Welcome Center on the Island. This site provides additional parking area, including designated areas for bus parking, restroom facilities, and information to travelers. The original proposal included construction of a pedestrian bridge from the south end of the Waypoint Center across the canal to provide
increased access to the Square. This part of the project has not been completed to date, but remains a part of the long term plans for the Island area. Additional planning work was completed for the Island as part of a Municipal Planning Grant in 2013 which explored economic strategies for revitalizing the Island.

Also important to the Island area, and to the economic and social connections between Bellows Falls and Walpole, is the Vilas Bridge located on Bridge Street. For many years, the bridge had a weight limit, but continued to deteriorate. The bridge was closed to vehicular and pedestrian traffic by the State of New Hampshire in early 2009. Repair and retention or replacement of this bridge is important for the downtown commercial area, and for traffic traveling south on Route 12 to the Walpole business area. The other bridge crossing, from Bellows Falls to North Walpole, has an at-grade railroad crossing on Route 12 just east of the bridge. With the Vilas Bridge closed, this route is the only means of travel south on Route 12. Increased train traffic and longer trains, due to the upgrade of the Bellows Falls tunnel, may result in delays for emergency vehicles, and delays for commercial traffic.

Pedestrian access in and around the two Villages is important. This includes adequately maintained walkways both summer and winter, and street lighting which provides sufficient lumens. Walkable Communities, Inc., a non-profit firm whose purpose is to assist communities to become more walkable and pedestrian friendly, visited Bellows Falls in 2003 under the sponsorship by the Windham Regional Commission. A “walking audit” was conducted of Atkinson Street and the downtown area looking at what makes it difficult to walk in the Village, including handicap accessibility. The recommendations generated by this audit can be used to assess other areas in the Villages. A popular walk is along the Rockingham Street sidewalk in Bellows Falls which gives one a spectacular view of the Connecticut River.

Encouraging children to walk to school is important and the “Safe Routes to School” program, sponsored by the Vermont Agency of Transportation, provides information and grant incentives to accomplish this. Safety issues remain, however, such as a lack of sidewalks near the Saxtons River Elementary School (sidewalks are scheduled to be built in the 2016 construction season). The Town and the School District were successful in obtaining a grant and the Rockingham schools have been participating in the Safe Routes to School program.

The Bellows Falls downtown area has had a number of street light studies to evaluate period styled lighting fixtures and high efficiency LED lighting technologies. As a result of these studies, many of the lights within the downtown business district have been upgraded. Effective and energy efficient street lighting is particularly important to encourage walking and bicycling and to reduce potential motor vehicle conflicts. As related to economic development, street lighting creates a welcoming atmosphere that is encouraging to residents and visitors alike.

Saxtons River is a small community with commercial services within walking distance of all residential areas of the village. In the past, the Village Trustees have undertaken a regular sidewalk paving program and have upgraded small sections of sidewalks. The sidewalk on Westminster Street, south of the bridge, was upgraded in 2004 with the completion of the new bridge. The sidewalk had been level with the adjacent roadway creating a hazard for pedestrians. The new sidewalk has granite curbing and is raised above the road surface to adequately separate it from the road travel way. Recently, per agreement, the Town has undertaken sidewalk maintenance in both villages.
Southeast Vermont Transit, a private non-profit transportation company that operates The Current Bus, provides local bus service between Bellows Falls and other areas towns including Springfield, Putney, Westminster, Ludlow and Brattleboro. It runs a commuter bus connection to the White River Jct.-Lebanon, New Hampshire areas. The Current operates a Monday-Friday in-town bus service around Bellows Falls Village with local service to shops in North Walpole and Walpole, New Hampshire and the services and businesses in Westminster along Route 5. It provides a Dial-a-Ride service for medical appointments in Bellows Falls, Saxtons River and Rockingham. Dial-a-Ride bus service is available in Bellows Falls and Saxtons River. It provides on-demand handicap accessible transportation services for eligible populations.

In previous Town Plans, the condition and need for reconstruction of Route 121 was a regular topic. This project was completed in 2005 and included the section of Route 121 running west from Saxtons River Village to Cambridgeport. In addition, the replacement of the former Tenney Bridge, now named the Centennial Bridge, was completed in 2004. The Saxtons River Memorial Bridge was completed in 2015. The Parker Hill Road railroad overpass, owned by the State of Vermont, was reconstructed in 2011.

The Town has established a paving plan and culvert inventory list based on rating the condition of the Town’s streets and highways. Town budget constraints have necessitated a reduction in the town funding for highway improvements. As a result, the paving program has fallen behind the original schedule. Pleasant Valley Road has seen a significant increase in traffic. It now serves as a connecting road from the Saxtons River and Westminster West areas to Route 103. Not only have the vehicles per day increased, but the weight of vehicles utilizing this road has risen. This had resulted in wear and damage to the base and paved surface which is need of repair. The Town work on Pleasant Valley Road was done over the past years in phases and has been completed. Brockways Mills Road reconstruction was finished in the fall of 2013.

Rockingham has three covered bridges; Hall Covered Bridge (Route 121 & Hall Bridge Road.), the Worrall Covered Bridge (Williams Rd.), and the Bartonsville Covered Bridge (Lower Bartonsville Rd.) The Hall Covered Bridge is a replica of the original bridge which was destroyed by an overweight truck falling through it in the 1980's. During Tropical Storm Irene, these covered bridges were either replaced or received extensive repair work.
Rail traffic has been and continues to be important to the State, the region and the Town. The State of Vermont conducted a study of the rail lines in the late 1990s which found that the railroad tunnel running under the Square in Bellows Falls to be the biggest impediment to improved freight rail service through the state. Work was done in 2006-2007 to lower the tracks in the tunnel to accommodate double-stacked loads. Currently, the Bridge Street Road, which goes over the railroad tunnel, is settling. The Town has attempted to add pavement and restore the original road grade. But it is not known whether the roadway will continue settling.

The tunnel begins at the edge of the canal, runs under the business district, and emerges at the base of Mill Street. The tunnel was constructed of arched stone by the Vermont Valley Railroad in the 1800's, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The increase in railroad traffic, which may result from the improved tunnel, gives impetus for the Town to seek an alternative access to Mill Street which currently serves as the only ingress to the Bellows Falls Wastewater Plant, and the main access to the hydroelectric facility and yards. Improved access to this area is also important for development of the Town owned TLR/White Mountain Paper complex and expanded use of the historic Adams Grist Mill, and the Bellows Falls Historical Society lands adjacent to the Connecticut River. (See also Chapter 5, Economic Development and Chapter 8, Historic Resources.)

Both rail and truck traffic are important to the community, but traffic which exceeds the capacity of the community infrastructure has the potential of becoming burdensome and impacting both pavement and bridges. Through truck traffic, with loads heavier than allowed on I-91, creates problems for villages in the Connecticut River valley and the region. Such traffic is an issue for both the Square and Atkinson Street in Bellows Falls. Rail traffic which results in overburdened highways and bridges due to off-loading facilities may be costly to the Town and the State when infrastructure needs replacement or major repair. This is a concern on the Island in Bellows Falls due to the condition and age of the Depot and Bridge Street bridges.

The Town participated in the Route 103 Corridor Management Plan along with the Town of Chester, the Windham Regional Commission, the Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission and the Vermont Agency of Transportation. Access Management was the focus of the study and various methods to improve access management are contained in the Plan.

**GOALS**

1. To provide safe, efficient transportation facilities for movement of goods and people.

2. To use existing rail and highway corridors as a stimulus for economic growth.

3. To properly maintain all roads, bridges, and culverts to maximize transportation efficiency, safety, cost effectiveness and aesthetic appeal.
4. To provide safe and convenient pedestrian access within the villages of Bellows Falls and Saxtons River and bicycle paths throughout Town.

POLICIES

1. Advocate the repair and re-opening or replacement of the Vilas Bridge and the repair of the bridges across the canal at Depot and Bridge Streets to prevent additional deterioration resulting in further reduced load capacity. Support the creation and adoption of a long-term plan for continued access via bridge at these points which is critically important for the continued economic vitality of the commercial-industrial areas on the Island.

2. Keep the Island area in Bellows Falls Village available for rail transportation use and intermodal transportation needs and encourage activity compatible with rail/other transport and industrial-commercial uses including a pedestrian/bicycle pathway system. (See also the Energy & Recreation chapters.)

3. Continue active participation in the Windham Regional Commission Transportation Committee.

4. Work with the State of Vermont and neighboring communities of Westminster and Walpole, N.H. to improve the existing rail underpass in Westminster or develop alternative routes between the N.H. Route 123 bridge/N.H. Route 12 and I-91 and Route 103 so as to improve truck traffic flow through this area.

5. Support improvements to Route 5 between the truck terminals located in Westminster just south of the Bellows Falls Village line and I-91 and allowing tandems to operate between these terminals south on Route 5 to I-91.

6. Maintain the scale, rural quality, and capacity of secondary roads and bridges during improvement and maintenance procedures.

   Consider the scenic value of Town roads when improvements are undertaken. Roads should be widened or paved only when necessary for safety and year-round maintenance, and the impact of a greater, faster traffic burden should be evaluated. (See also the Scenic Resources section of the Town Plan.)

7. Advocate the use of rail service because of its efficiency and encourage the retention of facilities pertaining to it. All rail service is dependent upon the national energy policy. It is recognized that it will take a national policy to improve the condition of rail service in this area as well as across the country and support should be given to plans for continued rail transportation.

   While local government boards are not directly involved in the permitting of rail sidings, such should be encouraged when compatible with the community's goals for transportation and energy.
8. Advocate greater funding from the state, including designated grant money, for town highway paving and bridge work due to heavy truck traffic from rail off-loading facilities.

9. Coordinate railroad activities within the town and region working with the railroads, the State of Vermont Agency of Transportation Rail Division and Windham Regional Commission.

10. Encourage rail service by Amtrak at current or increased levels.

11. Evaluate the need for public transportation services within the town by community specific surveys. Public transportation services should be supported by ridership and non-local subsidies to assure that there is no impact on the local tax rate.

12. Review potential development and land uses in the areas near Exit 6, I-91 in view of the potential for increased traffic near this exit which serves as a significant interchange for traffic transferring to and from Route 103 especially in light of the substantial increase on winter weekends due to ski area related traffic.

13. Disallow subdivision development on Class 4 roads until the roadway is upgraded to Select board standards, reclassified, or alternate routes provided.

14. Evaluate transportation projects in view of the immediate and long-term impacts on growth, land use and development.

15. Private utilities and departments of the Town, Bellows Falls and Saxtons River should coordinate projects which require excavation within the highway right-of-way. Excavation for private utilities should not interfere with or add to the cost of existing municipal facilities or roads.

16. Include handicap standards in sidewalk maintenance and reconstruction whenever feasible taking into consideration location and budget.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While considered high priority, there is no ranking.

1. The Highway Department will continue to update the road assessment and management schedule annually, and the anticipated paving and culvert replacement schedule biennially and as needed. The Highway Department will continue to work with the Windham Regional Commission on road management plans.

2. The Town, through its boards, will seek an alternative access for Mill Street.

3. The Select board will continue the paving/chip sealing plan with the objective of surfacing 1/10 of the Town's paved roads each year.
4. The Planning Commission, working in cooperation with the Highway Superintendent, shall review and submit to the Select board for consideration, amendments to the Town road specifications to allow for various turn-around methods at dead-end roads and to avoid excessive travel-way width in residential or rural developments with a resulting reduction in costs and land taken for roadways.

5. The Town will work towards completing the gateway designs per the Bellows Falls Village Gateway Project of 2003 in coordination with the Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance, Inc. and Our Town, Inc. The Town may seek grants or other funds for final design and construction completion.

6. The Select board shall continue to seek priority ranking and state funding for bridge replacement or upgrade from the Agency of Transportation. See the bridge priority list below for further information.

7. The Select board and the Rockingham representatives to the Windham Regional Commission will seek assistance from the Windham Regional Commission Transportation Committee in working with Walpole, N.H. and the State of New Hampshire to repair and re-open or replace the Vilas Bridge. Although not a Rockingham or Vermont responsibility, the continued use of the Vilas Bridge is of critical importance economically to this community.

8. The Town will continue to seek grant funds which may become available for covered bridge repair or maintenance.

9. The Town and Bellows Falls Village will continue to upgrade existing street lighting to period style lighting and high efficiency LED fixtures.

10. Through the Development Office, the Town will develop a pedestrian path system linking the following destinations: the Railroad Depot, the Square, the Adam's Grist Mill, the High School, and the Native American Petroglyphs. See also the Recreation section.

11. The Town, through the Development office, will continue to seek funding for construction of a pedestrian bridge over the canal from the Connecticut River Byway Waypoint Welcome Center to the business district in the Square.

12. The Select board shall seek priority ranking and state funding for highway infrastructure and bridge replacement or upgrade for those facilities affected by traffic relating to rail off-loading operations.

13. The Town will support projects to improve visitor amenities at the railroad station such as improved rest room facilities, a snack bar or restaurant, and canopies next to the tracks.

14. The Town will support the development of an intermodal facility, preferably on the Island, to include continued passenger rail service, bus service, vehicular parking, and bicycle facilities.

15. The Town will support creation of regional Park and Ride facilities in areas adjacent to the Interstate. Separate facilities are necessary to serve different areas of the Town. For example, a facility to serve the Saxtons River area would be more practical if located near
the Back Westminster Rd., in Westminster. Existing publicly owned land should be considered for use.

Preferred locations include: at the Connecticut River Transit site on Rockingham Road/U.S. Route 5, within the I-91 corridor and ramp system, Route 103, and a joint site with Westminster near the Back Westminster Rd.

16. Work with the State of Vermont to transfer ownership of Island Park on Depot Street to the Town of Rockingham.

17. The Planning Commission will review the Route 103 Corridor Management Plan and consider and make recommendations for access management based on the Plan.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. These items are not ranked.

18. Limit access points and combine driveways into single curb cuts when feasible to serve potential lots or development. The Select board shall adopt a policy addressing limited curb cuts.

While applicable to all areas of the community, this is particularly significant along Route 5 north of Exit 6 (northbound), and along Route 103 which are regulated by the State. All access points shall be reviewed for compliance with town and state highway standards.

19. The Select board will conduct an annual review of the road policy in view of the current and anticipated growth, and identify areas needing improvements in light of the present use and desired levels of future growth.

20. The Planning Commission will identify locations of scenic roads.

21. Encourage input by residents on proposed highway and bridge improvement/alteration projects via public informational meetings, notices to residents, and press releases.

22. The Highway Department, working with the Planning Commission, will continue to evaluate class 3 roads which serve a single residence and which do not continue beyond that residence, to provide information to the Select board regarding reclassification to class 4 or discontinuance.

23. The Town, through its Select board and Planning Commission, will work with the Windham Regional Commission and elected officials to reduce truck traffic in village centers by encouraging the State of Vermont to increase weight limits on I-91, and to improve bridges and other existing roads which will direct traffic away from village centers.

24. The Town should consider reclassifying Parker Hill Rd. to a class 2 roadway if warranted by the amount of traffic.

25. The Highway Department shall gather information on bridges including sufficiency data, location, local name, year built, rating, priority of needed improvement, type of construction, and review and update annually. A similar data base will be created and updated for roads.
26. The Town, through its Select board and Planning Commission, will work with the
Windham Regional Commission to encourage cooperation between railroads and local
communities, despite being exempt from local and state control due to federal legislation.

27. Continue to stabilize the Rockingham Street embankment to preserve the sidewalk, or
consider reducing the road to two lanes and creating a linear park and walkway.

28. The Planning Commission shall encourage provision of pedestrian paths and bike-ways
within new developments.

29. The Planning Commission and Development Office will annually evaluate the need for
parking in the downtown area and assure that selection of parking areas does not impair
the visual, architectural or historical significance of the town center or necessitate the
removal of buildings. Use existing studies with bi-annual update of data/work with
Chamber of Commerce.

30. The Town, working with the local bus service, should develop a plan for:
* construction of bus shelters (The style of the shelters should be appropriate for the
  neighborhood’s architecture.);
* incorporating curb cut-outs for bus pullouts;
* developing park and rides for the commuter buses.

31. Research locations for and install bike racks.

32. The Town will work with the Rockingham schools to promote the “Safe Routes to
School” program including upgrade or installation of sidewalks, bike paths, bike racks,
signs, or other items which would make it easier for school children to walk or ride
bicycles to their schools.

INVENTORY

1. **Highways**

   The highways and roads within Rockingham include a limited access highway (I-91), two
   major highways (US 5 & VT 103), and locally important VT 121 running westerly from
   Bellows Falls. Roads fall within classification of 1 through 4 and serve various functions
   including local, collector, and arterial/limited access. See the Transportation Network,
   Transportation Route Number, and Road Surface Type Maps for illustration of the
   highway classifications and of roadway functions.

   **Function**

   Arterial highways are those used for through travel. These include: Interstate 91, and
   most of Route 103. These exist to primarily serve statewide and interstate travel.

   Route 121, Pleasant Valley Road, U.S. Route 5 and Route 103 in the vicinity of the I-91
   ramps are classified as rural major collectors. These primarily serve traffic of intra-county
   importance (such as to larger towns, parks, regional schools, etc.)
Brockways Mills Road, Parker Hill Road, Lower Bartonsville Road are classified as rural local roads which provide service to adjacent land and over relatively short distances.

**Classification**

Refer to the Transportation Network Maps for information on the following.

**Class 1 Highways:** Town highways which form the extension of a State highway route. Number of Class 1 miles: 1.493.

**Class 2 Highways:** Town highways which are generally the more heavily traveled routes. Number of Class 2 miles: 15.516.

**Class 3 Highways:** All town traveled highways other than Class 1 or 2. Number of Class 3 miles: 61.25.

**Class 4 Highways:** All other Town highways including trails and pent roads. Number of Class 4 miles: 14.6.

**Legal Trails:** Town rights-of-way that can only be travelled by non-motorized users only: Number of Legal Trail miles: .05

**State Highway Mileage within Town:** 23.471.

**Town Highway Bridges:** In 2016, the Rockingham Highway Department updated the inventory of bridges and culverts. Bridges are classified according to length and responsibility, whether Town or State. Short structures range in length from 6.0 to 19.9 feet, and long structures from 20.0 feet and longer. Structures shorter than 6 feet are classified as culverts regardless of the design. In Rockingham, there are 28 short and 9 long major town "bridge" structures while there are 13 short and 13 long State "bridge" structures. These include all spans whether crossing water, railroads, or roadways.

Rockingham has three covered bridges; Lower Bartonsville Bridge, Worrall/Williams River Road Bridge, and the Hall Covered Bridge. The Town has shown a commitment to maintenance and restoration of its covered bridges by continued repair and, if necessary, replacement of these bridges.

As elsewhere in the State, some bridges in Rockingham are in need of significant maintenance. Construction was finished in 2004 on the replacement of the Tenney Bridge (now the Centennial Bridge) on Westminster Street, Saxtons River. Prior to that, a new bridge was built over the Saxtons River at Barbers Park Road in 1999. Just before that, the bridge at Shepard Lane, Saxtons River, was replaced with a large culvert. The bridge near the old stone mill in Cambridgeport was completed in 2003-2004. Most recently in 2015, the bridge at the easterly end of Saxtons River Village on Route 121 has been significantly improved / reconstructed.

Although the responsibility of New Hampshire, the Vilas Bridge must be given consideration by Rockingham due to the important role it plays in the Town's transportation network.

**Bridges** needing ongoing evaluation/investments are as follows:
- Vilas Bridge - Bridge Street, Bellows Falls
- Depot Street Bridge (#53) - from Canal Street to the Island, Bellows Falls
- Bridge Street Bridge (#52) - over canal on Bridge Street, by Post Office, Bellows Falls
- Pleasant Street Bridge (#19) - Saxtons River Village
- Lower Bartonville Bridge (#29) southwest of the covered bridge.

**Existing Conditions**

1. Highway through-traffic is adequately handled by Interstate 91, north-south, and Vermont Route 103, west. New Hampshire Route 12 is satisfactory to the east but VT 123 in Westminster has a difficult intersection/rail underpass that has constrained sight lines and narrow travel lanes.

2. The Vilas Bridge in Bellows Falls was closed to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic in 2009. The historic Arch Bridge, closed to vehicular traffic for many years, has been replaced by a new bridge in the same location. To use any of these bridges, traffic must be directed through the center of Bellows Falls creating severe traffic problems, increased danger to pedestrians and adverse impact on merchants located in the Square. Truck traffic which cannot use either the Vilas Bridge or the Westminster Bridge underpass is directed over this bridge.

3. Traffic to and from the Rockingham area is handled by the through-highways plus U.S. Route 5, north-south, and Vermont Routes 121 and 103 west. The congestion resulting from the Vilas Bridge closure has impacted traffic on Rockingham Street and increased traffic on Westminster Street.

4. Route 121/Saxtons River Road runs from Bellows Falls westerly through Westminster, back into Rockingham and then into Grafton. This road has experienced increasing amounts of traffic. The section of road between Saxtons River Village and Cambridgeport was reconstructed with work finished in 2005.

5. Specific projects may change in priority year-to-year as certain sites may need work done sooner than originally anticipated. Some specific projects (no ranking) for the future may include:
   - Gaskill Rd. - Improvements to the approach (1st 500 ft. approx.), including grading and paving.
   - Depot Street Bridge - Plan needed for renovation or reconstruction.
   - Old Darby Hill Rd. - Improvement to or modification for a turn-around.
   - Mill Street – Alternative access.
   - Hall Bridge Rd. /Barber Park Rd. - improvements to intersection via change in grade to road. Realignment/relocation or relocation of Barbers Park Rd.
   - Bridge Street bridge rehabilitation.

2. **Parking Facilities**
Over the past 20 years many public parking spaces have been added to serve the downtown business district which together with the existing spaces have significantly increased the number of public spaces available. On-street parking is available within the Square and on Rockingham, Canal, Bridge, and Westminster Streets, all of which serve the downtown business district. In addition, on-street parking is available on School Street which connects with the downtown via the town-owned and maintained stairs from School Street to Westminster Street. Locations of parking areas are shown on the Transportation Network Map. These include:


6. **Island Park**, Depot Street Paved. Leased to Town of Rockingham by State of Vermont. Number of parking spaces: 82. The Town leased this property beginning in 1975 for a ten year period, and renewed automatically for six additional ten year periods. Consideration should be given to acquiring this property due the role it plays in Downtown and Island development and its importance in providing parking for the downtown area.


8. **Waypoint Center parking lot**, located on Depot Street Paved. Owned by Town of Rockingham. Number of parking spaces: 42 plus 3-4 bus/RV spaces.

Total off-street parking: 321 spaces plus 3-4 bus/RV spaces.

3. **Railroads**
**Freight.** The Rockingham area is an important railroad junction. The Central Vermont Railway (formerly Boston and Maine) leads north and south, while the Green Mountain Railroad leads west. Green Mountain Railroad has developed a large freight yard in Rockingham off Bezanson Road. This is the Riverside Reload Center which offers loading and unloading bays, dock and ground level uploading capability, and outdoor and indoor storage.

**Passenger.** Amtrak trains between Washington D.C. and Montreal stop at Bellows Falls.

4. **Truck Traffic**

National and regional truck freight transfer and service terminals are located in and around Rockingham. The terminal complex located on Route 103 has access to all directions via Route 103 and I-91 although needing to go into Bellows Falls Village to access Route 12 in New Hampshire. The terminals south of Bellows Falls in Westminster pass through Bellows Falls to move north, east or west.

Truck traffic within the Bellows Falls village affects both the business district in the Square, and the residential neighborhood along Atkinson Street, areas which were not designed for large truck use. The impact that trucks have on the Village needs, however, to be balanced against the importance to the local economy.

Improvements to alternative routes, such as the Westminster underpass and connection to N.H. Route 12, may alleviate truck traffic in the village while providing better access for necessary truck movement.

5. **Bus Service**

Greyhound has a station in Bellows Falls with bus service to points in New England and Canada as well as connecting service elsewhere via other bus lines. Bus service is well patronized and is frequently adjusted to suit seasonal and other changes in demand.

Southeast Vermont Transit, which operates as the Current, a private non-profit, provides local bus service between Bellows Falls and other areas towns including Springfield and Brattleboro. It runs a commuter bus connection to the White River Jet.-Lebanon, New Hampshire areas. The Current operates a Monday-Friday in-town bus service around Bellows Falls Village with local service to shops in North Walpole and Walpole, New Hampshire and the services and businesses in Westminster near the road to I-91. It also provides a Dial-a-Ride service for medical appointments in Bellows Falls, Saxtons River and Rockingham. Dial-a-Ride bus service is available in Bellows Falls and Saxtons River. It provides on-demand handicap accessible transportation services.

6. **Other**

1. **Taxi services.** There is no taxis service available.

2. **Seniors Ride Service.** Senior citizens may obtain free bus service to the Senior Center for meals and Center activities via the Bellows Falls Senior Center. The service also includes weekly grocery shopping (including to Walpole, New Hampshire). Out-of-town shopping and excursion trips use the Center’s van.
3. **Rockingham School Bus Service.**

4. **Bike Paths & Trails.** The Bellows Falls Historical Society has developed a trail system for its land adjacent to the Connecticut River along Mill Street.

5. **Airports.** This community’s historically popular airport is the Bradley International Airport in Windsor, Connecticut because it is a direct route down Interstate 91. Numerous expansions at the Manchester-Boston Regional Airport have resulted in more flights offered. There are a number of smaller airports that offer a range of private and commercial airfare options to include Springfield’s Hartness State Airport, Rutland-Southern Vermont Regional Airport, and Lebanon Municipal Airport. Vermont’s only full service airport, Burlington International Airport, provides flights for a limited number of residents.
CHAPTER 3
ENERGY

The use, type and availability of all types of energy are major concerns of local communities, states and the country. Fuel prices have changed dramatically, and this has had an impact on jobs, transportation, heating, housing and even where residents look to live.

Town planning does not have a major role in deciding national and state energy policies. These policies and market conditions are the dominant factor in determining most energy issues. However, energy remains a critical resource for a community, and a diverse supply helps to ensure a viable future for residents.

Local planning can impact energy use, however, by encouraging energy-efficient housing rehabilitation programs, guiding where development is appropriate, encouraging new building design which maximizes energy conservation, working to develop energy-efficient public transportation systems, and utilizing diverse energy resources. Individuals and companies can have an effect by determining what type of energy source to use within one's home, commercial or industrial property, utilizing adequate insulation, and siting of structures.

Development closer to existing maintained roadways and existing villages and hamlets will help reduce the energy required to deliver municipal services to residents and businesses. This can be particularly critical regarding development on class 4 roads which residents later seek to upgrade to class 3 with town maintenance.

New technology will develop energy resources. The Town Plan cannot anticipate what may be available in five years, and it is necessary to be receptive to alternative energy resources and new technology. At the same time, the community may have concerns with impacts from these new energy sources. The Vermont Legislature has made minor changes (in 2015) to statutes which allow for limited community input regarding Public service Board review of alternative energy projects. The Town should determine what the community desires for standards to guide such projects.

This document will address only those issues on which the local community has a direct impact. Supply, allocation, and demand of energy resources are not a local function and are better addressed at the state and national levels.

Energy sources used within the town include electricity, propane gas, gasoline, diesel fuel, fuel oil, wood and some solar and wind. In addition, a study done in the 1980s indicated the potential for higher than normal groundwater temperature in the lower section of Bellows Falls Village. At the conclusion of that study, the Canal House senior housing used one of the wells drilled as part of the “hot well” study. The cost of other fuels remained low, and the incentive was not strong enough to encourage others to pursue geothermal energy use.

For more information, refer to the Hot Well study done in regards to this energy source which is available at the town offices.
Transportation uses a great share of the energy available. Public transportation has had a slow start in Rockingham over the years, and the small population base can make cost-effective public transit difficult. A trolley line once ran from Bellows Falls to Saxtons River (1900-1924). The small ridership and growing prevalence of individually-owned motor vehicles meant a short-life for the line. Currently, Southeast Vermont Transit offers public bus service within the community and also to other neighboring communities. This includes transportation to job centers, medical providers and shopping destinations. The transit service is seeing increased ridership on a regular basis. Again, the cost of gasoline has changed how residents view the drive to work in their personal vehicle versus the lower cost of riding a bus or carpooling. Providing transportation to jobs, including to ski areas, continues as a program goal. This program is subsidized by federal and state grants. Southeast Vermont Transit has completed construction of a new office and maintenance facility on Rockingham Road/U.S. Route 5 in Rockingham.

Planning continues for an inter-modal center on the Island in Bellows Falls combining facilities for intra & inter-community bus, interstate bus, cab, train, and bicycle. The Island area is ideally suited for such an inter-modal facility given its past history as a transportation center and its central location to the community. (See also Chapter 2, Transportation.) The proximity of the industrial-commercial Island area and downtown to residential areas in Bellows Falls is an advantage and allows people to walk to work with resulting savings in energy. This is also true of the proximity of the commercial Main Street area in Saxtons River Village to village residential areas.

One way to reduce energy used in transportation is to encourage bike paths and sidewalks. However, the maintenance of these same facilities can be expensive, particularly during the winter months. Also, the weather during the winter often limits the use of these facilities.

Electric vehicles should be considered as part of the Town Plan. The Island Growth Plan states that “charging areas ought to be close to existing or proposed businesses.” That Plan calls for installation of e-charging stations at the Bridge Street parking lot and other parking areas. The Island Park lot and Waypoint should be considered as employees who work in the vicinity park there during the work day. The downtown “Square” should be a priority as it is the main commercial area of the community.

The Town is not a major influence in energy issues but there are instances wherein the municipality can save energy on its own including building maintenance, location of new facilities, conversion to LED street lights, and vehicles (highway and school). Simple changes in types of light fixtures and better insulation around windows and doors can be done which result in savings. The municipalities and school districts should take advantage of available grants to upgrade to more efficient energy use. Methane produced at the Bellows Falls Wastewater Plan and the former BFI landfill on Missing Link Road are other potential energy sources.

Older homes are often less efficient than newer well-insulated ones. In many instances Victorian era homes which have been divided into apartments have ceased heating the entire building with a basement furnace. Landlords have installed individual heating units and the tenant pays for the heat. At times, electricity is picked as the least costly to install, but may be more expensive for the tenant to use. Another popular alternative is the propane heater. While providing adequate heat, it is often centrally located within an apartment and the heat is not dispersed to all the habitable rooms. Ensuring that these older buildings are energy efficient could save both dollars
and energy. Apartment buildings and units which have not undergone an energy audit should be encouraged to do so. This should result in installation of insulation, efficient heating units, tightening of windows and installation of storm windows if units are found deficient. However, there may be trade-offs between achieving maximum energy efficiency and maintaining the historic and aesthetic qualities of these older homes. Wherever possible, energy-efficient efforts should be compatible with the historic qualities of the house or apartment.

The hydroelectric plant in Bellows Falls is part of the TransCanada system which operates other stations along the Connecticut River including locations in Vernon and Wilder, Vermont. The Bellows Falls plant is fed by the canal which divides the “mainland” Bellows Falls from the so-called “Island” which is the older industrial area in the village. This canal was built in the late 1700's to circumvent the Great Falls and allow boats to navigate the length of the river. It was converted into the sluiceway for the hydroelectric system during construction of the dam and plant in the 1920's. The hydro plant, dam and major transmission lines were all owned by New England Power until deregulation in the mid-1990's required separate ownership of the power producing facilities from the transmission lines. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license for the facility will be up for renewal in 2018.

