

ATHENS, VT

TOWN PLAN (2025)



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LEGAL AUTHORITY

The Athens Town Plan has been prepared under Section 5 of the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act (24 V.S.A. Chapter 117). The Town Plan addresses the 12 goals listed in 24 V.S.A. § 4382 and includes the elements required of town plans by that statute. It is intended to serve as a source of information for Athens' residents, a reference for learning about resources and services that exist within our community, and a guide for future development based on community input.

Athens is a member of the Windham Regional Commission. The 2025 Athens Town Plan is compatible with the Windham Regional Plan and with the town plans of neighboring communities.

This Town Plan will become effective upon adoption by the voters of the Town after required public hearings held first by the Town Planning Commission and then by the Select Board. As required by law, copies have been sent to bordering towns, the Windham Regional Commission, and the State Agency of Commerce and Community Development for review and comment and to any community or interested group requesting a copy prior to the first hearing.

Under Vermont law, a town plan expires eight years from the date of adoption. Therefore, the Town must review its plan, revise it where necessary and readopt or replace it every eight years.

INTRODUCTION

Athens is a small, rural, and irregularly outlined town in Windham County, Vermont. Athens was granted by Vermont in March 11, 1780, and chartered May 3, 1780, to Solomon Harvey, John Moore, Jonathan Perham and associates. On October 27, 1794, a portion of the Town was set off towards forming the town of Brookline and, on October 30, 1816, a portion was set off to Grafton. On November 2, 1846, parts of Rockingham and Grafton were given to Athens.

Athens is bordered to the north by Grafton, to the west by Townshend, to the south by Townshend and Brookline, and to the east by Rockingham and Westminster. The major roadways through the Town are Route 35, which is now fully paved, and Brookline Road. The latter runs along Bull Creek which, with its tributaries, flows in a northerly course through the eastern part of the Town. The surface of the Town is uneven. The natural growth is mixed timber. Although the elevation is not generally abrupt, there are steep slopes on the east and west borders of the Town. Bull Creek forms the major valley and affords a good, well-producing soil, thought better adapted to grazing than tillage. There are small beds of steatite and azoic limestone found in the Town and, in the southwestern part, considerable quantities of calciferous mica schist.

In 1880, Athens had a population of 284 and, in 1882, it had three school districts and three common schools. The schoolhouse from District 2, known as The North School, has been serving as the Athens Town Office since 1981, when Athens built a larger school building.

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the population of Athens is 380, a decline of 62 residents from the 2010 Census.

INTENTION OF THE TOWN PLAN

Through the implementation of this Town Plan, the Town of Athens intends to encourage the development of the community in a manner which promotes land development, growth, and the general welfare of the public, while retaining the highest characteristics of a rural-residential area, with large blocks of forested land that provide recreational opportunities. Athens does not currently have zoning regulations and – based upon feedback at public meetings and residents’ responses to prior proposed town plans – it is clear that the primary concern of residents vis-à-vis approval of a town plan is to ensure that it does not serve as a precursor to future zoning restrictions.

In that regard, it is the intention of the 2025 Town Plan to preserve the right of private landowners to continue to use their property as they always have, without zoning or other new government restrictions. The Athens Town Plan is not a regulatory device and it does not restrict Athens’ landowners in any way. Rather, it will allow the Town’s concerns to be voiced in state development review processes, such as Act 250. The Town Plan can also inform the Public Utility Commission in Section 248 proceedings, *i.e.*, a Certificate of Public Good.

The objectives, policies and action recommendations expressed within this Town Plan, along with the various Town Plan maps, will serve to guide the Town’s efforts in land use planning and growth management, in the provision of public services and facilities, and in economic development and resource conservation. The Town Plan is amenable to further definition, adjustment and clarification as the Town considers how it will choose to reach its objectives as outlined in the various recommendations presented throughout this Town Plan.

BENEFITS OF A TOWN PLAN

It is important for citizens of Athens to understand that this Town Plan does not represent or include zoning bylaws, is not a precursor to zoning bylaws, and does not impose any new restrictions on the use of private property. Rather, the Town Plan provides an understanding of the Town’s history, its current attributes, resources and assets, and expresses a clear direction in which the property owners and residents desire the Town to continue. In that regard, in response to citizen feedback to prior proposed Town Plans, the 2025 Town Plan explicitly includes as a goal and policy the preservation of the rights of private property owners to be free from future zoning restrictions.

There are several benefits to adopting a Town Plan:

- ✓ A town plan is often a requirement for obtaining certain regional funding and grants.
- ✓ A town plan is necessary for a town’s goals and policies to be considered in Act 250 proceedings and other state regulatory processes. That is, before issuing an Act 250 permit, the District Commission must first determine (under Criterion 10) that the application “[i]s in conformance with any duly adopted local ... plan ... under 24 V.S.A. chapter 117.”
- ✓ A town plan is necessary for a town’s goals and policies to be deferred to in connection with applications for approval of communications facilities. That is,

before the Public Utility Commission may issue a certificate of public good under 30 V.S.A. § 248a(c)(2), it must first find that “substantial deference has been given to the plans of the affected municipalities.”

- ✓ A town plan is necessary for a town’s goals and policies to be considered in connection with applications for approval of electric or other energy transmission facilities. That is, before the Public Utility Commission may issue a certificate of public good under 30 V.S.A. § 248(a), it must first find that the facility “will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality.” 30 V.S.A. § 248(b)(1).
- ✓ A town plan provides a medium for the town to memorialize and preserve its own history and to inform its residents of resources and services available to them.

In addition to losing the benefits listed above, there are several detriments to *not* adopting a Town Plan:

- The absence of a town plan makes it difficult for neighboring towns to know what development is appropriate adjacent to Athens’ town borders and to adjust their own plans and policies accordingly.
- The absence of a town plan makes it difficult for the Windham Regional Commission to include Athens’ perspective in the regional plan, including land use.
- The absence of a town plan diminishes the town’s impact and effect in state regulatory processes. In the absence of a plan, especially a plan with clearly defined and unambiguous policies, town positions and comments have minimal influence on District Environmental Commission and the courts in Act 250 proceedings and on the Public Utility Commission in connection with energy development, transmission, telecommunications facilities and other similar proceedings.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

The statements listed below represent the overall town planning objectives of the Town of Athens and further establish a foundation upon which specific Town Plan policies have been based.

It is the objective of the Town of Athens:

1. To preserve and protect the right of private property owners to continue to use their property as they always have, without instituting zoning regulations.
2. To provide services sufficient to ensure that the basic health, safety, welfare, and educational needs of the Town’s residents are met and maintained at satisfactory levels, within the financial means of the Town.
3. To maintain the Town’s characteristic pattern of settlement, with residential areas separated by rural countryside, and to encourage continued use of lands for agriculture, forestry and recreational uses.

4. To encourage the conservation and enhancement of the community's cultural, historical, architectural, recreational, and scenic resources.
5. To have, maintain and improve an efficient and diverse network of high-quality town roads and highways.
6. To encourage Athens' growth in a manner consistent with these other objectives.

PUBLIC INPUT

PREVIOUS TOWN PLAN PROCESS PUBLIC INPUT

Town Plans were presented to the Town for approval in 2015 and 2017. During the process of preparing those previous proposals, feedback was solicited from local citizens. Given the paucity of response to those prior efforts to obtain public feedback, combined with the relative uniformity of feedback received, the current Planning Commission determined that additional public input – other than holding open meetings – was not cost effective. In drafting this Town Plan, the current Planning Commission has taken into consideration and attempted to address feedback provided to prior Athens Town Planning Commissions and, therefore, summarizes that information below.

JUNE 2014 PLANNING COMMISSION SURVEY RESULTS

As part of its work in drafting the proposed 2015 Athens Town Plan, the Planning Commission mailed a survey to all property owners to elicit their concerns. It received 42 responses, a response rate of 16.8%. The dominant concern expressed was Tax Burden (31), followed by Natural Resources (22), and maintaining the Rural Quality of Life (22). Other concerns expressed were Environment (18), Roads and Bridges (16), Emergency Services (11), Telecommunications (11), Education (9), Regulation and Development ((8), Cultural and Community Issues (8), mobile home park issues (4), use of ATVs on property and public roads (1), and less government interference (1).

MARCH 2015 TOWN MEETING

At the March 2015 Town Meeting, voters rejected the proposed Town Plan. Prior to the vote, the key area of concern expressed by residents at the Town Meeting was that the Town Plan was a regulatory document and would likely turn into town zoning, forcing people to follow ordinances restricting the use of their property. A second area of concern related to the power that a proposed Town Budget Committee would have and how this could diminish the ability of the Select Board to manage the Town's finances.

FEBRUARY 2016 COMMUNITY QUESTIONNAIRE

In February 2016, a questionnaire was mailed to all Athens households seeking responses to three questions: What I Like About Athens, What I Don't Like About Athens, and What I'd Like to see in the Future in Athens. Forty-two residents responded in writing with a wide range of likes and dislikes. The "like" most often mentioned related to Athens' rural nature, the quiet, natural beauty, neighborliness and helpful people. For "dislikes," the main item was decaying and junk properties and road and yard trash. High taxes and lack of transparency in government also

were mentioned. For “the future,” transparency in government was the most common concern mentioned, as well as cutting taxes and enforcing existing regulations.

MAY 2016 COMMUNITY FORUM

On May 4, 2016, a Community Forum was held to discuss the questionnaire responses. Only 20 people attended. Again, the most common concern mentioned was preservation of the rural character of Athens.

MARCH 2017 TOWN MEETING

At the March 2017 Town Meeting, voters rejected the proposed 2017 Town Plan. Public comment at the meeting again seemed to indicate that those opposed to the Town Plan were concerned that adoption of a town plan would be a precursor to implementation of zoning.

2024-2025 TOWN PLAN PUBLIC PROCESS

APRIL 2025 INFORMATIONAL MEETING

The Athens Planning Commission held an information meeting to introduce the Town Plan draft to the residents of Athens. The meeting was held in the former school building on Tuesday April 22, 2025 to seek input on the draft, explain the purpose and process of the town plan process and collaborate with residents. 8 residents attended the meeting and voiced opinions regarding the process and information contained within the plan. Several of the attendees made comments and requested edits in various sections of the plan which were then implemented by the Commission.