A second small-scale hydroelectric facility is located on the Williams River in Brockways Mills. This facility, originally built in the 1980's, operated for a short period of time. The facility was partially dismantled, and most of the electric generating equipment removed. The dam and impoundment remained, and the plant restored to power production capability with sale of power in 2006. The new ownership is under Brockways Mills LLC. The dam received extensive damage during Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 and major re-building was necessary.

**GOALS**

1. Encourage efficient, safe and renewable energy sources for all public and private buildings and transportation.

2. Encourage patterns of land use and development that use energy most efficiently.

**POLICIES**

1. Encourage energy conservation including energy used for transportation, for heating, and electrical energy used for running machinery and appliances.

2. Encourage energy sources and technologies which use renewable resources including solar, wood, wind, and geothermal.

3. Development should orient structures to take advantage of southern exposure, natural light, and solar gain. Building siting should consider shelter from wind and use of landscaping as a wind buffer and for summer shading.
4. Promote energy efficiency in the design, construction, and rehabilitation and retrofitting of buildings, layout of building lots, and location of roads.

5. Encourage non-motorized vehicles and pedestrian traffic through the expansion of bicycle paths and sidewalks.

6. Promote energy awareness and education.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While considered high priority, there is no ranking.

1. The Select board will set aside money each year in the annual budget for installation of more energy efficient equipment in Town buildings.

2. The municipalities and school districts will seek out available grants for energy conservation or production including solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, sidewalks, bike paths, electric, propane, oil, or other methods. For example, methane generation at the Bellows Falls Wastewater Plant.

3. When purchasing or leasing, the municipalities and school districts will consider alternative energy equipment and vehicles.

4. Promote construction of a parking area adjacent to the inter-state for carpool parking.

5. Renovations of publicly owned buildings shall incorporate energy conservation no matter what the scale of the renovation project.

6. The Planning Commission shall seek funding to study the best locations in the Town for wind towers.

7. The Planning Commission will consider amendments to the Zoning Bylaw regarding height allowances for wind towers similar to those for telecommunication towers.

8. Solar systems will be promoted where feasible.

9. The Select board will support the Conservation Commission’s Energy Committee to work with the municipality and its boards on energy issues and projects.

10. The Town will consider instituting a tax credit program for installation of solar, wind, or other alternative energy installations.

11. Grants or other funding shall be sought to develop geothermal heating in Bellows Falls Village if geothermal heating is determined feasible.

12. Each municipal building will be assessed to determine whether alternative fuel or other energy resources are feasible.
13. The Town will support legislation to create state tax incentives for landlords to insulate apartment buildings with emphasis on apartments in which tenants are responsible for their own heating bills.

14. The Town and other community agencies will continue to apply for grants and other funds to improve weatherization and improved heating systems in the existing housing stock.

15. The Town and other community agencies will encourage owners of multi-family dwelling units to adequately weatherize apartment buildings with insulation, caulking, and weather-stripping, and make owners aware of available rehabilitation programs.

16. The municipalities will review concerns and other issues in anticipation of participating in the TransCanada FERC license renewal for the hydroelectric facility.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. There is no ranking of priority for these steps and no schedule assigned for their completion.

17. Encourage landowners with woodlot potential to participate in sustained forest management programs.

18. Exempt alternative energy systems and equipment, as defined in 32 V.S.A. 3845, from real and personal property taxation.

[32 VSA 3845 allows for voter approval at town meeting of an exemption for alternate energy sources which include any plant, structure or facility used for the generation of electricity or production of energy used on the premises for private, domestic or agricultural purposes, no part of which may be for sale or exchange to the public. The term includes but is not limited to grist mills, windmills, facilities for the collection of solar energy or the conversion of organic matter to methane, and all component parts thereof, including land upon which the facility is located, not to exceed one-half acre.]

19. Natural gas facilities should be supported if they are located so as to protect historic and natural resources, and available to the community to use as a local fuel source.

20. Encourage developers to design subdivisions in such a way as to minimize the length of streets and to cluster delivery and pick-up points; appropriate solar orientation should also be encouraged.

21. New energy transmission corridors and generating facilities should be sited so as to minimize their visual impact on ridge lines, slopes and open areas. In addition, such facilities should avoid aquifers, significant plant and animal habitat, and historic resources.

22. Where feasible, development and expansion of public utility facilities and services should occur within highway or public utility rights-of-way corridors in order to reduce adverse physical and visual impact on the landscape and achieve efficiency in the expenditure of public funds.

23. Planning Commission review of the PRD/PUD zoning regulations should consider and implement building site design and settlement patterns which reduce energy usage both in lot and road layout.
24. Provide standards to reduce/eliminate energy-wasting strip development.

25. The use of the rail system for both passenger and freight should be encouraged. See both the Transportation and Economic Development sections of the Plan for more information.

26. Encourage carpooling which reduces traffic and energy costs.

27. Develop a sustainable interconnected system of sidewalks and walking/bicycle trails linking residences, schools, stores, work places, and tourist sites. See also the Recreation and Transportation sections of the Town Plan.

28. Provide information concerning alternate energy resources and methods of reducing energy consumption in the home such as weatherization and upgrading to energy efficient appliances.

29. Discourage any construction that does not use modern conservation techniques.

30. Use energy efficient construction methods in future municipal and school facility expansion; give consideration to utilization of renewable energy heating.

31. Adopt policies and guidelines that encourage or require energy efficient and aesthetically appropriate lighting standards throughout the town.

Continue to replace existing street lighting with energy efficient street lights which provide adequate lumens, and are in keeping with the character of the community.

32. Utility lines should be buried in areas of great scenic or historic value, in town centers and in very compact residential subdivisions (such as ½ acre lots or less).

33. Existing utility corridors should be used for multiple resource uses.

34. The Planning Commission will review the zoning bylaw and amend as necessary to clarify placement of solar panels and wind towers as accessory uses and primary uses.

INVENTORY
See the Energy Resources and Service Areas Maps for locations of the following:

1. Electric Power: Two electric power companies operate within the Town. Green Mountain Power Co serves most of the Town and New England Power Company serves a small area on the Island. See maps for service areas and two- and three-phase power areas. A Green Mountain Power substation is located on the south side of Bridge Street, just west of the Connecticut River.


Brockways Mills LLC on the Williams River. While shut down for a time, this plant is back in operation.
3. **Bulk Fuel Storage**: Bulk fuel storage [heating oil] is located on the Island in Bellows Falls with a capacity of 100,000 gallons. A second, smaller site is located off Paper Mill Road. A propane off-load facility, accessible by rail and operated by Green Mountain Railway, is located just north of Bellows Falls on Bezanson Road. This was put into operation in 2014.

4. **Gasoline Stations**: There are five gasoline stations in Bellows Falls Village and an additional two north of the Village on Rtes. 5 and 103. There is one gas station in Cambridgeport. A gas station in Saxtons River closed more than fifteen years ago, and residents from that area must drive to Bellows Falls or Cambridgeport to secure fuel.

5. **Hot Well**: Underground water sources in Bellows Falls Village have been found to have a higher than usual temperature. The Rockingham Canal House senior citizen housing located on Rockingham Street had used two wells to provide a heat-pump system for this facility. The heating and cooling system was later taken off the hot wells and a conventional air conditioning and furnace unit installed for heating purposes.
CHAPTER 4
EDUCATION

Three significant changes in the education community in Rockingham were the major renovations made to the Central Elementary School in Bellows Falls, the Saxtons River Elementary School in Saxtons River, and the Rockingham Middle School in Bellows Falls.

These renovations allowed for more and better use of space. Upgrades were made to the existing sections of the buildings including windows, heat, and function. The upgrades to these buildings allows for continued use of these community based schools within the village settings. The Town bonded to finance the upgrades and additions.

Among the issues now facing Rockingham is the future of the Middle School. This building was built in the 1920s and originally served as the high school. It is now used as a Middle School for grades 5 through 8. This school is located on School Street in Bellows Falls. The building occupies almost the entirety of the lot leaving no room for on-site outdoor facilities. In order to keep the building operational as a school, there were significant renovations and upgrades to the interior spaces.

The 21st century will present many challenges for our young people, and they need to be as fully prepared as the community can make them. Allowing students to leave school at age 16 may have been reasonable when Vermont was largely an agricultural state and help was needed on the farm. In today’s complex technological world, it is much more difficult for young people to obtain well-paying jobs without first finishing high school and it makes it much more important for students to stay and graduate.

Just as important to the community, now and for the future, is encouraging more students to continue their education beyond high school. This is not limited to 4-year colleges, but includes junior colleges, technical schools, work-study and trade schools and other similar institutions.

The following is information on the make-up and relationship of the school districts and staffing affecting Rockingham, including information on administration, facilities, enrollment, quality of education, and costs. An inventory of school facilities follows the action step section.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS
Rockingham’s schools are under the direction of an elected town School Board. This School Board provides guidance for the education of students in grades K through 8. Facilities include the Bellows Falls Middle School, Central Elementary School, and the Saxtons River Elementary School. The Middle School serves students from Rockingham, and accepts tuition students from Westminster, Grafton and Athens.

Rockingham belongs to a union of other towns forming the Bellows Falls Union High School (BFUHS) District. The union district includes the member towns of Rockingham, Westminster, Grafton and Athens. Membership on the Bellows Falls Union High School Board is divided among the four towns. Board members are elected at town meetings in March. The Union High School is located in Westminster.
Both the Rockingham school district and the Union High School district operate under the overall administrative services of the Windham North East Supervisory Union (WNESU) which also includes the towns of Westminster, Athens and Grafton.

**LOCAL FACILITIES**
See the Inventory following for details on each facility.

The Rockingham School District operates the Central Elementary School, Saxtons River Elementary School, and Bellows Falls Middle School for its K through 8 school population.

The Middle School has been recently renovated and accepts students from Athens, Westminster, and Grafton and serves students from 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.

Rockingham high school students attend the Bellows Falls Union High School (BFUHS) along with students from Westminster, Grafton and Athens. Rockingham has the largest number of students at BFUHS. Students may also opt for school choice, or attend a technical center in Springfield or Brattleboro.

**REGIONAL FACILITIES**

Technical Centers. The River Valley Technical Center in Springfield and the Windham Regional Career Center in Brattleboro offer technical education to high school and post-high school students.

Community College of Vermont. Rockingham residents may take advantage of advanced studies through the Community College of Vermont (CCV) programs. It is a disadvantage to residents that these courses are not available in the local community, but are given in Springfield and Brattleboro. One may enroll for one course or full-time study. Courses are offered in the fall, spring and summer, during daytime, evening and weekend hours. There are sixteen associate degree programs and seven career certificates.

Johnson State College External Degree Program (EDP) offers a state-wide degree completion program via the Vermont State Colleges network. The courses take place one Saturday or Sunday every three to four weeks at regional locations. Some courses are offered online. Completion of the program leads to a bachelor’s degree.

Vermont’s Adult Education and Literacy programs are offered through Learning Works, Vermont’s Adult Education & Literacy system. Brattleboro and Springfield are the centers closest to Rockingham. These offer services ranging from beginning to advanced literacy in math, reading, writing, interpersonal skills, workplace skills, general educational development (GED), adult diploma programs (ADP), English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), commercial driver's license (CDL) and basic computer instruction. Through the Adult Diploma Program, adults may earn a high school diploma from a local school. This program uses performance based projects that demonstrate academic skills and meet educational standards, and provides an alternative option for earning a diploma.

**EDUCATION FUNDING**
In the past, education funding in Vermont came primarily from the town property tax. With the adoption of Act 60 in 1997, the source of education funding has changed, and an education property tax is paid to the State. Act 68, adopted in 2004, superseded Act 60, but left a state-wide education property tax with a complicated formula to equalize the tax rate throughout the
State. That formula has been updated in recent years but still remains complicated and challenging to implement. For more information on education funding, see “Overview of Vermont’s Education Funding System” which can be found on the Vermont Department of Education’s website.

The educational statistics included in this plan, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the Vermont Department of Education School Report. Residents can access this information on the department’s web site at www.education.vt.gov. The information from the Education Department is used as it can be compared with other similar data from other school districts throughout the state.

Act 150, passed in spring 2000, created a system of public school choice for students in grades nine through twelve. Each school must join with at least one other school to form a choice region. Schools are allowed to limit the number of students who may transfer out in a given year. For BFUHS the level is set at 10 or 5% of students or whichever is fewer. The number allowed to transfer out is not based on town of residence. Schools are required to determine their capacity to receive students, but there are no specific numerical or percentage figures. If more students want to transfer out of or into a school than there are places available, nondiscriminatory lotteries are to be used. The law provides no funding for transportation, and, unless regions agree otherwise, no tuition changes hands.

Receiving schools for students wishing to transfer out of BFUHS include Hartford, Rivendell, Rutland, Windsor, Springfield, Windsor Southwest, Windham Central, Windham Southeast, and Windham Southwest.

SPECIAL EDUCATION INITIATIVES
Rockingham schools continue to exceed the state wide average number of 14.96% of students identified as eligible for and served by special education programs (from “Special Education Child Count Data Report for 2014.”) This data shows that the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union District has 19.77% of students so identified. Statewide, the lowest percentages in a district are 5.12%, while the highest is 23.21%.

ENROLLMENT
The need for various facilities is impacted by both increases and decreases in enrollment. Enrollment figures in the Rockingham schools have continued to decline. Department of Education statistics show that in 1995 there were a total of 818 students in the Rockingham schools. This included the Bellows Falls Middle School, Cherry Hill School, Central Elementary and Saxtons River Elementary. This is enrollment totals. In the case of the Middle School, the numbers include students from Athens, Grafton and Westminster.

In 2015-2016, the Department of Education statistics report a total of 581 students in the Rockingham schools. This includes Bellows Falls Middle School (233), Central Elementary (239), and Saxtons River Elementary (109). The trend for the last two decades has been a slow decline in student enrollment.

The Compass School, a private independent middle/high school, which opened in 1999 in Westminster, has continued to draw local students. The school serves students in grades 7-12.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION & PERFORMANCE
State requirements have established standards for all schools in Vermont. The intent is to improve the quality of education throughout the state and to create accountability for quality
education. Interactive reports on all Rockingham Schools are available on the Vermont Department of Education’s website.

Central Elementary, Saxtons River Elementary, Bellows Falls Middle School, and Bellows Falls Union High School did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress Report requirements in Mathematics and Reading. This is the most recent data available on Vermont’s Department of Education website and reflects the 2013 academic year.

It is encouraging to see progress in the school programs, but the drop-out rate for Bellows Falls Union High School continues to remain above the state average, although some improvement is shown. In 2006-2007, the overall Vermont drop-out rate for grades 9-12 was 3.08% dropping to 2.89% for 2008-2009, and 2.48% in 2013-2014 (most recent data available). The Bellows Falls Union High School rate for the same time periods was basically double the State’s rate. However, this is an improvement from the 9.9% in 1999.

For many students, education ends at the close of their high school years. The number of Bellows Falls Union High School students attending four-year colleges was in decline. The most recent survey reported in 2015 shows 40% of graduating high school students attend college.

Student to teacher ratios (using full-time equivalent [(FTE)]) counts for 2014-2015
- State of Vermont = 10.03
- Central Elementary = 13.23
- Saxtons River School = 12.84
- Bellows Falls Middle School = 13.93

**COSTS**

Educational funding has changed several times over the past years. However, it is still a major portion of the property tax. A major portion of the property tax continues to go towards the maintenance of the schools. The Town of Rockingham Annual Report details each year’s municipal and school tax rates.

More than ever, state and federal regulations and policies affect the capacity of the Town's educational facilities. It is critical that the local boards (School Boards, Select board, Village Trustees, and Planning Commission) maintain effective communication on issues affecting education in order to provide adequate continued educational facilities and programs that meet the needs of the community.

**GOALS**

1. To support an education philosophy that emphasizes the need to teach our young people that learning is a life-long process. Graduation from high school is a basic marker of the end of community-supported education. In a rapidly changing world, on-going learning for employment and enrichment is necessary.

2. To foster the development of an expectation of excellence in all the schools, from elementary through high school. Expecting a lower level of accomplishment from students due to income levels, parental involvement, special education ratios, or any other rationale, constitutes a self-fulfilling prophesy and should not be acceptable.
3. To assure that all students graduate from high school.

4. To encourage life-long learning opportunities, and assure that quality education is available to residents of all ages in recognition that residents cannot reach their full potential without education, and that quality education is a foundation of our community.

5. To increase citizen involvement at all levels of our educational system.

6. To achieve the highest quality of education available, while recognizing that education costs must be balanced against the community’s ability to support and pay the costs.

7. To improve the overall image and quality of our educational system.

**POLICIES**

1. Encourage better communication between and within the community, the Rockingham School District, Bellows Falls Union High School, Planning Commission, and the Town and Village Boards on issues affecting the education system, including its performance, and cost.

2. Encourage adult-level and continuing education programs within the community and work towards making such programs an ongoing part of our education system.

3. Promote and retain neighborhood schools where feasible.

4. Legislative mandates for program and facility requirements should be funded by the State.

5. Coordinate local educational programs with the business community on a continuing basis at both the Bellows Falls Union High School and continuing education level to provide students with necessary job skills.

6. Facility space and grounds should be used to their full capacity including allowance for use by community groups such as, but not limited to, adult education, athletics, curriculum and activities clubs, civic and similar groups.

7. Recognize that the type of housing established within a community can affect school costs through increasing enrollment or special needs.

8. Continue to upgrade the energy efficiency and handicap accessibility of all school facilities.

9. Continue to seek a balance between the need to improve and enhance the quality of our education system and the community’s ability to support and pay the costs.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While considered high priority, there is no ranking.
1. The School Board and community should request that local legislators propose legislation to require student attendance until age 18.

2. The School Board should assure that future facility plans consider energy efficiency and potential power generation as well as mandated building codes. Buildings (including renovation and repairs) shall be appropriately designed for the northerly climate and the neighborhood within which the facility is located.

3. The School Board shall investigate the demand for continuing education and inventory adult education options within the community including establishment of an interactive television site within the local Union School District, and work with the business community (commercial and industrial) to assess needs of employees for vocational and basic competency training.

4. The Planning Commission shall continue to share information with the School Board on upcoming development projects.

INVENTORY

Locations of the following facilities are found on the Educational Facilities Map.

1. **Bellows Falls Middle School**, School Street, Bellows Falls. (SC-1)
   Serves Rockingham Students grade five through eight plus seventh and eighth grade tuition students from Athens, Grafton, and Westminster. School capacity is set at 450 students. There are 17.2 classroom teachers including full-time equivalents. No playground facilities. Original construction date - 1926; latest addition – 1955, last renovation - 2012. Owned by Town of Rockingham School District.

2. **Central Elementary School**, School Street Ext., Bellows Falls. (SC-2)
   Serves kindergarten through grade four. Classroom capacity is set at 350 students. There are 17.66 classroom teachers, including full-time equivalents. Playground facilities available on site. Original construction date - 1954; latest addition - 2005. Owned by the Town of Rockingham School District.

3. **Saxtons River Elementary School**, School Street, Saxtons River. (SC-3)
   Serves kindergarten through grade five. Classroom capacity is set at 120 students. There are 10.8 classroom teachers, including full-time equivalents. Playground facilities available on site. Original construction date - 1915; latest addition - 2005. Owned by the Town of Rockingham and Town of Rockingham School District.

   Space rented from St. Charles Parish.

5. **Wells Street Playground**, Wells Street, Bellows Falls. (SC-5).
   Maintained by the Town of Rockingham under agreement between School District and Town. Open land/playground which originally was used for Wells Street School, now demolished.

   Serves grades nine through twelve including students from the Union District towns of Rockingham, Westminster, Grafton and Athens. Capacity is set at 700 students. There are

7. **River Valley Technical Center**, Springfield. The Bellows Falls Union High School is one of the sending schools to the River Valley Technical Center. Other schools are: Green Mt. H.S., Black River H.S., Springfield H.S. and Fall Mt. Regional H.S. in New Hampshire. Practical experience, along with classroom instruction. Offers programs ranging from culinary arts, engineering technology to the industrial trades.

8. **Windham Regional Career Center**, Brattleboro. Bellows Falls Union High School is also a member high school district of the Windham Regional Career Center which offers career exploration and vocational-technical training in conjunction with an academic program. Participating school districts also include Brattleboro, Leland & Gray, Twin Valley and Hinsdale, N.H.


10. **Pre-school**. Licensed childcare programs include full-day centers, part-day preschools, private kindergartens, and family home providers. Childcare providers are regularly evaluated by the State of Vermont and must meet child safety, performance, and other licensure guidelines. Previous Town Plans provided a list of providers, which are now continually updated on the Vermont Department for Children and Families Child Development Division (key search words – Bright Futures Childcare Information System).


13. **Vermont Adult Learning**. Program options include the Vermont Adult Diploma Program, the Bridge to College skills program, Essential skills program, the General Educational Diploma program. The offices in Springfield, and Brattleboro are available to Windham County residents. Local resource location for Vermont Adult Learning and the Vermont Adult Diploma Program is at Parks Place, Bellows Falls.

14. **Adult Technical Education**. The River Valley Technical Center offers continuing education opportunities with evening classes and workshops in the fall, winter and spring. The RVTC Daytime Technical Education programs should offer a chance for adults without a high school diploma to attend the Centers’ daytime programs as secondary students at no-cost to the individual.

The Center also offers programs for adults with GED to attend a daytime program at no cost. Other adults with a high school diploma can attend a daytime program on a space available basis with a tuition charge.
15. **Community College of Vermont.** Part of the State of Vermont College system, providing post-secondary courses in academic and vocational subjects, for an Associate Degree. Nearest location – Springfield and Brattleboro.
CHAPTER 5
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Town recognizes that the regional, national and global economies are critical to its own economic growth. On the other hand, the Town must take the lead in the strengthening and growth of jobs and businesses for its people and be the pivotal point for this community's economic development.

There is a critical need to coordinate development activity within the community and it is imperative that the Select board take the principal role in promoting and requiring coordination between interested individuals, organizations and offices.

For many years the community has strongly supported economic development. This is evidenced by the votes to develop the Industrial Park and to extend the water and sewer services to the Park, and creation of a local municipal development office.

The community hereby makes a commitment to continue to carry out economic development plans and projects in the future by a variety of means in order to enhance the community’s economic and cultural vitality and its quality of life.

The community must focus its economic development efforts to best use its resources and maximize benefits for its residents. A diversified economic and employment base is critical to the health of the community. The topography of the town makes utilization of suitable industrial and commercial land a crucial issue. An investment has been made by the community in infrastructure improvements which the community should promote. Other rural areas are not served by municipal water or sewer and do not, in many instances, have highway and rail access necessary for intensive development. The Industrial Park is almost filled, with only one lot remaining. Not all businesses are suitable for downtown locations, and the community should look at other areas where such development is desirable and feasible.

The Island area in Bellows Falls has been a core industrial and commercial area and includes a rail yard and fuel storage facility. While originally almost exclusively industrial, commercial uses have begun to locate on the Island. This area has also been used for auto repair businesses and other uses which are not suitable for the downtown area. Future development of the Island needs to balance the need for these types of businesses which may generate more noise and exterior storage than other commercial uses.

The opposite is true of Atkinson Street in Bellows Falls which is zoned residential with a mix of small commercial and mom-pop type stores. Expanded commercial development on Atkinson Street would have a significant impact on housing on that street and the adjacent streets. It may also have a negative impact on the downtown area and that should also be considered.

The community also recognizes the importance of agriculture and forestry and the town’s scenic, historic, cultural and recreational resources to the economy. These topics are addressed in other chapters and not included in the economic development chapter although recognized as playing a critical role.

Economic development needs to concern itself with the retention of existing businesses, assisting in the expansion of existing businesses, helping with start-up businesses and recruiting new businesses to the area. One of the issues which the community must deal with is the lack of jobs
for local residents graduating from post-secondary schools. Another issue is the ability to attract those with median income or better jobs in the town to live in the town and to provide suitable housing.

The Town will encourage businesses, both commercial and industrial, which are responsive to community interests, improve the town's median income, and generate income which is spent several times again supporting the local economy. Emphasis should be placed on seeking median income producing jobs.

The Windham Regional Commission Brownfields Reuse Initiative program has benefited several sites in Rockingham and has the potential to assist other property owners in re-developing sites. The program conducts assessments of Brownfields - abandoned or under-utilized sites. These are usually commercial or industrial properties that suffer from real or perceived contamination. The goal of the program is to help get them back into productive commercial or community use. Properties on Depot, Westminster, Canal and Mill Streets in Bellows Falls, and Main and River Streets in Saxtons River have received funding from this program.

Rockingham is in the unique position of having excellent accessibility to transportation systems, including rail, truck, and Interstate 91, good water and sewer capacity, and should take advantage of this in its planning for growth. The Island area and its continued association with both transportation and manufacturing is an important component of any development plans.

It is essential for the community to realize that other growth, including housing, schools, and roads, and increased demand for related services (e.g., fire, police, and highway) will accompany economic growth.

The community's economic activity has changed in the past years, and this must be recognized and dealt with. While at one time the center for the area, improved roads and larger discount stores and supermarkets in surrounding communities including Keene and Claremont, N.H., and Brattleboro, VT., have changed the focus. For many items, such as clothing, there is little choice within the local community. The lack of this type of merchandise can have a ripple effect on the remaining stores. Residents who travel to other communities to do the grocery shopping are likely to do other shopping out of town.

A Farmer’s Market operates in Bellows Falls from late spring through October and gains in popularity every season. This is a good example of encouraging people to shop locally.

The importance of the downtown/Square to the community must be acknowledged. It also must be recognized that the downtown serves more than just a retail function; it is home to offices, banks, local government, and entertainment. The community must understand its needs and seek active participation from residents, merchants, business people, and property owners to keep the focus on continued economic revitalization and marketing of the Square. The Square is part of the Bellows Falls Designated Downtown which was first recognized in 1999 and continues. The Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance (BFDDA) is the organization which supports the designation.
In addition to the Town Development Office, the Southeast Vermont Community Action Micro Business Development program offers business counseling to assist participants to evaluate a proposed business concept and develop a business plan, and provides referrals to other programs.

One of the concerns raised by businesses is the quality of the workforce in the community. Workforce development is essential to enable further growth and progress. This includes the need for fundamental competencies in the workplace such as workplace readiness, and the ability to work in a team environment. Education is key to having a quality workforce. Education and economic development need to be woven together. Basic reading and writing skills are necessary and those who do not possess such minimum skills will have a difficult time earning a livable wage. Job readiness programs may assist in preparing people for the workforce. Providing summer jobs to young people can have a positive impact in developing a work ethic.

The Howard Dean Center in Springfield is an opportunity to provide additional training to workers. It needs to continue to work with local businesses to determine needs and to coordinate programs and schedules with all local schools.

Vermont’s workforce is aging. Young families leave for other job opportunities and students who go to school elsewhere often do not return to the state or area. Local opportunities for both education and jobs need to be strengthened for this trend to be reversed.

The advent of the Connecticut River Byway, seasonal events and other activities which draw visitors to the area has shown a need for more quality accommodations in the community with a range of prices. This does not just apply to tourists, however, as the need also exists for the business community. With the Town’s sale of the Windham Hotel, it is hoped that some of this need will be met.

There are several development actions being undertaken by the Town and/or other parties which have a positive impact on economic development in the town. These include:

Bellows Falls Downtown Development District. The Town is a Designated Downtown and a participating community in the Vermont Downtown Program. The Downtown Program has stimulated the creation of the Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance (BFDDA), a non-profit organization devoted to promoting and revitalizing the downtown. The Select board has approved the creation of a Design Review District and adopted relevant regulations for review of all exterior changes to buildings in this district.

Tax credits have benefited the Downtown with several renovation projects resulting in continued occupancy of downtown buildings. This includes the Hotel Windham on the Square, and the former Bellows Falls Times storage building at 6 Island Street, the Arms block on Westminster Street, the Rockingham Canal House, the building at 5 Square (Windham Antiques) and 2-20 Square (retail, offices, and restaurant uses). The projects range from rehabilitation, façade improvement, sprinkler systems to elevators. This results in the continued viability of historic commercial buildings and keeping the downtown a vibrant area.

Saxtons River Village Center Designation. The Village of Saxtons River is a Designated Village Center created under the Vermont Village Center Program. The tax credit program has made it possible for the nonprofit, Main Street Arts, to purchase and demolish an adjacent run-down building to construct
an addition with handicap accessibility and improved fire safety components which benefited from tax credits due to the Village Center designation.

Current and future revitalization includes re-use or re-development of old mill buildings and sites on the Island area of Bellows Falls which is covered in the Island Growth Plan. This Plan also includes infrastructure improvements for pedestrian access. Sites and buildings on Rockingham and Westminster Streets; extension of the downtown historic lighting style; completion of work on the Bridge Street Bridge, upgrade of the Depot Street bridge and improvements to the Bridge Street parking lot are other projects in line for needed work.

The benefits of both the Designated Downtown Program and the Village Center Program include making property owners eligible for tax incentives for redevelopment and rehabilitation projects in the designated districts to maintain and enhance buildings as well as priority consideration for various state grants and programs such as Municipal Planning Grants and the Community Development Block grant programs (CDBG). The Bellows Falls Designated Downtown and the Saxtons River Village Center delineations are depicted on the Downtown District and Village Center Designation Map.

Both designations further the Town Plan Economic Development Chapter goal as stated: “To revitalize the town’s traditional commercial centers in Bellows Falls and Saxtons River to enhance the town’s overall economic vitality and make the town a better place to live, work, participate in cultural events, and visit.” The designations also further the polices from the same chapter “To encourage sustained retail sectors in downtown Bellows Falls and Main Street, Saxtons River, utilizing existing space and recognize that an effective community-wide economic development strategy needs to include downtown revitalization as a central component” and to “Give priority to development in areas where infrastructure improvements are in place versus areas which would require additional expenditures for improvements.”

The designations assist in furthering the following Action Steps of the Economic Development chapter including

- “Seek funding from the Vermont Community Development Program and other sources for renovations to buildings suitable for commercial or industrial use and which are unused or underutilized.”
- “Assist the owners of old mill buildings with redevelopment plans and seeking available funding for repairs and/or renovations to these historic buildings.”
- “Upgrade/renovate substandard vacant and/or under-utilized buildings by working with property owners on redevelopment opportunities or by purchase and re-sale, and seek funding to accomplish this.”

The Downtown and Village Center designations achieve the following goals:

- Furthering the intent of the Historic Resources Chapter by providing financial assistance to encourage the preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, repair and adaptive re-use of commercial and industrial buildings and bridges; and
- To seek out new and compatible uses to allow architecturally and historically significant structures to continue as visual, cultural and economic assets to the community.
- Furthering the intent of the Land Use Chapter by maintaining viable and livable village and urban centers and encouraging commercial development in designated areas and sustaining economic development that can be supported by municipal services. The designations also assist in maintaining and enhancing the streetscape of the urban and village centers by preservation of significant groupings of buildings, landscape features and other amenities which, together, form community centers.
The Bellows Falls Downtown Designation was first enacted in 1999 and the Saxtons River Village Center Designation in 2003. Given the goals of the Town, and the benefits accruing from these programs, both designations should be a priority for continuation.

**Downtown Building Renovation.** Several renovation projects have followed those of the Exner and Howard Blocks. A storage building and brownfield site on Canal Street has been renovated into a restaurant-retail space. In addition, the Newberry’s/Odd Fellows building on Rockingham Street was renovated to provide living space on the upper floor and quality commercial space on the main floor. The Town bonded to restore the Bellows Falls Opera House making it feasible for live shows as well as movies. This re-opened the balcony and stage creating a 550 seat venue for film and performing arts. The old Fire Station on Rockingham Street had its first floor storefront area restored. In 2006, a fire damaged the Barbieri Block on Rockingham Street. It was hoped that the building would be restored, but the damage was significant and demolition was eventually completed.

**Downtown Infrastructure Improvements.** On Canal Street, the sidewalk was replaced, a decorative fence replaced the chain link fencing, pedestrian scaled historic style streets lights were installed, and a small pocket park was created. In the Square, streetscape improvements were carried out which included replacement of brick bump-outs, granite edging along tree planting spaces, new classic park benches and some new trees.

**The Connecticut River Byway designation.** Management of the Connecticut River as a scenic resource, with appropriate development to encourage tourism and river-based recreation could enhance Rockingham’s tourism industry. One tool to accomplish this is the Connecticut River Byway, designated at the federal and state level as a National Scenic Byway. One of the Byway’s goals is to encourage and support tourist traffic along the route. Bellows Falls is a “Waypoint Community,” with an interpretive-visitors center for the Byway located on the Island.

**Inter-modal Facility.** The Green Mountain Railroad train station and other facilities on the Island are being considered for redevelopment by the Town as an inter-modal transportation transfer facility, providing a link between train, bus, and private cars. This development, with improved pedestrian links to downtown Bellows Falls, could greatly increase foot-traffic in the downtown business district.

**Connecticut River Transit.** Connecticut River Transit has completed its maintenance facility on Route 5 in Rockingham, opposite the Industrial Park. A Park and Ride is planned for a portion of the site.

**TLR Mill.** A $1 million Federal Environmental Protection Agency cleanup of the Town-owned former paper mill removed the asbestos contamination and collapsed building sections.

**Railroad Tunnel.** Work was completed in 2008 to eliminate the railroad tunnel height restriction imposed by the tunnel beneath the Bellows Falls Square. The tunnel is a historic resource within a historic district.
The downtown business district in Bellows Falls serves the entire town and surrounding communities. It is easily accessible from Westminster, Walpole and North Walpole. Restoration of the Vilas Bridge connection is important in maintaining the economic links with Walpole.

Making the downtown easily accessible from the public parking on the Island is equally important. A downtown forum (2006) included a pedestrian bridge of the Canal between Depot and Bridge Streets to improve the pedestrian link between parking and downtown businesses as an important element. This included a “canal walk” along the Canal behind the buildings on the east side of the Square, and improving the rear elevations of the buildings. Adequate signage to direct vehicles to public long term parking and visitors to the downtown area can also assist in bringing business to downtown.

A Gateway Plan was developed to improve the streetscape and pedestrian access and slow traffic entering the Designated Downtown area. The Bellows Falls Wastewater Department, the Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance and Town departments have worked cooperatively to begin planting of landscaping at the north end (intersection of Rockingham and Atkinson Streets). Due to costs involved, these are multi-year projects.

Green Mountain Power and the other electrical companies relocated the substation further east on Bridge Street. (See Chapter 3, Energy)

Renewed interest in developing potential geothermal resources within Bellows Falls offers the possibility of business for local contractors as well as economic benefit through cleaner sources of heating and cooling of select buildings and businesses.

GOALS

1. To encourage sustainable, long-term economic growth with minimum environmental impacts, in order to provide for the continued well-being of the community.

2. To encourage development within the areas designated in the Town Plan and Zoning Bylaw and within the capacity of the community’s infrastructure, educational system, and water/sewer systems.

3. To create jobs in pace with the employment needs of town residents and to strengthen and diversify the local economy by supporting the growth of targeted businesses.

4. To encourage commercial and industrial businesses which create median income producing jobs, and generate income which is spent several times again supporting the local economy.

5. To revitalize the town’s traditional commercial centers in Bellows Falls and Saxtons River to enhance the town’s overall economic vitality and make the town a better place to live, work, participate in cultural events, and visit.

POLICIES
1. To open and improve communication and coordination between the various organizations dealing with economic development including the Bellows Falls Area Development Corporation, the Greater Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance, municipal boards including Select board, Bellows Falls and Saxtons River Boards of Trustees, relevant school boards, the Planning Commission, Development Office, and state and regional organizations.

2. To affiliate with and encourage development organizations which represent and serve the interests of the entire community and which are held accountable to the Select board and community.

3. With direction from the Select board and community input, prioritize and specify goals, ascertain which party is responsible for specific actions and hold them accountable to see that results are delivered to the community.

4. Strive for continuity in economic development programs and provide for regular communication between development organizations and boards, particularly the Select board.

5. In the short-term, strive for economic development which employs the current workforce while increasing the quality of jobs and skills of the workforce, while in the long-term improving the town's median per capita and household income.

6. Through the Development Office, and with local public input, prepare a community economic development plan and seek funding assistance for economic development from state and national legislators and public and private partnerships.

7. Determine which industries the town desires and give clear guidance within applicable regulations as to what requirements must be met.

8. Encourage sustained retail sectors in downtown Bellows Falls and Main Street, Saxtons River, utilizing existing space and recognize that an effective community-wide economic development strategy needs to include downtown revitalization as a central component.

9. Development efforts need to include:
   Creation and expansion of retail and commercial activity in addition to manufacturing. Meeting the needs of and assisting existing businesses.

10. Encourage tourism by upgrading the community's general appearance and the attractiveness of the downtown business district and surrounding residential neighborhoods and recognizing the scenic and historic sites which attract visitors.

11. Give priority to development in areas where infrastructure improvements are in place versus areas which would require additional expenditures for improvements.

12. Encourage development which produces a net benefit to the Town in terms of tax dollars generated, jobs created or retained, and wages paid, compared to new demands for municipal services.
13. Work towards improved and upgraded parking facilities to serve the downtown Bellows Falls commercial area. This should be done without demolition of additional buildings which reduces the number of available storefronts, negatively impacts the grand list and advances economic malaise.

14. Recognize the importance of the downtown location of the Bellows Falls Post Office as a part of the economic climate of the Square, and discourage relocation outside the central business district.

15. Encourage rail service by Amtrak and public bus service at current or increased levels.

16. Support “creative economy” initiatives in the arts and in business.

17. Encourage banks with local branches to work with first-time home buyers to make home ownership feasible.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While considered high priority, there is no ranking.

1. The Planning Commission and Development Office will continue to identify sites for future industrially zoned land giving preference to locations near to or adjacent to existing industrial areas and with proximity to adequate electrical service and utilities. Further, do build-out analysis for existing Industrial Park and areas.

   Consideration should be given to restricting some areas to industrial development only, due to the limited land available for such use.

2. In conjunction with the Downtown Designation, the Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance, the Select board, Bellows Falls Trustees, and Planning Commission will prioritize projects on the Island and downtown area, and set time frames for beginning work.

3. The Town, working with the Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance and other organizations, will seek funding for the Gateway projects, including match money for potential grants.

4. Seek funding from the Vermont Community Development Program and other sources for renovations to buildings suitable for commercial or industrial use and which are unused or underutilized.

5. The Select board and Development Office will seek re-funding for the Revolving Loan Fund utilizing public and/or private sources.

6. The Select board and Development Office will issue a Revolving Loan Fund annual report based on standard accounting practices including information on the fund balance, amounts of loans, grants or disbursements, loan payments received or forgiven, and closing balance of funds available.
7. The Select board will develop a tax stabilization policy to provide guidance as to which projects qualify for stabilization.

8. Encourage the owner or other parties to renovate the former Gates Garage/Meatland building on Westminster Street for re-use or re-sale.

9. Encourage the owner or other parties to redevelop the former Barbieri’s Block at 15 Rockingham Street for re-use or re-sale.

10. Assist the owners of old mill buildings with redevelopment plans and seeking available funding for repairs and/or renovations to these historic buildings.

11. The Planning Commission will hold a forum to receive input on appropriate uses for the Island and the Granger Street industrial zoning districts giving consideration of the need of certain types of businesses for locations other than a traditional downtown due to noise and other factors.

12. The Planning Commission will hold a forum to receive input on appropriate uses for Atkinson Street giving consideration of the impact on the existing residences on Atkinson Street and nearby streets.

13. Develop plans for renovation and/or re-development of the TLR property, and actively seek funding for such. In the short term, stabilize the current buildings against further degradation.

14. The Town will develop plans for future use of the Bridge Street properties beneficial to the business district.

15. Continue to upgrade the downtown Bellows Falls commercial district lighting as recommended in the September 10, 1992 report of lighting consultant James Stockman. Period style lighting will be extended along Bridge, Westminster, and Canal Streets.

16. Continue to improve downtown parking, sidewalks, and access to buildings to comply with the American’s with Disabilities Act.

17. The Town, working with property owners, shall re-furbish and improve (and continue maintenance thereafter) the appearance of the walking area from the railroad station to the Square to the Windham Hotel including work on the Canal bridges, building facade stabilization and improvement, and restoration of the railroad station track-side canopies.

18. Using the preliminary pathway plans, the Town should work towards establishing a linear park with a multiuse path along the Canal.

19. Continue to replace deteriorated sidewalks in the Bellows Falls and Saxtons River commercial districts.

20. Investigate the re-location of Mill Street, and the benefits resulting from relocation.

21. Continue to participate in the Designated Downtown and Village Center designation programs for Bellows Falls and Saxtons River.
The following Action Steps are considered important to the community but less so than those listed above. These items are not ranked.

22. Work with the adjacent towns of Westminster, Grafton, Athens, Chester, and Walpole and Charlestown, N.H. in furthering economic growth and vitality for the area including studying formation of a state-recognized regional development corporation with these communities if no affiliation is made with another regional development group; establish a regular meeting schedule in this regard.

23. The Town will continue to work with the Connecticut River Byway Council to seek funding for the Connecticut River Byway Waypoint Welcome Center for exhibits, audio and visual materials, a regional curator, and other materials.

24. Planning Commission sponsorship of an annual meeting between organizations dealing with economic development including the Select board, Trustees, Development Office, Chamber of Commerce, Bellows Falls Area Development Corporation and the Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance.

25. Appoint one Select board member to monitor economic development projects and schedules.

26. Through the Development Office begin a campaign to target companies which the community wishes to attract.

27. The Town must work towards improving traffic circulation in the Island/Canal Street/Square areas including consolidation of transportation services, both rail and bus, on the Island giving due consideration to the multiple uses on the Island from pedestrian and tourist visitors to light and heavy trucks.

28. The Chamber of Commerce and the Development Office should continue to publish and update a Rockingham tourist directory at least every two years. They should also improve public informational signs (e.g., directions to the tourist information center and to the parking areas).

29. Upgrade/renovate substandard vacant and/or under-utilized buildings by working with property owners on redevelopment opportunities or by purchase and re-sale, and seek funding to accomplish this.

30. Maintenance of a database of available rental space, buildings, and appropriately zoned land for commercial and industrial uses.

31. Encourage TransCanada to continue to adequately staff and maintain the Fish Ladder Visitors’ Center such as with the current partnership with the Grafton Nature Museum.

32. The Bellows Falls Village Board of Trustees will formulate of a water/sewer line extension policy.
CHAPTER 6
AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

As in most Vermont communities, agriculture in Rockingham has undergone significant changes in the past fifty years.

While there were approximately 45 operating farms in the Town in the mid-fifties, those numbers have fallen over the years. At that time, the local farm economy supported a large cream and cheese company, two farm machinery dealers, four grain stores and dealers, and three farm trucking companies. A “milk train” ran from Bellows Falls to Boston six nights a week.

While Rockingham currently has few large farm operations, the many smaller farms are an important part of the local farm makeup. Local farmers participate in the Bellows Falls Farmer’s Market. It is open every Friday afternoon from May through October and provides an outlet for the vendors who come from Rockingham and other neighboring communities.

The last remaining large dairy farm was the Fisher farm located on Pleasant Valley Road, which sold its herd in 2010 and diversified its agricultural operations to include electric fencing and excavation work. The nearby Stickney farm, also a former dairy farm, is currently licensed as a dairy heifer replacement business supporting other farmers.

Other farms include:
- Morningstar Perennials, Darby Hill Road – apples, other berries, pears, pre-picked produce, and over 500 varieties of Vermont hardy, potted perennial flowers, trees, vines and shrubs;
- Rockingham Hill Farm, Meeting House Road – special events;
- Dayspring Farm, Darby Hill Road – sheep, cattle
- Lillie Brook Farm – diversified farmstead, special events
- Vermont Country Store Tree Farm, Route 103/Rockingham Road;
- Vermont Apple Orchard, Leach Road – apples;
- Meadowsweet Farm, Saxtons River Road – wool, sheep.

Small farms, not listed here, also continue to operate in the community with products used by the owner or sold on a small scale. In addition, other residents keep horses and other livestock. While these might not be large operations, the smaller parcels of good farmland remain an important asset. The potential use and value of the small farm is an important resource for the future and should be preserved and encouraged.

Maple sugaring is also quite prevalent in the area, with southern exposure sugar bushes producing sap with good sugar content.

 Farms are valued by tourists and residents alike for their production of food, picturesque pastures, livestock, fields, and buildings. Farms maintain open land, in counterpoint to the wooded hillsides, thereby increasing the aesthetic value of the community. As Rockingham (and the
region) continues to place increasing emphasis on encouraging tourism, the aesthetic value of the farms will similarly increase; whether full-time or part-time. Continued brush hogging of open fields should be strongly encouraged in order to keep this land open. It does not take many years before unmaintained open fields are overgrown with saplings.

Many Vermont residents have come to view the local farms with their picturesque pastures and buildings as a given and have forgotten that the farmer is also a businessperson. Very few residents rely on agriculture to earn a living. Many landowners do limited farming in order to generate income for taxes on the land. Cutting fields for hay also keeps the land open. Equipment cost for haying is high, however, which limits the number of persons active in providing haying services. These activities have the added benefit of keeping many parcels open land. The type of farming has been gradually changing from dairy farming to vegetable farming. Small orchards may face increased international competition. Researching other products for farm revenue is needed.

Protecting important agricultural soils should be part of a Town vision for the future of agriculture in Rockingham. (See below for information on specific parcels.) Development of a plan for conservation of important agricultural lands through land trusts or other mechanisms should be undertaken. Various programs and mechanisms should be used to preserve farmland. The following are some methods which property owners and interested residents may use.

Vermont Land Link, managed by the Vermont Farmland Access Network and operated from the University of Vermont Center for Sustainable Agriculture, seeks to match landowners who want to keep their farm land active with people looking to farm. The program began in mid-1998. The local program works in conjunction with the Windham County Farm Bureau. Land Link does not just work with large parcels of land. Even parcels which are five to twenty-five acres in size are suitable if good tillable land. Both landowners and farm seekers complete a Land Link application which is entered into the data base for a match. Information is then provided to each party who may then contact the other party about land availability.

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) makes loans and grants to nonprofit organizations, municipalities and state agencies for the acquisition of land and for the purchase of conservation easements. All conservation projects are protected in perpetuity by legal instruments (conservation easements) recorded in the land records which go with the land upon resale. The conservation easements are co-held by the applicant organization or a sponsoring organization, VHCB, and, in the case of farmland conservation projects, by the Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food & Markets.

Changing policies towards the use and cost (due to reduced subsidies) of limited water resources in the west and midwest, coupled with an increasing focus on locally-grown or specialty products, may result in a continued place in the economy for the smaller farm in the future. The rising cost of fuel may mean that communities will need to grow food on smaller farms and smaller parcels of land.

The community has indicated a desire to preserve the farm and rural character of the Town. This can be done, but the community must support the efforts made to accomplish this and to a degree be willing to pay the cost.

Ninety-seven agricultural parcels were inventoried by the Town working with the LESA program in 1990. This program (Land Evaluation and Site Assessment) evaluates farm land according to size, location, soil, productivity and the like. The LESA Report was done with the support of the
Windham Regional Commission and is an inventory of the quality and relative importance of remaining farm and open land. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) developed a ranking of all soils, including Rockingham's, which is published in "Agricultural Value Groups for Soils: Windham County, Vermont."

The LESA survey has two major parts: 1) land evaluation which determines the quality of the land for agricultural uses based upon chemical and physical properties of the soil; and 2) site assessments whereby non-soil factors are used to assess sites and areas of land for their agricultural viability. The Rockingham LESA Tabulation Report lists the parcels of farmland by score. The LESA maps are incorporated into the Town Plan.

Some of the areas identified as prime farmland by the NRCS include the "Upper Meadows" area adjacent to the Connecticut River, the area near Bartonsville next to the bow of the Williams River and north of the railroad crossing, the area on both sides of the Saxtons River just southwest of Saxtons River Village, the Barbers Park area next to the Saxtons River and adjacent to I-91, the former Steamtown property just north of Bellows Falls and next to the Connecticut River (see below), and the area north of Herricks Cove off Route 5. These are identified as prime agricultural land by the NRCS and the NRCS maps are incorporated by reference into the Town Plan.

Of the areas listed by NRCS as prime farmland, the Upper Meadow land, the land by the bow of the Williams River, the area southwest of Saxtons River Village, and the Barber Park farm are listed within the top twenty total LESA scores. These areas are significant agricultural resources, based on the LESA land evaluation. Some of this land is near or within potential future “expansion zones” as population increases.

Site assessment of the relative importance of agricultural land must use all of the resources available to adequately address community concerns and to assess the true value of the land. In addition, site specific conditions may impact the actual agricultural value of some parcels to the point that they should not be included as important to agriculture. An example of this is the so-called Steamtown property which has more important value to the community for commercial-industrial use than agricultural use due to its location near the railroad and public investment in infrastructure improvements including water and sewer. Since the conclusion of the LESA evaluation, some lands have been improved which were not rated very high at the time of the survey. Consideration should be given to improvements done to specific parcels in the interim when evaluating the value of the land as an agricultural resource.

GOALS

1. To encourage preservation of high quality agricultural and forest lands, including currently active full-time and part-time farms, for future generations.

POLICIES

1. Agriculture has been a contributing and balancing element to employment and the economy of Rockingham. With Vermont's soil base and water quality, the ability to grow local food, and the scenic and tourist character, Rockingham should conserve the
irreplaceable agricultural resources and knowledge which might again be needed to provide sustenance for area residents.

2. The importance of leased farm land, whether for pasturage or sugaring, and the detrimental effect of the break-up of large parcels into smaller ones creating impediments to continued agricultural use, should be recognized and consideration and encouragement given to cluster development.

3. Soil productivity is the most important criterion and the most productive soils should be preserved despite proximity to other man-made improvements, with the exception of the so-called Steamtown property.

4. The Town should continue its support for the Bellows Falls Farmers’ Market and encourage periodic farmers’ market days during the winter months.

5. Prime agricultural soils, capable of supporting economic agricultural operation, should be devoted primarily to farming or to uses which will maintain such lands for agricultural use.

Secondary agricultural soils which are not developed should be used for development which would not materially reduce the productivity of these soils and prevent future agricultural use.

6. The construction, expansion, or provision of public facilities and services should not significantly reduce the resource value of agricultural land unless there is no reasonable alternative and the facility or service has been planned to minimize its effect on the adjoining lands.

7. The Town should encourage and protect the continued use of lands for agriculture and forestry in order to keep these areas of non-renewable resources available and to help meet existing and future needs for food, forage and fiber.

8. The Town should support value-added processes on the farm, diversification of products, and local marketing efforts. This includes small processing businesses for farm products, such as cheese making, freezing and canning, flour mills, and limited-size meat processing plants.

9. The current tax policy on active farms should be formulated in order to help preserve and encourage the few existing full-time active farms.

The Town should also revise its tax policy on part-time farms so as to encourage open land and diversified agricultural use.

10. The community should preserve the Town's rural character and to provide for diverse economic opportunities in farming and forestry.

**ACTION STEPS**
The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While these are considered high priority, they are not ranked.

1. The Planning Commission will review the Planned Residential and Planned Unit Development sections of the zoning bylaw and give consideration to allowing density increases where clustered development is proposed and which protects agricultural soils.

2. The Town should consider establishing a Conservation Fund to facilitate the purchase of development rights of important agricultural/forest/natural resource land. The first step should be a study of other communities which have created and used conservation funds to further preservation of resource lands.

3. The town should work with appropriate organizations, such as the Vermont Land Trust, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Vermont Land Link program to provide information to property owners in Rockingham about conserving farm land and the farm matching program.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. While these are considered a priority, they are not ranked.

4. Appraise and assess land for tax purposes based on the use of the land consistent with the Zoning Bylaw and any other local regulation or state law, including Act 250, affecting the current or prospective use of land.

5. Continued support for the Use Value Appraisal Program (the current use-value program). Current listings of Rockingham parcels enrolled in the program are available at the Listers Office.

6. Subject to community input and direction, encourage the creation of land trusts including ownership, purchase and resale with limited development rights, conservation easements, and transfer of development rights. This should be done with input from the Select board and Planning Commission upon determination that projects will benefit the community and further its goals.

7. Encourage agriculture support services and industries including processing and distribution centers in order to provide greater diversity within the agricultural economy.

8. Develop a policy to offer tax stabilization for new farm structures to farmers who participate in or are eligible to participate in the current use program.

9. Establish a program within the Development Office to assist both existing and new farmers including part-time farmers, and to coordinate the program with ongoing marketing and publicity projects such as tourism or small business marketing.

10. As provided for in Chapter 7, the Rockingham Conservation Commission should work with the Planning Commission to inventory natural resources, and to work with landowners who seek to preserve farmland.

INVENTORY
See the Agricultural Lands Map.
FOREST RESOURCES

Forested land provides products such as lumber, firewood, and maple syrup. In addition it provides benefits in the form of wildlife habitat, recreation, watershed protection, and scenic areas. Forested land can be managed for a single purpose, such as lumber, or for multiple-uses. Woodlands that are not directly managed (e.g., “Left to grow on their own”) still retain the potential to produce and provide benefits. While unmanaged lands retain potential to provide benefits, there are situations where a long term lack of management negates or lessens possible benefits. For instance, erosion problems left uncorrected result in loss of roads and trails over time, which later are expensive to repair. It also may result in silting of brooks and wetlands. As our forests age, the window of opportunity for improvement to the forest from thinning fades as well. This can also apply to management of the urban forest including street trees.

As the need for forestry products and woodland benefits continues to increase throughout the world, the importance of maintaining land capable of producing these products and benefits increases. Because such land is not now used productively makes it all the more important that its suitability for the production of forest resources should be protected from inappropriate development.

The "Forest Land Evaluation and Site Assessment" (FLESA) process, administered by Natural Resources Conservation Service, is available which could assist the Town in identifying, quantifying and evaluating its prime timber-producing, wildlife, recreation, and scenic forest land. "Prime" forest land, as such, has not been identified in Rockingham.

Timber production, wildlife habitat, watershed protection, recreation and scenic views are important assets that the forest provides. Careful and long-term management of forest resources is essential to continue these uses. Residents who are used to an old growth forest are at times concerned with the debris left behind after a logging operation has ceased. However, logging and leaving piles of brush behind benefits wildlife. The moose and turkey populations have benefited from the increase in forest land. Logging benefits the deer as it can provide more browse areas. Cut areas provide habitat for some birds while a mature forest provides habitat for others.

The Town has a forest management plan for its land in Grafton, and Bellows Falls Village has a plan for the Village watershed area. These plans encourage leaving of cut debris on the forest floor where it decomposes and replenishes the forest soil.

Conservation easements and land trusts can assist in assuring the future preservation of these resources.

In addition to the woodlands and forests, urban forest resources are also important resources. The trees, parks, and “green space” within Rockingham’s more urban areas, particularly the villages of Bellows Falls and Saxtons River, enrich of the character of these areas. In addition to their scenic values, such trees and greenspace provide wildlife habitat, windbreaks, shade, dust and exhaust filters, and modify local climate. Urban forest resources also provide important buffers between neighboring properties and land uses.
The concern regarding management of the urban forest led to formation of a citizen Tree Committee. The Tree Committee assists the town in tree planning and planting. The Tree Committee was instrumental in development of a town Street Tree Care Plan in 1998. The goals of the committee and the plan are to promote the care of urban trees, to develop policies affecting tree planting, maintenance and removal, and to develop a work plan for planting and maintenance of municipal trees. A limited inventory of trees along the major streets in the two villages has been completed.

During periods when the Town Plan has been re-written, the topic of creating a Conservation Commission in Rockingham has come up. The Town voted to create a Conservation Commission at its annual meeting in March 2010. The Conservation Commission is now an active town board and has also taken on the responsibilities of a local energy committee.

**WILDLIFE & PLANT RESOURCES**

Wildlife has long been a major attraction of Vermont for both residents and nonresidents. Development in areas particularly suited to wildlife invariably reduces or eliminates many kinds of animal life by destroying or breaking up their habitats into smaller or isolated areas.

Woodland wildlife habitats are often characterized by large softwood tracts at higher elevations and mixed hardwoods at lower elevations. Equally important are the margins between these wooded areas and open land or scrub forests. These habitats along the edges of woodlands support a large variety of large and small animals and birds. In addition, the marginal areas are particularly important in providing conditions essential for wintering deer. Recently logged areas can provide similar benefits as noted above. Reference should be made to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife winter deer yard maps for specific locations which are critically important.

Wetland areas are marshy areas of standing water, lowlands with saturated soils and a variety of seasonal wet environments. Such areas are essential to the survival of many species of animal and plant life. They provide the complex environment for watering, breeding, feeding and cover for completely different kinds of fauna and flora from the woodland areas.
Closely allied to the wetlands are the beaver areas. Beaver ponds and swamps are especially rich wildlife zones. While the beaver are relatively prolific and adaptable, the associated wildlife is not.

Shore land wildlife areas along the Connecticut River, its many coves/setbacks, and its tributaries (Saxtons River and Williams River), and Minards Pond are specific areas due consideration. In addition to these specific open water areas it should be noted that stream and pond buffer zones serve to preserve shore land wildlife habitats provide scenic value and provide water quality and flood protection benefits. Herricks Cove, on the Connecticut River, was designated an “Important Bird Area” by the National Audubon Society and Vermont Audubon Council in 2000. This is one of 21 such significant sites in Vermont.

Natural areas in Rockingham which should receive special consideration when any development within them is contemplated have been identified. Refer to the Forestry & Wildlife Resources Map. Plant resources include rare and endangered species. It is important to consider that these resources are not replaceable. Once destroyed, these natural areas cannot be easily reclaimed. Proposed development within or in close proximity to these areas should receive specific study and direction by the Planning Commission. Development should be so controlled that the resource value of these areas is not destroyed or significantly decreased.

Plant material which is native to the area is important for wildlife. Invasive species can reduce the food available for birds and animals. An example is the purple loosestrife which has invaded many wetlands supplanting the native species which provide food to wildlife. Landscape plans and replacement plants which are native to this area should be encouraged. The Bellows Falls Historical Society proposal for the Mill Street riverside park area in Bellows Falls includes planting of native species of trees and other vegetation. The Friends of Herricks Cove are also seeking to restore native shrubs and trees to that area.

Vegetation along the riverbanks helps stabilize riverbanks. Through the Trees for Streams program, the Windham County Natural Resources Conservation District was awarded a grant to plant 435 trees along the Saxtons River. After the trees were planted, citizen volunteers added mulch to give the trees added food and protection while they get established.

**EARTH RESOURCES**

Mineral/earth resources are another important natural resource. Mineral resources include sand, gravel, stone, and clay which are important for road building and maintenance, fill, erosion control and building. The town owns its own gravel pit in the Upper Bartonsville area off Route 103 and has a lease for gravel extraction on Brockways Mills Road. These town resources, and other privately-owned mineral resources, are important given the demands for road maintenance. Extraction activity, the transportation of the material, and eventual reclamation of the extraction site are critical issues as they relate to community need and neighborhood impact. The town recognizes that resource extraction can impact neighborhoods. Significant impacts are detrimental to the community and should be avoided or mitigated. (Refer to the Natural
GOALS

1. To plan for and protect forestry and wildlife resources.

2. To protect and preserve rare and endangered plants and animals and their habitats as much as is reasonably possible in a changing environment.

3. To protect and preserve access to earth resources where an undue adverse effect on adjacent uses would not result.

POLICIES

1. Restrict development in habitats which support endangered or rare species of wildlife where development would destroy or imperil those species.

2. Encourage development of forest management plans and logging according to acceptable silviculture management practices as defined by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

3. Establish riparian buffer strips along watercourses which prevent clear-cutting of trees along the embankments. Consider the steepness of the embankment and width of the waterway in determining the minimum footage necessary to provide adequate protection and to allow for flexible buffer strip depths.

4. Protect vital natural areas and locations of special educational, scientific, archaeological significance and other areas of ecological value.

5. Restrict the use of significant natural areas so that the resource or condition is not threatened and the public good upheld.

6. Encourage forestry for lands which are not useful for farming, residential or industrial-commercial uses. Well managed forests are also economically, environmentally, and aesthetically beneficial to town residents.

7. Discourage the use or development of sites or areas of endangered or rare species of wild flora where such use or development would destroy, diminish or imperil those species.

8. Prohibit development from significant wildlife habitats as identified on the town plan maps or identified from review of state or private studies, and regulate these areas to preserve such habitats.

9. The town is encouraged to purchase or accept rights to property that needs protection, and to encourage the sale of private property for public use, and to discourage sale or development of Town or Village forest lands.

10. The extraction or processing of minerals or earth resources should not have a significant adverse environmental impact, result in significant impact to neighboring property owners,
or represent a burden on municipal services or facilities. The extraction of such resources must ensure site rehabilitation suitable for alternative uses.

11. Encourage forestry practices which prevent damage to wildlife, abutting properties, streams and drainage patterns.

12. Provide for continued maintenance and upkeep of trees and plantings, including replacement planting when necessary, within the urban parks and along village streets. Encourage the planting of trees which have been shown to thrive in a challenging environment, such as paved town centers, and avoid tall growth trees under power lines.

13. Follow the Street Tree Care Plan for Rockingham and recommendations of the Tree Committee.

14. The Town will ensure the protection of the Connecticut River and its tributaries within the Natural Resources Overlay District by: A. Maintaining, restoring, conserving and providing stewardship for habitats and natural communities that support rare, threatened, and endangered species as defined by state and federal law. 10 VSA 5401 defines: "Threatened species" - a species listed on the State threatened species list under this chapter or determined to be a "threatened species" under the federal Endangered Species Act. "Endangered species" - a species listed on the state endangered species list under this chapter or determined to be an "endangered species" under the federal Endangered Species Act. The term generally refers to species whose continued existence as a viable component of the State's wild fauna or flora is in jeopardy.

15. Locations and habitats for rare, threatened, and endangered species along the Connecticut River within the Natural Resources Overlay District are to be protected from development or disturbance to preserve the unique ecological functions they serve and the significant community interests they represent.

**ACTIONS STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While these are considered high priority, they are not ranked.

1. The Planning Commission shall use available data from state and private sources to study, identify, and protect significant wildlife habitats such as deeryards. The wildlife habitat maps for the town are incomplete and further studies to update this resource information should be conducted within three years of adoption of this Town Plan.