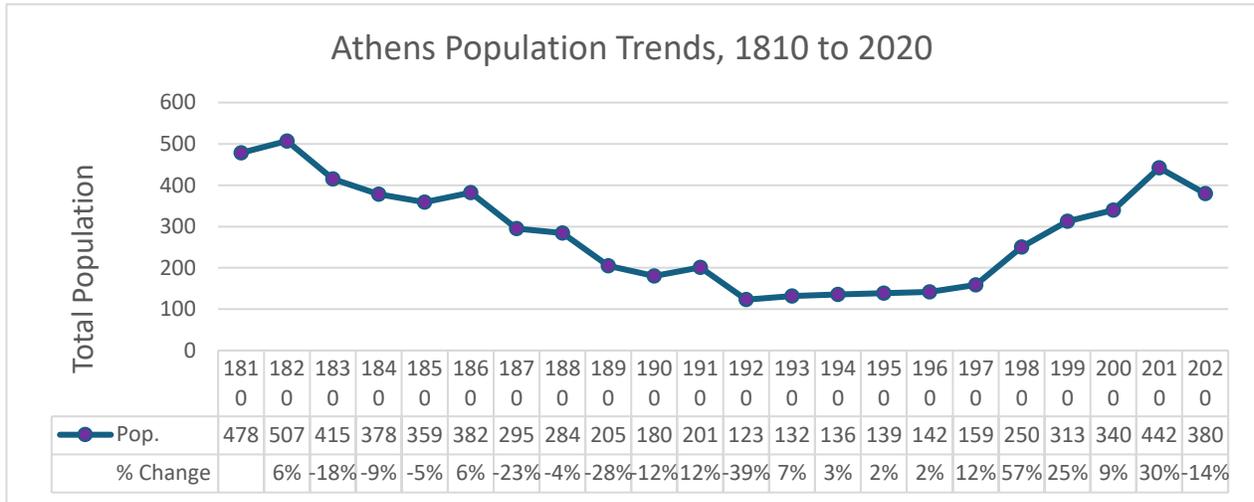
[ENTER DATE] PUBLIC HEARINGS

On [ENTER DATE], public hearings were held in connection with the proposed 2025Athens Town Plan. The hearings were attended by [ENTER NUMBER] residents. At the hearing, residents expressed concerns about [ENTER SUMMARY OF VIEWS EXPRESSED].

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Athens is located in a region of diverse and changing communities. The Town borders Westminster, Grafton, Townshend, Rockingham, and Brookline. It is linked to these communities by roadways, waterways, contiguous forestland and wildlife habitat, and through the sharing of important community facilities and services. In addition, many of Athens’ residents have strong social and economic ties to the region’s important employment and cultural centers.

TABLE 1:



Source: Vermont Indicators, <http://www.vcgi.org/indicators/> & 2020 U.S. Census

TABLE 2:

POPULATION TRENDS IN ATHENS & NEARBY TOWNS							
Town	1990	2000	2010	2020	Change (10 Years) 2010-2020	Change (30 Years) 1990-2020	% Change (30 Years)
Athens	313	340	442	380	-62	67	21%
Brookline	403	467	530	540	10	137	34%
Newfane	1,555	1,680	1,726	1,645	-81	90	6%
Townshend	1,019	1,149	1,232	1,291	59	272	27%
Putney	2,352	2,634	2,702	2,617	-85	265	11%
Westminster	3,026	3,210	3,178	3,016	-162	-10	0%
Windham County	41,588	44,216	44,513	45,905	1,392	4,317	10%
Vermont	562,758	608,827	625,741	643,077	17,336	80,319	14%

Source: 2020 U.S. Census Bureau

TABLE 3:

COMMUTING		
	Estimate	Percent

Workers 16 years and older	150	
Car, truck or van - drove alone	121	80.7
Car, truck or van – carpooled	3	2
Walked	0	0
Worked at home	23	17.3
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	39.4	

Source: 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Commuting Characteristics

TOWN GOVERNMENT

The official business of the Town is conducted at the annual March Town Meeting and at occasional special Town Meetings during the year. Between Town Meetings, five elected Select Board members conduct most of the regular business of the Town. All officials are elected by the residents, currently by Australian ballot. In addition, other items on the Warrant are voted by the residents at the Town Meeting.

The Town has several standing Committees/Commissions:

- The Athens Cemetery Commission is elected at Town Meeting to oversee Athens’ two local cemeteries.
- The Athens Meeting House Committee is elected at Town Meeting to oversee matters related to the Athens Meeting House, which was built in 1817.
- The Housing Rehabilitation Committee is appointed by the Select Board to oversee housing grants within the Town.
- The Athens Town Planning Commission is appointed by the Select Board to oversee town planning matters.
- Community Center Advisory Committee
- Budget Committee
- Campbell Fund Trustees
- Weather Emergency Committee

Goals:

- ✓ To provide municipal services sufficient to ensure that the basic health, safety, welfare, and educational needs of the Town's residents are met at satisfactory levels, within the financial means of the Town.
- ✓ To preserve and protect the right of private property owners to continue to use their property as they always have, without instituting zoning regulation.

- ✓ Maintain strong local government of elected and appointed officials and volunteers.
- ✓ Maintain fair and up-to-date property appraisals, consistent with Vermont Law, as the basic source of Town funding
- ✓ Under the direction of the Select Board, continue to evaluate and strengthen local government with technical and financial assistance from appropriate agencies.

Policies:

- ✓ Growth and development should not exceed the capacities of local facilities and services.
- ✓ The right of private property owners to continue to use their property as they always have shall be preserved without instituting zoning regulation.

Actions:

- ✓ Ensure that citizens are kept reasonably informed of all town ordinances, regulations and standards and make these documents available when requested.
- ✓ Inform citizens of all town services and changes to town services.
- ✓ Participate in regional, state and federal regulatory proceedings affecting the Town.

TAXATION AND PUBLIC FINANCE

Since enactment of Act 60 (the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1997), which changed the landscape of property taxes by use of a common level of appraisal, and its amendment in 2003 by Act 68, Athens has struggled with its tax base. There are no commercial businesses in Athens, as well as a lack of houses with a high assessed value, to help spread the tax burden. In response to this same burden being felt by many residents statewide, in 2004 it became possible for Vermont residents to file for a “Homestead.” In doing so, most residents become eligible for “income sensitivity” prebates which, in turn, are used by the town towards the state education tax.

Certain non-profit organizations may, under state law, request special tax treatment and the Town may vote to reduce or fix assessments at a specific level for a specific period. Residents are reluctant to grant special tax status unless the benefits to the Town as a whole are clear. In addition to the Town of Athens itself, which is a tax-exempt landowner, the following non-profit organizations own real estate in Athens:

- ✓ Christian Community Church
- ✓ Bull Creek Common Lands, Inc.
- ✓ Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association (WHPA)

Goals:

- ✓ To maintain a stable and affordable tax rate.

Policies:

- ✓ Require that special tax considerations not be granted as a “favor” to a particular non-profit organization, but only as an equitable adjustment in exchange for significant benefits to the Town as a whole.
- ✓ If an offer is made to give property to the Town for recreation or conservation purposes, in exchange for reduced or stabilized taxes, the cost in reduced taxes shall be carefully balanced against the short- and long-term benefits to the Town.
- ✓ It is neither desirable nor in the Town’s best interest to encourage large lot subdivision development of its open space and forest lands as a means for developing additional tax revenues, but which would place an even greater burden on Town facilities and services.

Actions:

- ✓ The Select Board should consider offering time-limited tax incentives to new enterprises providing jobs and, ultimately, adding to the tax base.
- ✓ Maintain a Budget Committee to submit to the Select Board an annual budget recommendation for the next fiscal year and a revised five-year projection. Included in the budget recommendation should be, at minimum, fire and police protection, public education, land acquisition, municipal buildings, roads and

bridges and capital equipment. In addition, the Budget Committee should investigate other sources of revenue for the Town.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT FOR EQUIPMENT

A town's equipment, large and small, is the lifeblood of its operations. Athens, being spread out with many dirt roads, has a significant inventory of road maintenance equipment. It is vital that Athens maintain its road network and, by extension, the equipment required for that purpose.

Goals:

- ✓ Maintain equipment appropriate to the existing level of population and activity and the current growth rate.
- ✓ Plan for investments in necessary equipment with special attention to the impact on property taxes.

Policies:

- ✓ Town funding of capital improvements via taxes shall be planned at as stable a level as possible.
- ✓ Capital improvements shall be planned to maintain Town equipment appropriate to the existing level of population and activity and the current growth rate, with consideration of the financial ability of the Town tax base.

Actions:

- ✓ The Budget Committee shall develop a five-year and ongoing capital budget to be submitted at each Town Meeting.
- ✓ The Select Board shall communicate annually to the Budget Committee the Town's capital projects for which funding will be needed.
- ✓ Any capital improvements over and above the capital budget must be financed by special action of the voters.
- ✓ The capital budget must cover all tax-supported capital expenditures, including schools, roads, bridges, municipal facilities, and debt service on long-term loans.
- ✓ The Budget Committee should investigate opportunities, and apply, for additional grant funding for necessary town equipment.

TOWN SERVICES

Athens directly provides, or contracts with outside vendors to provide, the following services to its residents:

- Police
- Fire
- EMS
- Waste collection
- Snow plowing
- Road maintenance
- Cemetery maintenance
- Community buildings

FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES

The Town of Athens provides 24/7 fire protection to its residents by contract with the Grafton Volunteer Fire Department. Grafton belongs to the Southwestern New Hampshire District Fire Mutual Aid System. Athens has dry hydrants located at the junction of Walker Road and Route 35, near the junction of Brookline Road and Valley Cemetery Road, and on Reed Road near the junction of Christian Road. The contracted fire protection provider also is responsible for dry hydrant maintenance.

Goals:

- ✓ Provide effective fire protection and fire prevention services.

Policies:

- ✓ Provide for a contracted fire protection service through annual appropriations.
- ✓ Keep residents informed of the procedures for alerting the contracted fire protection service in event of emergency.
- ✓ Large developments and major subdivisions shall be responsible for providing adequate water sources and/or dry hydrants for fire suppression.

Actions:

- ✓ The Select Board shall periodically review and report to the Town at Town Meeting on the effectiveness of the contracted fire protection service.
- ✓ Implement an effective communication program between the contracted fire protection service and the Select Board.
- ✓ Develop and implement a plan to maintain fire ponds and existing hydrants under the supervision of the contracted fire department and explore the feasibility of installing more dry hydrants to maintain and improve access to fire control water.
- ✓ Communicate to residents the procedures for alerting the contracted fire protection service in event of emergency.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS)

Athens contracts with the Grafton Rescue Squad to provide emergency medical services to Athens residents. Ambulance service is provided by contract with Golden Cross Ambulance, Inc.

Goals:

- ✓ Provide residents with access to timely and competent emergency medical care and ambulance service by qualified personnel.

Policies:

- ✓ Provide for a contracted emergency medical service through annual appropriations.
- ✓ Keep residents informed of the procedures for alerting the contracted emergency medical services.