2. The three municipalities (Rockingham, Bellows Falls and Saxtons River) should develop forest management plans for all municipally owned forest land to ensure it is properly managed in order to preserve the resources. See the Publicly Owned or Leased Land Maps and property inventory in the text for locations. Specifically:

   A. Bellows Falls Village should review and continue to implement recommendations made in the "Multiple Use Management Plan - Bellows Falls Village Forest, March 1989" and the "Bellows Falls Village Corporation Forest Management Plan, July 1983" and continue to work with the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation in this management program.
B. Saxtons River Village should contact the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation to establish a multiple use management plan for the Horan Forest, owned by the Village. This should include and provide opportunity for conservation timber management, habitat enhancement, trails and recreation.

C. Encourage the property owner of the Warner Center to work with Saxtons River Village on a compatible multiple use management plan for the Center, located adjacent to the Horan Forest.

D. The municipalities should pursue planning and implementation of passive recreational uses of the publicly owned forest lands including trails for hiking and cross-country skiing. See also Chapter 9, Recreation.

E. The municipalities should continue to work with the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation in developing and implementing long-range multiple-use management plans for the municipal forests.

3. The Planning Commission shall review and propose amendments to the Zoning Bylaw to establish suitable criteria for locating and operating gravel pits and other earth resource extraction facilities. At a minimum this should include standards addressing noise, traffic, methods to limit the impacts, and site reclamation.

4. The Select board should retain the Rockingham town forest land located in Grafton and continue to work with the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation to assure adequate woodland harvest in the future which would cover taxes due Grafton.

5. The Tree Committee should continue its work on developing a comprehensive Tree Plan including continued inventory of street trees within the villages of Bellows Falls and Saxtons River and seek grants for inventory and tree planting of street trees and village parks.


7. The Planning Commission will consider amendments to the zoning bylaw which would establish an overlay sub-district within the Natural Resources Overlay District for areas of known rare, threatened, and endangered species and their habitat(s) that prevents development or disturbance of those areas and directs development away from them. Development in these areas and associated buffer areas shall not be permitted. Where necessary, appropriate buffers shall be established by the appropriate municipal panel. Buffer widths will be based on the size, condition, and significance of the rare, threatened, or endangered species upon consultation with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department or qualified consultant.

The amendment should require the following:
(a) consultation by the applicant with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department;
(b) inclusion of a formal written opinion with the project application issued by the Department or other appropriate expert regarding the impact of the project on the species or habitat;
(c) the applicant to provide sufficient information about the species/habitat(s) to enable the appropriate municipal panel to understand the full implications of the project to the species/habitat(s) and whether the proposed development is compatible or incompatible with the conservation interests and needs of the rare species and the community’s interests.

8. The Planning Commission will consider amendments to the zoning bylaw which would establish an overlay sub-district within the Natural Resources Overlay District to conserve significant natural communities. Development shall be limited and, where necessary, appropriate buffers shall be established by the appropriate municipal panel. Buffer widths will be based on the size, condition, and significance of the natural community upon consultation with and review by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department or qualified consultant.

The amendment should require the following:
(a) consultation by the applicant with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department;
(b) inclusion of a formal written opinion with the project application issued by the Department or other appropriate expert regarding the impact of the project on the significant natural community;
(c) the applicant to provide sufficient information about the natural community to enable the appropriate municipal panel to understand the full implications of the project to the natural community and whether the proposed development is compatible or incompatible with the conservation interests and needs of the significant natural community and the community’s interests.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. While these are considered a priority, they are not ranked.

9. The Town should provide information/education on forest resources to residents including landowners, schools, planners and other town officers.

10. The Planning Commission should consider sponsoring a FLESA study to identify and categorize forest lands in the interest of recognizing the value of natural and economic resources in a manner which does not necessarily restrict development or property rights. Grants shall be sought and the work be done in cooperation with the Conservation Commission and Windham Regional Commission.

11. The Conservation Commission should work with the Planning Commission to inventory natural resources including implementing a FLESA study and to recommend guidelines for development within or in close proximity to special natural areas which would be incorporated into the Town Plan and Zoning Bylaws.

12. Request that the Vermont Departments of Forests, Parks, and Recreation and Fish and Wildlife provide short informal training sessions on natural resources for the Planning Commission.

13. The Tree Committee should encourage tree planting, especially along roadways, consistent with the Town's needs for clear rights-of-way and drainage ditches and the preservation of scenic views. See also the Scenic Resources element of this Plan.
14. Subject to community input and direction, encourage conservation easements and land trusts whose purpose is the preservation of natural resources and whose projects are found to benefit the community and further its goals. The Select board and Planning Commission will seek comment from community residents in making such determinations.

See also Agriculture, Action Steps, regarding Conservation Fund establishment.

15. The Planning Commission should consider development guidelines which would serve to protect critical habitats via buffer strips along streams, wetlands, and woods, encourage cluster development, and the establishment and preservation of greenways.

INVENTORY

While the valley areas still retain much open meadowland, the upper elevations are more wooded particularly in the southwest and north-central area of the community.

The Rockingham Town Forest land extends westerly from Bellows Falls Village in the Oak Hill area. In addition, Bellows Falls Village maintains its watershed in the Darby Hill area. Saxtons River Village has the Horan Forest located south of Route 121 and Maple Street. In addition, there is the Dorand State Forest which is located on both the east and west sides of the Cambridgeport Road in Upper Bartonsville. The Town also owns forest land in the Town of Grafton, located on the west side of the Cambridgeport Road.

The Conservation areas as shown on the Land Use map are primarily forest land.

Information on rare and endangered species is provided by the National Heritage Inventory. Due to the sensitivity of the exact locations of these rare and endangered species, only the "neighborhood" locations are available. The available information on deer yards/deer wintering areas comes from the statewide maps prepared by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife.

See the Forestry and Wildlife Resources Map for locations of these sensitive areas. This map does not represent a final inventory of critical resources because some may remain unknown or unmapped. Boundaries on the maps are approximate and the regional Vermont Fish and Wildlife Office in Springfield should be contacted for more information on exact locations and boundaries.
CHAPTER 8
HISTORIC RESOURCES

The Town of Rockingham was chartered in 1752 and Rockingham celebrated its 250th birthday in the year 2002. Rockingham has a rich past which has been set forth in two histories published by the Town. The first is the Hayes History covering the period from 1753 to 1907, and the second is the Lovell History which covers the period from 1907 to 1957. In addition, a pictorial history of old photographs was compiled in 1976 as part of the National Bicentennial Celebration. These documents are available to review at the Rockingham Town Clerk’s Office and at the Rockingham Free Public Library.

CONNECTICUT RIVER BYWAY

Rockingham is situated on the west side of the Connecticut River which runs from the Canadian border to Long Island Sound. The “Connecticut River Byway” has been designated a National Scenic Byway by the Federal Highway Administration, and the Waypoint Welcome Center has been built on the Island in Bellows Falls. In addition, the Connecticut River has been designated an American Heritage River by the Environmental Protection Agency. The Town of Rockingham, and particularly Bellows Falls Village, has a wealth of river history to share with visitors. From the Native American petroglyphs and fishing sites, an early canal to circumvent the “Great Falls”, log drives on the river to the beginning of the paper industry and creation of what later would be International Paper, there is much to tell about this community.

The Waypoint Center on Depot Street, Bellows Falls includes a permanent exhibit of a timeline of the river valley in this region. Both the interior and exterior exhibits display photographs of the river in years past, including its use for commerce and recreation, and the displays convey the river and region’s stories to residents and visitors alike. The building itself is designed to remind visitors of the railroad heritage of Bellows Falls from the locomotives to the railroad station canopies, as well as the spandrel arch bridge which spanned the Connecticut River from 1905 until 1982. It was the longest of its type in the world when constructed.

Much of the Rockingham section of the Connecticut River remains unchanged. The Upper Meadows Road neighborhood is an example of this with virtually no additional construction on the road aside from the old homes. The Upper Meadows Road area was originally laid out as the town’s center, Citydale, as shown on the 1700’s lots and ranges map of the town.

The permanent settlement of the community began with the early farmers who cleared the dense forest of trees. Once trees were removed, the fields needed to be cleared of stones resulting in the old stone walls which run throughout the Town. The beauty that the stone walls add to the countryside is not the only reason to protect them. Some of these mark the original lots and ranges by which the Town was first laid out, and these remain important for researching early property ownership. The stone walls are an unrecognized historic resource, and should be retained, or re-built if retention in place is not feasible, whether the project is town road work or development.

HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Rockingham has a number of National Register Historic Districts including almost all of Saxtons River Village, much of downtown Bellows Falls, Rockingham Village, the industrial “Island” area, and the rural Parker Hill district which encompasses land in both Rockingham and the town.
of Springfield. The National Register Bellows Falls Neighborhood Historic District includes a large residential portion of the village area between Center Street on the west, School Street on the north, Westminster Street on the east, and Westminster Terrace on the south. The Bellows Falls Neighborhood district recognizes the wealth of significant Victorian homes in a portion of the village which has seen little intrusion of incompatible architecture. In 2010, the Westminster Terrace District, the Williams Street Extension District and the George-Pine-Henry Street District were entered on the National Register. There are several structures which have individual designation including the Rockingham Meeting House, and the Miss Bellows Falls Diner. The Town Development Office is currently working with State and Federal officials to add the campus buildings at Vermont Academy in Saxtons River to the National Register. (Vermont Academy Campus Historic District was recently accepted as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places via a CLG grant funded by the National Park Service through the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation)

The Rockingham Meeting House is an extremely important historical building for the town, the state and the nation. Much work has been done over the past few years to stabilize the building and to make very necessary repairs including the foundation, exterior walls, roof and windows. Additional work was done on the old tomb which was taken apart, the stones reset, and the site covered again with soil and grass. Additional work is needed on the interior plaster. It is important that the work done, and materials used, be sensitive to the National Historic Landmark status of the building and its site.

The Parker Hill Rural Historic District was entered on the National Register in June, 1993. This Rural Historic District includes not only homes, but also fields and stone walls which are as much a part of the history of Rockingham as buildings. The Parker Hill Historic District encompasses the Parker Hill area in the Town of Springfield as well as the portion in Rockingham.

Bellows Falls was a strong railroad center and a junction for railways running north-south and east-west. The Green Mountain Railroad operates freight trains from the Depot Street area on the Island, and has operated excursion trains. The so-called "Sunshine" freight building south of the railroad station (circa 1850, National Historic Register listing), the oldest of the remaining railroad buildings in the State, was taken down in 1999 due to concerns about its structural stability.

See the inventory for a complete listing of historic districts. Additional information on each district is available at the town offices, and is on file at the Rockingham Public Library. The Rockingham Zoning Bylaw has one historic district which is regulated by bylaw and requires permits for any exterior work. This is the Meeting House Historic District. The Downtown Design Review District criteria stress the historic value of the commercial structures in the downtown core and the preservation of the important architectural features.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACTIVITIES
Effort has been made in the past to identify, protect and preserve important historic sites, and this work must continue. The community is interested in preserving and promoting its significant historic resources, architecture, and sites as an important record of its heritage. Several buildings and sites within the town have undergone work in the past few years which has added to and preserved the historic quality of the community.

- The Town, through a state enhancement grant, purchased and stabilized the Hotel Windham, one of the significant structures on the Square in Bellows Falls. Exterior work included a new roof and re-pointing of brick. The building was sold to private developers who continue to renovate.

- The Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance (BFDDA) worked with the Town and Housing Vermont to successfully complete rehabilitation of the Howard Block on the south side of the Square. This building had been closed after a fire, and the owner did not plan rehabilitation. The empty building was recognized as important to the downtown streetscape. It reopened with completely renovated apartments on the upper floors and commercial space on street level.

- New owners of the Newberry’s building on Rockingham Street renovated the building into several street-level storefronts and an apartment on the upper level, bringing back this empty building as an active participant in the downtown area.

- The Town, due to a tax sale, took ownership of the TLR/White Mountain paper mill complex on Mill St., Bellows Falls. Since that time, a fire damaged some portions of the buildings while other portions collapsed. The two brick portions of the building remain. This complex was part of the beginning of what is known as International Paper, and the site is significant to the paper mill industry. In addition, a portion of the original canal which bypasses the falls is located under one of the brick buildings. The Town has continued to seek to preserve this unique complex, but environmental contamination issues have delayed progress. Uses considered in the past have included a regional archeological center in conjunction with the designation of the Connecticut River as an American Heritage river and of the Connecticut River Byway.

- A combined effort of Town funds, State grants and private donations resulted in the restoration of the Bellows Falls Opera House and upgrades to other portions of the building. The effort started with the restoration of the Town Hall clock which again rings on the hour. State funds, with local Town matching funds, provided a grant to restore the Town Hall weathervane and repair the tower roof. The theater renovations included complete refurbishing of the theater with new seating, lighting, wall treatments, a movable movie screen, dressing rooms, digital projector, and re-opening of the balcony. The theater is now capable of hosting both movies and live shows and has been renamed the Bellows Falls Opera House. The Lower Theater was improved.
with paint, lighting, seating, and curtains and is available for meetings and shows which
do not need as large a stage as the Opera House space.

• At the Saxtons River Cemetery, the original carriage building was renovated for storage
and display of a horse drawn hearse which was originally built in Saxtons River.

While the Town has done much to encourage historic preservation, individuals and organizations
have also contributed much to increase the historic preservation efforts in the community. These
include:

• Rockingham Meeting House Association continues efforts to raise funds for further
restoration and creation of an endowment for future maintenance of the Meeting House.

• Efforts of Housing Vermont, Inc. to rehabilitate the Exner Block on Canal Street and allow
for residential occupancy and retail use while saving the unique tin interiors and exteriors
of the building. The Town and the Rockingham Arts and Museum Project took a leading
role in the restoration, and has done much to promote cultural and heritage awareness.

• Work of the Bellows Falls Historic Society to
continue developing the Adams Grist Mill and the
Wyman Flint Mill and surrounding lands as part of a
Historic Riverfront Park with an interpretive walking
trail system as part of a remediation of an old industrial
brownfield. The Grist Mill is located immediately
adjacent to the TLR Paper Mill complex and has
operating grist mill machinery. Efforts to catalogue and
use archival preservation practices to prevent
deterioration of and better present society artifacts to the
public.

• Work of many private homeowners who have enthusiastically renovated and painted their
historic homes and opened them for house tours. To recognize this effort, the CLG
sponsors the Rockingham Old House awards every other year

Older historic buildings were constructed prior to the enactment of building, fire, electrical and
other codes. Adaptive re-use of such buildings is important in many instances to the continued
existence of these structures. The importance of this issue resulted in the 2006 2nd edition of
was a joint effort of the Vermont Department of Labor and Industry, the Vermont Division for
Historic Preservation, and the University of Vermont.” Local codes should be reviewed to allow
for the same flexibility in the rehabilitation of historic buildings as the National Fire Prevention
Association, NFPA 1, Fire Prevention Code. Section 3-9 of that code states that “The provisions
of this Code relating to the construction, repair, alteration, enlargement, restoration, and moving
of buildings or structures shall not be mandatory for existing buildings or structures identified and
classified by the state or local government authority as historic buildings where such buildings are
judged by the authority having jurisdiction to be safe and do not constitute a serious life safety
hazard.”

Adaptive re-use of buildings has been on-going and should continue. In the past, the old
Rockingham Hotel on Rockingham Street was renovated and an addition constructed, creating
senior housing which is now known as the Canal House. Other buildings which once housed
industrial uses have been converted to commercial use or restaurants. A list of buildings which are possible candidates for adaptive re-use is not included in this document, but proposals for re-use should be encouraged if compatible with the neighborhood in which the property is located.

The community recognizes that some historic resources are sites other than buildings. These include the cemeteries in the Town at the Meeting House, Oak Hill, Restland (aka the Old Catholic Cemetery), the Immanuel Episcopal Church, Saxtons River, and Cambridgeport. Smaller cemeteries are also important and these include small sites on the Cambridgeport Road, Williams Road, off Randall Hill Road and Upper Bartonsville Road. The Rockingham Meeting House was used originally as both a house of worship and the town’s public meeting building. While the Old Congregational Church (now the Saxtons River Historical Society) on Main Street in Saxtons River and Christ’s Church are within the Saxtons River National Register of Historic Places District, other older churches have not been so included. These include the Immanuel Episcopal Church, St. Charles Church, Sacred Heart Church, and the former YMCA building (Methodist Church) on Atkinson Street, all within Bellows Falls.

CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION (CLG)

Rockingham was one of the first communities in the State to form a Certified Local Government Commission (CLG) and take advantage of the grants provided only to CLG communities. This program is designed to provide an opportunity for local communities to identify and protect local buildings, areas and landscapes of historical significance. As a creation of the National Historic Preservation Act of Congress, the CLG Program can provide additional assistance for communities wishing to maintain their historic character. The CLG Commission works with the Town, local historic societies, and individuals in seeking to further enhance the advantages to the community from historic preservation. The day-to-day work is done by a part-time Town staff person who carries out the programs which the Commission promotes. The CLG Commission represents all areas of the community, and programs should be inclusive of the rural as well as the village areas.

*The Town has continued its sponsorship of the Certified Local Government (CLG) Historic Preservation Commission which has allowed for continuation of historic preservation programs and events. The Commission has also been able to continue its “Historic Talks” program which has included sessions on exterior Victorian house color schemes, Victorian gardens, and petroglyphs. The CLG has also hosted talks on: Historic New England Architecture, Colonial Meeting Houses & Vermont in the Civil War.

*The CLG sponsors an annual Old House Award program in conjunction with National Preservation Week. Commission members have noted the increase in the number of houses nominated and eligible for the award as a positive impact. The 2015 awards are listed on the town’s website at www.rockbf.org, search for the Rockingham Certified Local Government (CLG) page.

HISTORIC SOCIETIES AND MUSEUMS

The Town has three active historic societies including the Rockingham Meeting House Association, the Bellows Falls Historical Society, and the Saxtons River Historical Society. The last operates from an old church on Main Street, Saxtons River, and showcases a different exhibit
annually. The Bellows Falls Historical Society operates the Adams Grist Mill, an intact showcase of old grist mill machinery as well as collections of other local historical artifacts. The Meeting House Association focuses on the Rockingham Meeting House.

The Rockingham Free Public Library is a rich resource for local history research providing historic maps, catalogued photographs, a genealogy research collection, microfilm of historic newspapers, and a collection of objects specific to Bellows Falls, the Town of Rockingham and surrounding areas. The Library also provides local history education programs, information for displays and written material, as well as reference services to assist and support local history research. The Library hosts genealogy workshops and provides genealogy reference services and research support to the local community and to individuals who send inquiries by mail or email. The Rockingham Free Public Library is a repository for all of the applications for National Register status.

**GOALS**

1. To preserve the historic buildings, farms, fields, walls and overall rural character of the community including historic buildings not located in designated districts.

2. To preserve the historic and architectural character of the villages of Bellows Falls and Saxtons River, and the designated historic districts.

3. To encourage the preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, repair, and adaptive re-use of historic houses, outbuildings, barns, commercial and industrial buildings, and bridges.

**POLICIES**

1. Land in and adjacent to areas of historical, educational, cultural, architectural or archaeological value should be used in a manner that will not reduce or destroy these values.

2. Whenever architecturally and historically significant structures are obsolete for their original purpose, new and compatible uses should be sought which will allow them to continue as visual, cultural and economic assets to the community.

3. Continued Town support for the Certified Local Government historic program which operates under the auspices of the Town Development Office.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While these are considered high priority, they are not ranked.

1. The Town will prepare and follow a long-term rehabilitation and maintenance plan for the Meeting House, a National Historic Landmark.

2. The Town will seek grant funds for streetscape improvements to the rear building facades on Canal Street.
3. The CLG Commission will sponsor a program by which property and homeowners may identify historic sites with markers and plaques.

4. The CLG Commission will continue working with other civic organizations to update as necessary and reprint the walking tour brochure for the downtown Bellows Falls area and develop a driving tour brochure for the other areas of the community. The Rockingham Meeting House brochure and the Bellows Falls Neighborhood Walking Tour brochures will be reprinted in August 2016.

5. The CLG Commission, in cooperation with local historical societies and other organizations, will encourage the preservation of the 19th century Victorian homes in Bellows Falls through education, public awareness programs, and other activities.

6. The Bellows Falls Historical Society should seek funds for repair and maintenance of both the exterior and interior of the Adams Grist Mill, the Wyman Flint Mill, brownfields remediation and further development of the Historic Riverfront Park and interpretive walking trail system.

7. The Bellows Falls Fire Department, working with the Rockingham CLG Historic Commission, will review local codes to incorporate language similar in intent to section 3-9 of NFPA 1, Fire Prevention Code.

8. Continued work and involvement by the town and Bellows Falls village in plans for any further work on the railroad tunnel under the Square, and the approaches to the north and south, to assure the continued viability of the historic downtown buildings and economy and access to the properties off Mill Street.

9. The CLG Commission should evaluate other areas of the community worthy of nomination to the National Register of Historic Places and hold public community-wide discussions to determine if additional nominations are warranted.

   The discussion should include the Upper Meadows Road area, portions of Missing Link Road and Old River Road, and the cemeteries and church buildings within the Town.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. While these are considered a priority, they are not ranked.

10. Seek grant money to research and write the Rockingham town history from 1957 to the present.

11. Encourage the preservation and interpretation of historically significant industrial and commercial sites, including manufacturing, mining, papermaking, energy production, agriculture and transportation.

12. The Select board, through the Development and Planning/Zoning Offices, will continue Town support for the Connecticut River Byway and Waypoint Center including working with adjacent towns, businesses and other organizations. Seek additional grants for
revolving displays, and a Waypoint curator to coordinate exhibits in conjunction with other Interpretive Centers.

13. Assist the Certified Local Government Historic Commission (CLG) to identify and catalog historic sites, structures, statuary, and archaeological sites within the town and assess the need for further protective measures. Make the current inventory readily available to the public.

14. In cooperation with the local historic societies and CLG, assist property owners to identify, preserve, and protect historic sites, foundations, stone walls, and ruins located on their property.

15. Encourage the formation of voluntary neighborhood groups to help preserve the historical heritage of neighborhoods including structures, trees and landscaping.

16. The Town will continue to support the railroad museum on the Island/Downtown Bellows Falls National Register Historic District in cooperation with the active railroads in the Town and State.

17. Under town direction, continue to participate in environmental assessment and necessary remedial action, to further re-use and/or rehabilitation of the town owned TLR mill buildings on Mill Street, Bellows Falls.

18. The Town, through the Development Office, will seek funds for a feasibility study for a regional Connecticut River archeological study center located in Bellows Falls and sited in underutilized historic buildings, such as the TLR mill buildings.

19. Encourage the State of Vermont to clean and maintain the monument marking the first Protestant sermon in Vermont, located at the intersection of Route 103 and U.S. Route 5.

**INVENTORY**

The following are historic sites within the Town:

(Except as noted, these are shown on the Historic Resources Maps. NRHP denotes listing on the National Register of Historic Places.)

- **H-1** Rockingham Meeting House  
  National Historic Landmark (NRHP)  
  Meeting House Road, Rockingham Village

- **H-2** Native American Petroglyphs  
  Bridge Street, Bellows Falls  
  Connecticut River, under Vilas Bridge

- **H-3** Bellows Falls downtown Historic District (NRHP)

- **H-4** The Island Area Multi-Resource Historic District (NRHP)  
  Bellows Falls

- **H-5** Saxtons River Village Historic District (NRHP)

- **H-6** Oak Hill Cemetery chapel, gazebo, and Civil War monument (NRHP)
Pleasant Street, Bellows Falls

H-7 Miss Bellows Falls Diner (NRHP)
Rockingham Street, Bellows Falls

H-8 Moore & Thompson Paper Mill Complex (NRHP)
Bridge Street, Bellows Falls

H-9 Meeting House Historic District, Rockingham Village (District within Rockingham Zoning Bylaw)

H-10 Immanuel Episcopal Church and Cemetery
Burial place of Hetty Green
Church Street, Bellows Falls

H-11 Adams Grist Mill Museum (NRHP)
Mill Street, Bellows Falls

H-12 Canal (NRHP)
Canal Street, Bellows Falls

H-13 Worrall Covered Bridge (NRHP)
Williams Road, off Route 103

H-14 Bartonsville Covered Bridge (NRHP)
Lower Bartonsville Road

H-15 Site of First Protestant Church Service in Vermont
Junction of Route 5 and 103 - Stone & brass marker

H-16 Site of First Minister's House
Whiting Road off Route 103, Rockingham

H-17 Stone Railroad Bridge
Over Connecticut River
Bridge Street, Bellows Falls

H-18 Upper Meadow Road Neighborhood
off Missing Link Road

H-19 Saxtons River Historic Museum
Main Street, Saxtons River

H-20 Parker Hill Historic District (NRHP)

H-21 Stone arch bridge, west of Route 5 &
south of intersection with Route 103
(near pull-off)

H-22 William Hall House (NRHP)
1 Hapgood Street, Bellows Falls

H-23  Bellows Falls Neighborhood Historic District (NRHP)

H-24  Old cemeteries as listed above. (Not on Historic Resources Map.)

H-25  War Memorial by James Novelli, Hetty Green Park
School Street, Bellows Falls

H-26  Rockingham Village Historic District (NRHP)

H-27  Westminster Terrace Historic District (NRHP)

H-28  Williams Street Extension Historic District (NRHP)

H-29  George-Pine-Henry Street Historic District (NRHP)

H-30  Hall Covered Bridge (NRHP)

H-31  Vermont Academy Campus (in process)

In many instances, local history is lost before being recorded. During informational hearings on this document, it was learned that much of the stone for foundations in Bellows Falls came from a quarry located on the west side of Route 5 near the railroad setback.

Efforts need to continue to record this history for future generations.
CHAPTER 9
RECREATION & CULTURAL RESOURCES

The town is fortunate to have a variety of both recreational and cultural opportunities available throughout the year. In addition, the close proximity to neighboring towns both north and south allows residents to enjoy activities nearby.

RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

The Connecticut River, which borders the Town along the east, is an important recreational resource for the community. The town's location along the river provides opportunity for boating and fishing which has seen a significant increase over the past five to ten years. A valuable summer resource is the Trans Canada picnic grounds and boat launch at Herricks Cove on the Connecticut River. This area was designated an “Important Bird Area” by the National Audubon Society and Vermont Audubon Council in 2000. This is one of 21 such significant sites in Vermont. While owned by the power company, this area is an asset to the community. Those individuals who use the facility have a responsibility to see that it is kept clean. Litter and vandalism have been a problem in past years. Due to the status as an important bird area, the passive recreational use should continue. Development of the area for camping trailer use would not be appropriate. Since 2001, an annual Herricks Cove Wildlife Festival has been held at Herricks Cove with live animal demonstrations, crafts, workshops and vendors. The festival is sponsored by local businesses, Audubon societies, the Grafton Museum and TransCanada Hydro.

Closer to the Bellows Falls Village area is the Bellows Falls Historical Society land adjacent to the lower section of Mill Street. The feasibility of inclusion of this area into any plans for renovation of the town owned TLR building on Mill Street has been referenced in prior Town Plans. In 2005 USGEN New England transferred this land, which includes the historic Adams Grist Mill and Wyman Flint Mill, to the Bellows Falls Historical Society. With assistance from many different funding agencies, the Society has been developing the riverside park area with historic interpretive walking trails and river access.

The Town Recreation Department provides a year-round program concentrating activities during the summer months. Programs are run at both the Saxtons River Recreation Area and at the municipal playground/pool in Bellows Falls. During the winter months the Recreation Department sponsors programs such as a volley-ball league using available school facilities.
The municipal swimming pool in Bellows Falls was constructed in 1958. The recreation center building was recently reconstructed (2014) and houses an office, game room and changing rooms on the first level and a grandstand and recreation office is on the 2nd level. Along with a newly constructed playground (2015), the 60-acre recreation center offers basketball and tennis courts, baseball fields, hiking trails, a hill for sledding, an outdoor skating rink and a ski tow. The outside areas are open 24/7. The Recreation Department staff have indicated a need for a year-round facility. As four-season activities continue to grow, the Department is finding it increasingly difficult to find available, suitable facilities which are not in use by the schools or other organizations.

The senior population currently enjoys physical and social activities provided by the Bellows Falls Senior Center located on Hyde Street in Bellows Falls. A few of the popular activities are the Bone Builder class, out-of-town trips and swimming at the Edgar May Recreation Center in Springfield, Vermont.

A teen facility has been listed as one of the top five community concerns brought up during the Rockingham Community Visit done by Rural Development in 1998 and continues to be a top priority today. It was felt that there is a need to expand opportunities for teenagers, especially during the after school period. Local residents teamed with the Boys and Girls Club of Brattleboro to open a teen center in Bellows Falls in 2006. This is an issue which needs to be addressed by all the neighboring towns together as teens from other nearby communities in Vermont and New Hampshire meet in Bellows Falls.

Recreational activities are offered by a wide variety of organizations in the Town. Some of these are area-wide and include other communities. For many, regional facilities located in other communities, such as Brattleboro and Springfield, are simply too far away to be accessed. A survey of the various recreational activities offered by the Town, YMCA, Senior Center, schools, and other organizations with a listing of all the available resources would be a valuable tool in deciding future program needs. This should include a condition assessment of publicly owned facilities, both town and school. Any survey should include what recreational services are offered to all generations. The community needs to keep in mind the recreational needs of its senior citizens. Both activities and facilities need to be multi-generational.

Existing class 4 roads throughout the Town, old roads in the Bellows Falls watershed area, and the Dorand State Forest provide a valuable resource for hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, mountain biking, and horseback riding.

Although privately owned, the Vermont Academy campus provides many recreational opportunities to town and village residents. The Vermont Academy hockey rink generously provides ice time for Public Skate on Sundays and to the Pleasant Valley Association youth hockey program. The Saxtons River Pirates, a semi-pro baseball team, is once again using Vermont Academy as their home field. There are also cross country trails for hiking, snowshoeing and skiing on the hills of the campus that are free and open to all.

**CULTURAL RESOURCES**
Rockingham’s cultural revival was highlighted in the September 2004 report “Advancing Vermont’s Creative Economy,” produced by the Vermont Council on Rural Development. In a section titled “Vermont’s Creative Economy at Work,” the report cited Rockingham among six Vermont places and events that illustrate that cultural heritage is central to a community and is an integral part and force in that community’s economic development.

The Town residents voted a bond to renovate the Town Hall theater and this work was completed in 2006. The theater was once again named the Bellows Falls Opera House. The renovations allow for both showing of movies and for live theater. The theater was totally renovated with new seating, wall coverings and curtains, a movable movie screen, handicap lift, air conditioning, and lighting. The projection room was moved back into its original location, and the balcony reopened. The arched windows, which had been covered over on the interior, were exposed and a curtain system installed to shut out light during shows. The theater renovations add to the earlier renovations to the Woman’s Club Room and its stage area, and the lobby area, and all go to reinforcing the role of the Town Hall as the heart of the community’s cultural and civic life. The Town continues to operate the movie theater, and has an events coordinator assist in scheduling live shows.

The opening of the Waypoint Center on Depot Street, Bellows Falls, has created another venue for exhibits or performances. The Center has a large open platform area which creates a stage for events. In the recent past, the Farmer’s Market has operated from the Waypoint Center. The facility is a multiple use resource for a variety of activities - including the town-wide Alumni dance which attracts hundreds of returning alumni from across the country. It is also the new home of the Bellows Falls Area Chamber of Commerce.