Actions:

- ✓ The Select Board shall periodically review and report to the Town at Town Meeting on the effectiveness of the contracted emergency medical and ambulance services on an annual basis.
- ✓ Implement an effective communication program between the contracted EMS service and the Select Board.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The Vermont State Police (“VSP”) from the Westminster Barracks respond to 911 calls and the Town contracts with the Windham County Sheriff’s Department for limited traffic enforcement. The Town also has one appointed part-time constable enforcement officer (24 V.S.A. § 1031), who can respond to certain public safety issues within the Town. Wildlife issues are responded to by a state game warden contacted through VSP.

Goals:

- ✓ Ensure residents have access to effective law enforcement protection in the event of emergency.

Policies:

- ✓ Keep residents informed of procedures for contacting law enforcement, the Town constable, and the game warden.

Actions:

- ✓ The Select Board shall report to the Town at Town Meeting on law enforcement issues on an annual basis.
- ✓ Communicate to residents the procedures for contacting VSP and the state game warden in the event of emergency.

HEALTH SERVICES

There are no health care facilities or private doctor offices in Athens. Residents rely on services available in adjacent towns, which include Grace Cottage Hospital in Townshend, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, Springfield Hospital and Rockingham Medical Group and Urgent Care. The Veterans Administration operates a clinic in Brattleboro and a hospital in White River Junction, which serve veterans.

Historically, Athens has supported health services organizations that directly serve Athens residents. In addition to the health care organizations listed above, those services have included Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA), the Townshend Food Shelf, the Bellows Falls Area Senior Center, Health Care and Rehabilitation Services, Inc., VNAS of Vermont (hospice), Grafton Cares, and Senior Solutions.

The Athens Health Officer is appointed by the State Secretary of Human Services on the recommendation of the Select Board. The Health Officer is responsible for making certain sanitary inspections and responding to complaints regarding public health hazards.

The Vermont Department of Health provides various services to Athens residents, including well-child immunization clinics, screening clinics, and public health nurse visitations, consultations and home-making services.

Athens residents benefit from charitable community-based health-related services such as Grafton Cares, Visiting Nurses, and Meals on Wheels.

Campbell Fund

In April 1876, David Richard Campbell presented \$4,000 cash to the residents of Athens “to support and aid the paupers, indigent, and poor of said town of Athens.” The Campbell Fund’s principal amount is to remain unused with its income to be used in the aid and benefit of Athens residents. Currently, this fund is administered by three (3) Trustees elected by the Town of Athens. While the Campbell fund has most recently been utilized by Athens residents for medical purposes, it is not restricted to those uses.

Goals:

- ✓ Keep residents informed of the community-based health-related services available to them, including funding available through the Campbell Fund.

Actions:

- ✓ The Select Board should keep up to date on available health-related services in the community and ensure that the Town is participating in those available to Athens residents.
- ✓ Support community-based health-related charitable organizations benefitting Athens residents.

- ✓ Encourage additional voluntary contributions of principal to the Campbell Fund for the benefit of Athens residents unable to afford health care services.
- ✓ Make available at the annual town meeting a list of providers near Athens and their contact information.
- ✓ Make available at the annual town meeting and throughout the year at the Athens Town Office donation forms and informational materials for the Campbell Fund.

SOLID & LIQUID WASTE DISPOSAL

The Town currently provides, in alternating weeks, limited solid waste and single-stream recycling collection at the street. Household (not auto) batteries are collected at the Town Office. Residents also have access to disposal facilities, including hazardous waste disposal, at the Solid Waste Management District facilities in Springfield.

Goals:

- ✓ Provide ways for residents to dispose of solid waste that are legal, affordable and ecologically safe, in accordance with state waste disposal laws and regulations.
- ✓ Ensure proper disposal of liquid waste and the prevention of contamination of ground and surface water.

Policies:

- ✓ Support efforts to reduce solid waste and to encourage recycling and composting, appropriate to the Town's circumstances.
- ✓ Support efforts to reduce or eliminate existing sources of ground and surface water contamination.
- ✓ No hazardous waste shall be produced or disposed of anywhere in the Town except in conformance with all applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations.
- ✓ Property development shall proceed in a manner that does not contaminate ground or surface water.
- ✓ Property development shall proceed in a manner that ensures proper and sufficient solid and hazardous waste disposal.
- ✓ Developers of commercial and industrial uses responsible for unique or large amounts of solid or hazardous waste shall demonstrate that the methods of disposal will not adversely affect the environment.
- ✓ Businesses generating solid and hazardous waste shall be responsible for disposal and associated costs.

Actions:

- ✓ Cooperate with the State Agency of Natural Resources to ensure septic systems are installed and maintained correctly to prevent contamination of ground and surface water.
- ✓ Maintain membership in the Southern Windsor/Windham Counties Solid Waste Management District.
- ✓ Provide information to residents on disposal options for non-traditional trash.
- ✓ Organize an annual large-item disposal day.
- ✓ Create informational handouts for distribution at Town Meeting and throughout the year at the Athens town office.
- ✓ The Town should consider an ordinance that prohibits the placements of household and personal items within the right of way of Town roads, beyond normal trash and recycle pickups. This is a serious threat to public health and safety.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Athens has several community facilities benefitting the community.

Athens Town Office, 25 Brookline Road. This building houses the offices of the Town Clerk, Select Board, Planning Commission, Listers, Treasurer, and 911 Coordinator, and provides meeting space for Athens residents and for committees and commissions that conduct town business.

Athens Town Garage, 121 Brookline Road. This facility is the headquarters for the Athens Road Department and houses its road maintenance equipment and supplies. The building, built in 1986, does not have a restroom and is an energy sieve. A 2023 state energy resilience program assessment reported more than \$90,000 in improvements needed.

Athens Cemeteries. Two public cemeteries are located in Athens: Valley Cemetery, 19 Valley Cemetery Road, and West Cemetery at the east junction of Reed Road and 258 Route 35. In addition, Athens is home to the private G.W. Stevens Estate Cemetery.

Athens Community Center (previously the Athens Town School), 28 Brookline Road. This building is available for community events, meetings, etc., with the permission of the Select Board.

Athens Brick Meeting House, 2 Meetinghouse Road. The Meeting House must be open to the public at least one day per month from May to October to comply with federal grant requirements. In recent years, the Meeting House has hosted a plant sale, concert, a historical

representation of Daisy Turner, a pig roast, ice cream socials and several flea markets to raise money for the renovation and rehabilitation of the Meeting House.

Goals:

- ✓ Maintain and improve the Town’s facilities, within the Town’s financial means.
- ✓ Preservation of architecturally and historically significant buildings

Policies:

- ✓ Community facilities are important community resources and should be adequately maintained for current and future use.
- ✓ Community facilities, lands, and adjacent lands shall be used and maintained in a manner consistent with the Town’s rural character.

Actions:

- ✓ Explore ways to facilitate, increase, and encourage residents’ use of community facilities.
- ✓ Maintain the Town Office building and the Community Center, which are centrally located for social and cultural activities.
- ✓ Maintain and enhance the Athens Brick Meeting House.
- ✓ Encourage activities that support area library resources in Rockingham, Grafton and Townshend.
- ✓ Maintain the Athens Valley Cemetery and West Cemetery and make them accessible to the community.

EMERGENCY PLANNING & DISASTER PREPAREDNESS:

The Town has an Emergency Operations Plan and a FEMA and Town-approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Athens has a volunteer Weather Emergency Committee that only is active in the event of weather-related emergencies, working in cooperation with other town and regional officials and services. It is *not* a 911-type service. The Weather Emergency Committee:

- Operates an emergency shelter at the Athens Community Church when circumstances warrant, and when the Red Cross is unable to run the shelter; and
- Conducts a post-storm assessment of the needs or impact to Athens residents.

The Town complies with state road, bridge and culvert standards. During emergencies affecting town road infrastructure, the Town has a process to work with state and federal agencies to reopen damaged roadways.

EDUCATION

Athens belongs to the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU). Athens pre-school students attend a school designated by WNESU.

In 2004, Athens joined with the Town of Grafton to form The Athens/Grafton Joint Contract School District. All K-6 students attend the Grafton Elementary School. Currently there are 31 children attending Grafton Elementary School including 10 from Athens; the number of students is expected to decline in the coming years. The school building has six classrooms, a library, a gym, and a tutoring/resource room, as well as office space and a nurse's room. The gym serves as a multi-purpose room for the serving of satellite meals, physical education and band instruction. Art and music are offered once per week. All students and staff have access to a wireless network and a mobile laptop lab and there are SMART boards in each classroom. Community members make use of the building on a regular basis for a variety of activities. The school has an active volunteer program.

Students in grades 7-8 attend middle schools of their choice, as provided by Vermont statutes.

Athens is part of Union High School District #27 with the towns of Grafton, Rockingham and Westminster. Students in grades 9-12 attend Bellows Falls Union High School. Commonly referred to as the "High School Choice" law, Vermont statute allows for up to 10% of, or 40, students, whichever number is lower, to choose to attend a different Vermont high school of their choice. Leland and Gray High School in Townshend and Green Mountain High School in Chester are area high schools commonly chosen under this school choice statute.

Private pre-school and kindergarten education are provided for children ages 3-6 by the Saxtons River Montessori School. Private secondary schools in the area include Vermont Academy in Saxtons River (Grades 9-12) and the Compass School in Westminster (Grades 7-12).

Transportation is provided to various schools within WNESU for grades K-12. The Town of Athens does not provide transportation to students who choose to attend a school outside of WNESU.

Goals:

- ✓ Provide Town students with access to effective and efficient educational facilities and programs that meet Vermont Educational Standards.
- ✓ Ensure that all Town students have an educational program that motivates and equips them to become self-supporting and participating members of a democratic society.
- ✓ Ensure that all elementary school graduates are literate, mathematically competent, and emotionally prepared for the next level of education.

Policies:

- ✓ Ensure that Town residents have input into the decision-making process and are aware of actions being considered by WNESU, the Union District #27 High School Board and the Athens/Grafton Joint Contract School Board.
- ✓ Ensure that new development that directly or indirectly results in a substantial increase in the number of school-age children shall be mitigated by the developer so as not to exceed the Town's fiscal capacity as identified in the municipal budget or any duly adopted Town and/or School capital budget and program.

Actions:

- ✓ The Athens/Grafton School Board should continue its efforts to maintain enrollment in the elementary school at an optimum class size through arrangements with neighboring school districts or with students who tuition in from outside the district.
- ✓ Encourage the use of both the Athens and Grafton school facilities by making them available for adult education programs, Town functions, and physical fitness opportunities.
- ✓ Encourage the Grafton Library and other community groups, including businesses, to be partners with the Grafton Elementary School to make full use of the human and organizational resources in Athens/Grafton.
- ✓ Support state initiatives to make daycare available to Athens residents with young children.
- ✓ Encourage the Athens/Grafton School Board to adopt strict residency requirements for all school district parents and children.

ADULT EDUCATION

Vermont Adult Learning (“VAL”) is a state-funded program that helps adult learners (age 16+) acquire reading, writing, math, and computer skills needed to earn high school diplomas/GEDs. VAL has centers open to Windham County residents in Springfield (802-546-0880), Brattleboro (802-257-9449), and throughout the state.

Community College of Vermont offers an associate degree program, career-related certificates, and credit and non-credit training programs. Their curriculum includes liberal arts, business, human services, technology, and allied health.

Vermont State University offers associate degree and bachelor degree programs, as well as an Office of Continuing Education and Workforce Development, which provides accessible, career-focused education, across various fields.

The Howard Dean Education Center in Springfield and the Windham Regional Career Center in Brattleboro have a wide range of learning opportunities presented by leading educational institutions in northern New England.

Parks Place Resource Center in Bellows Falls provides resources and adult education.

Goals:

- ✓ Encourage total literacy for all Town adults.

Policies:

- ✓ Keep Athens residents informed of available adult educational opportunities.

Actions:

- ✓ Work with regional educational organizations to encourage adult education at all levels and to make all adults aware of available courses.
- ✓ Encourage Athens residents to apply for educational programs that will equip them for new job opportunities.

TRANSPORTATION

Town of Athens roads and highways are under the general supervision and control of the Athens Select Board.

Vermont town highways are roads that the Town has the authority to maintain or that are maintained by the Town (19 V.S.A § 301(7)). Town highways are graded Class 1-4. Classification assists in determining the distribution of the State's annual Town Highway allocation. The Town maintains its roads to state highway and bridge standards. A portion of Mill Hill Road is closed through the winter based on a long-standing town policy despite being a Class 3 town highway.

Athens' highways fall into the following classifications:

Class 1 - 0 miles

Class 1 town highways are those that extend a state highway route and carry a state highway number. There are no Class 1 highways in Athens.

Class 2 - 6.75 miles

Class 2 town highways are those selected as the most important highways in each town. As far as practicable they shall be selected with the purposes of securing trunk lines of improved highways from town to town and to places which, by their nature, have a more-than-normal amount of traffic. The Select Board, with the approval of the Agency of Transportation, determines which highways are Class 2 town highways.

Class 3 - 11.14 miles

Class 3 town highways are all traveled town highways negotiable under normal conditions all seasons of the year by a standard manufactured pleasure car, other than Class 1 or 2 town highways. The Select Board, after conferring with the Agency of Transportation, determines which highways are Class 3 town highways.

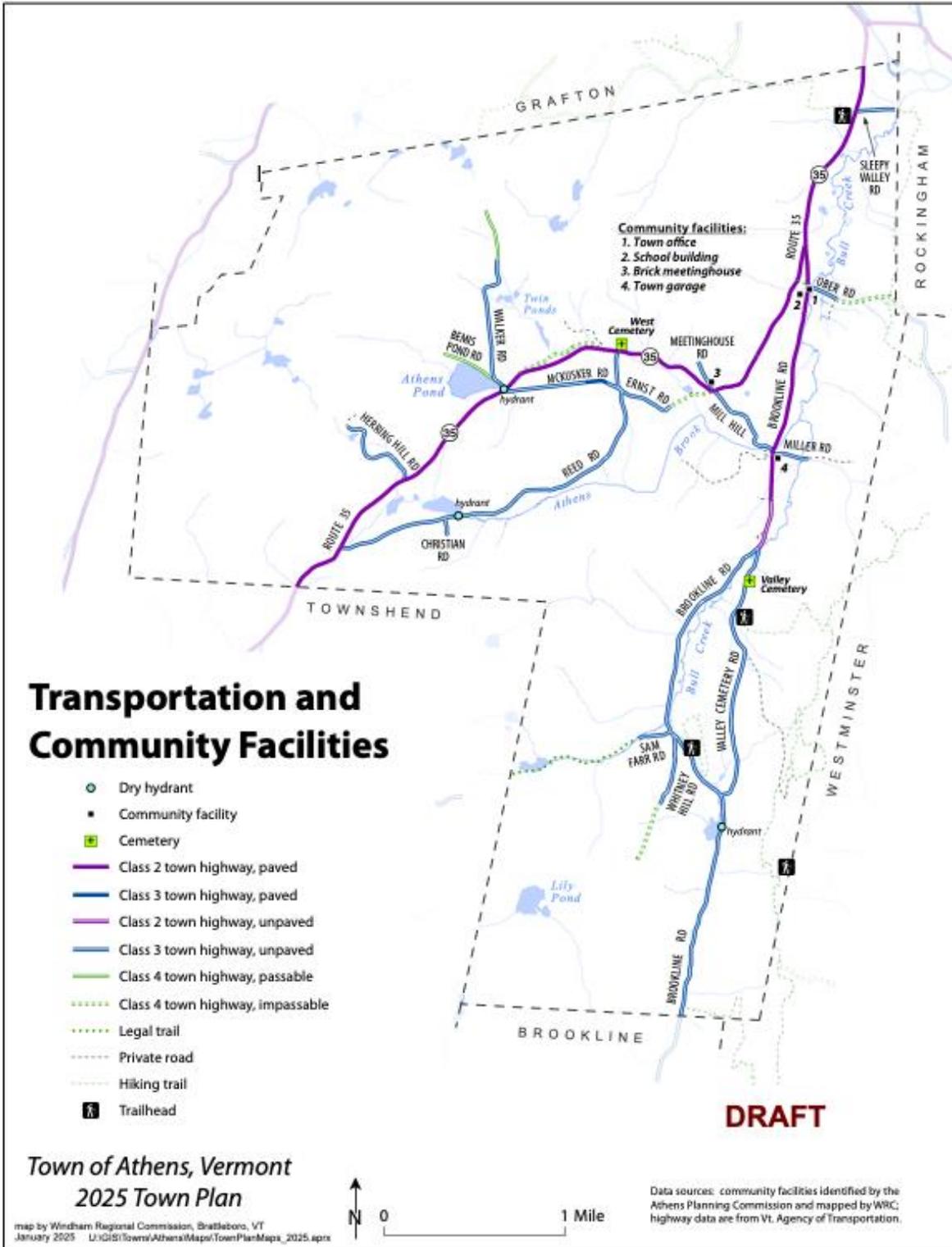
Class 4 – 2 miles

Class 4 town highways are all town highways that are not classified as Class 1, 2 or 3 town highways or “unidentified corridors” (19 V.S.A § 302(a)(4)). Class 4 highways are not maintained under all conditions for standard manufactured pleasure cars. The Select Board shall determine which highways are Class 4 town highways.

Trail – 0.96 miles

“Trail” means a public right-of-way that is not a highway (19 V.S.A § 301(8)).

TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES MAP



Goals:

- ✓ Maintain functional and safe roads that are aesthetically pleasing and respectful of local character, within the financial means of the Town.
- ✓ Maintain road ditches, bridges and culverts, including for roadbed drainage, storm water capacity and the prevention of roadside erosion, in compliance with all state and federal road and bridges standards and the Vermont Clean Water Act.

Policies:

- ✓ The scenic value of the Town roads, and the impact of a greater, faster traffic burden, shall be evaluated prior to undertaking substantial improvements of Town roads.
- ✓ Roads should be widened and/or paved only when necessary for safety and year-round maintenance.
- ✓ Remove healthy trees from the highway right of way only when necessary to improve safety and road maintenance.
- ✓ Local road and bridge standards, and highway maintenance, shall adhere to all applicable state and federal road and bridge standards.
- ✓ Retain all existing public rights-of-way, whether presently being maintained by the Town or not, to preserve residents' access and provide for future growth, absent a determination (with public input) that it no longer is in the Town's best interest to retain the right of way.
- ✓ Development and expansion of public utility facilities and services should occur within highway or public utility right-of-way corridors to reduce adverse physical and visual impact on the landscape and achieve greater efficiency in the expenditure of funds.

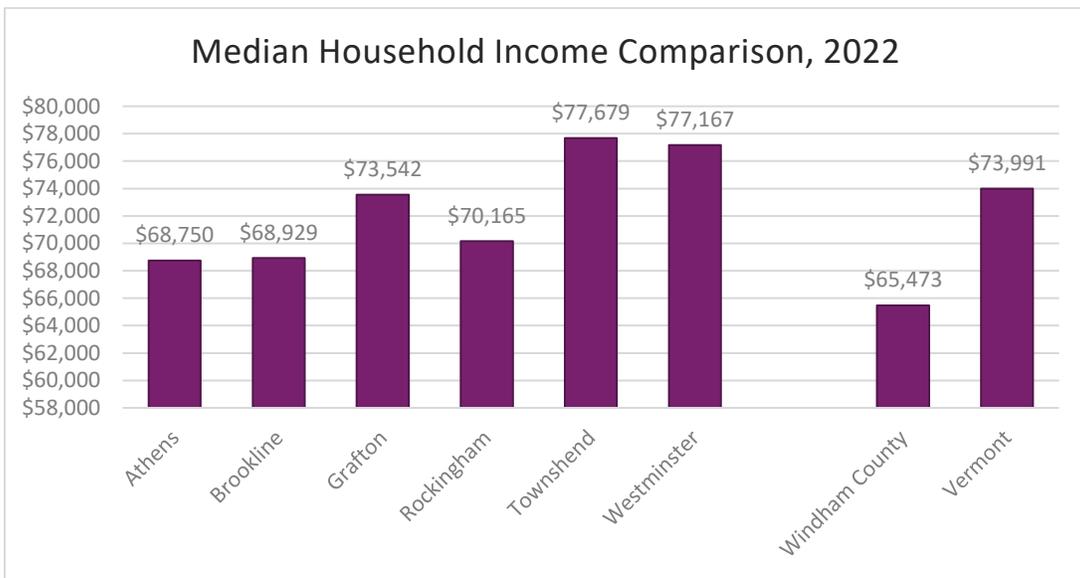
Actions:

- ✓ Encourage public transportation carriers to include Athens in their routes and public schedules.
- ✓ Ensure that road cuts and embankments are properly graded and seeded to minimize erosion and to maintain their scenic character.
- ✓ Post all bridges maintained by the Town as to the allowable limit. Heavy equipment users causing damage to the bridge or rendering it unusable will be responsible for replacement or repairs. A bond should be considered to offset any excessive use or damage and will make the Town aware of anticipated heavy trucking.
- ✓ Maintain and amend local road and bridge standards to reflect the Town Plan and ensure compliance with state and federal regulations.
- ✓ Enforce speed limits through contract with an appropriate law enforcement service provider.
- ✓ Maintain a paving plan for paved town roads.