Although the Town of Rockingham has had some type of library since the 1790’s, in its present form the Rockingham Free Public Library had its beginnings in the middle of the 19th century. The library is a town owned facility, created by vote in 1887. It was housed in the town hall until 1909 when the original structure was completed. The building was donated to the town by philanthropist and steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, one of only four Carnegie libraries in Vermont.

In 2013, after Town residents voted a bond, the library underwent a major renovation to make the building energy efficient, ADA, safety and code compliant. An addition was built to make room for a new elevator, thus providing handicap accessibility to all three floors. The library specializes in recreational reading, reference materials, and genealogical and historical research. There are catalogued collections of photographs and postcards and a large collection of genealogy titles in the Historical Room including local newspapers on microfilm. The library collection has approximately 44,000 titles and ranges from books, magazines, movies, and audiobooks, as well as electronic resources such as eBooks, downloadable audiobooks, and online research databases.
The library provides Internet and computer access free to the public. The library actively participates in interlibrary loans through the Vermont Department of Libraries. In addition to regular library functions, the library in recent years increasingly has become a community center providing meeting space and an eclectic mix of programs for community members of all ages. The Library’s Youth Department works with local youth organizations to provide educational, creative and entertaining programming for youth of all ages. The Library has had significant building improvements over the last 5 years.

The Library's Long-Range Plan was written in 2005 and includes the following goals:

1. To keep the collection up-to-date and responsive to the needs of the community.
2. To continue to invest in new technology and remain up-to-date on the Library’s service offerings in that area.
3. To promote Library services to the town and larger community.
4. To continue to offer and improve cultural programs and services and serve as a center for a variety of activities.
5. To provide a pleasant working atmosphere where the staff and director are able to work at their most efficient level and are continually adding to their education and skills.
6. To continue to maintain and improve the building, with respect given to the Library’s architectural style and history.
7. To plan for the future long-term financial stability of the Library.

Falls Area Community Television is a community access television station which provides studio production facilities, equipment training and television equipment to be used in the community to enable individuals to produce their own television shows. Such shows may be aired on local cable channels 8 and 10. FACTV also records and airs public meetings such as school boards and municipal meetings as well as various annual village and town meetings.

Stone Church Arts uses the historic and beautiful Immanuel Episcopal Church to present a variety of musical events throughout the year including string quartets, classical piano and fiddling.

Vermont Festivals presents music events at local restaurants and the Bellows Falls Opera House. Events include the Roots on the River Festival, a popular early summer weekend of music, which uses venues located in downtown Bellows Falls, the Roadway Inn lawn, and the Rockingham Meeting House. The Rockingham Hill Farm hosts two festivals, Pickin’ in the Pasture music festival and the Hill-to-Hill music festival. Flying Under Radar (a concert series production organization) continues to collaborate with the local radio station, WOOL 100.1F and other local organizations. Wool100.1FM is a community radio station which broadcasts in the Great Falls region. It is a nonprofit volunteer-run station.

Main Street Arts (MSA) in Saxtons River offers year round classes in a variety of art and other subjects. Activities geared toward children are a main part of the offering at Main Street Arts. The organization uses a portion of the former Odd Fellows Hall on Main Street in Saxtons River Village for their classes and play and musical productions. Due to the limited seating at the Hall, MSA has indicated an interest in utilizing the Bellows Falls Opera House for some of its productions. Main Street Arts recently purchased the adjacent lot and constructed a 1.6-million dollar renovation/addition which includes a new elevator.

The Rockingham Arts and Museum Project (RAMP) offers and works with other organizations to foster and bring art in many forms to Rockingham. RAMP originated in 1996. Past projects have included bringing the Bread and Puppet Theater to Bellows Falls to work with the community in producing puppets for a parade, assisting in sponsoring Yellow Barn concerts at the Rockingham
Meeting House and the Flying Under Radar musical series in local restaurants as well as the Great River Arts Institute. The production of a mural on the south side of the brick building at 51 Square has brought art out into the mainstream of downtown Bellows Falls.

Great River Arts Institute is a RAMP sponsored program that offers afterschool programs throughout in Bellows Falls and other off-campus sites during the school year that fosters literacy through art-based, multi-disciplinary activities. Regional artists and educators are brought in to create innovative, hands-on art projects which also interweave elements of science, social studies, environmental studies and language arts.

The Saxtons River 4th of July Committee puts on a parade, children’s field events, adult bingo, town-wide barbeque, musical entertainment and culminating with an evening dance and spectacular fireworks at the Saxtons River Recreational Area. Rockingham Old Home Days is held on the first weekend in August. The weekend activities range from art shows, train shows, truck shows, to musical entertainment at various locations near downtown Bellows Falls all weekend. Saturday night of Old Home Days ends with a show-stopping fire works display over the Connecticut River which is estimated to draw up to 20,000 viewers. A major tradition of the weekend is the Rockingham Meeting House Pilgrimage on Sunday. Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance holds a Friday Night Art Walk every third Friday of the month, which highlights private studios and galleries.

It should be recognized that the town’s cultural resources also include the many historic sites in the community. Refer to Chapter 8, Historic Resources for additional information.

**GOALS**

1. To continue support for and maintenance of diverse recreational and cultural programs and facilities to assure continued availability by community residents of all ages.

2. To use cultural resources to re-energize the community, revitalize downtown Bellows Falls, and continue to activate economic development that builds on heritage, preservation, creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit.

3. To provide for additional use of the Library facilities by the community.

**POLICIES**

1. The use and development of land and waters should take into consideration the impact on recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, canoeing and boating, skiing, horseback riding, snowmobiling and other outdoor recreational activities.

2. Land and water areas of high outdoor recreation potential should be protected from development. Access to such lands should not be restricted.

3. A long-term plan for preservation and development of recreational resources should be established.
4. Town parks, recreational and cultural facilities should be well maintained.
5. Public facilities, whether town or school, should be kept open for use by all residents.
6. The community, working with public and private organizations and individuals, should encourage improved access to the Connecticut River resources.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While these are considered high priority, they are not ranked.

1. The Select board shall appoint a Recreation Commission with the following responsibilities: to assess community recreational needs including facility assessment and establish a long-term plan of development. Priority should be given to assessing the need for replacement, upgrade or repairs of facilities at the Bellows Falls Playground; any assessment should include both initial costs and ongoing maintenance costs. Also, to develop a partnership with private and business organizations to promote Rockingham's recreational opportunities as well as assisting with funding/grants; to work with TransCanada in assessing maintenance issues at the Herricks Cove boat launch/picnic grounds.

2. The town will continue to operate the Town Hall movie theater, and will encourage the use of the stage for live theatrical and musical performances.

3. Improve existing and establish new access to local rivers.
   * Work with the Bellows Falls Historical Society (BFHS) in the area off Mill Street to create a riverside park and historic interpretive walkway.
   * Work with the Town of Westminster and Bellows Falls Union High School to connect the BFHS interpretive path system to the Basin Farm and other trail systems.
   * Evaluate the feasibility of creating a pathway from Bellows Falls to Herricks Cove.
   * Encourage Saxtons River Village to create a park on village land adjacent to the Centennial Bridge and waterfalls, and a walkway along the village land.

4. The Select board and Planning Commission will review concerns and other issues dealing with Herricks Cove and recreational uses along the Connecticut River in anticipation of participating in the TransCanada FERC license renewal process in 2018.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. While these are considered a priority, they are not ranked.

5. The Development Office shall investigate and develop a preliminary plan for a system of paths for non-motorized travel such as hiking, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, snowshoeing, and bicycling. Locations could include a Williams River trail, a Parker Hill trail, and a Darby Hill trail. Separate trails are recommended for snowmobiling and all-terrain vehicles.

6. The Development Office shall work with the Bellows Falls Union High School District and the Rockingham and Upper Valley Land Trusts to develop an assessment study for a
path system to connect Bellows Falls through the Basin Farm areas with trails on the Bellows Falls Union High School land.

7. When improving town roads, the Select board will provide bike paths or bike lanes where feasible.

8. The town, through the Select board, should work with the State of New Hampshire and its towns in planning a pathway along the former Cheshire Railroad right-of-way which runs from the Vilas Bridge area to Keene, N.H.

9. The Town Recreation Department will work with the Senior Center to assure that the recreational needs of the older generation are adequately met, and work towards creating programs to meet those needs.

10. The Library will provide for continued internet access, and multifunctional use.

11. In cooperation with individuals, non-profit and for-profit organizations and the schools, the town will encourage:
* the creation and appropriate maintenance of public art that enhances the cultural vitality of the community;
* the exhibition of art and musical and theatrical performances open to the public.

**INVENTORY**

**Recreational Inventory**
See the Scenic and recreational resources map for locations of the following:

- **R-1** Bellows Falls Municipal playground & swimming pool - Public Playground Road, Bellows Falls
  Playground facilities - 2 lighted tennis courts, Jr. League baseball field, lighted basketball courts, toboggan and sliding hill, swimming & wading pool.

- **R-2** Saxtons River Recreation Area, Inc. - Open to the public.
  Ownership private.

- **R-3** Trans Canada Boat Launch and Picnic Grounds - Open to the public
  Ownership private.

- **R-4** Lighted ski rope tow - Public
  Playground, Bellows Falls

- **R-5** Bellows Falls Country Club - Open to the public.
  Ownership private.

- **R-6** Saxtons River Elementary School - Public
  School Street
Saxtons River Playground

R-7 Central Elementary School -
School Street Extension
Bellows Falls Playgrounds

R-8 Wells Street Playground -
Wells Street
Bellows Falls Playground facilities, basketball court, skating rink.

R-9 Hit or Miss Gun Club -
Missing Link Road, Rockingham

R-10 Vermont Academy Indoor Skating Rink -
Shepard Lane, Saxtons River

R-11 Polish American Club picnic grounds - Private
Darby Hill Road, off Route 5

R-12 Green Mountain Flyer -
Depot Street
Bellows Falls Excursion train rides operated by the Green Mt. Railroad.

R-13 Senior Center
Hyde Street
Bellows Falls

R-14 Bellows Falls Union High School -
Off Route 5
Westminster Although not located within the town limits, facilities are available
for town residents including tennis courts, cross-country ski trails, playing fields,
and track.

R-15 Dorand State Forest
Cambridgeport Road
Upper Bartonville

R-16 Meeting Waters YMCA
49 Square
Bellows Falls

R-17 Trans Canada Fish Ladder -
Bridge Street
Bellows Falls

R-18 Middle School
School Street
Bellows Falls Gymnasium. Used for Recreation Dept. Programs

R-Other Snowmobile trails. There is a network of snowmobile trails in
Rockingham which connect to trails in neighboring towns. Information
on the trail network is available to members of VAST (Vermont Association of Snow Travelers.)

All-terrain-vehicle (ATV) trails. VASA (Vermont ATV Sportsman’s Association) continues to seek expansion of trails.

**Cultural Resources**
The locations of these are not mapped. See text for any additional information.

C-1 Bellows Falls Opera House/Movie Theater Square Bellows Falls

C-2 Waypoint Center Depot Street Bellows Falls

C-3 Rockingham Arts & Museum Project 7 Canal Street Office Bellows Falls

C-4 Main Street Arts Main Street Saxtons River

C-6 Horowicz Performing Arts Hall Vermont Academy campus Saxtons River

C-7 Rockingham Free Public Library Westminster Street, Bellows Falls

C-8 Falls Area Community Television Hospital Court, Bellows Falls

C-9 Great River Arts Institute 33 Bridge Street, Bellows Falls
CHAPTER 10
SCENIC RESOURCES

From the view of Mt. Ascutney to the north from Rockingham Street in Bellows Falls, or the Rockingham Meeting House from Parker Hill, the Town has many scenic landscapes which are recognized and appreciated by residents and visitors alike. For some businesses, the scenic resources of the community and area provide a valuable economic resource which needs to be recognized and protected.

Rockingham lies along the western edge of the Connecticut River. The Connecticut River Byway was named a National Scenic Byway in September 2005. This Byway includes both Vermont and New Hampshire, and the Connecticut River Joint Commission (CRJC) continues to promote the strong connection between towns on each side of the river. For more information, see the following web sites: www.ctrivertravel.net and www.byways.org.

The Scenic Byway program is intended to promote economic growth and development in a balanced manner, and the Program and/or data collected as part of the Program are not intended to be used in an Act 250 hearing, or to preclude any land development otherwise permitted by local zoning.

The Natural Resource Overlay zoning district received approval by a town-wide vote in March of 2005. This area includes most of the lands east of Interstate 91 and north of the intersection of Route 5 and 103. Uses in the underlying districts are more restrictive and limited to uses with less impact on the area and on the Connecticut River.

Conservation of scenic resources need not prevent development nor cause economic hardship; rather, it should be an important consideration in the planning and design of development.

Some examples of scenic areas in Rockingham are listed below. It should be recognized that many other areas are equally attractive which are not on this list. Scenic areas are not limited to open areas but include historic sites and buildings such as homes and streetscapes. The natural areas which compose scenic areas are not restricted to broad views but can be farm fields, stone walls, streams, shorelines, and the back-roads that bicyclists enjoy along with those out for a weekend drive.

New England is equated with a viewscape of villages separated by rural countryside. The close-knit village areas are distinct from the more rural part of the community. These defined edges provide the difference between strip development and what we know as Vermont. While a product of closer growth patterns due to transportation limitations, the village edge remains an important element in the identity of communities.

The classic image of New England includes open fields and stone walls. Many of these walls run along roads. Where ever located, they add to the view one has of a grassy field or flowers alongside a roadway. As discussed in the Historic
Resources chapter, the stone walls are also historic relics of the early years when the community was settled. Every effort should be made to assure that these stone walls will remain for future generations.

Village tree-lined streets provide scenic areas on a smaller scale. Old photos of Bellows Falls and Saxtons River show elm-lined streets providing both welcome shade and an attractive streetscape for visitors and residents alike. Shaded village parks provide a similar benefit. Bicentennial Park on Depot Street, Bellows Falls, developed during the country's celebration in 1976, is a successful mix of park and parking lot. This was planted with many native species ranging from birch, to blueberries.

The walk along Rockingham Street provides a view of the Connecticut River, and on clear days, Mount Ascutney. The sidewalk is uneven in areas and maintenance is a concern given the steep embankment on the east side. The retention of the view and the scenic walk is important to the community, narrowing the road to two lanes may be necessary to stabilize the embankment. This may give rise to an opportunity for a linear park along the east side of the road.

A Tree Committee was formed in 1997 to assist the town in tree planning, planting, and proper maintenance. The Committee has worked with local civic organizations to encourage tree planting in local parks and along public ways. Trees have been planted at the Wells Street Playground, the Rockingham Recreation Center on Williams Terrace, the Meeting House, Hetty Green Park, and other public sites as part of this project. Tree planting downtown is a constant due to the harsh conditions for trees in the most urban part of the community. The Tree Warden is a town official, appointed by the Select board, who plays an important role in street tree care. Interest, knowledge and background in this field should be criteria in making this appointment.

A Street Tree Care Plan was adopted by the Select board in 1998, and an inventory of street trees along the major streets in Bellows Falls and Saxtons River was completed in 1999. Further work is needed to maintain and update these tree inventories.

**GOALS**

1. To protect the community's scenic resources for the benefit of residents and visitors.

2. To recognize that the scenic character of the community provides an economic benefit as well as visual attraction.

**POLICIES**

1. Assure the protection and preservation of river corridors, scenic highways, roads and views, and other scenic resources.

2. Development should provide for adequate but not excessive lighting.

3. Recognize that the built environment can both enhance and detract from scenic resources.

4. Discourage strip development and minimize its impact where already existing or unavoidable due to topography.
5. Consider the Street Tree Care Plan in Bellows Falls and Saxtons River, and other areas in evaluating design and development proposals.

6. Follow the Street Tree Care Plan in conducting highway operations and maintenance.

7. To design projects so as to protect and preserve old stone walls.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While these are considered a priority, they are not ranked.

1. The Select board and Bellows Falls Trustees shall work, in conjunction with the railroads, towards creation of a river view of the Connecticut River by cutting trees on the east side embankment along Westminster Street across from Henry Street towards Hapgood Street, and maintaining an open view shed from Rockingham Street north of the “Arch Bridge.”

2. The Planning Commission will review and amend as necessary the Planned Residential Development / Planned Unit Development sections of the Zoning Bylaw to encourage preservation of scenic resources by use of cluster development.

3. The Planning Commission will review and develop standards to minimize strip development including more landscaping, softer lighting, reduced building setbacks from the road with parking behind the buildings, clustering buildings around common access roads, and reducing the number of access roads.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. While these are considered a priority, they are not ranked.

4. Encourage and preserve tree-lined village streets and areas of rural roadways and maintain scenic features such as stone walls which contribute to the visual quality of Vermont communities while weighing the needs of safety.

5. The Planning Commission will review and designate road areas which are scenic resources for the community.

6. The Planning Commission will work with the Conservation Commission to map ridgelines within the Town and identify which should be protected.

7. The Zoning Office will make available information on how to site a house as part of a zoning permit application package.

8. The Planning Commission will develop and provide lighting standards information to projects subject to site plan review. This will include standards to protect scenic resources from excessive lighting.

9. The Town Tree Committee shall work with civic and fraternal organizations to promote proper tree maintenance and planting, seek grants to allow for tree, shrub, and other
planting in public spaces, parks, and along streets and roads, and work with municipal personnel to learn how to properly maintain trees.

10. Create a tree inventory GIS data layer.

11. Encourage the development of a pocket park in Saxtons River near the Westminster Street Centennial Bridge by providing information to the village trustees on available grant programs.

12. Amend the Subdivision Regulations and the Zoning Bylaw to include protection of old stone walls as part of a project review if allowed under 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117.

13. The Planning Commission will discuss ridgeline zoning with the community and propose amendments to the Zoning Bylaw if supported by a positive community response.

14. The Planning Commission will discuss shoreline zoning along the Connecticut River to protect the view from the river and propose amendments to the Zoning Bylaw if supported by a positive community response.

INVENTORY
The following areas are designated as scenic resources and shown on the Scenic and Recreational Resources Maps.

S-1. Gorge on the Williams River
      Brockways Mills

S-2. Gorge on the Williams River
      Parker Hill

S-3. Scenic view from the
      Rockingham Meeting House
      northerly towards Parker Hill
      Old Rockingham Village area

S-4. Scenic view north from
      Griswold Drive
      Bellows Falls Village

S-5. View northerly of the Connecticut River from the junction of Rockingham and Atkinson Streets
      Bellows Falls Village

S-6. Scenic view of Connecticut River Valley southerly from Interstate 91 near former rest area on Rockingham/Springfield town line

S-7. Setback area of the Connecticut River just north of Bellows Falls
      Located east of Route 5.

S-8. Herricks Cove area at confluence of the Williams and Connecticut Rivers
S-9. Roundy’s Cove area located east of Route 5 about two miles north of Herricks Cove Road.

S-10. Albee’s Cove area located east of the railroad causeway along the Setback.

S-11. View of the Connecticut River from the plateau north of the Williams River off the Old River Road.

S-12. Minards Pond and surrounding area.

S-13. Hall Covered Bridge, Route 121.

S-14. Fisher and Stickney Farms area, Pleasant Valley Road.


S-16. View south from the Setback towards Bellows Falls Village. (Not shown on map.)

S-17. View from the northern end of Parker Hill Road looking Northeast towards the mountains of New Hampshire, including Mt. Washington. (Not shown on map.)


CHAPTER 11
UTILITIES & FACILITIES

Rockingham’s utilities and facilities include water resources (potable water, public water, and surface water), waste disposal (sewage systems, septic systems, and solid waste disposal), stormwater, and municipal/community services and facilities. These are key attributes for the town - the availability of these utilities and services influences where growth and development occur. Bellows Falls Village and some adjacent areas, including the town industrial park north of the village, are served by public water and sewer systems. There is excess capacity in both water and sewer systems - an important factor in encouraging economic development in the area served by these utilities.

Bellows Falls Village undertook a program to map utilities, including lines, hydrants, shut-offs, gate valves, manholes, and similar infrastructure. The Bellows Falls Village area from the Westminster town line to the Rockingham Industrial Park is complete. This detailed mapping has been incorporated with the Town’s updated parcel mapping, and the section of the Town west of Bellows Falls Village, along the Route 121 corridor to Saxtons River, is almost complete. This mapping has proved to be a very valuable tool for both municipal departments and the public.

WATER RESOURCES

Water resources include both ground and surface water. Rockingham’s water resources are used for potable water, recreation, agriculture, and industry, including power generation. Water resources also include those waters necessary for aquatic ecosystems.

The Town of Rockingham is bounded by the Connecticut River on the east. The Connecticut River forms a large impoundment behind the dam at Bellows Falls providing both hydroelectric power and recreational opportunities. The Saxtons River in the south and the Williams River in the north traverse the Town on their way to the Connecticut River. The latter empties into the Connecticut River at Herricks Cove, and provides a wildlife and scenic area, as well as limited public access to the Connecticut River.

Watercourses and shorelines are valuable scenic and recreational resources which are limited in amount. The resource value of watercourses and shorelines can be diminished or destroyed by development activity which fails to adequately assess and protect these finite resources.

Potable Water Supplies

The Bellows Falls Village area is served by a public water system which has been extended into the Town to serve the Industrial Park area north of the Village, and to the Kissell Hill/Bellows Falls Union High School and Gageville (North Westminster Village) areas in the neighboring town of Westminster to the south. The latter system was extended as the private water system operating in Gageville had been declared unsafe by the State of Vermont. There are a few other...
small private systems which are classified as public water systems but the greater part of the land area within the community is served by individual wells. This includes most of Saxtons River Village although some properties are served by the Vermont Academy system and others by private wells serving multiple homes. An inventory of these systems follows this section.

The Town obtained a State of Vermont Municipal Planning Grant in 2007 for an Aquifer Recharge Area Study within the Town. In 1968 the Vermont Department of Water Resources (with the U.S. Geological Survey) plotted a Ground Water Favorability Map of the Ottauquechee-Saxtons River Basin which includes all the land within the Town. This study was part of a statewide reconnaissance of groundwater availability and was intended as a guide for local exploration. Further studies were recommended, but no town-wide investigation had been done until the grant project began. The information produced by this study may influence the layout of zoning districts and uses within those districts.

Adequate potable water has not been a major concern historically. This situation can change suddenly and dramatically as was the case in Saxtons River Village several years ago when wells serving residences along Main and River Streets became contaminated from improper handling and disposal of gasoline and chemicals. While a study was begun regarding the feasibility of a public water supply to serve the contaminated area or the entire Village, no action was been taken. The ground water appears to be recovering based on monitoring conducted under direction of the State. However, concerns were raised again when a fuel oil spill occurred at the Saxtons River Elementary School. As of now, there are no impacts on nearby wells.

As seen in the southeastern United States in 2007, water supplies are an important, and sometimes limited, resource. Climate change will impact the availability of water supplies even more. Priority should be given to residents over any large-scale commercial sale of potable water should allocation of this finite resource be necessary in the future.

A “Water System Improvements Study” was done in October, 1999, by Forcier Aldrich & Associates, Inc. for Bellows Falls Village. This report identified seven areas in the distribution network as problematic due to age, chronic maintenance problems, or insufficient hydraulic capacity to met current demands. Items in that report which remain to be done are:

- The Rockingham Industrial Park transmission line. This existing 10” X 8,200 ft. asbestos cement line is undersized resulting in potential low pressure conditions to develop during high flow conditions. The asbestos cement pipeline is subject to frequent maintenance to correct breaks or leaks at service taps
- Replacement of the remaining existing 8 inch cast iron line running along Mill Street. The line under the railroad tracks was replaced and sleeved as part of the tunnel enlargement project in 2006-2007.
- Meter replacement for lines larger than 5/8”.

The Village has completed much of the work recommended in the report as follows:

- A storage tank at the north end of the system.
- The 100 year old 16” Minards Pond transmission line which ran between the water treatment facility and Route 5 through private residential properties and woods. The new line runs in the Pond Road right-of-way.
- The Griswold Drive service area distribution network (except for Clace Drive).
- The water main on Island Street.
- The water main on Underhill Avenue.
- The water main in the Clace Drive area.
- Sleeved the water line from Granger Street running under the railroad tracks.
- A new meter reading system for all 5/8” lines.

Maintenance of a water system is constant, and other old lines need replacement. These are listed in the Action Steps following.

The Bellows Falls Water Department is required to have a Source Protection Plan which provides information on Minards Pond, possible sources of contamination, and protection from contamination. Excerpts from the Source Protection Plan are incorporated into the Action Steps below.

The availability of connection to public systems for both potable water supply and wastewater treatment is important for development and influences where growth occurs.

**Public Water Supplies**

Public water supplies are defined in Vermont as a water supply system with fifteen or more connections or which regularly serves an average of at least 25 individuals daily at least 60 days out of the year; these may be owned by a municipality or privately.

Federal regulations are having an effect on the operation of many of the water systems which operate in the Town. While a larger system such as Bellows Falls Village has some capacity to absorb the costs associated with these regulations, the smaller systems are faced with serious concerns about continued operation.

See the Water Resources Map for public system watershed/wellhead protection areas, sources, storage and areas of service including the wellhead protection areas for the North Westminster system which extend into Rockingham.

**Surface Waters**

Surface waters within the State are classified as either "A" or "B". Within the "B" class are Waste Management Zones (WMZ) which are usually found downstream of a wastewater treatment plant. All surface waters not classified as "A" are Class "B" waters.
Rockingham's Class A waters are associated with the public water supplies in the community. See the inventory listing and the Water Resources Map for locations of the Class "A" waters, Class “B” waters, and Waste Management Zones.

**GOAL**

1. To recognize that clean water is an essential resource to the community and that it is in the best interests of the town and its residents to maintain adequate, accessible, and clean water resources.

**POLICIES**

1. Development shall be compatible with the preservation and maintenance of existing and future ground and surface water resources and their aquifer protection areas.

2. Development shall be reviewed as to its impact on water resources.

3. In order to conserve the town's water resources and minimize the cost of public water supply and waste disposal systems, development shall be planned, designed, constructed, and operated to minimize consumptive water demands.

4. Municipal water systems shall be related to town urban and new community centers only, so as to encourage cluster development, minimize the public investment, and discourage strip development.

5. Watercourses and shorelines shall be retained and maintained in a natural state to protect their recreational and scenic value.

6. Development within the floodplain areas which significantly alters the ability of the floodplain to store flood waters is discouraged. All development within the floodplain areas shall comply with applicable federal, state and local regulations.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While these are considered high priority, they are not ranked.

1. Seek funds for water main replacement on Park Street, Hapgood Street Extension, Mill Street (except under rail tracks), and Granger Street to the east side of the tracks (except under rail tracks).

2. Fund replacement of the metering system for lines larger than 5/8 inch.

3. Review land uses allowed in aquifer recharge areas and well-head/watershed protection areas and revise zoning bylaws to protect areas from incompatible land uses.

4. Minimize risk of contamination to the Bellows Falls watershed, particularly near the area near the headwaters of Ellis Brook by:

   *Purchase of land within the Source Protection Area or impacting feeder brooks;
*Request re-zoning of land to assure protection of Source Protection Area and feeder brooks;
*Assure that proposed wastewater disposal systems meet and maintain high standards of compliance with State On-site standards.

5. Continue mapping infrastructure including roads, bridges, water and sewer lines and other critical components of systems giving priority to the villages and more densely populated areas before mapping the rural sections of the town.

6. Bellows Falls Trustees should continue to the established capital fund for future work on the water distribution system. Consideration should be given to the impact on water rates when scheduling construction improvements.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. There is no ranking of priority for these steps and no schedule assigned for their completion.

7. Bellows Falls Village will continue replacing the asbestos cement pipe throughout the system.

8. The Bellows Falls Water Department will upgrade the roads to the gate houses in the Darby Hill watershed.

9. The Bellows Falls Village Trustees will investigate the feasibility of extending water service to Saxtons River Village and points in between.

10. The Bellows Falls Water Department will investigate applicability of Bellows Falls Water Connection Permits for the Kissell Hill line in Westminster.

11. Restrict development to areas other than:
   a. Headwaters of watersheds characterized by steep slopes and shallow soils, or
   b. Watersheds and well-head protection areas of public water supplies, or
   c. Areas supplying significant amounts of recharge water to aquifers.

12. Bellows Falls Village should consider further investigation into a second source of water supply.

13. The Planning Commission should review areas which may be suitable for shoreline zoning.

14. The Bellows Falls Water Department and Village Trustees should review the need for upgrade of the Kissell Hill area water lines.

15. The Bellows Falls Water Department and Village Trustees should discuss the future upgrade of private water lines serving portions of Webb Terrace and Darby Hill Road.

16. The Bellows Falls Village Water Department will compile in one booklet the water agreements for the Kissell Hill area and Bellows Falls Union High School in Westminster, and North Westminster Village along with sewer agreements.

Agreements which will or have expired will be reviewed and re-negotiated as necessary.
INVENTORY

1. **Bellows Falls Village Water System.** This system serves areas within Bellows Falls Village and also extends outside village limits northerly to the Rockingham Industrial Park area, southerly to Kissell Hill/Bellows Falls Union High School and southwesterly to Gageville, both in the Town of Westminster. See the Water Line Service Area Detail Map for service area.

The system provides excellent quality water which meets or exceeds federal standards for organic and inorganic compounds, lead/copper, and coliform bacteria testing.

Minards Pond is the reservoir located above and to the west of the village. A water treatment plant was constructed at the pond and began operations in 1990 with an upgrade in 2007. The pond is fed via springs and brooks which originate on the hillside to the west of Interstate 91. These include the Ellis and Farr brooks. This watershed area consists of approximately 600+ acres. In addition, the area immediately around the pond consists of 50+ acres.

The pond storage capacity is supplemented by four concrete water tanks. One is located on Clace Drive and serves the Reese Circle-Griswold Drive area with a 375,000 gallon capacity constructed in 1980. The second, constructed in 1988, is located at the south end of the village off Cedar Crest Road and has a 500,000 gallon capacity. A 700,000 gallon clear well storage tank is located at the Water Treatment plant at Minards Pond. The most recently constructed tank is the 500,000 gallon tank located at the north end of the system, opposite the Rockingham Industrial Park.

It may not be feasible for some areas within the Village to connect to the water system due to elevation and lack of adequate minimum pressure.

Approximately forty percent (40%) of the 98,310 linear feet of existing water distribution piping was installed prior to the 1900's. Water pipe replacement projects have been actively pursued during the past 15 years. The latest projects include the Pond Road line, and Island Street. Other projects done were: Underhill Avenue – 2000; Butterfield Ave., Myrtle Street and Williams Street Ext. - 1999; Earle Street - 1998; Williams Terrace and Pleasant Street - 1996; and Depot Street and Bridge Street (from Island Street east) - 1994. Prior to that work was done on Westminster, Green, and Church Streets.

It is anticipated that the current system will meet expected demand though the year 2025.

Costs of extension of main lines, upgrading of existing lines and other facilities are to be paid for by a developer where subdivision or development occurs. Those connected to the system pay user fees based on consumption.

Connections - 1,010
Capacity - 1 million gallons per day design - Water Treatment plant.
Water pipe network -  
0 ft. of galvanized  
44,650 ft. of cast iron  
38,235 ft. of ductile iron  
15,425 ft. of asbestos cement  
Total............... 98,310 ft.