- ✓ Maintain updated list of culverts maintained by the Town.
- ✓ Contract to purchase at best market price sufficient gravel for road maintenance and winter sand and salt.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Athens’ economy at present includes small farms producing agricultural products, logging, independent contractors, and cottage industries producing value-added products. The increased number of vacation homes in Athens has contributed to the economy, creating opportunities such as construction, landscaping, caretaking and maintenance. Many residents commute to jobs in neighboring towns, as well as to Brattleboro and Springfield, which offer manufacturing, health care, education and service jobs.



Source: 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Goals:

- ✓ Encourage economic development consistent with maintaining the Town’s rural character.
- ✓ Balance development with preservation of open spaces, forest lands, natural resources, and the Town’s historically significant buildings.

Policies:

- ✓ Planning for change and growth within the Town should be guided by the following considerations:
 - Future Town needs, including roads, schools, public safety, and services

- Encouragement of residential and commercial uses
- Provision of adequate municipal services and facilities
- Preservation of open spaces and large forest blocks.
- ✓ Development of telecom and energy infrastructure should be appropriate to Athens’ rural landscape, including in terms of scale, location of towers, and other relevant factors.
- ✓ Development should be compatible with existing uses and not otherwise negatively impact Athens’ rural, natural, or social environment.

Actions:

- ✓ Encourage economic development that maximizes the circulation of dollars within the community and nearby surrounding communities, provides diversified local employment opportunities, and enhances Athens’ small-town rural character, while promoting the wise and sustainable use of Athens’ natural resources.
- ✓ Encourage the strengthening and diversification of tourism and recreation in a manner that maintains high environmental quality.
- ✓ Encourage the local manufacture and marketing of agriculture and value-added agricultural products, sugaring, home gardens, forestry products, and cottage industries.

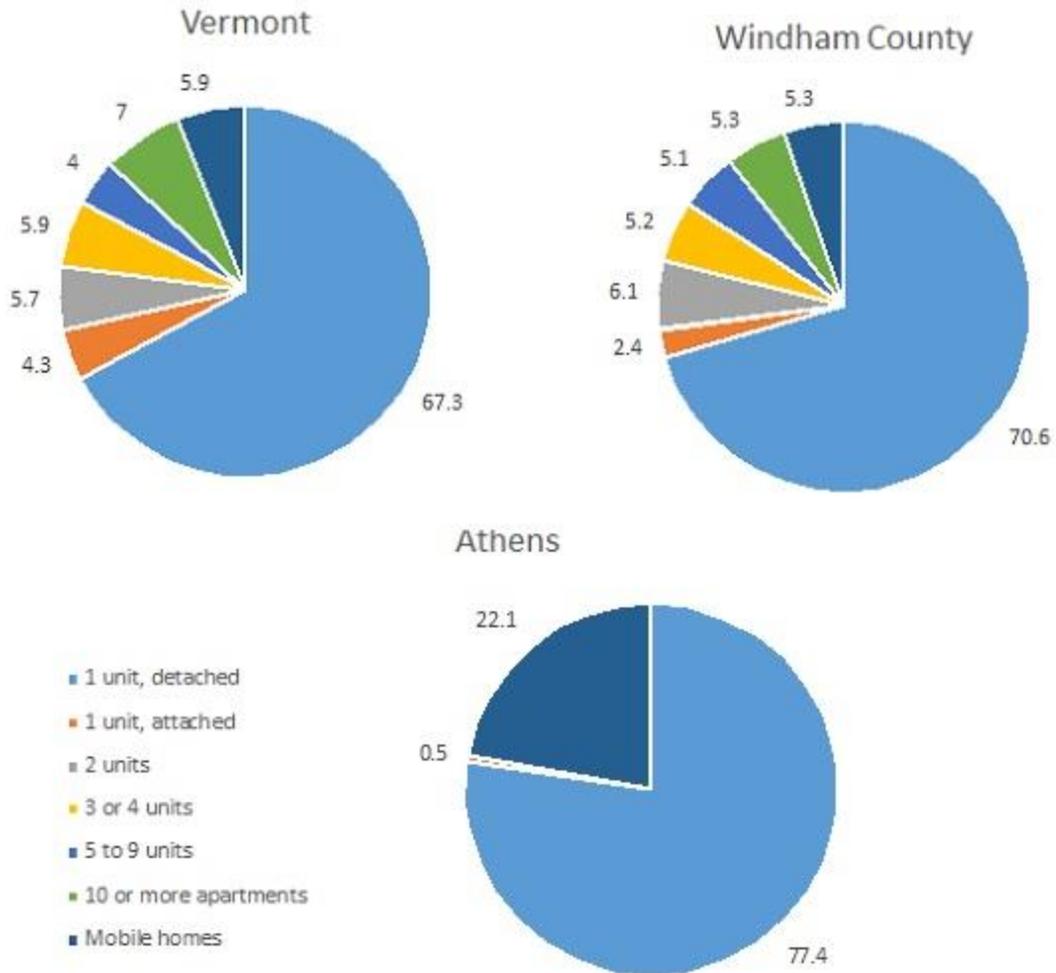
HOUSING

An adequate supply of year-round housing that offers varieties of size, cost and location is essential to the economic and social health of every town in the region, including Athens. Athens’ housing stock consists mostly of one-unit, detached homes and mobile homes.

Comparison of Housing Types, Athens, Windham County and Vermont, 2022

HOUSING TYPES AVAILABLE IN ATHENS		
2022 ESTIMATES		
Housing Unit Types	Count	Percent
1 unit, detached	151	77.4
1 unit, attached	1	0.5
2 units	0	0.0
3 or 4 units	0	0.0
5 to 9 units	0	0.0
Mobile homes	43	22.1
Total Housing Units	195	100

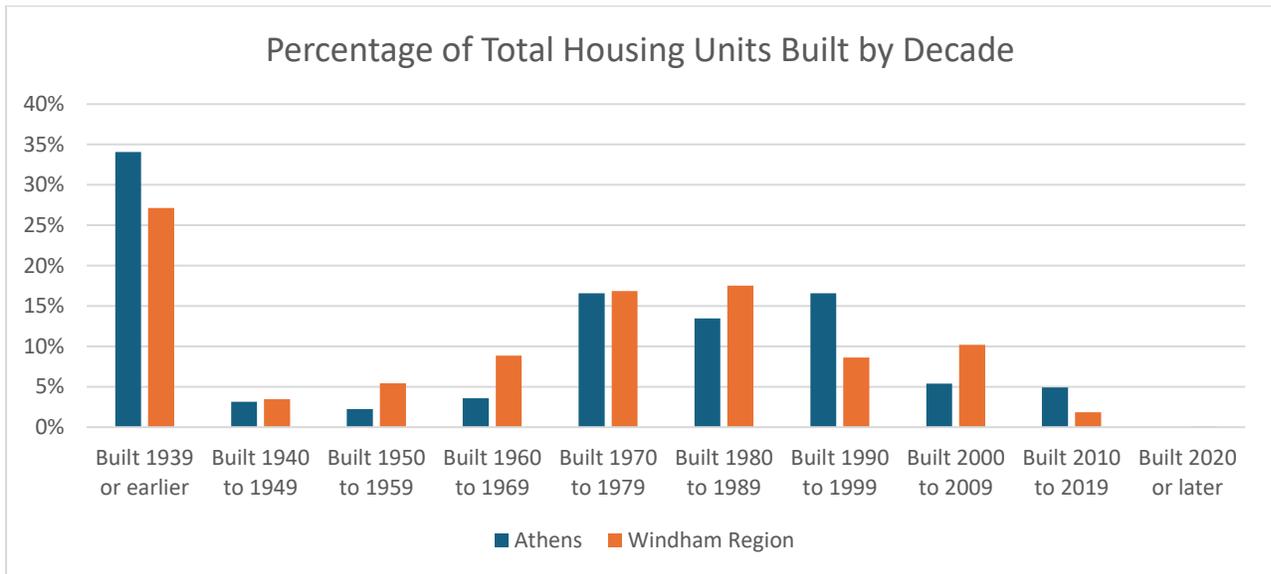
Source: US Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey, Selected Housing Characteristics



HOUSING OCCUPANCY IN ATHENS		
	Estimate	Percent
Housing Occupancy		
Total Housing Units	235	
Occupied housing units	195	83.0
Vacant housing units	40	17.0
Housing Tenure		
Occupied housing units	195	
Owner-Occupied	130	66.7
Renter-Occupied	65	33.3

AGE OF HOUSING IN ATHENS 5-Year Estimates		
Year Structure Built	Estimate	Percent
Built 2010 to 2019	11	4.7
Built 2000 to 2009	14	6.0
Built 1990 to 1999	40	17.0
Built 1980 to 1989	37	15.7
Built 1970 to 1979	33	14.0
Built 1960 to 1969	10	4.3
Built 1950 to 1959	5	2.1
Built 1940 to 1949	9	3.8
Built 1939 or earlier	76	32.3
Total housing units	235	100

Source: 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate



Source: Housingdata.org

The Athens Housing Rehabilitation Fund provides loans designated for repairs and improvement of Athens residents' homes. The loan program is administered by the Town's Housing Grant Commission.

Goals:

- ✓ Maintain the rural residential character of the Town.
- ✓ Ensure that moderate- and low-income housing are part of the housing mix.

Policies:

- ✓ Property owners are expected to notify the listers of new construction, renovation, and/or demolition for the purpose of the grand list notification.

- ✓ New housing development should take into account the rural character of the town, as well as the resources of the Town to sustain such development.

Actions:

- ✓ Remind Athens residents of the Athens Housing Rehabilitation Fund and that loan applications may be requested from the Town Treasurer and submitted to the Athens Housing Grant Commission for review.
- ✓ Encourage nonprofit housing organizations, such as Windham/Windsor Housing Trust, and private developers, to identify needs in Athens that meet the guidelines for affordable family and elderly housing.

ENERGY

Much of Athens' housing stock was built at a time when energy efficiency was not considered important and insulation technology did not exist. Moreover, because settlement in Athens is dispersed, and many residents drive to other towns to earn a living, the distances residents must travel increases their energy consumption. As a result, many Athens residents face energy challenges. Residents can realize the most energy savings through conservation and efficiency.

In 2024, the Town Garage and the Community Center were assessed as part of the Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP). As a result, the Town ultimately was awarded almost \$500,000 for energy-related upgrades.

Goals:

- ✓ Increase the energy efficiency of Town facilities.
- ✓ Work with industry partners to make the electric grid in Athens more resilient.

Policies:

- ✓ Encourage energy efficiency and conservation.
- ✓ Renewable energy development should be socially and environmentally responsible and consider the rural character of the Town.
- ✓ Encourage alternative energy production for individual use.

Actions:

- ✓ Create a plan for cost effective energy efficiency improvements to all town-owned buildings.
- ✓ Inform residents that whole structure energy audits, that can diagnose sources of heat loss, are available through Efficiency Vermont, SEVCA and private contractors.
- ✓ Develop a neighborhood ride sharing program.

RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Outdoor recreational activities available in Athens include hiking, cycling, skiing, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, ATV, and picnicking, by private landowners with their permission and through the Turner Hill Wildlife Management Area, the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Nature Reserve and Trails, and the Bull Creek Common Lands. The Town supports the continued availability of these opportunities.

TRAILS & PRESERVED LAND

Windmill Ridge Nature Reserve and Trail straddles Athens, Brookline, Westminster and Putney. The Pinnacle is the highest and most scenic peak (+/-1,683 feet) in Westminster, and overlooks Hedgehog Gulf and, westward to, Mount Snow and Stratton Mountain, over 20 miles away. Conserving The Pinnacle was the dream of the Jamie Latham Memorial Fund, which was established in 1991 to honor a young man who loved this beautiful spot. From this beginning, the nonprofit Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association was formed. Its lands now consist of over 2,800 acres, including 822 in Athens. These publicly accessible lands include a 25-mile hiking trail system and wildlife sanctuary.

There are several trailhead access points in Athens:

- Route 35 Trailhead (30 Route 35), across the street from Sleepy Valley Road, which also provides access to Athens Dome trails
- Athens Access Trailhead (37 Valley Cemetery Road)
- Latham Trailhead (Old Athens Road), which is accessible from Westminster

The Turner Hill Wildlife Management Area consists of about 1,000 acres around Athens Dome, straddling Athens and Grafton. This Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department land is a state wildlife management area. The Windmill Pinnacle Association (WHPA) has built a kiosk at the quarry area near the Athens Dome with information furnished by the Grafton Historical Society. Four miles of trails, from Route 35 in Athens (there is a kiosk marking the beginning of the trail) to Turner Hill Road in Grafton, are clearly marked and open for public use.

The Bulrushes at Athens Dome. In 2007, the Southern Loop Project (SLP), which was an electrical engineering project by Vermont Transco, LLC, came into the Athens-Grafton area. At that time, it purchased over 600 acres of land from various owners and estates in both towns, including the Turner Hill Site, which lies in both Athens and Grafton. It contains 29.9 acres of wetland, 16 potential vernal pools and nearly 3 miles of streams. This satisfied the mitigation of wetlands requirement of the SLP. Partial access to this area can be reached via Grafton on the Turner Hill Road.

Bull Creek Common Lands (“BCCL”) is a nonprofit with a mission to conserve land in, and adjacent to, the Bull Creek and Grassy Brook Watersheds of southeastern Vermont. BCCL has established the 36-acre Raymond Bemis Community Forest, which is located between Brookline Road and Valley Cemetery Road, and currently has a one-mile hiking trail.

HISTORIC SITES

Athens has a number of historic sites, including the Athens Brick Meeting House (1817), the Athens Town Office (1858), the Athens Christian Community Church (1859) which comprise Athens inventory of historic structures, and the town cemeteries. Also scattered around the town are numerous abandoned homesteads with cellar holes, and abandoned town roads, many dating back to the late 18th century.

Athens has four groups dedicated to preserving the Town's historic sites: the Athens Brick Meeting House Committee, the Athens Historic Preservation Society, the Cemetery Commission and Town Office Volunteers.

Goals:

- ✓ Preserve and protect access to the Town's natural resources and historic sites.

Policies:

- ✓ Use lands adjacent to or including areas of historical and cultural value in a manner that will maintain and preserve the value of the site or area.
- ✓ Protect Town historic structures from destruction and incongruous alterations.
- ✓ Encourage the preservation of large tracts of contiguous land for outdoor recreational activities.

Actions:

- ✓ Encourage varied and accessible opportunities for public and private recreation in a manner consistent with environmental preservation.
- ✓ Encourage activities that support the Windham Historical Society.

LAND USE

EXISTING LAND USE

The Town of Athens is primarily rural. The vast majority of town land is forested with limited access to the Town's roads. The areas close to, or directly accessible from, Town roads are primarily developed with low density residential construction. The town center on Brookline Road consists of the Town Office, Athens Community Center, and Community Christian Church.

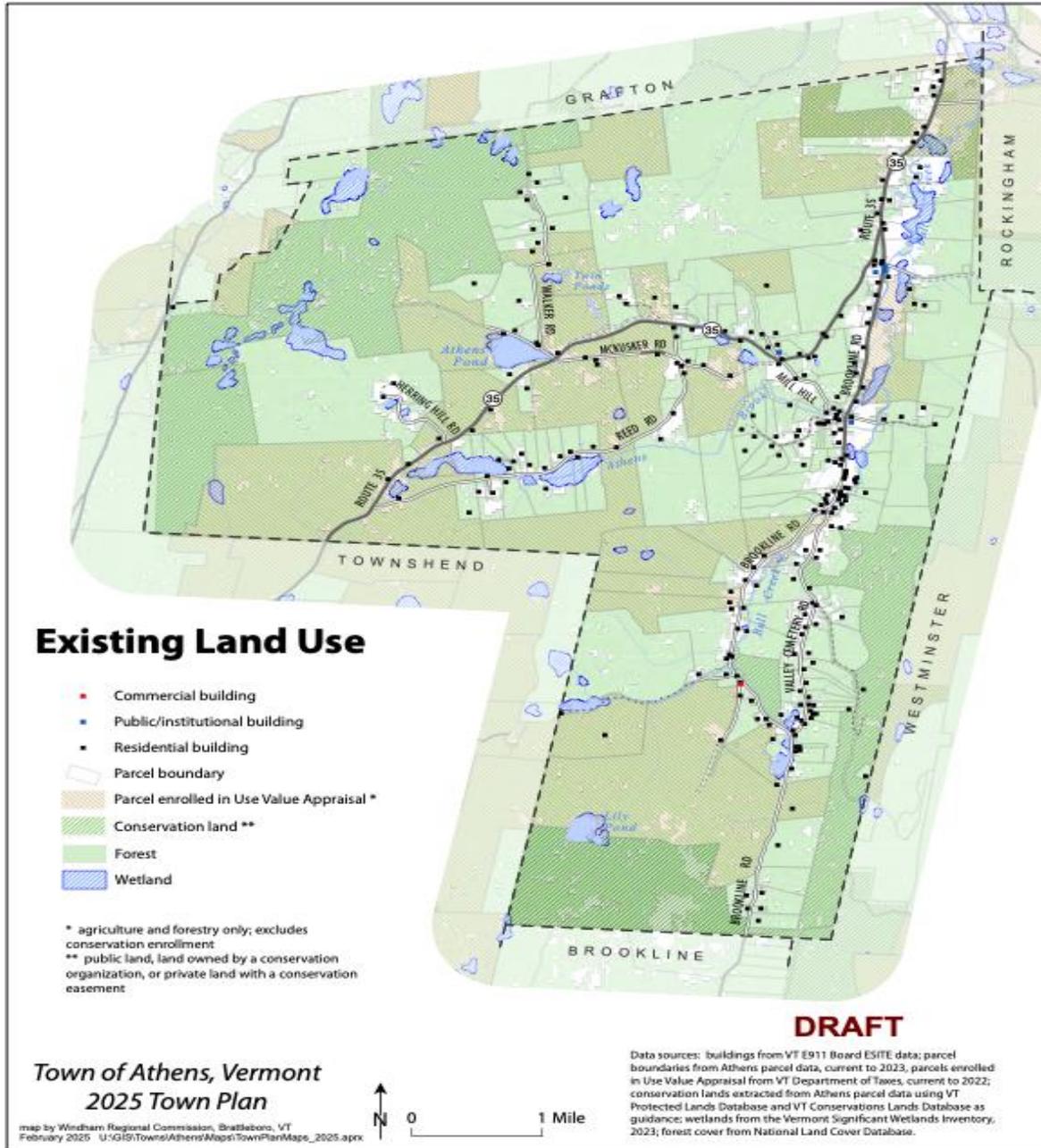
The forest lands provide areas for logging, game hunting and recreation, as well as shelter and forage for a variety of larger game including bear, moose, and deer. The area along Bull Creek has rich farm soils and is used extensively for agricultural production. Several large parcels of land have been conserved through the private and public conservation efforts of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association, Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont River Conservancy.

Because of topography, most residential areas are developed in a linear pattern along the Town's roads, which allow for an easy commute to Brattleboro, Bellows Falls and other

employment centers. The areas of concentrated development are on Route 35, Brookline Road, Valley Cemetery Road, Reed Road, Walker Road, and McKusker Road.

Athens has not experienced any measurable industrial or commercial development.

EXISTING LAND USE MAP



FUTURE LAND USE

The classification of Athens' lands described below is consistent with the Town Plan maps that identify resources, opportunities and limitations for development. The land use plan is intended to maintain Athens's rural character, which has defined the Town for centuries. Additionally, it provides for the protection of the natural resources and scenic areas, as well as economic growth.

Residential Lands:

Lands that have already been committed to residential development are easily accessible from the existing road system. These areas should accommodate low to moderate densities of mixed-use development which is compatible with existing land uses sensitive to the limitations of the land. Rural land uses such as agriculture, forestry, and recreation should be maintained and encouraged.

Commercial and light industrial uses may be appropriate. Non-residential uses should be designed to minimize adverse impacts – such as noise, light, hazardous waste, and heavy traffic – on residential lands. Road construction should be carefully planned to respect the natural environment and to promote the clustering of houses on appropriate sites.

Rural/Residential Lands:

Rural/residential land areas in the Town of Athens have special value and development should occur at a lower density than in residential areas. Rural/residential lands often include undeveloped forest lands that have limited access to improved public roads, areas with steep slopes, wetlands, scenic areas and agricultural lands. Therefore, any development in rural/residential areas should be designed to have minimal impact on these areas.

Forest Lands:

Forest lands are so designated because of their special and unique value to the public and the region's ecosystem. They are not yet committed to development at intensities that reduce the land's value or function. This land use category includes all lands currently in conservation by public ownership, such as the 1,000-acre Turner Hill Wildlife Management Area, as well as the private conservation efforts of the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association. There also are private landowners who have conservation easements on their lands.

Residential development in forest lands including state designated forest blocks is discouraged. Any development in, or near, forest lands including state designated forest blocks should be designed to have minimal impact on the special resource values of the area.