Age of system - 100+ years  
Reservoir - Minards Pond

Tanks -  
Clace Drive, 375,000 gallons, constructed 1978  
Cedar Crest, 500,000 gallons, constructed 1985  
Pond Road, Treatment Plant Clearwell, 700,000 gallons, constructed 1990  
North end, 500,000 gallons, constructed 2003  
Pressure - varies between 40 & 140 PSI  
Fire prevention - 169 hydrants  
Consumers - Residential, commercial & industrial

2. North Shore Trailer Park, 127 Missing Link Road. This park is served by a privately owned water system. The source is a driven point well located within the park. See the Water Resources Map for location.

3. Vermont Academy system, Saxtons River. This privately owned system serves the Vermont Academy campus in Saxtons River and a few private residences. The water source is a bedrock artesian well located 1.2 miles to the north of the campus off the Rockingham Hill Road within approximately 55 acres of Academy owned land. This system supplies fire hydrants located on Academy Avenue and Main Street in Saxtons River. The line runs through several different parcels of property including a mix of woodland and open field. Its exact location has not been detailed which is of concern when on-site wastewater disposal systems are proposed for these other pieces of property. See the Water Resources and Water Line Service Area Detail Maps.

Well - 25 gallons per minute  
Storage - 34,500 gallon concrete storage tank  
Transmission - 10" ductile iron transmission main  
Fire protection - 3 hydrants in "downtown" Saxtons River Village area supplied by 8" mains on Academy Avenue & Main Street. System connected to a 550,000 gallon open reservoir isolated from system by gate valve, for use only during emergencies.

4. Warner Center system, Saxtons River. This privately owned system serves the Warner Center complex in the former Saxtons River campus of Kurn Hattin and also several private residences. It also supplies fire hydrants on Westminster Street and Clark Court. The source is a drilled well on the site near Westminster Street, Saxtons River, with storage at a higher elevation on the same property. See the Water Resources and Water Line Service Area Detail Maps.

Surface Waters

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Waters</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Description of Section</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Back Pond</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>West of Minards Pond</td>
<td>2 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolles Brook</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>All portions above Vermont Academy, Saxtons River Water Supply Intake</td>
<td>1.0 sq. mi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut River</td>
<td>WMZ</td>
<td>From the Charlestown Sewage Treatment Plant outfall to Commissary Brook</td>
<td>1.0 mi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut River</td>
<td>WMZ</td>
<td>From the Bellows Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant outfall to the Cold River, Walpole, N.H.</td>
<td>0.9 mi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis Brook</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Bellows Falls Water Supply Upper reaches of tributary to Connecticut River</td>
<td>Approx. 1.7 mile mi.; 246 acre drainage area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farr Brook</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Bellows Falls Water Supply</td>
<td>156 acre drainage area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minards Pond</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Bellows Falls Water Supply</td>
<td>42 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saxtons River</td>
<td>WMZ</td>
<td>From the Saxtons River Wastewater Treatment Facility to USGS gauging station #0115 4000</td>
<td>2.0 mi.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WASTE DISPOSAL - SEWAGE, SEPTIC DISPOSAL, AND SOLID WASTE

Municipal Sewage Systems

The Bellows Falls Village and Saxtons River Village sewer systems serve approximately 70% of town residents. The Saxtons River system operates within the limits of the village, while the Bellows Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant serves the Kissell Hill and Gageville (North Westminster) areas of Westminster, the Industrial Park area of Rockingham, and Walpole/North Walpole, New Hampshire.

The location of municipal sewer service influences where and what type of development can occur in a given area. Many activities are not compatible with individual on-site septic systems and can only locate where there is municipal service. In addition, some areas would not be suitable for development or would be suitable only for less intense development without the presence of municipal sewer.

Sewer capacity is a valuable community asset and committed but not utilized capacity could result in higher costs to the users. Leaving unused but committed capacity at the plant with no cost share attributable to that commitment can impact other existing and potential users.

The Bellows Falls and Saxtons River sewer systems (excepting the New Hampshire section) are plotted out on the town plan maps. See the Sewer Service Area Detail Map. The locations of the Wastewater Management Zones in the Connecticut River and Saxtons River, indicating the outfalls from the municipal sewage plants are shown on the Water Resources Map.

Bellows Falls system. The Bellows Falls system has a total design capacity of 1.4 million gallons per day with secondary treatment and operates at 29% of capacity with flow of 0.54 million gallons per day. The treatment facility is constructed along the Connecticut River and its outfall is into the Connecticut just north of the junction with the Saxtons River.

The Bellows Falls sewer system was originally constructed in 1962 and upgraded in 1989 to secondary treatment. At that time a joint agreement was made between Bellows Falls Village and the Town of Walpole, N.H., to accept sewage from across the Connecticut River. Walpole and North Walpole, New Hampshire, have a 1/3 entitlement to flowage capacity per the agreements with those municipalities. Work on the headworks at the plant started in late 2009. The rotating biological contactors or RBCs were completed in 2015.

The most recent extension of sewer lines includes the line from the Village limits to the Rockingham Industrial Park. This was a Bellows Falls Area Development Corporation (BFADC) project with support from the Town. The cost of the Park sewer line was $300,000. The amount remaining on the Town bond payment is $115,952 (as of June 2015). The semi-annual payment is $10,698. There are eleven (11) commercial connections to the line, and six (6) residential connections. Many of the properties along the route have not connected into it due to the cost. The connection fee for a non-residential connection is $10,000.00 for up to 2,000 gallons per day of effluent flow. The residential connection fee is $500.00 for up to 450 gallons per day of
effluent flow. The annual sewer fund revenue generated from these connections is approximately $18,000.

Walpole and Gageville (North Westminster) are responsible for the sewer lines serving these areas. Bellows Falls Village is not responsible for the Kissell Hill sewer line. The 1986 Sewer Agreement with Walpole reserves 0.301 million gallons per day (MOD) for Walpole and 1.099 MOD for treatment of wastewater from Bellows Falls, Rockingham, North Westminster and Westminster.

While the Bellows Falls sewer system is served by the BFVC Wastewater Treatment plant with a total design capacity of 1.34 million gallons per day, there are limitations on the interceptor system's capability of conveying this volume to the plant. These limitations are based upon the distribution of the volume within the system especially as it relates to pump stations. For example, the design capacity of the sewer line serving the Park at first could not be fully utilized unless the Atkinson/Rockingham Streets pumping station capacity was increased which was done a few years ago. The West Street sewer line was replaced recently, but other lines remain which need work.

An additional problem is the State's requirements in regards to combined sewer/stormwater overflows (CSO) which are no longer allowed into the rivers of the State. Stormwater infiltration is being addressed Village-wide in Bellows Falls because of CSO requirements and because it is a limiting factor in the capacity of the interceptor system to transport sewage to the treatment plant. The Hyde Hill stormwater flow into the Rockingham Street pumping station was reconstructed to reduce the flow and increase the sanitary sewage pumping capacity at this point.

While the Bellows Falls facility is at only 39% of hydraulic capacity, due to the amount of septage and sludge accepted at the plant, the actual solids "loadings" are high. If the daily hydraulic loading is increased, the septage and sludge operations would have to be reduced.

Bellows Falls received a certificate from the State of Vermont which allows transport of sludge to Claremont, New Hampshire, for composting. At present, an average of 300 wet tons of sludge is generated each year.

**Saxtons River system.** The Saxtons River Village Wastewater Treatment plant is located on the north side of the Saxtons River and its outflow is upstream from the bridge on the east side of the village. The plant has a total design capacity of 105,000 gallons per day and is operating at 34% of capacity or 35,200 gallons per day for the 12 month average flow. The level of treatment is secondary. Significant rain events result in increased flows to the plant reducing capacity.

Sludge from the Saxtons River plant is disposed of via a haulage contract with a private hauler and disposed of in Glens Falls, New York or Fitchburg, Massachusetts. The phragmites reed beds which had been used for sludge disposal were removed in 1998. Additional sludge storage will need to be addressed by the Village in the future as will infiltration problems into the collection system.
The Saxtons River Village sewer system was last upgraded in 1990. A recent report on the plant from the State of Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation indicates that significant upgrades will be required in the near future. The Saxtons River village has bonded for a design of a new treatment plant at the same location.

The most recent public line extensions were on Clark Court and Vancor Drive, and a private force main on Oak Street in 2000. Some properties within the Village limits are not served by public sewer including both residential and commercial parcels on Pleasant Valley Road. The Village explored extending the lines up Pleasant Valley Road and east on Main Street in 1998-99. No action was taken due to the cost of the project, limited public funding, and the resulting rate increase such work would have necessitated.

As of 2009, and for several years prior, Saxtons River Village has contracted with the Village of Bellows Falls and the Bellows Falls Wastewater Department operates the Saxtons River facility.

**Septage Disposal**

The remaining 30% of the residents of the Town are served by individual on-site septic systems. Effective July 1, 2007, new and replacement on-site waste disposal systems for residential and non-residential uses must meet State of Vermont standards, and obtain State permits.

Some recent construction has occurred on lands less suitable for septic system placement resulting in the construction of more expensive mound systems. These are also necessary for some replacement systems at existing residences. While new construction loans incorporate the costs for the building and the utilities, failure of those more expensive systems may have a significant cost impact on homeowners whose systems need replacement years later.

Groundwater level and soil type are critical in locations where septic systems are used as incorrect placement or improper construction can have a negative impact on water resources.

Septage disposal, a necessary part of maintenance of an on-site system, is done by private companies that pump out the septic tanks in the community. The Bellows Falls Wastewater Treatment plant accepts septage at 4,000 to 7,000 gallons per day from the surrounding areas utilizing the solids capacity of the facility while helping to offset the cost of operations. This is a reduction from the 10,000 to 13,000 taken in 1994 due to excessive biochemical oxygen demand which overloaded the plant. Septage is not accepted by the Saxtons River Village plant.

**Solid - Hazardous Waste**

Rockingham is a member town of the Southern Windsor-Windham Solid Waste District with waste disposal via contract with Gobin Disposal Systems, Inc. The District adopted an ordinance requiring licensing of haulers. State legislation is needed to authorize adoption of the ordinance which would allow licensing of haulers and a surcharge fee.

Solid waste is collected by private haulers paid by residents and businesses. In the alternative, residents may take bagged trash to the Transfer Station-Recycling Center where disposal cost is based on the number of bags. Waste collected at the Transfer Station is hauled to the incinerator. For many residents, the Transfer Station is the most reasonable cost alternative for trash disposal.

The Towns of Rockingham and Westminster joined together to construct a Recycling Center, which is located at the old Bellows Falls Village dump site on Route 5 about ½ mile south of the Village. This opened in early 1993. This center also serves as the Transfer Station for
Rockingham residents. Sufficient and reasonable hours of operation are essential to enable all residents, including those who work out-of-town, to take advantage of this municipal facility. The Recycling Center was expanded in 1998 to provide additional space for storing materials, and the hours extended in 2007.

The Town provides for curbside pick-up of yard waste in the spring and fall. This is limited to leaves which must be placed in clear plastic bags. This requirement is necessary as the receiving sites require clear bags to allow inspection for unwanted contaminants which might be mixed in with the yard waste. Within Bellows Falls and Saxtons River villages there is a need for a disposal site for yard wastes, including limbs, during the other times of the year. Yard waste can be disposed of at the recycling center.

The Town of Rockingham previously hosted a landfill located on U.S. Route 5 near the Springfield town line and adjacent to the Connecticut River. That was an unlined landfill created in the 1960's upon the closure of small municipal dumps which had served local communities for many years. That landfill later was named an EPA superfund site and an environmental cleanup was undertaken after potable drinking water in the vicinity was contaminated by landfill leachate. Several riverfront camps were purchased by the landfill operators and demolished due to the contamination problems created. Periodic testing of water supplies in the area remains ongoing.

Residents continue to be concerned about potential impacts on water supplies, rivers and streams, and neighborhoods resulting from landfill construction and use. Due to its location at the intersection of three major highways (Interstate 91, U.S. Route 5, and Route 103), the town has a history of trucking companies and transfer facilities locating within its borders. These same conditions make the town attractive to similar businesses which involve trucking, including solid and hazardous waste hauling and disposal. The combination of this potential with the past experience of the earlier landfill contamination means that proposals to locate future landfills or other types of waste disposal facilities must undergo strict review and meet the highest standards to protect the residents, the land, and its resources.

Land which has limited or little agricultural potential is preferable for a landfill site. An acceptable site would be one which is located on land that has agriculturally marginal soils, or is occupied by progressively less productive farming operations. In the event that a farm site is considered, there must be mitigation of agricultural uses or buffer areas, and/or improvement of non-farmed adjacent prime agricultural land to sustain the viability of impacted farms.

Act 148, Vermont's Universal Recycling Law, was passed in 2012. It bans disposal of certain types of waste in landfills starting in 2015, requires trash haulers to also offer services to manage these types of waste, and requires facilities which accept trash to also accept these types of waste. It also mandates composting of organic food waste. The law's requirements are being phased in and will be complete by 2020.

GOALS

1. To encourage waste reduction, recycling, and reuse to reduce the total waste stream, and to provide means of disposing of the remaining wastes which are affordable and ecologically safe.
2. To reduce the cost of waste disposal for Town residents.

**POLICIES**

1. Municipal sewer systems shall be related to town urban and new community centers so as to encourage cluster development and to prevent strip development.

2. Development which is responsible for unique or large amounts of waste should be permitted only if it can be demonstrated that the method of disposal will not adversely affect the environment and that the affected community can finance the disposal of additional waste without incurring an economic hardship.

3. Development of on-site sewage disposal systems shall be permitted only where soil conditions and topography will not cause failure or contamination of ground or surface waters.

4. The Town shall support recycling/reuse activities and waste reduction strategies.

5. Stormwater shall be separated from sanitary sewer systems so as to enable maximum plant efficiency at the Bellows Falls and Saxtons River wastewater treatment facilities.

6. Economic and efficient wastewater disposal methods should be used whether involving public sewer or private on-site systems. Regular maintenance should be done to assure proper functioning public systems and information provided to homeowners on maintenance of private systems.

7. All waste management facilities must consider and remediate adverse impacts, and make reasonable accommodations for the host Town.

8. The Town will ensure that all waste management facilities protect public health, environmental quality, and effectively protect against negative impacts on the land and its resources.

9. The Town will ensure that all waste management facilities are constructed, operated, monitored and maintained now and in the future so as to not jeopardize the public health, safety, welfare, or the natural environment, and provide reduced costs of disposal for Town residents.

10. The Town will ensure the protection of the Connecticut River, an American Heritage River, and its tributaries within the Natural Resources Overlay District and its associated rare, threatened and endangered species and significant natural communities as set forth in Chapter 7, Forestry-Wildlife Resources & Earth Resources, Policy items 14 and 15 and Actions Steps 7 and 8.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While these are considered high priority, they are not ranked.

1. The Town and/or Bellows Falls Village will continue to eliminate stormwater inflow/infiltration into the BFVC sanitary sewer system.
2. Bellows Falls Village and Saxtons River Village should develop a program for long term affordable sludge disposal or reuse.

3. Bellows Falls Village will update its wastewater disposal ordinance including details and specifications for construction, including a wastewater department capacity allocation ordinance and a limited time period for permit validity.

4. Revise the Town and/or Village sewer ordinance to require existing buildings and new development along Rockingham Rd/U.S. Rte 5 and connecting roadways to connect to the Industrial Park sewer line.

5. Bellows Falls Trustees and Saxtons River Trustees will continue to fund capital funds for future work on the respective sewer plants and systems.

6. Bellows Falls Village will continue to reconstruct manhole and invert structures throughout the Village. Priority should be given to those at the Pine Street, Center Street and Williams Terrace intersection.

7. Bellows Falls Village will continue with sewer line replacements including the following:
   a. Laurel Avenue
   b. Barker Street
   c. Foot of Griswold Drive to Taylor Street to Prospect Street to School Street Extension
   d. Mill Street (down the hill and the drop-aerate spot)

8. To protect the Town’s land, its resources, and residents,
   A. Solid or hazardous waste management facilities shall not be sited in:
      1. State or municipal forests;
      2. public water supply watersheds or source protection areas;
      3. groundwater areas for Class 1 and Class 2 waters;
      4. wetlands, including Class 1, 2 and Class 3, and associated buffer zones, as defined in the Vermont Wetlands Rules;
      5. Fish and Wildlife Refuge areas designated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service or Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, or designated Important Bird Areas; Wildlife management areas designated by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources; threatened or endangered species habitat area, as designated by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources;
      6. a watershed for Class A waters, as designated by the Vermont Water Resources Board;
      7. within the floodway or within the 100-year or 500-year floodplain;
      8. on slopes of 15% or greater;
      9. within Natural Resources Conservation Service hydric soils;
      10. within prime agricultural lands as determined by the Town of Rockingham Lands Evaluation Site Assessment study.
      11. Lands abutting surface waters including all rivers, streams, creeks, brooks, reservoirs, ponds, lakes, springs, and all bodies of surface waters which are contained within, flow through, or border upon the State of Vermont or any portion of it, whether natural or man-made.
      12. Land protected by overlay districts specifically authorized by Title 24,
Vermont Statutes §4414(2) where farmland, watershed protection areas and stream and wildlife corridors are protected through development restrictions contained in duly adopted zoning bylaws and as shown on the Town of Rockingham zoning map 1 of 2, amended Jun 9, 2009.

B. The Town will hire a qualified and impartial public health professional to conduct a health risk assessment associated with solid and hazardous waste management impacts, the cost for which will be paid in advance by the applicant for a waste management facility.

C. The Town will hire qualified and impartial consulting services necessary to evaluate the application and impacts created by a proposed solid or hazardous waste management facility which shall include, but not be limited to, a certified wildlife consultant to provide a wildlife habitat inventory, and mapping of wetlands, hydric soils, vernal pools, and site evaluation. The consulting services chosen will be mutually agreed to by the Town and applicant, and the cost will be paid in advance by the applicant for a waste management facility.

Site evaluation shall be conducted in conformance with Vermont State Standards or as approved by the Vermont State Geologist and shall include site specific study of:

1. soils and surficial geology (for example, including but not limited to split spoon samples in watershed areas of rivers and streams to detect varves, sandy lens, and other conditions that allow for unexpected movement of water or leachate);
2. bedrock geology;
3. integrated groundwater geology and geochemistry;
4. topography;
5. surface water;
6. groundwater location and flow direction (for example, but not limited to, determination of permeable lens in the underlying soils);
7. air quality; and
8. airshed characteristics such as prevailing wind speed and direction, meteorology, and climatology;
9. aquatic and terrestrial wildlife impacts;
10. aquifer recharge areas affecting potable and recreational waters.

D. The Town will require thorough protection of adjacent properties against odors, dust, litter releases, vectors, and undue adverse impacts from lighting.

E. The Town may provide for a “Host Town Agreement” for a solid or hazardous waste management facility proposed to be located in Rockingham, and which otherwise is in compliance with applicable laws, rules, and regulations, which shall address, but not be limited to provisions for:

1. Establishing aesthetic buffers to minimize off-site visual impacts:
   (a) from residences or public highways that are within 2,000 feet of the facility and which have or may have in the future, a clear view of the facility;
   (b) from historic sites (National Register, State of Vermont Register, or as
included in the Town Plan), significant viewsheds and scenic areas (as included in the Town Plan) and U.S. Route 5 and N.H. Route 12 where beyond 2,000 feet of the facility.
(c) Aesthetic buffers may include tree retention, tree planting, fencing, berms, limitations on site elevation, site design or other methods which adequately limit visibility.

2. Mitigating conditions predicted a health risk management assessment conducted by a qualified and impartial consultant;

3. Paying annual fees to cover any increased costs for Town infrastructure development and maintenance;

4. Paying the Town of Rockingham a per ton tip or processing fee surcharge for solid or hazardous waste received at the facility;

5. Granting rights of entry to town officials, their representatives and or designees, for the purposes of inspecting the facility for compliance with town and other facility permits, and any host town agreements;

6. Establishing an Oversite Committee appointed by the Select board;

7. Daily cleanup of roadsides and windblown litter originating from the waste management facility operation, including off-site litter from vehicles hauling to and from the site, at the expense of the facility owner or operator;

8. Operating plans, including curtailment of operations if necessary, if odors, dust, litter or vectors reach adjacent properties, or leachate is found in the leak detection system;

9. Adequate funding to ensure operation and maintenance of leachate and waste management facility gas collection, monitoring, and management systems in perpetuity;

10. Monitoring waste management facility gas emissions for hazardous and deleterious constituents and control programs to confine risks to the public health and the environment to acceptable levels;

11. Comprehensive surface water monitoring program during the active life and post-closure period including monitoring of the potential for airborne transport of waste-derived constituents to nearby surface waters;

12. Funding for independent third-party monitoring of waste management facility operations and oversight of continuing compliance with permit conditions and for as long as the waste may present a threat;

13. Ensuring that the facility operator, for as long as potential for public impact exists, will be responsible for, and has adequate funding for financial post closure requirements, monitoring, testing, repairs, replacements, and mitigation; and
14. Such other conditions as may be reasonable or necessary to protect public health, safety, welfare, or the natural environment, or otherwise to further the policies recited above.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. While these are considered a priority, they are not ranked.

9. Inflow problems and sump pumps into the Saxtons River sewage collection system will be studied and corrected when the storm drain system is adequate.

10. The Town, through its Select board working with local representatives and other towns, shall seek responsible management of the Southern Windsor-Windham Solid Waste District in the financial, ecological and public communications areas.

11. The Town Recycling Facility will continue to provide information to residents on disposal options for non-traditional trash, i.e. non-regulated hazardous waste (e.g., batteries, metals, tires, construction and demolition debris).

12. The Town should increase the hours and days of operation of the Recycling Center and transfer station including expanded Saturday hours and one evening per week hours.

13. Bellows Falls Village will continue a regular program for flushing and inspection of sewer lines.

14. Saxtons River Village should reconsider extension of the public sewer system to the south end of the Pleasant Valley Road to serve the existing non-residential buildings, and to be in place for residences upon failure of existing septic systems.

15. Bellows Falls Village will prepare a plan to connect the Rockingham Street pump station via Atkinson Street to Oak Street (thence gravity flow to the plant) to allow downsizing the Canal and Depot Streets pump stations resulting in reduced electrical costs.

16. The condition of sewer lines shall be inspected when water line replacement is done, and sewer lines replaced and manholes raised as needed.

17. The Bellows Falls Village Wastewater Department will compile in one booklet the sewer agreements for the Kissell Hill area and Bellows Falls Union High School in Westminster, North Westminster Village, Walpole, N.H., and the Rockingham Industrial Park sewer line, along with water agreements.

Agreements which will or have expired will be reviewed and re-negotiated as necessary.

18. The Bellows Falls Wastewater Department and Saxtons River Village will prepare information for the upcoming twenty-year evaluations of the Bellows Falls and Saxtons River wastewater plants as recommended by the State of Vermont.
STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

The Town of Rockingham is situated along the west side of the Connecticut River valley and is traversed by the Williams River and the Saxtons River which are the two major streams within the Town running into the Connecticut River from the west.

Much of the terrain is hilly and cut by valleys along these rivers. The valleys along Atcherson Hollow, Leach, Pleasant Valley, Rockingham Hill, and Brockways Mills roads run generally north-south with streams which feed into the Saxtons and Williams rivers.

Development and use of land for urbanization, recreation, agriculture, forestry, and other uses can have profound impacts upon the hydrologic characteristics of watersheds by affecting the volume, rate, and quality of stormwater runoff. Drainage problems can be created when new development reduces the amount of vegetation which controls the infiltration of water into the ground. Adverse effects can include combined sewer overflows, increases in the severity and frequency of flooding, deterioration of water quality, stream channel degradation, erosion, and increased sedimentation. Uncontrolled stormwater runoff can damage public and private property including roadways, driveways, railroad beds, and bridges. It can create hazards to public health and safety such as accumulations of water that will flood or freeze producing hazards on roads, and flooding damage to basements and stream habitat. The Town adopted the Community Hazard Mitigation Plan and Policy in 2013 to establish standards for upgrading roads, bridges, culverts and roadside ditching to minimize damage from flooding.

Uncontrolled runoff can cause serious damage to public infrastructure and private property. This has been made obvious in Bellows Falls Village when runoff from the Hyde Hill Brook resulted in flooding along Laurel Avenue several times, the last in February 2016. In addition, damage to existing facilities can occur from development activity which is not adequately protected from erosion. An example of this was blockage of the Pond Road catch basins in the late 1980's due to sediment from development of upstream lots and roadway resulting in damage to the town road.

On-site stormwater runoff controls are designed to reduce problems at the point of origin and are the responsibility of the individual developments. Failure to adequately provide for on-site control can necessitate creation of additional off-site controls, the cost of which is borne by the taxpayers. While both are necessary for a complete system, the community should review development plans to assure that impacts on downstream areas are minimized.

In the past, the basic approach to stormwater control was to collect and dispose of it as soon as possible at a convenient downstream location. As more development occurs, this can result in serious flooding and overload at downstream sites. Stormwater management today needs to recognize that further control of stormwater is essential to reduce or prevent flooding or overload in lower sections of a drainage basin. Certain existing and new uses are required to submit stormwater control plans under the State-Federal Multi-Sector General Permit. The Town has submitted a Stormwater Pollution Plan for the Route 103 gravel pit, and Bellows Falls Village for the Bellows Falls Wastewater Plant.

Stormwater runoff is prevented or reduced by preservation of green space and riparian buffers, development which minimizes the disturbed, cleared, or paved land, and on-site infiltration systems. Stormwater runoff is controlled by ditches, culverts, catch basins, drain ways, swale drains and detention facilities. Most of the runoff not absorbed into the ground eventually flows into natural waterways.
Culvert information for town roadways is continually updated and includes mapping, location, diameter, length and materials and age.

A stormwater separation project was completed in Bellows Falls Village in the 1970's. The storm drainage system is extensive, but further work is needed in particular areas to limit damage from heavy runoff and to eliminate stormwater draining into sanitary sewer lines and causing overflows into the Connecticut River. Some of the principle areas still remaining which require further work include: Island Street, the Post Office on Bridge Street, Athens Pizza on Westminster Street, and the Middle School roof drains, School Street.

**Hyde Hill Brook**

The Hyde Hill Brook runs from the Reese Circle area of Bellows Falls Village down to Hyde Street where it enters the underground storm drain system running to the Connecticut River. The brook runs through both developed and undeveloped areas on the top and side of the hill. The developed portion of the watershed was constructed without a comprehensive storm drainage system or stormwater management plan. During heavy rainstorms, runoff causes flooding of the Hyde Street and Laurel Avenue area. As a result, the Hyde Hill Brook Drainage Basin Study was prepared for the Town in 1992 by C.T. Male Associates, P.C. Recommendations made in that study are referenced below. The Town constructed a detention basin off Clace Drive as a result of that study, and further subdivision in the immediate vicinity. It is anticipated that development will continue in the area served by the Hyde Hill Brook drainage basin.

**GOAL**

1. To control stormwater drainage to protect both public and private investment and property and the health and safety of the community.

**POLICIES**

1. Review all plans for future construction to assess stormwater runoff impact on affected properties, including adjacent properties and those in lower section of a drainage basin, and the municipality in order to ensure the health and safety of the public and to protect both public and private investments.

2. Assure that future development does not overload existing downstream drainage facilities, cause erosion or negative environmental effects. This can include downstream drain ways which are beyond design capacity for volume or rate of flow, downstream drainways impacted by erosive velocities of flow, or adversely affected by erosion and/or sedimentation and/or deteriorated water quality.

3. Utilize on-site stormwater controls wherever possible and practicable.

4. Infiltration of runoff on development sites should be encouraged wherever soil and water quality are suitable.

5. Development plans should be appropriate to the site and relate to the topographic, soil, and vegetation characteristics.
6. Development should preserve the existing natural drainage patterns and vegetation as much as possible.

7. Soil disturbance during development activity should be kept to as short a time period as possible and affect as small an area as possible.

8. Wherever appropriate, the Town should require a right-of-way, easement or obtain necessary private property for the construction or maintenance of stormwater control systems.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While considered high priority, there is no ranking.

1. The Town shall upgrade the stormwater collection and conveyance system serving the Hyde Hill brook study area to convey twenty-five year storm flows. This should include necessary drainage structures on Reese Circle.

2. The Town shall construct debris control structures along Hyde Hill Brook (C.T. Male study).

3. The Planning Commission shall identify potential growth areas so that the Select board and Highway Department can assess future stormwater drainage area problems.

   Specified areas already identified which should have stormwater drainage studies include Alden Road, Ski Bowl Road, Webb Terrace, Darby Hill Road, and Golden Hill Road areas. Easements are needed from private property owners to complete further work on this road.

4. Storm drains in Saxtons River Village will be upgraded.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. These items are not ranked.

5. The Town should consider further repair of the collapsing embankment on Parker Hill Road and consider alternatives to ditching which increases the potential for erosion.

6. The Town should assess constructing a ditch dike on Clace Drive (C.T. Male study).

7. The highway superintendent shall improve the culvert inventory by continually adding information regarding location, condition, and replacement schedule for all culverts regardless of length or diameter; for inclusion in GIS mapping.

8. Where necessary, the Town will install beaver deceivers.
CHAPTER 12
LAND USE

Current land use in Rockingham is based on the town’s history - in particular, its economic development history. Future land use in Rockingham will be based on the town’s ongoing and future economic development and the town’s design for the future as contained within this plan. One of the principal means Rockingham uses to move towards its design for the future is by planning for land use. In Rockingham, land use is based on the premise that development should occur in an orderly fashion, according to criteria and guidelines that allow reasonable use of property without interfering with others reasonable use of their property. Through appropriate development, Rockingham seeks to achieve and maintain a vital community and to protect the town’s investments in the local economy, highways, water and sewer systems, and schools.

Current Land Use

Rockingham’s current land use pattern of small villages and hamlets surrounded by rural areas reflects a layout established in the 1700s by the first settlers of European descent. Villages (Bellows Falls, Rockingham, Saxtons River, Cambridgeport, and Bartonsville) were established at key transportation points and where water power was available. During the 1800s, rural areas were developed as farm and grazing land and much of the original forest was cleared. Improvements in technology, power generation, and transportation systems led to increased industrial development within Bellows Falls, Saxtons River, and Bartonsville. Subsequent changes in industrial technology and power production, combined with social changes and natural disasters, led to the collapse and disappearance of much of the original industrial base. The difficulties of farming in Vermont, combined with changing national agricultural and socio-economic patterns, led to a gradual phasing out of most farms during the 1900s. Farming is no longer a major determinant of land use in the rural areas.

Historically, most of Rockingham’s housing and industrial development lay within the villages of Bellows Falls and Saxtons River. Currently, both housing and industrial expansion are occurring outside of the villages. Cambridgeport, Bartonsville, and Rockingham are now no more than hamlets, small clusters of houses with a few small businesses, but no defined village structure. Much of the rural area has reverted to forest. Over the last several years, these rural areas have seen a significant growth of single family housing.

Present land use in Rockingham is shown on the attached land use maps, classified according to broad categories: Industrial-Commercial, Conservation, Forest Preserve, Hamlet, Historic Hamlet, Resource; Urban; Rural; and Village. These categories are discussed in greater detail later in this section.

Determining Future Land Use

Rockingham uses the process of zoning, expressed through the town’s zoning bylaws, to regulate proposed uses of land to fit the design for Rockingham’s future. The town’s zoning bylaws regulate what uses can be done on a parcel of land, e.g., describing what type of development is
allowed and at what density, how much of a parcel can be developed, and how far back from the edges development can occur. As required by State land use law, the zoning bylaws must be based on the Town Plan. However, since the Plan serves as a blueprint for the future, not all recommendations in the Plan may be reflected in the bylaws.

Land Use Maps show the various zones which identify how land is or should be used. Factors affecting development potential displayed on the various Town Plan maps are combined with town policies to produce the Land Use Maps. In considering future land uses, the Land Use Maps should also be compared with the Agricultural Lands Map which indicates agricultural land designated by the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) process, and the Rockingham Aquifer Recharge Area Study.

It is neither practical nor useful for the Land Use Maps to attempt to consider in detail each small change or variation in the character of the land. Therefore, the Land Use maps show Rockingham land use patterns on a broad scale. Future revisions of the zoning bylaw should reflect the uses as set forth on the Potential Land Use Map, and the Goals, Policies and Action Steps of all chapters of this Plan.

Detailed consideration of any specific site will be aided by study of the Town Plan Resource Maps and of soil survey detail sheets available from the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Among the factors considered in preparation of the Land Use maps are the following: existing sewer and water services; existing public and privately owned recreation, conservation, and watershed lands, existing rural settlements; current agricultural, commercial, and industrial land uses; agricultural, forestry, and wildlife resource values; proximity to improved public highways; and the feasibility of extending highways, utilities, and town services to rural areas.

Public investments and infrastructure are major influences on where development occurs. An example is the extension of the water and sewer lines to the Industrial Park area. Expenditure of tax dollars for infrastructure is a community’s investment in future land use. The rising energy costs, particularly for transportation, may influence land uses in the future. These same costs impact municipal and school budgets if more roads need to be maintained and plowed, or more students need transportation over longer distances. Construction of residences on class 4 roads should be discussed since this may affect town budgets significantly in the future.

Despite planning efforts, conflicts may develop between different land uses. This can result from changes in a community’s demographics, economic development, road construction or improvements, increased traffic, availability of public water or sewer and other similar factors. Examples of typical land use conflicts common to the region include: locating a gravel pit or landfill next to a residential neighborhood, increasing single family housing development within historically rural areas, and development of prime agricultural land. Rockingham seeks to resolve such conflicts between land uses through its planning and zoning processes, and by following the procedures described within its zoning bylaw.

At the same time, the community recognizes that some uses are necessary for the town. Determining where such uses are appropriate is difficult at times. The zoning bylaws currently acknowledge this by allowing a variety of uses in the more rural districts. Rural areas traditionally have hosted more than just residences. For example, farmers have done logging and maple sugaring along with growing crops. Some activities can only occur in the more rural areas where the resources are located, such as gravel or sand extraction.
The zoning bylaws should not be stagnant. The community should regularly review the zoning districts and uses. Changing technology makes it easier for residents to work from home, and this is reflected in having two types of home based uses in the zoning bylaw – home occupation and home business – which allow for limited non-residential uses of homes. In addition, changes are necessitated from time to time by amendments to the enabling statute under Title 24, Vermont Statutes.

As was noted in the Transportation chapter, the Town participated in the Route 103 Corridor Management Plan. Access management was the focus of the study and various methods to improve access management are contained in the Plan.

Occasionally, there may also be a conflict between the Town Plan and the Zoning Bylaw. The land use maps are not controlling. The proposed land use map is a look to the future for its residents and would only be controlling if reflected in adopted zoning bylaw regulations. In these instances, the Bylaw is the prevailing standard. Rockingham recognizes that while the Town Plan is its design for the future, the Zoning Bylaw may implement only a part of that design at any one time.

GOALS

1. To plan development in order to balance uses and demands with the natural capacity of the land, capacity of municipal services, and the town’s goals and policies as set forth in this Plan.

2. To maintain viable and livable village and urban centers and sustain the character of rural areas.

3. To preserve high quality agricultural lands, encourage forest management, and appropriate use of natural resources.

4. To encourage manufacturing and commercial development in designated areas and sustainable economic development that can be supported by municipal services.

POLICIES

1. Restrict, where necessary and reasonable, the use of lands with limited capability for development or with high resource value.

2. Encourage new development within existing patterns of settlement including villages and hamlets interspersed with rural undeveloped areas and those used for agriculture and forestry.

3. Land capability shall provide a foundation for judging how the lands of the Town should be used. Capability shall be based on factors such as resource value, slope, accessibility,
permeability, flood hazard, wetlands value, and other criteria as set forth in the Plan and bylaws or ordinances.

4. Encourage the continued use of lands for agriculture and forestry purposes.

5. Encourage the use of conservation easements to protect and preserve valuable natural resources.

6. Encourage cluster planning for residential, commercial, and industrial development.

7. Zoning Bylaws and Subdivision Regulations should provide for efficient, orderly development to allow for appropriate utilization of land in accordance with this Plan.

8. Village and urban centers should sustain a more intense level of activity with consideration given to maintaining residential neighborhoods.

Adequate municipal facilities and infrastructure needed to support higher densities of land use should be provided and maintained within village and urban areas including public recreation areas and sidewalks.

9. Careful analysis of resulting impacts must be given to any proposal which would increase commercial activity in village locations other than along Main Street in Saxtons River, and on the Island, within the Square, and along portions of Rockingham and Westminster Streets in Bellows Falls. It would be detrimental to the central business areas of both villages if commercial activities move from the downtowns into residential areas. Consideration must be given to the impact on the character of these communities and residential areas.

10. Maintain and enhance the streetscape of the urban and village centers by preservation of significant groupings of buildings, landscape features and other amenities which, together, form community centers.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While considered high priority, there is no ranking.

1. Propose multiple zoning districts for Saxtons River Village based on residential, commercial, light industrial and institutional uses.

2. Use the Aquifer Recharge Area Study to review the Rockingham Zoning Bylaw zoning district maps and uses, and make changes based on the study.

3. The Planning Commission will identify potential areas for future industrial expansion, with preference given to proximity to municipal water and sewer sources.
4. The Planning Commission will work with the Bellows Falls Downtown Development Alliance to review uses in the Designated Downtown area.

5. The Planning Commission should hold a public forum with residents of Bellows Falls neighborhoods to discuss the desirability of increasing non-residential and commercial activity on Atkinson Street.

6. The Planning Commission shall study the impact of allowing zero lot line development in the older village and urban areas where such development has been used in the past (e.g. Green Street), and shall give consideration to amending the Zoning Bylaws to allow for such development in completely new developments.

7. The Planning Commission shall propose amendments to the Planned Residential Development/Planned Unit Development sections of the Zoning Bylaw to clarify the application process and define standards for development.

8. The Planning Commission will identify areas of significant earth resources utilizing available data such as Natural Resources Conservation Service information.

9. The Planning Commission shall propose an amendment to the Zoning Bylaw to establish suitable criteria for locating and operating gravel pits and other earth resource extraction facilities.

10. The Planning Commission will review the subdivision review standards to assure that the Commission, applicants and neighbors have a clear understanding of the criteria which must be met, and if met, would allow for subdivision to occur.

11. The Planning Commission will review the Route 103 Corridor Management Plan and consider and make recommendations for access management based on land use revisions set forth in the Plan.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. These items are not ranked.

12. The Planning Commission shall propose an amendment to the Zoning Bylaws for older residential areas in Saxtons River Village and Bellows Falls to allow for construction closer to the front lot line. Consideration should be included for closer setback for open porches on facades in order to maintain the classic Victorian architectural style of the villages.

13. The Planning Commission shall propose an amendment to the Zoning Bylaws to increase the minimum lot size for lands within the Urban Expansion area as shown on the Proposed Land Use Map to 20,000 square ft. due to stormwater drainage/potable water concerns.
Refer to other chapters for additional Action Steps which relate to land use.

**LAND USE MAP**

The categories of uses portrayed on the Land Use map are described in the following sections.

**Conservation and Resource Areas** are similar with respect to their physical character. Some areas within these designations both present serious limitations to development and offer significant resource values.

1. **Conservation Areas** are essentially undeveloped areas which are largely wooded. Some of the Conservation areas have limited access to an improved public road and to necessary public utilities and services, while others may have poor soils or steep slopes.

   Much of the Conservation areas may not be suitable for large scale development due to these factors but may be suitable for small scale development in relation to the overlying zoning district. The range in lot sizes under the Zoning Bylaw reflects the proximity to public roads and land use in the late 1960’s when the Rockingham Zoning Bylaw was originally proposed.

   Those Conservation areas which are most remote from public highways and utilities should remain largely undeveloped until public services are available, and there is a demonstrated need for more intensive development in these areas. Should development within Conservation areas be proposed, cluster development is the preferred design.

2. **Resource Areas** generally should be used primarily for agriculture, forestry, recreational and open space uses with single family residences scattered throughout the Resource areas. It includes lands subject to flooding, such as along the Connecticut River, or which may be wetlands or critical for wildlife. This includes Resource areas which are within Recreation-Conservation zoning districts, on the State of Vermont wetlands map, or which support critical wildlife habitat. Resource areas which meet these criteria should remain undeveloped to maintain their natural character.

   Some lands within the Resource areas are located within zoning districts which allow for a range of lot sizes from one to 5 acres. These limited areas may be suitable for small scale development in relation to the overlying zoning district.

3. **Rural Areas** are those which, for the most part, can support low to moderate intensity residential and non-residential development. Moderate intensity is considered to be 1-3 acres per residential unit on the average.

   Rural areas have been mapped for suitable topography within close proximity to town highways, or with convenient access to present population centers such as Bartonsville, Cambridgeport, Rockingham, Saxtons River and Bellows Falls.

   Areas for residential development within the villages of Bellows Falls and Saxtons River are limited, and the rural areas have seen and will continue to see a demand for more housing development in the future.

   Rural areas allow for low intensity mix of rural land uses in addition to agriculture, forestry and residential. Some uses allowed within rural areas are essential to the
community and cannot be located in more urban or village areas. These uses should also include small-scale home businesses and outdoor recreation as long as these uses are compatible with one another and do not cause excessive noise, pollution, or disturbance.

The Rural Area east of Interstate 91, and north of the Williams River, is a visually sensitive area due to its proximity to the Connecticut River. This area is within a Natural Resources Overlay district under the Zoning Bylaw. Development in this rural area must be sensitive to the scenic qualities intrinsic to the Connecticut River.

4. **Commercial-Industrial Areas** are shown where physical conditions and proximity to transportation and municipal services are suitable for industrial development, and where industry is presently concentrated. Sites for future expansion of industry are available within these areas. Minimum lot sizes range from 20,000 square feet to 1 acre dependent upon the feasibility of connection to public water and/or sewer.

Most recent industrial development has occurred in the area north of Bellows Falls which is served by that municipality's water and sewer.

In general, due to topography and other physical conditions, large areas for new economic development are limited. Good industrial land should be used for that purpose and consideration given to the impact that other incompatible uses, such as residential, can have on future industrial development of these particular areas.

Maximum use must be made of existing older sites and buildings. Within the Bellows Falls Island area there is a substantial amount of older industrial space. Some space is available due to the decline of the paper making industry.

Grants should continue to be sought to renovate this space or build anew if rehabilitation of the existing facilities is not feasible. One must also recognize that the Bellows Falls Island area is on the National Historic Register. See the Historic Resources chapter herein and the Historic Resources Maps.

5. **Hamlet Areas** include the small population centers of Cambridgeport, Upper and Lower Bartonsville, and Rockingham Village. For the most part they include land which can support moderate to high intensity rural development with one residential unit per acre considered to be the maximum unless sewer and water service are provided. It should be recognized that in some areas one acre may be insufficient for siting of an on-site wastewater disposal system due to soil type and the need to meet isolation distances from wells, watercourses, etc.

The desirability of these population centers should be enhanced by encouraging the location within these areas of small commercial (mom & pop type) activities serving local needs. Large commercial and industrial activities with a broader impact should be located in the designated commercial/ industrial areas.
The old Rockingham village area has been designated a **Historic Hamlet** to encourage compatibility of new development with the Rockingham Meeting House and its surroundings. The zoning bylaws should contain reasonable provisions to preserve the setting of this hamlet and to ensure that the architecture and design of any future development is compatible with existing structures of the 18th and early 19th century period.

6. **The Village Area** includes the Village of Saxtons River in which sewer service is either available or can be provided by extensions of sewer lines. Within the village, sewer service allows for a relatively high population density and a combination of residential, institutional, commercial, and light industrial uses. Minimum lot area is dependent upon connection to public water and/or sewer and residential versus non-residential use.

Potable water is supplied by individual wells and these resources must be protected. It is important that the Zoning Bylaws effectively maintain the character of the village, particularly its approaches, commercial center, and residential and institutional neighborhoods.

The majority of the Village is on the National Register of Historic Places. Building design should enhance and not detract from this designation. Refer to the Historic Resources chapter and maps.

Development of areas within the village not served by public sewer should be reviewed and considered in view of their potential for relatively high population density upon extension of the sewer system. Expansion of village area to the north/northwest is limited given the extent of Vermont Academy land. Expansion of "village area" would actually be outside the village limits.

While there is a municipal sewer system in the Village, water is supplied via individual wells. Maintenance of water quality is of present concern with recent experiences of ground water contamination.

Uses allowed within the village as a whole include residential, commercial and industrial. The village character is a traditional "Main Street" with its post office, churches, grocery store and other commercial shops. The remaining areas have been primarily residential with two large institutional uses, Vermont Academy and Kurn Hattin, at the north and south ends of the village. The latter, now the Warner Center, is a commercial center for small business.

Maintenance of this village character entails careful consideration of proposals for non-residential uses located other than on Main Street and of any large scale development plans with resulting impacts on traffic and noise. Consideration also should be given to development of zones within the Village area to define what level of activity is acceptable in a small village setting with close proximity between commercial and residential uses.
Route 121 serves as the major roadway to and from the Village. (Refer to the Transportation section.) This includes through traffic from Grafton and Westminster West.

7. An Urban development area has been designated which encompasses the intensively developed areas of Bellows Falls Village, the Oak Hill area, and areas immediately north of Bellows Falls Village which are served by the Village sewer and water systems or are within reasonable distances from the existing systems.

This "urban" portion of the community has been the area of the most intensive land use activity with existing infrastructure to serve the more intense uses. Minimum lot sizes vary throughout the "Urban" area and range from 7,000 sq. ft. to 14,000 sq. ft.

Within the Village, issues include development of the Hyde Hill Brook drainage basin, increased through truck traffic, intrusion of commercial uses into residential areas, continued development on the Island and within the traditional industrial area.

The easterly portion of Bellows Falls Village (the Island and east of Granger Street) is an industrial area. This changes into the commercial area of the Square and Rockingham and Westminster Streets before shifting to the residential neighborhoods. Much of the Island and downtown area is within National Historic Register districts. See the Historic Resources chapter and maps.

The Village is bordered by steeply sloping wooded hillsides on the west which are near critical watershed area. At the north end, the urban area is separated from the Industrial area by the topography of the Connecticut River “setback” and steep embankments. New development has primarily occurred on the hillsides above and to the west of the original village area.

Individual commercial activities can be found in residential areas in the Village. A long-term effect of the spread of commercial development into residential areas is to drain the downtown of its purpose and vitality. One issue is how to maintain enough commercial use in residential areas to serve those neighborhoods while at the same time preventing a decline in the downtown business district.

Access into Bellows Falls Village is via Route 5 from north & south, Route 121 from the west, and N.H. Route 12 from the east. Atkinson Street is both a major residential street plus used by through traffic. Steady increase in truck traffic and the impact on the downtown and residential areas has raised concerns in the village.

An Urban Expansion area has been designated and includes the area west of the older village. This area is near the watershed and includes land within the Hyde Hill drainage basin. Watershed protection and stormwater control are limiting factors for increased development. Adequate water pressure for connection into the municipal system may also be a restriction. Development in this area should be connected into municipal sewer. Single family home development can be anticipated here and lot size should be similar to the previously developed lots such as the Reese development (approximately 20,000 sq. ft.).
8. **Forest Preserve Areas** include publicly owned lands presently designated as public forests. These preserves provide natural resource areas for public use and enjoyment. Of critical importance, the Bellows Falls Village Forest serves as the watershed of Minards Pond, the Village water supply. Other areas include the Saxtons River Village Horan Forest, the Town of Rockingham Oak Hill land, and the Bellows Falls Village wooded playground land.

The Dorand State Forest is a forest preserve area in the Bartonsville area of the town.

9. **Agricultural Areas** include lands presently in agricultural use or ownership, or where soil conditions are particularly suitable for continued or expanded agriculture. Proposals for non-agricultural development in these areas should be planned to minimize their impact on agricultural uses or potential. Minimum lot sizes vary considerably and reference must be made to the zoning map since agricultural areas are located in several different zoning districts.

Agricultural areas are not shown on the Land Use Maps, but detailed information can be found in the Agricultural section of this document and on the Agricultural Lands Map.

10. **Flood Hazard Areas** are lands with a major flood hazard potential. One should refer to the official floodway maps available at the Zoning and Town Clerk's offices for detailed information and location. Development of these lands must conform to the Town of Rockingham Flood Hazard Area Zoning Bylaw. Refer to the most current Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) maps for floodplain area.

It should be noted that small streams which have the potential for flooding and causing damage are not shown on either this map or on the official floodway maps. Careful consideration to the topography must be given when considering development of these sites. The Town should work with the Vermont Fluvial Erosion Hazard Program to identify these areas.

11. **Pond and Stream Areas** may include buffer zones away from the shorelines of ponds and permanent streams. Ponds are defined to include natural wetlands, ponds and lakes, but to exclude artificial ponds constructed by the current owner. Development within these areas should be compatible with the scenic, recreational, or wildlife habitat values of the stream or pond, and should not cause contamination or undue erosion.

Other values include groundwater storage and surface water stabilization. Provision of access areas, dry hydrants or other facilities for fire protection purposes in these buffer areas should not be restricted. Seasonal streams which have significant wildlife habitat and fisheries value should be protected.

Wetland boundaries should not be considered absolute. They may change from time to time depending on such factors as time of year, precipitation received, geological processes (erosion, sedimentation etc.), beaver activity, and human alterations. Final determination of wetlands boundaries is made by the State of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

**NATURAL & TOPOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT MAP**
Fundamental to all development is the need for sewage disposal which is safe for both the
developed land and for adjacent lands. Except where connections can be made to municipal sewer systems, individual disposal systems are required. Most water supplies in Rockingham are also on an individual parcel basis making safe disposal of sewage more critical. The most important physical conditions of the land in this regard are slope, soil depth, soil type, and wetness.

While the needs of residential, farm, commercial and industrial uses differ, the suitability of the land depends upon these factors. The Physical and Topographic Conditions map shows these factors for Rockingham. Slope information was provided by the U.S. Geological Survey. Slopes in excess of 15% constitute critical limitations to development while those below 15% may have moderate to serious limitations depending upon factors other than slope. Land in excess of 20% slope is not generally suitable for development and lots which have a large percentage of land in excess of 20% slope should be carefully reviewed by the Planning Commission and additional land with a slope of less than 20% should be added to such lots. Careful planning is necessary where slopes are in the 15% - 20% range. Soil depth, type and wetness information are provided by a soil survey of Rockingham made by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service.

The information shown serves to delineate specifically what most residents have known generally: a sizable portion of Rockingham is steep land not suited for development. Another sizeable portion of the land can be used for some development only with very careful site selection and treatment. It is apparent from this map that most existing development has been placed in areas having relatively few limitations.
CHAPTER 13
NEIGHBORING TOWNS

A town plan is to include a statement indicating how it relates to development trends and plans for adjacent municipalities, areas and the region.

Rockingham is located in the northeast corner of Windham County and is abutted by the towns of Chester, Grafton, Athens, Westminster and Springfield. The latter is the largest of the abutting communities. Chester has a thriving commercial district along Route 11, and the Bartonsville area of Rockingham has close association with Chester due to the proximity of shopping. Athens is the most rural of the adjacent communities while Grafton has a small centrally located historic village. The Kissell Hill and Gageville (Village of North Westminster) sections of Westminster have close ties with Bellows Falls due to their location immediately next to the town line.

As was noted in the economic development section of the Plan, Rockingham's role in relation to its neighbors has changed over the past years. While still more developed than its immediate neighbors (except Springfield), it is not the only or primary shopping area. Rockingham, particularly Bellows Falls, faces competition from Keene, New Hampshire, as far as retail sales.

The Connecticut River was used for travel as early as the 1700s and this meant travel north and south, following the river. This pattern remains true today with two major highways (Interstate 91 and U.S. Route 5) traveling north to south. The Town’s location on the Connecticut River has traditionally meant much contact with residents of neighboring New Hampshire. Until the 1970s, North Walpole, New Hampshire high school students attended school in Bellows Falls.

One of the goals of the Connecticut River Byway is to have towns along the river work with each other to promote the Byway as a single entity despite involving two states and many towns. The Waypoint Welcome Center in Bellows Falls, built as part of the Byway project, serves as a gateway for not only Rockingham, but for other neighboring river towns. Rockingham recognizes that the Byway involves both sides of the river, and that the towns must work together for success.

One of the oldest formal working arrangements between Towns is the Mutual Aid system for firefighting. Based on that model, the Town more recently has formalized a mutual aid agreement with some neighboring towns for highway emergencies. The Town of Rockingham and Bellows Falls Village have worked with adjacent communities on issues ranging from the Solid Waste District, to a joint sewer system with Walpole and a joint recycling center with Westminster. Currently, the concern over potable water supplies to residents in North Westminster has resulted in the extension of the water line into that neighboring community. Concerns about the Vilas Bridge must be shared with Walpole, N.H. to press for re-opening of this river crossing to local traffic. The limitation on access to Route 12 in New Hampshire due to the restricted railroad underpass in Westminster Depot is an issue that affects both Rockingham-Bellows Falls and the Town of Westminster.

Rockingham is a Connecticut River Valley town and the lack of a sales tax in New Hampshire impacts commercial activity in Rockingham as in other Vermont border communities. Prior to the opening of the North Meadow shopping plaza there were few retail shops in Walpole, but at the present time, Walpole has an effect on the Town as far as retail sales.
An example of the close relationship with Walpole is the Great Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce which includes members from both Vermont and New Hampshire.

Athens, Grafton, Westminster and Rockingham form the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union District and all communities send their high school students to the Bellows Falls Union High School.

Rockingham is abutted on the north by the towns of Chester and Springfield. As was noted previously, Rockingham shares many of the same concerns as Springfield ranging from housing to economic development.

The 2014 Springfield Town Plan states that the town is sensitive to its role as a neighbor in a larger community of towns, and that some of the results of actions taken to implement the 2014 Springfield Town Plan will have regional consequences. “Action taken by surrounding towns, as well as the state, also have an impact on the Town of Springfield. Each jurisdiction needs to work toward a coordinated effort.” The Springfield Town Plan states that “All of the towns surrounding Springfield have town plans and zoning ordinances. None of these plans is in conflict with the Springfield Town Plan.” Further, “The town of Rockingham’s plan for future land use does not conflict with the land use planned for Springfield on the southern end of town. In Rockingham, most land that borders Springfield is designated as forest preserve, resource, or rural. The Rockingham Town Plan acknowledges Springfield’s role as an employment center, stating that impacts on jobs in Springfield impact towns beyond its borders.”

Chester (population 3,154 – 2010 Census) is a smaller, more rural community which has less industrial development than Rockingham or Springfield. It has worked with the regional development agency for the Springfield area to bring some light manufacturing to the community in recent years. There are economic ties between Rockingham and Chester as evidenced by the importance of the talc mills to Chester and to the railroad serving both communities. Chester’s Town Plan states it “is surrounded by towns which share many similar planning concerns and are faced with varying degrees of development pressure. The 2016 Chester Town Plan does not conflict with the plans of the above towns.”

Further, “Some neighboring towns share similar concerns to those in Chester with regard to development and traffic. The towns of Chester, Cavendish, Ludlow, and Rockingham, for example, see a significant increase in traffic flow during the winter months, due to the operation of five ski resorts in the area, namely, Okemo, Killington, Bromley, Magic and Stratton. The expansion plans of Okemo Mountain Resort and Killington Resort will cause further increases in traffic through Chester, Cavendish, Ludlow, and Rockingham once they are implemented. The increase in truck traffic and truck size along Route 103 is also a shared concern amongst the towns of Chester, Cavendish, Ludlow, and Rockingham.”

Chester’s 2016 Town Plan recommends continued implementation of the VT Route 103 Corridor Management Plan and incorporates the findings of this corridor study into their Town Plan.

The 2016 Chester Town Plan also states that the town shares the Williams River watershed with Rockingham and other towns, and also that the land use and conservation plans of the neighboring Towns are compatible with those of Chester.

The 2016 Chester Town Plan encompasses policies not adverse to those of Rockingham. That Plan states “Most residents indicate a preference for a rural character rather than an urban or
suburban community. They want growth to occur at a pace and in a manner which does not destroy the character of the community or result in significant tax increases. Growth deemed good for the Town should enhance the social, environmental, cultural, and economic values of the Town.”

The 2015 Westminster Town Plan states that a goal of the Plan is "To plan development so as to maintain the historic pattern of compact village centers separated by rural countryside, working toward an ongoing and respectful relationship among the three communities in our town while at the same time honoring the uniqueness of each.”

Portions of Westminster are closely tied with Rockingham, particularly Bellows Falls. This includes the industrial area on Granger Street, the Kissell Hill area, the south end of Westminster Terrace, and the North Westminster/Gageville area. These areas are located in the northeast section of the Town and are not the more rural areas found in the rest of Westminster.

The 2015 Westminster Town Plan notes that “The land use elements of the Putney, Brookline and Rockingham town plans are consistent with those proposed in this plan. With one exception all of these plans identify the boundary areas as low density residential and/or conservation areas which are compatible with each other. The only exception occurs in the northeast corner of Westminster, where the town abuts the Village of Bellows Falls. In this area to the plans are compatible in that ‘Urban’ designation given to Bellows Falls is adjacent to the Highway Commercial and Terrace Village areas proposed for Westminster.’

Additionally, the plans serve to strengthen the existing interconnectedness between the towns. This can be found in the areas of education (Westminster, Rockingham, and Athens share a regional high school), transportation systems, public safety and natural resource protection.”

Westminster not only shares the regional high school with Rockingham, it also sends middle school students to the Bellows Falls Middle School located in Bellows Falls. In addition it has ties through water and sewer line extensions into areas in the north portion of Westminster. Westminster’s population (2010 Census) is 3,178.

Athens is the smallest community in the area with a population of 442 (2010 census). This is the most rural of all the communities with most residents commuting to other towns for employment. Athens contracts with Saxtons River Village to have fire coverage provided by the Saxtons River Fire Department. This resulted from increased requirements for firemen to meet, and burdens on the local department which made it difficult to provide its own coverage. As of 2016, the Town of Athens does not have a Town Plan.

Grafton, located to the west of Rockingham, is a picturesque rural community primarily residential with low-intensity small businesses. With a population of 679 (2010 Census) it is a community which attracts tourists and part-time residents and differs from Rockingham in many respects. The goals expressed in the 2013 Grafton Town Plan are appropriate for this more rural community and in many respects not that different from Rockingham's goals given the differences in the communities.

The Cambridgeport neighborhood is composed of properties located in Grafton and Rockingham. This is an area of high water tables and structures served by on-site individual wastewater disposal systems. Any new building, a change in the use of a building, or a failed system may create health hazards from wastewater. The Rockingham Town Plan places the Cambridgeport area in the less dense “Rural” designation based on the limited land capability for septic disposal.
Grafton worked with Rockingham over the past years to accomplish the improvement to Route 121. In addition, the Grafton plan recommends development of a mechanism for support of the recycling programs based in neighboring towns. Other shared-town concerns for Grafton include provision of emergency services, roads, electoral redistricting, educational facilities, state aid, economic development, waste disposal and recycling.

The goals in this Town Plan are generally in agreement with the goals of the Windham Regional Plan. In some instances this community has found that its needs are different from that of the region. This should not be surprising given the location of Rockingham and its close relationships with Walpole/North Walpole, N.H. and with Springfield in Windsor County.

This document is meant to set forth the concerns and goals of this community. As stated elsewhere in this document, Rockingham is not as "urban" as Brattleboro but neither is it as rural as Athens. It is unique in that there are two incorporated villages within the Town which have their own governing boards, municipal taxes and facilities. Rockingham also has close ties with the Town of Springfield which in the past has been a job market for local residents. In addition, local residents travel to Springfield for contacts with state agencies.

The differences between the various communities must be recognized, but most communities have a desire to work together as expressed in their respective town plans on issues such as housing, transportation, solid waste disposal, and watershed management.

**GOALS**

1. To communicate with neighboring towns in addressing mutual concerns at both the local and regional levels.

2. To continue to seek regional solutions to issues when practical and effective.

**POLICIES**

1. Continue to participate in the Windham Regional Commission and appoint active representatives to it from the Town.

2. Work with adjacent communities to improve the economic base and affordable housing for the entire region.

3. Communicate and cooperate with neighboring towns on matters of mutual interest to better serve all communities and to prevent conflicts.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While considered high priority, there is no ranking.

1. The Select board shall work with other member towns of the Solid Waste District to assure fiscal and administrative responsibility to community residents.

2. The Town will work with adjacent communities on both sides of the Connecticut River to
create a strong, regional Connecticut River Byway visitor’s center and scenic byway.

3. To continue to work with the Town of Chester, and other appropriate agencies and organizations, to implement the Route 103 Corridor Management Plan.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. These items are not ranked.

4. The Select board and Planning Commission will actively participate in the annual inter-community meetings sponsored by Windham Regional Commission.

5. The Select board will continue to work with the Town of Walpole, N.H., regarding the reopening of the river crossing at the Vilas Bridge.

6. A Rockingham representative to the Windham Regional Commission (WRC) should be a member of the WRC Transportation Committee due to concerns about the Vilas Bridge and the Select board shall strongly advocate committee appointment.

7. The Planning Commission will meet jointly with the Planning Commissions of adjacent communities to discuss issues of mutual concern.
CHAPTER 14
MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT & SERVICES
COMMUNITY SERVICES

This chapter of the town plan describes the functions and services of the various municipal governments and boards which operate within the Town of Rockingham, and describes the framework of municipal government that influence, direct, and implement this town plan.

Municipal facilities and services as discussed herein are town and village properties and services including administration, fire, police, ambulance, and library. Highways, education and school boards, recreation, water and waste disposal are found under separate chapters.

One of the best tools which municipal government can use to keep its citizens involved in the governing process is the Internet. The Town of Rockingham and Bellows Falls Village share a web site at www.rockbf.org which is a valuable tool for both municipal officials and community residents.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT & SERVICES

Municipal government services in Rockingham are divided between three municipal governing bodies. The Town of Rockingham is the primary municipal body, with responsibility for providing certain services throughout the entire town. Town services are supported by property taxes and other fees, and officials are elected in town-wide elections. Within the town of Rockingham are the villages of Bellows Falls, and Saxtons River Village. Each of the villages provides an additional layer of services within their boundaries, supported by village-specific fees and taxes. Village boards are elected by village residents. Those areas of Rockingham that are not within the boundaries of the two villages are often referred to as “rural Rockingham.”