Neighboring Town Plans & Regional Plan Conformance

Townshend, Grafton, Brookline, Rockingham and Westminster are the towns surrounding Athens. The town plans for each municipality are supportive of the conservation minded approach that Athens is taking within this document.

Grafton considers its southern border with Athens to be a conservation priority and Cambridgeport is listed as a place where some development might be appropriate outside of the village center. This area matches up with the northeast corner of Athens where there is a “Residential” land use classification.

Rockingham shares a very short western border with Athens which is primarily classified as a conservation area. This area of Athens is largely forested and features a trail leading to conserved lands. It is shown on state mapping as a highest priority interior forest block.

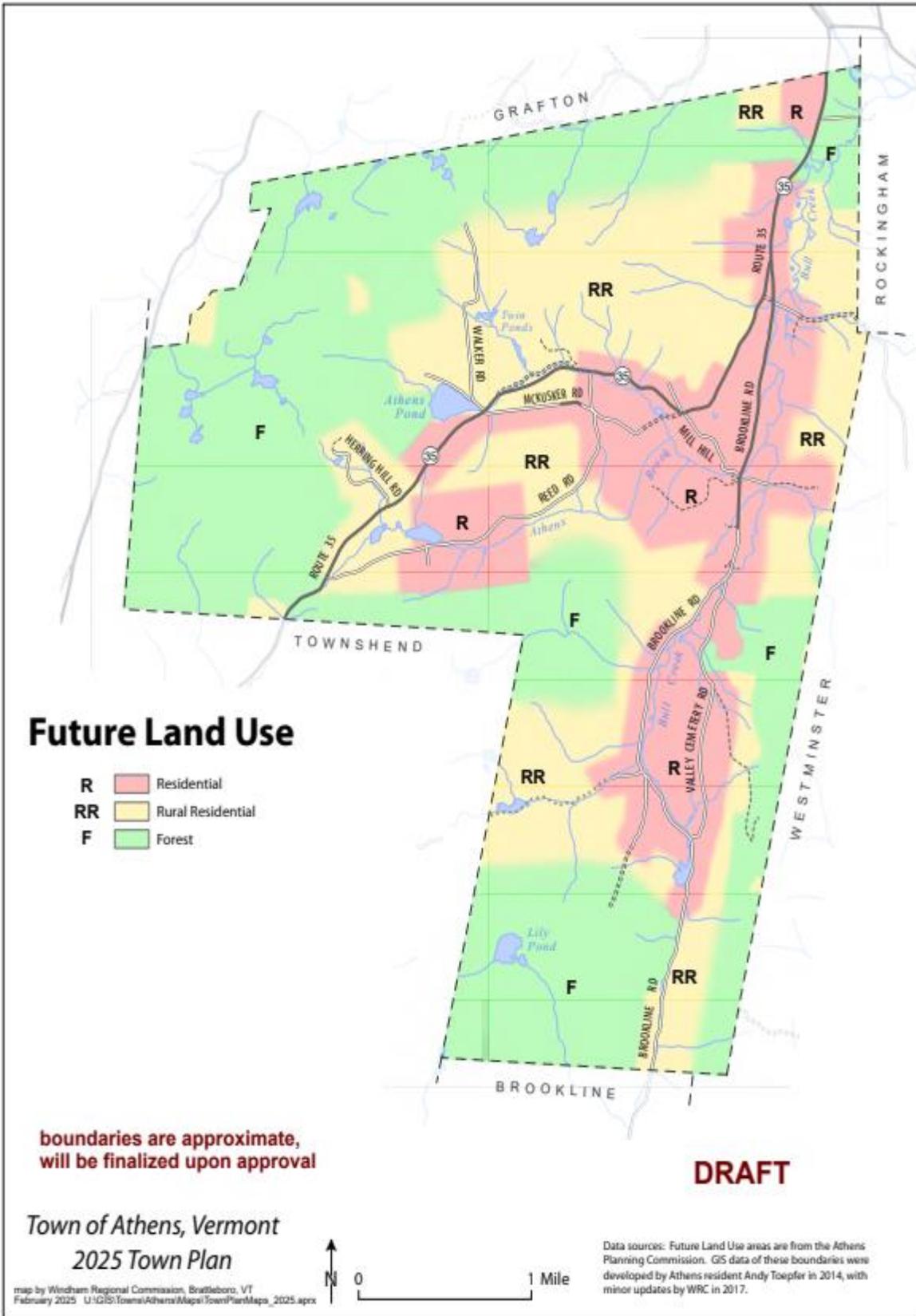
The western border with Westminster is largely forested, shown as a highest priority interior forest block by the state of Vermont and is mostly under conservation already. Westminster does not have an active town plan.

Route 35 goes through Townshend and is one of the main ways to access Athens. The lands along the border with Athens are classified as resource or productive rural lands and match with the Forest designation in this plan.

Brookline, like Athens describes the majority of their land as forest with pockets of residential and agricultural uses located along the transportation routes. The policies and goals largely align with one another.

The Windham Regional Plan supports the Athens Town Plan in many ways and seeks to utilize current growth centers like village centers to provide the bulk of new development for residents. This supports the Athens Town Plan which focuses on maintaining Athens as a rural town with strong forest blocks.

FUTURE LAND USE MAP



Goals:

- ✓ Ensure that the Town is represented at Act 250 hearings.
- ✓ Maintain and expand agriculture, forestry, open space and recreational land uses.
- ✓ Growth and development should be conducted in a manner that protects Athens' natural resources, preserves the area's rural character and does not negatively impact Town facilities and services, or property taxes.
- ✓ Limit fragmentation of priority forest blocks from road building and development.

Policies:

- ✓ Public utilities and transportation facilities should use existing corridors to minimize the impact on the environment and to assist desired development patterns.
- ✓ Development should be limited on lands where soil conditions and topography may cause failure of waste disposal systems or where development activity may cause pollution or contamination of ground or surface water.
- ✓ Lands adjacent to Town facilities, services, or lands, should be developed in a manner that does not interfere with the public's use or enjoyment of, or access to, them.

Actions:

- ✓ Work with existing non-profit land trusts to acquire or hold conservation easements on significant resource, conservation lands and priority forest blocks to promote recreation, reforestation, water conservation and suitable forest practices.
- ✓ Encourage residents and property owners to participate in the Town planning process.
- ✓ Encourage the development of on-farm business to ensure agriculture thrives in Athens.

FOOD SECURITY

The Town of Athens recognizes the importance of food security to a healthy community, as well as the fact that we have entered a time when food security will increasingly be an issue for fellow residents and neighbors. Therefore, Athens should encourage and support policies and practices that provide greater food security for its residents.

Goal:

- ✓ Access to healthy, affordable, and sustainable food.
- ✓ Access to local food resources.

Policies:

- ✓ Support and encourage local agriculture and farming.

Actions:

- ✓ Encourage direct purchasing of farm products from local farmers, including farm stands and CSAs.
- ✓ Encourage gardening by all residents, as well as the development of neighborhood and community gardening and grow-a-row efforts.
- ✓ Encourage the development of local food skills through the organization and sponsorship of workshops in gardening, cooking, root cellaring, canning, freezing, and fermentation, and extending the growing season.
- ✓ Encourage community efforts, and the sharing of resources, to meet the food needs of all citizens.
- ✓ Support a food shelf to provide access for low-income citizens to Vermont Food Bank resources and provide emergency food for all citizens in times of weather emergencies.

RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

GROUND & SURFACE WATER RESOURCES

Athens residents depend upon groundwater wells and springs for their potable water supply. The amount and quality of groundwater appears to be adequate for continued growth, but problems of supply and quality may occur if the land is used more intensively. Protecting these water resources from pollution is critical to maintaining adequate clean water supplies for area residents.

Both surface water and ground water sources face threats to their water quality from point source and non-point source pollution. Point sources are those that can be traced to a specific source, such as a pipe or sewer outfall. Non-point sources of pollution are more diffuse in origin. They can include storm water runoff, septic system effluent, snow dumps, road salt, and soil erosion.

The State of Vermont regulates the construction and use of individual on-site sewage disposal systems. Athens currently enforces a health ordinance for compliance with State regulations for septic systems.

Goals:

- ✓ Protect ground and surface water resources from pollution.

Policies:

- ✓ Protect ground and surface water quality minimizing impact on:

- Aquifers
 - Watersheds of upland streams
 - Areas characterized by steep slopes and shallow soils
 - Areas supplying large amounts of recharge waters to aquifers
 - Public water supplies
- ✓ Discourage large-scale water extraction.
 - ✓ Developers should provide a sufficient water supply sufficient for all units within a planned development and for fire protection.
 - ✓ Watercourses, ponds, and shore lands should be retained and maintained in accordance with state regulations.
 - ✓ Protect wetlands in accordance with state regulations.
 - ✓ Storm water management along Town roads shall meet state guidelines.

Actions:

- ✓ Ensure that a new water supply systems do not diminish, and any waste disposal systems do not contaminate, an existing water supply.
- ✓ Ensure that individuals storing, using or transporting hazardous chemicals do so in a manner so as not to have any adverse effects of streams or sources of water in the Town.
- ✓ Support surface water classification and management strategies that are consistent with Town and regional planning objectives for the affected watershed, and which will also effectively maintain or enhance existing water quality.
- ✓ Plan development to conserve the Town's water resources.
- ✓ Support state, regional and local efforts to inventory and map aquifer recharge areas and wetlands.

FISH AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES

The following general fish and wildlife habitats have been identified in Athens:

Upland habitats: These include forested areas on steep slopes or coniferous or mixed forests that provide substantial winter cover for a variety of wildlife. Areas known to provide winter shelter and browse for deer and other wildlife are particularly important. Activities which can destroy or greatly diminish capacities of wildlife habitats include housing, recreational and industrial development, highway construction, commercial wind towers, cell towers, and commercial solar fields.

Water habitats: These include small ponds and watercourses that provide the conditions necessary for healthy fish life, and may be attractive to a variety of migratory waterfowl. These are abundant and include Athens Pond, Lily Pond, Reed Road Beaver Pond and marshy areas (Athens Dome, Sam Farr Road, vernal pools along the Windmill Hill Pinnacle trails).

Shore land habitats: These include shoreline areas around ponds and stream side (riparian zones) that are undeveloped and attractive to a variety of amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.

Wetland habitats: These include wetlands (e.g., Beaver Pond on Reed Road) that are important for a wide variety of songbirds, game birds and other wildlife, including beaver, otter, mink, grouse, woodcocks, Canada geese, and turkeys. Another important wetland habitat lies within the Athens Dome land now known as the Turner Hill Wildlife management Area. The Nature Conservancy stepped in to purchase an additional 80 acres when it was found that the Northeastern Bulrush (*Scirpus ancistrochaetus* is a rare species of flowering plant in the sedge family), an endangered plant in Vermont was found.