Rockingham also contains the “villages” of Rockingham, Brockways Mills, Bartonsville, and Cambridgeport. These are not separate incorporated villages; however, they remain as unique hamlets and centers of relatively dense residential use. These are recognized as potential growth areas.

Municipal government expense and administration has become much more costly and complex in recent years. Many of the increases are accounted for by the demand for additional special government services by state and federal government as well as by town residents. The ability of the town to pay for its services and facilities is also affected by the cost of education. The cost of the town school district, including the high school union district, generally amounts to two-thirds of the overall town budget each year. Many of the school programs are federally or state mandated.

One key component of the tax equation in Rockingham is the percentage of tax revenue from the hydroelectric plant. (The dam and Connecticut River are part of New Hampshire, and the dam is taxed by Walpole, N.H.) The hydroelectric plant property taxes account for approximately one-third of the town’s income and one-half of Bellows Falls Village’s income. A move to have the Town of Rockingham acquire ownership of the hydroelectric plant was defeated in 2005.

In 2016, a town-wide vote was held to consider consolidating the Village of Bellows Falls into the Town of Rockingham. The basic concept of the consolidation proposal was to form one single municipal government to oversee all village-town services. The consolidation referendum was defeated at the polls, leaving the current two municipal governing bodies intact.
TOWN OF ROCKINGHAM

The official business of the Town is conducted at the annual March meeting and at occasional special town meetings. The Select board is the elected board responsible for Town services and operations. This is a five person board elected at the March town meeting. The Town operates under the municipal manager form of government and shares a municipal manager, administrative costs, and other municipal functions with Bellows Falls Village. Costs are allocated proportionately between the town and village. All elected officials for the Town are chosen by Australian ballot.

With the exception of fire and police coverage, the Town provides the following services throughout the municipality including within the Villages:

Administrative Offices - the Town offices operate from the historic Town Hall located in downtown Bellows Falls. These offices handle tax collection and billing for both the Town and Rockingham School District, town bookkeeping, and accounts payable and receivable. The administrative staff is shared with Bellows Falls Village Corporation.

Bellows Falls Opera House/Movie Theater. The Town operates the cinema and hosts live shows at the Town Hall. (See Chapter 9, Recreation and Cultural Resources for additional information.)

Cemetery Sexton - one or more cemetery sextons are appointed annually by the Select board who have responsibility for the Town owned cemeteries.

Conservation Commission – the Commission is a nine member board appointed by the Select board for four year terms. It may inventory and conduct studies of the community’s natural resources and lands, and may advise the Select board and Planning Commission.

Development Office - the Town offices include the Development Office which assists both existing and new commercial and industrial businesses, including administration of the Revolving Loan Fund. The Development Director also serves as the Executive Director of the Bellows Falls Area Development Corporation.

Emergency Medical Service - Emergency medical services for the town, including the two villages, are provided by a private ambulance service, operating under contract with the Town. The ambulance service provides similar service for other towns in the area. An emergency-use heli-pad is located at the Sonnax building in the Rockingham Industrial Park.

Fire Department - the Rockingham Fire Department is not a part of the town government structure, but is an independent fire company receiving funding through annual town budgets. It is a volunteer department. See below for additional information on fire services.

Health Officer – Health complaint investigations are done by the health officer, including animal bite cases and rental inspections under the Rental Housing Health Code.

Highway Department - road maintenance and work on all public town roads is done by the Town Highway Department with supervision by the Highway Superintendent. This includes the roads within the two villages.

Historic Commission - the town participates in the Certified Local Government (CLG) historic
preservation program and the part-time CLG Coordinator works with the Select board appointed CLG Commission. (See Chapter 8, Historic Resources for additional information.)

**Library** - The Rockingham Free Public Library provides services to all Rockingham residents. It is governed by a board of trustees elected at the annual Town Meeting, and is funded through town taxes. Full and part-time staff handles the day-to-day work. See below and Chapter 9, Recreation and Cultural Resources, for additional information

**Listers’ Office** - The listers’ office assesses property for the grand list for tax purposes. This is the grand list used by all three municipalities, including both villages. The three listers are elected at March town meeting. Each serves a three year term.

**Police** - Bellows Falls has a full time Police Department that provides police services within the village. The Town of Rockingham does not provide independent police coverage, but police services are provided by the Vermont State Police. The Town of Rockingham may appoint a constable, but historically the position has been difficult to fill. Currently, the Town Constable position is held by the Bellows Falls Chief of Police who can provide minimal services such as serving papers for the courts and coordinating law enforcement activity with the Vermont State Police.

**Recreation** - The Town operates a recreation department which runs the summer program at the Bellows Falls Playground and provides for life guard coverage at the privately owned Saxtons River Recreation area. Winter programs include skating and skiing at the Bellows Falls Ski Tow and indoor sports. (See Chapter 9, Recreation and Cultural Resources.)

**Transfer Station-Recycling Center** - the Town funds and operates the Rockingham-Westminster Recycling Center which is located on Route 5, just south of Bellows Falls Village on land owned by Bellows Falls, and leased to the Town.

**Town Clerk’s Office** - the Town Clerk is an elected official. This office is charged with the maintenance of land records, vital statistics records including births, marriages, deaths and various licenses. The office also runs local, state and presidential elections.

**Zoning Board of Adjustment/Planning Commission (PC/ZBA)** - The PC/ZBA is a combined Commission and Board with five members appointed by the Select board. They prepare the Town Plan, revise zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations, and review land development and subdivision applications. They also address land use issues for the entire town, including both villages. The Town Planner / Zoning Administrator administers zoning, subdivision, and floodplain permitting for the town.

**PROPERTIES**
There are a number of properties owned by the Town, Town School District, Bellows Falls Village and Saxtons River Village. The locations are shown on the Publicly Owned or Leased Land Maps. Properties acquired recently via tax sale are not included in this inventory.

**Town Hall** – The municipal offices, located in downtown Bellows Falls, play an important role in the continued effort to support a strong commercial downtown area. Renovations to the Town Hall, completed in 2006, included a complete refurbishing of the theater. Prior projects included the installation of an automated lift to the Lower Theater, construction of an interior fire escape and repair of the weathervane and tower roof. In 2016, the exterior doors will be replaced with energy-efficient doors improving access and preserving the historic building aesthetic.
Rockingham Free Public Library - The original building was constructed in 1908 with funds provided by Andrew Carnegie. After two additions, the library now totals about 14,000 square feet and is one of the largest library buildings in Vermont. The lower floor houses the Children’s Library and a meeting room that can seat 60 plus. The main floor is the adult library with a meeting room for twelve, and the upper floor is the library’s museum, although access to the third floor museum is limited due to the stairway. The library, with the exception of the third floor, is now ADA compliant. After asbestos remediation took place in 2009, a Conditions Assessment of the whole Library building was completed. Internal and external renovation work of this well-used, historic, 100 year-old Carnegie Library has been an ongoing project with the goal of preserving this building so it can serve the community for another 100 years.

Cemeteries - the Town maintains five municipal cemeteries. These include: Meeting House Cemetery in Rockingham, Restland Cemetery off West Street, and Oak Hill Cemetery off Pleasant Street in Bellows Falls, the Saxtons River Cemetery, and the Cambridgeport Cemetery. All original laid-out lots in the Oak Hill Cemetery have been used. The cemetery roads are now being used for additional grave sites. The nearby Restland Cemetery is filled.

The Meeting House cemetery has 340 lots marked out in the land north of the original cemetery. Additional land (known as the Divoll parcel) is also available on the adjacent town parcel just west of the newly laid-out area.

The Saxtons River cemetery was mapped. There are over 200 single graves remaining. There is additional area for expansion in the land to the west of the original cemetery. Cambridgeport Cemetery has over 150 plots remaining plus additional room for expansion.

BELLOWS FALLS VILLAGE CORPORATION

The Bellows Falls Village Board of Trustees is the elected board responsible for Bellows Falls Village services and operations. This is a five person board, including the Village President, elected by Australian ballot at the May annual village meeting. Bellows Falls Village operates under a charter approved by the Vermont legislature. The Town and Bellows Falls Village share a municipal manager, administrative staff, and other municipal functions. Costs are allocated proportionately between the town and village.

The Village provides the following services within the Village limits. Some services extend beyond the village limits, and these are noted.

Administrative Offices - The Bellows Falls Village offices operate from the Town Hall located in downtown Bellows Falls. The village shares office staff with the Town of Rockingham which includes tax collection and billing for the village, village bookkeeping and accounts payable and receivable including water and sewer billing and collection.

Village Clerk - the Village Clerk is elected at the annual May meeting. This office provides clerical services for the Board of Trustees and is responsible for the May village elections.

Village Treasurer – the Village Treasurer is an elected position. Most of the bookkeeping duties are done by the administrative staff.

Police Department - The Bellows Falls Police Department operates from the joint Fire-Police Station on Rockingham Street. The Police Department is headed by a chief with a combination of full and part-time police officers. The Chief is also responsible for the Fire Department which
includes administrative services. Similar to other small police departments, recruitment of qualified personnel is an on-going issue.

Fire Department - the Bellows Falls Fire Department operates from the combined Fire-Police Station on Rockingham Street which was constructed in the mid-1980s. Full time staff includes the deputy chief and several firefighters. There are also on-call-firefighters that staff the fire department evenings and weekends. The fire department maintains an alarm system serving Bellows Falls Village, and extending northerly to the Rockingham Industrial Park, and southerly to the Bellows Falls Union High School in Westminster. See below for additional information on fire services.

Public Works – The Bellows Falls Village public works includes the Village Water and Wastewater Departments with supervision by the Chief Operators.

Wastewater Department - The village operates a wastewater treatment plant located on Mill Street in Bellows Falls. This plant serves the entire village and sewer extensions running northerly on Route 5 to the Rockingham Industrial Park, and south to the Bellows Falls Union High School and the Kissell Hill development, located in the Town of Westminster, and westerly to the village of North Westminster. Sewer mains running south out of the village are not owned or maintained by the village but are the responsibility of the Kissell Hill homeowners’ association, the high school, and North Westminster. The Bellows Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant also serves the Village of North Walpole, N.H., and the Town of Walpole, N.H. Those municipalities are responsible for the sewer mains within their communities.

Water Department - the village operates a water treatment plant located at Minards Pond. The pond and the Bellows Falls watershed off Darby Hill Rd are the sources for village water. This plant serves the entire village and has line extensions to the Rockingham Industrial Park, North Westminster, and to the Bellows Falls Union High School and Kissell Hill.

Hydrant System - The village water includes hydrants for fire protection. These hydrants are located throughout the village limits, and extend northerly along Rockingham Road/Route 5 to the Industrial Park, southerly to the Bellows Falls Union High School, and westerly towards North Westminster. A fire protection fee is charged by the Village on all properties within a specified proximity to a hydrant to assure continued maintenance of lines. Properties which may not be connected to the water line for daily use benefit from the availability of water for fire protection and lower insurance rates.

SAXTONS RIVER VILLAGE

The Saxtons River Village Board of Trustees is the elected board responsible for Saxtons River Village services and operations. This is a five person board elected at the April annual village meeting. Election of officers is from the floor at the annual meeting. The Trustees handle the day-to-day business of that village as there is no staff.

The Village provides the following services within the Village limits. Some services extend beyond the village limits, and these are noted.

Administrative Services - The Village Board of Trustees operates the village via meetings twice a month.

Tax Collector - Tax bills are sent out and collected by the village tax collector who is elected at
the annual village meeting.

**Treasurer** - The treasurer is elected at the annual meeting and handles accounts receivable and payable reporting back to the Village trustees.

**Village Clerk** - the village clerk is an elected official. This office provides clerical services for the Board of Trustees.

**Water and Wastewater Treatment Plant** - the village operates a wastewater treatment plant, located on Plant Road. Bellows Falls Village wastewater treatment employees operate the Saxtons River plant under contract to Saxtons River Village. Saxtons River is served by privately owned wells and there is no municipal water service.

**FAST Squad** - the First Response Squad is an independent, volunteer organization that is funded through village taxes.

**Fire Department** - The Saxtons River Fire Department is funded through village taxes. It also covers the Town of Athens under contract. It is an independent, volunteer organization whose chief is appointed by the Trustees. See below for additional information on fire services.

**Police services** - Saxtons River has in the past contracted with a law enforcement agency to provide limited police coverage within the village limits. If there is no contract with a specific agency, the coverage defaults to the Vermont State Police.

## FIRE SERVICES

Three fire departments cover the community: the Bellows Falls Fire Department, located in and maintained by Bellows Falls Village; the Saxtons River Fire Department, located in and maintained by Saxtons River Village; and the Rockingham Fire Department, located at the Town Garage and maintained by the Town.

Due to the high costs of replacement equipment, a Fire Committee, composed of members from each department and municipal boards, was formed several years ago to coordinate the purchase of new equipment. The plan includes an apparatus replacement schedule for all the fire departments. A Town funded capital reserve fund was established to support the purchase of new equipment. Pre-planning for fire equipment is critical given the costs of new apparatus and the time frame prior to delivery. It may take up to twelve months for delivery after a bid on a truck has been approved.

The committee is composed of a representative from the Rockingham Select board, the Bellows Falls and Saxtons River Trustee Boards, the fire chief of each department, and the municipal manager. To date, the committee process has resulted in the purchase of the Rescue Truck, housed at the Bellows Falls Fire Department, and a pump-tanker truck, housed at the Rockingham Fire Department, and replacement trucks for Bellows Falls and Saxtons River.

The Bellows Falls Department includes several paid members to provide full-time coverage along with paid call-firefighters. The Saxtons River and Town of Rockingham Departments are staffed by volunteers. In all cases, fund-raising activities of the firefighters provide part of the operation funds. Other funds are raised through annual municipal budgets. Each department provides continuous training programs for all members. All departments belong to an area-wide Southwest New Hampshire Mutual Aid Association which includes neighboring towns in the two
states. Dispatching for mutual aid and the Saxtons River and Rockingham departments is handled by mutual aid headquarters in Keene, N.H. Bellows Falls dispatching is combined with the Bellows Falls Police Department.

Topography and location of population centers divide Rockingham naturally into three fire zones: the area bordering the Connecticut River, including Bellows Falls; the southern part including Saxtons River and Cambridgeport; and the northern part including Rockingham Village area, Brockways Mills, and Bartonsville. This natural division is reflected in the primary coverage areas assigned each department and in mutual aid back-up assignments. At present, taxation for fire protection does not reflect the coverage provided by the several departments. The natural fire zones recognized by the departments should be formalized by the Town and Villages. Coordination of fire zones should be studied further.

Bellows Falls Village is served by a hydrant system which operates from the Village water supply. This extends to the Rockingham Industrial Park north of the Village. Saxtons River Village has two hydrant systems which operate off of private water supplies. The Vermont Academy water system serves the hydrants in the village area from the Academy to the Saxtons River. The Upper Village area, south of the Saxtons River, is served by a hydrant system operating from the Warner Center water supply.

Fire suppression for the rest of the town is via the water carried to the site by pumper trucks. Operational dry hydrants are located at a private pond on Parker Hill Road near the Rockingham-Springfield town line, a private pond off Coburn Hill Road, and on Cambridgeport Road north of the former Anderson farm. Additional dry hydrants are needed to assist firefighters to access water quickly.

OTHER COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Annual Town Report contains reports from the many service agencies which receive funding from the Town. One should refer to that document for additional information.

Medical Services
While the Rockingham Memorial Hospital has closed its doors, the community benefits from the medical services provided at Greater Rockingham Area Services (GRAS), which operates the building housing the Health Center at Bellows Falls and doctors’ offices. The Health Center provides non-emergency care, is staffed by a physician’s assistant and open during the day. Most recently, a dental clinic opened at the facility. The Health Center and the Rockingham Medical Group services at the GRAS facility operate under the auspices of Springfield Hospital. Rockingham is centrally located to nearby hospitals located in Brattleboro, Ascutney, and Keene, New Hampshire, as well as Springfield.

Enhanced 911
Rockingham, Bellows Falls, and Saxtons River participate in the State of Vermont E-911 program. Residents throughout town may dial 911 for emergency calls. The calls go to the Primary Safety Answering Points (PSAP) in Rockingham, Rutland, Williston, or Derby and then are routed to the proper emergency response organization.

Senior Center
The Bellows Falls Senior Center is located on Hyde Street in Bellows Falls. The Center provides on-site meals, and coordinates the meals-on-wheels program for those seniors at home. In
addition to Rockingham, the program delivers meals to Grafton, North Westminster, North Walpole and Walpole. The Center offers arts and crafts programs, exercise classes and line dancing.

GOALS

1. To encourage widespread citizen involvement at all levels of town government activity.

2. To provide necessary public services and adequate facilities at a reasonable cost to the residents of the community.

3. To maintain all buildings and facilities on a regular schedule to ensure repairs are not postponed which will be more costly in the future.

4. To plan for necessary capital investments with special attention to the impact on property taxes.

5. To maintain a stable tax rate.

6. To ensure quality childcare is available.

POLICIES

1. Maintain strong local government based on broad citizen participation and to provide ample opportunities for citizen input during every stage of the decision making process.

2. Funding of capital improvements should be planned to maintain the tax appropriations for such improvements at as stable a level as possible.

3. The town and villages and their public services need an adequate tax base to support these services. The development and provision of governmental and public utility facilities and services should be based upon a projection of reasonably expected population increase and economic growth, and should recognize the limits of the town's human, financial and natural resources.

   Neither public nor private investment may grow or decline out of reasonable proportion to the other without stress on the community.

4. Maintain all municipal buildings, facilities and utilities on a regular schedule to ensure that repairs are not postponed which would only be more costly in the future.

5. An assessment of public investment in municipal services and facilities is requisite to gauging the effects of proposals for private development or subdivision. Increased costs of operation of town services must be weighed in relation to increased tax revenues to ensure that the revenue to the town will balance against necessary or reasonably anticipated increased public services.

6. Privately owned municipal-type facilities or services such as private water or sewage systems or roads will not be accepted by the municipality unless the cost of maintaining such facility is provided for in the municipality's capital construction program or adequate surety is provided by the developer to cover operating and maintenance costs in the event
that the municipality is required to assume responsibility for the facility. Such facilities shall be built to Town or Village Specifications.

7. Proposals for large scale development should be accompanied by economic impact statements prepared by the developer.

8. Lands adjacent to public or quasi-public facilities, services, or lands including but not limited to highways, fire and police stations, schools, hospitals, libraries, parks, and hiking trails should be used in such a manner that will not endanger, jeopardize or interfere with the public's use or enjoyment of or access to the facility, services or lands.

9. The construction, expansion or provision of public facilities and services should not significantly reduce the resource value of adjoining agricultural, forestry, recreational, or residential lands unless there is no reasonable alternative and the facility or service has been planned to minimize its effect on the adjoining lands.

10. The town supports the development of childcare services which meet the needs of residents, employers and employees working within the town and which are compatible with the residential and non-residential neighborhoods in which they are located.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the timeframe this Town Plan is in effect. While considered high priority, there is no ranking.

1. The Planning Commission will coordinate biannual joint meetings of municipal boards and officers to facilitate communication on issues and matters of mutual interest.

2. The fire departments will continue to jointly investigate future firefighting and protection needs (equipment, personnel and coverage) and alternatives for meeting those needs. Representatives from each municipal board should continue to be appointed to the study group.

3. The municipal office and town clerk's office will develop a central filing system for all town records, and codify and publish in one booklet all town ordinances, regulations, and standards.

4. Where feasible, require that subdivisions and other developments have the necessary means for fire protection including water supplies in the form of dry or charged hydrants.

5. The Select board and Village Trustees should initiate an abandoned building fund to enable removal (in whole or part) of buildings which are found derelict.

6. The Select board will continue with plans to enlarge the Meeting House Cemetery and ready it for use, including completion of a survey of lots. Consideration should be given to evaluating the remaining land at the Saxtons River cemetery and the availability of any additional adjoining land.

7. Continuation of capital budget and program preparation and updating including establishment of funding and priorities to encompass those capital expenditures anticipated
within a 5 year period, including but not limited to: roads and bridges, vehicle/equipment, water/sewer systems, fire/ police protection, library, land acquisition, building program, solid waste disposal, recreation, education, and general government costs.

8. The Library Board will continue to manage its capital plan and to seek funding for ongoing renovations.

The following Action Steps are considered important to the community, but less so than those listed above. These items are not ranked.

9. Solicit public participation through the use of surveys, questionnaires, and public hearings.

10. Identify potentially affected parties early in the decision making process and include them in discussions beginning at the early stages of a project.

11. Continue to inform the public of ongoing government activities on a regular basis. Commit adequate resources to update the municipal web site in a timely manner, and continue to put upcoming meeting agendas and board minutes on the Rockingham and Bellows Falls website at www.rockbf.org.

12. Evaluate development proposals for demands on municipal facilities and services. Require the developer to prepare economic impact statements, traffic impact studies, and other impact studies as requested by the municipalities so as to accurately determine impact to the municipalities from proposed development.

13. Consider phasing of large-scale development to lessen the impact of demands on facilities and services.

14. Fire departments shall assess the condition of existing dry hydrants and install additional dry hydrants and hydrant systems where appropriate. Fire departments shall continue to seek funding from grant sources available for such programs.

15. The Select board will continue to study the most effective and economical alternative methods of providing emergency medical services.

16. When planning issues involve the villages, the Trustee Boards shall be invited to participate in the discussions on proposed changes to bylaws and the Town Plan.

17 The Village Trustee Boards should appoint one member as a liaison with the Planning Commission.

18. Seek funding to install dry-hydrants in areas not served by public water and hydrant systems. Permission from private landowners will be needed for many of the sites.

19. To encourage the State to develop on-line training tools for childcare employees.

20. To encourage communication between public resources such as the library and recreation departments to make childcare providers aware of program activities.

INVENTORY
An inventory of all properties owned or leased by the Town of Rockingham, Bellows Falls
Village, Saxtons River Village, and the Rockingham School District can be found in the appendices and on the Publicly Owned or Leased Land Maps. Properties acquired recently through tax sale may not be shown.

**OFFICIALS.** The Village and Town Annual Reports have a listing of all elected and appointed officials.

Following is a chart showing town, village and school tax rates at five-year increments over a 25-year period.

### Tax Rate Summary
Town of Rockingham - Rockingham School District
Village of Bellows Falls - Village of Saxtons River

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CHAPTER 15
FLOOD RESILIENCY

Rockingham has land, homes and businesses that are susceptible to the two types of flooding impacts: inundation and fluvial erosion. Inundation occurs during high water events on extensive acreage along the Connecticut, Saxtons and Williams Rivers. Inundation flooding hazard is shown on maps created by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Fluvial erosion occurs when a river or stream jumps or cuts its bank and rips through an area. Both inundation and fluvial erosion are potential hazards along the Connecticut River, Saxtons River and Williams River, and their tributary brooks, as well as along the streams that drain watersheds extending to our borders with Westminster, Grafton, Chester and Springfield.

In 2013 Vermont enacted Act 16, “An Act Relating to Municipal and Regional Planning and Flood Resilience”, which requires that all municipal and regional plans effective after July 1, 2014 include a “flood resilience element” pursuant to the purpose and goals of 24 V.S.A. §4302 - Purpose; Goals - subsection (c)(14).

Act 16 also amended 24 V.S.A. § 4382 - The plan for a municipality - adding an additional element to the requirements for a municipal plan, specifically to include a flood resilience plan.

Fluvial Erosion

By statutory definition, “fluvial erosion” means the erosion or scouring of riverbeds and banks during high flow conditions of a river. Most of the flooding damage experienced in Vermont is from the power of moving water and the sudden destruction of under-sized culverts and erosion of stream banks supporting roads and buildings. Providing a river the room it needs to slow the flow over time, can allow it to function as a responsive system and avoid repeated losses to public infrastructure and investments.

Erosion (and deposition) along a stream or river is natural. Sometimes, efforts to stop this process in one place can make it worse in others. Rivers, streams, and their channels are changing constantly in response to the inputs of water, energy, sediment and debris that pass along them. Every few years a stream fills to bankfull and the shape of the channel responds to this force by cutting deeper into some streambanks and also by depositing sediments in the quiet inside bends. This process is visible as an S-shaped form that slowly changes position.

If the stream cannot spill out of its banks after reaching bankfull depth, the power of the trapped water increases and the channel either digs down or cuts out further to the sides. Nearby roads and buildings can suffer dramatic and costly damage.

A river is in geomorphic equilibrium when its water, energy, sediment, and debris are in balance. In this condition, a river is neither building up sediment in the channel nor losing sediment from its bed. Importantly, a river in equilibrium has not become overly deep and can continue to overflow onto its floodplains. The water that spills onto the floodplain slows down and the velocity of the water still in the channel does not become excessively powerful.

In trying to protect roads and buildings we need to be sure that the river is able to function as well as possible upstream and downstream. We need functional streams and rivers with room to adjust (River Corridors) and intact floodplains to moderate the impact of high water events.

River Corridors and floodplains

River corridors and floodplains are different but related. In statute, “River Corridor” means “the
land area adjacent to a river that is required to accommodate the dimensions, slope, planform, and buffer of the naturally stable channel and that is necessary for the natural maintenance or natural restoration of a dynamic equilibrium condition and for minimization of fluvial erosion hazards, as delineated by the Agency of Natural Resources in accordance with river corridor protection procedures”.

The River Corridor provides the physical space the river needs to express its energy and meander without having to dig down. A River Corridor includes a 50-foot buffer on either side of the meander belt/fluvial erosion hazard area to prevent disturbance in this area and allow for bank stabilization.

The floodplain provides an area where water flowing out over a river bank can spread out on the land and slow down. The floodplain as defined by FEMA is the area that will be inundated by the flood event having a 1-percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year. The 1-percent annual chance flood is also referred to as the base flood or, most commonly, the 100-year flood.

River Corridors and floodplains overlap a great deal. Mapping one over the other might show 60 – 90% overlap. Some areas in the River Corridor, currently high and dry, will eventually be shaped by the channel. Some areas in the floodplain, underwater during a large flood, may not be needed by the river channel to maintain geomorphic equilibrium.

The extent of a River Corridor is based on calculations including such things as the meander belt of the stream, soils, watershed size and gradient, and channel width. The extent of floodplains is based on calculations such as stream peak flow history and frequency.

The Connecticut River has a highly unique topography, it shares a boundary with New Hampshire, and is an actively public and privately controlled waterway. Vermont’s Department of Environmental Conservation plans to create a river corridor map for the Vermont-side of the Connecticut River. Once that Connecticut River corridor map is complete, this data will be combined into the statewide river corridor mapping that is electronically available on the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources atlas.

**Regulatory Flood Hazard Designations**

There are two types of regulatory flood hazard designations and two sets of official maps that identify those flood hazards in Vermont: inundation hazard areas are identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs). Fluvial erosion hazard (FEH) areas are identified by the VT Agency of Natural Resources on River Corridor maps.

**Inundation Hazard**

Towns participating in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) must regulate development in areas designated on the FIRMs that show the floodplain that FEMA has calculated would be covered by water in a 1% chance annual inundation event, also referred to as the “100 year flood” or base flood. This area of inundation is called the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA). FIRMs may also show expected base flood elevations (BFEs) and floodways (smaller areas that carry more current). FIRMS are only prepared for larger streams and rivers. The Town of Rockingham has areas of inundation hazard flood risk mapped by FEMA.

**Fluvial Erosion Hazard**

A significant portion of flood damage in Vermont occurs outside of the FEMA-mapped
floodplain areas, along smaller upland streams, and along inadequate road drainage systems. FEMA maps are only concerned with inundation. These other areas are more at risk from flash flooding and fluvial erosion than from inundation and are often not recognized as being flood-prone. Property owners in areas outside of SFHAs are not required to have flood insurance but the fluvial erosion damage from flash flooding can be extremely costly.

Vermont ANR’s River Corridor maps show the area needed to address the fluvial erosion hazards which may be inside of FEMA-mapped areas, but often extends outside of those areas. River corridor maps delineate areas where the lateral movement of the river and the associated erosion may be more of a threat than inundation by floodwaters. Elevation or flood-proofing alone may not be protective of structures in these areas as erosion can undermine structures. ANR released statewide river corridor maps in late 2014. The Town of Rockingham has areas of River Corridor mapped by ANR.

Flood Hazard Regulation

Inundation
For federal flood insurance to be available to property owners though the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), a municipality must adopt and administer flood hazard area regulations. These can be within local zoning regulations or adopted as a free-standing bylaw. A community’s flood hazard regulations must apply to at least the Special Flood Hazard Areas identified by FEMA. They regulate new structures and place restrictions on other types of activities, such as fill within the floodplain. They specify land, area and structural requirements to be adhered to within the SFHA.

Fluvial Erosion
To satisfy the intent of Act 16 - to protect citizens, infrastructure, and the environment - as well as to qualify for maximum Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund match from the State in the event of a disaster, a town must adopt and administer River Corridor protection standards, in addition to, or as part of its flood hazard area regulations. These can be within local zoning regulations or adopted as a free-standing bylaw.

Addressing flood resilience
This plan identifies flood hazards as 1) the Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs) shown on the NFIP FIRMs and 2) identifies fluvial erosion hazard areas as those shown on the ANR River Corridor maps. Further, this Plan designates both those identified areas as areas to be protected, including floodplains, river corridors, and land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property. In addition, this plan incorporates by reference the town’s Local Hazard Mitigation Plan approved under 44 C.F.R. § 201.6. Finally, this plan recommends the following policies and strategies to protect the designated areas to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.

GOAL

1. It is the policy of the town to foster the protection and restoration of river corridors, floodplains, wetlands, and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion.

POLICIES
1. New development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas should be avoided. If new development is to be built in such areas, it should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.

2. The protection and restoration of geomorphic equilibrium, floodplains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be encouraged.

3. Flood emergency preparedness and response planning are encouraged.

4. Cooperation and coordination with towns that share our watershed should be fostered.

**ACTION STEPS**

The Action Steps immediately following are a high priority, and shall be completed within the time frame this Town Plan is in effect. While considered high priority, there is no ranking.

1. The Town will adopt and administer flood hazard regulations governing development in designated Special Flood Hazard Areas and River Corridors, in order to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure, improved property, people, and the environment.

2. The Town will be familiar with Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) that delineate areas that could be inundated by water during flooding. (Selectboard, Zoning Board, Zoning Administrator)

3. The Town will be familiar with ANR River Corridor maps that delineate the land area adjacent to streams and rivers that are required to accommodate a stable channel. (Selectboard, Zoning Board, Zoning Administrator)

4. The Town will pursue a flood resilience management approach whose essential components are to identify and map flood and fluvial erosion hazard areas based on studies and maps provided by the Vermont ANR Rivers Program, and designate those areas for protection to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and private property.

5. The Town will update the Flood Hazard Areas Overlay District to include regulation of river corridors, and include provisions for advance notification of and specific limits on new development activities in identified flood hazard areas, fluvial erosion areas, and/or River Corridors, based on regulatory templates developed by the ANR DEC Rivers Program.

6. The Town will regulate any new development in identified flood hazard areas, fluvial erosion hazard areas, and/or River Corridors to ensure that development does not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion, and extend these provisions to development activities that might increase the amount and/or rate of runoff and soil erosion from upland areas.

7. The Town will further pursue a flood resilience management approach by implementing their Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and other strategies for restoring the stream geomorphic equilibrium conditions and enhancing the emergency preparedness that will mitigate the risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.