Goals:

- ✓ Preservation of fish and wildlife resources and habitats.

Policies:

- ✓ Plan development to minimize impact upon fish and wildlife habitats.
- ✓ Minimize fragmentation of large blocks of wildlife habitat and encourage connectivity between habitat blocks as corridors for wildlife migration.

Actions:

- ✓ Work with area residents with specific knowledge of the community, wildlife habitats and natural areas, and the State District Wildlife and Fisheries Biologists and the Vermont Natural Heritage Program to better identify and map significant wildlife habitats in the Town.
- ✓ Consider conducting a Natural Resources Inventory to identify important lands for protection.

AGRICULTURAL AND FOREST RESOURCES

Primary agricultural soils are those with high potential for growing food or forage crops and sufficiently well drained and fertile, or highly responsive to the use of fertilizer. Primary agricultural soils are on lands with less than 15% average slope and on lands of size capable of supporting or contributing to an economical agricultural operation. Most of the primary agricultural soils in Athens are located in the valley areas. There are large, privately owned fields with crops that are harvested for local farmer use, commercial animal and produce farms (including farms offering “Community Supported Agriculture” (CSA) shares), and small, non-commercial farms where food is grown for homeowner consumption. In addition, large, forested tracts play an important role in the local economy by providing jobs to loggers, truckers, and foresters and income from timber sales to landowners. Most of the town is classified as either a priority forest block or a habitat connectivity block with the exception being the farmland along Athens Road in the northeast corner of town. As development occurs in town these large intact forest blocks can get fragmented by development. This lowers the quality of habitat and overall health of the forest. Habitat connectors refer to land of water that links patches of habitat with the broader landscape and aid in the movement and dispersal of animals and plant species.

Goals:

- ✓ Preserve Athens' agricultural and forest resources.

Policies:

- ✓ Encourage farms, agricultural land and related agricultural services required to ensure a viable agricultural community.
- ✓ Discourage development that hinders soil productivity or precludes their future use for agriculture and forestry.
- ✓ Discourage development that fragments or otherwise causes the quality of Athens forest resources to be diminished.
- ✓ Any non-agricultural development proposed to be located on agricultural lands should minimize any adverse impact on existing or potential agricultural uses.

Actions:

- ✓ Encourage the use of forest and land for wood products, maple syrup, recreation, wildlife habitat and scenery.
- ✓ Encourage the development of local industries that produce value-added agricultural and forest products.

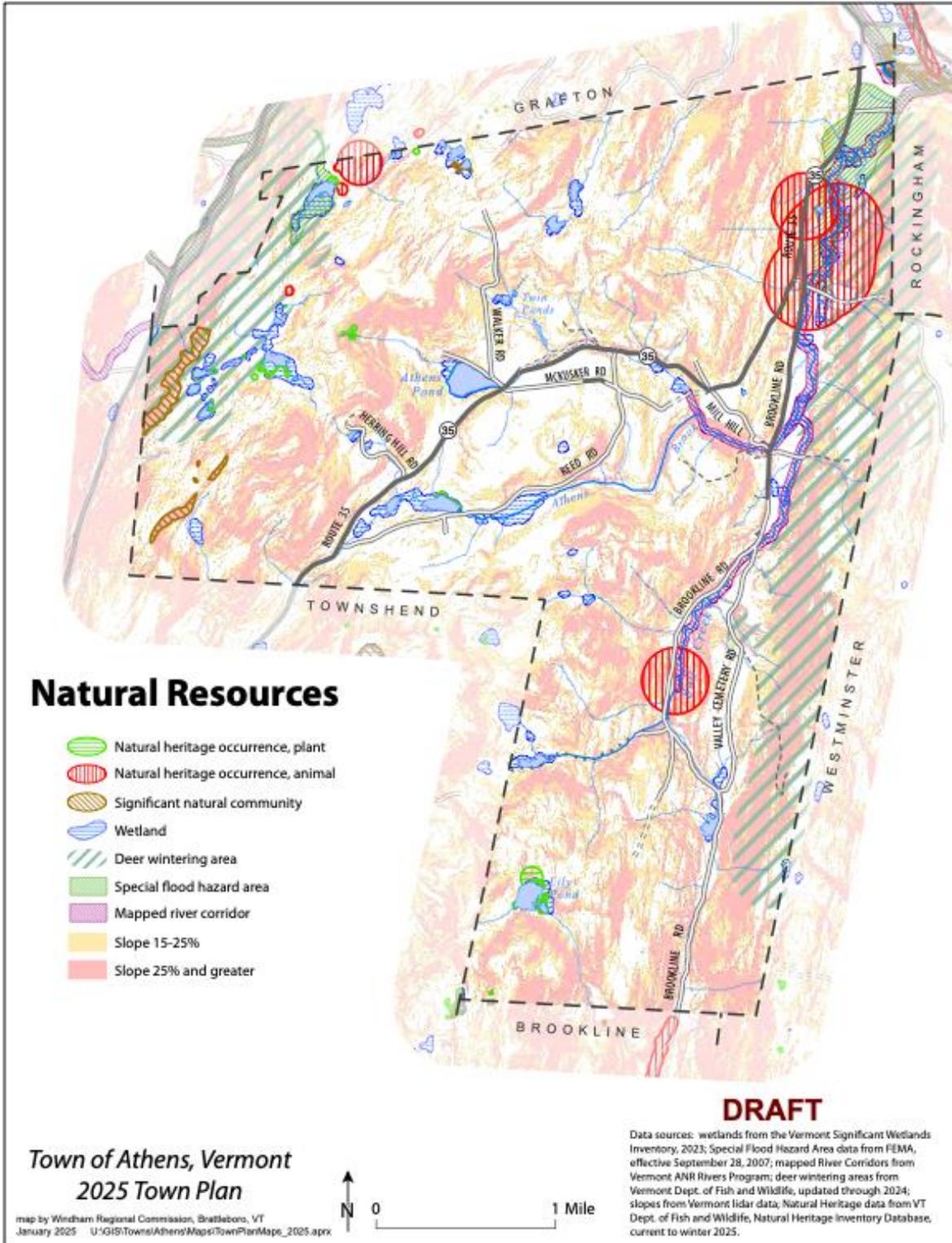
EARTH AND MINERAL RESOURCES

Historically, there were privately owned sand and gravel pits in Athens that no longer are used.

Actions:

- ✓ Work with the Agency of Natural Resources and the Vermont State Geologist to identify and map important earth and mineral resources in the Town.
- ✓ Support applications for grants or other sources for acceptable land reclamation practices.
- ✓ Encourage the use of new sources of local gravel for road and construction when these sources of gravel have appropriate state permits.
- ✓ Monitor non-permitted commercial excavation activity.

NATURAL RESOURCES MAP



SOILS AND TOPOGRAPHY

Soils are the most important determinate of the land's development capability, especially in areas with no municipal underground infrastructure. Knowing the important aspects of soils is necessary for understanding road fills, septic systems, flooding and water damage. Soils are classified into groups and subgroups, and each has individual characteristics and consistencies. A soil's depth to water table, susceptibility to flooding, depth to bedrock, stone content, and permeability present potential constraints to the construction of roads, buildings, and septic systems.

The Town of Athens is comprised of two soil types: (1) along the Bull Creek there are excessively to moderately drained soils in sandy deposits and on-stream terraces, out-wash areas, and on flood plains; and (2) in other areas there are shallow, gently sloping to very steep hillsides that are excessively drained and well drained in loamy glacial till, and in compact, loamy glacial till on hills and mountains.

Topography can be described in terms of elevation and slope. Although elevation alone does not constrain development, higher elevations tend to coincide with thinner soils and steeper slopes. Slopes of less than 8% are generally most suitable for building. The erosion potential of such slightly sloping land is low, its ability to absorb runoff is high, and soils are usually of adequate depth and composition for septic systems. Exceptions are extremely flat areas, some of which may classify as wetlands, where drainage is poor. As slopes increase, the suitability of the land for development decreases. In areas of steep slopes, the velocity of runoff, and therefore the potential for erosion, increases. The ability of the soil to filter septic leachate is decreased. Overcoming constraints to development and slopes exceeding 25% present severe constraints and should be avoided.

In Athens, elevations range from 1740' in the NW at the Grafton border; Lily Pond in the SW at 1600', 1300' in the Hedgehog Gulf; 1300' in the NE junction near Rockingham. Steep slopes coupled with two types of soils affect development and sets logging limitations. Lower elevations are found where roads exist and homes are built. For instance, along Grassy Brook, on the west side of Brookline Road in the south and on the east side along Bull Creek, homes are built as the steep slope of Hedgehog Gulf decreases. The entire elevation along Bull Creek to the north into Rockingham is 600'. Moving west from the divide of Route 35 and Brookline Road, the elevation rises gently to Athens Pond at 1180' to the Townshend line at 1200'. The elevation is 1240' to the western border with Townshend, at Sam Farr Road.

FLOOD RESILIENCE

Flood hazard areas are lands adjacent to rivers and streams that are inundated during periods of high surface water runoff. The Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973 mandates that towns regulate development in designated flood areas and that property owners in flood plain areas purchase flood insurance. If the town or property owners fail to meet these requirements, any federal or federally related financial assistance for buildings in the flood plain will be unavailable to the community or property owners. According to the Flood Insurance Rate Map of Windham County (2007), the Athens flood hazard area goes from the Ober Hill Road Bridge, crossing Bull

Creek; follows the Creek area north, then north again to the Grafton-Athens line, and east along the Rockingham line, to the junction of the Athens-Grafton town line.

Athens has a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan that identifies flood hazards as the Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA) shown on the National Flood Insurance Program and Flood Insurance Rate Maps (D-FIRM) and identifies fluvial erosion hazard areas as those shown on the Agency of Natural Resources River Corridor maps. Further, this plan designates both those identified areas as areas to be protected, including flood plains, river corridors, and land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property. Finally, this plan recommends the following policies and action recommendations to protect the designated areas to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.

Policies:

- ✓ Encourage the protection of floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure, property, people, and the environment.
- ✓ New development should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.

Actions:

- ✓ Make available at the Town Office information relevant to flood hazards, flood hazard regulations, and flood hazard mitigation.
- ✓ Consistent with state regulations, discourage new development in identified flood hazard areas, fluvial erosion hazard areas, and/or river corridors to ensure that development and related activities do not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion or increase the amount and/or rate of runoff and soil erosion from upland areas.
- ✓ Encourage flood emergency preparedness and response training.
- ✓ Maintain a current Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.