

# CHAPTER 10: EDUCATIONAL, CULTURAL, AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

## BACKGROUND

The Windham Region is fortunate to have access to a variety of educational resources, a rich and vibrant arts and cultural heritage, and a wealth of natural recreational resources. These resources are foundational to fostering strong local ties to the community, creating a high quality of life for residents, and improving the economic prosperity of our communities.

Educational resources encompass child care, elementary and secondary schools, higher education institutions, continuing education opportunities, and community libraries. A quality educational system is critical for achieving social and economic goals, including the availability of high-quality child care to support working parents and local businesses. Libraries play an important role in serving learning and information needs and providing a community center space.

Nationally recognized musicians, artists, writers, and craftspeople have chosen to make the region their home. The presence of the arts community enriches the lives of residents and visitors, and enhances the region's economic vitality and appeal as a place to live and do business. The region has an abundance of historic resources as well. Historic structures and sites are an integral part of the region's character and quality of life. They serve as a link to the past and help strengthen the local economy by promoting investment as well as tourism.

Recreational resources in the region take many forms. Some communities have municipal recreation departments and provide a wide range of activities for various age groups. Ski resorts play an important role by providing recreation to residents and tourists, and increasingly through all four seasons. Hiking, road biking, mountain biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and hunting are just some of the recreational activities that also take place throughout the region's vast forest resource areas. Residents and visitors utilize the many rivers, streams, lakes, reservoirs, and ponds for water recreation such as swimming, boating, and fishing.

## EDUCATION AND LIBRARY RESOURCES

### EARLY EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE

The availability of high-quality child care is a concern for many parents, employers, and communities. Affordable,

high-quality child care is essential in developing a full employment economy, raising income levels, and lowering the need for public assistance. High-quality child care also has many positive benefits for a child’s social development and preparation for elementary school.

According to a study entitled “Stalled at the Start: Vermont’s Child Care Challenge” completed by Let’s Grow Kids in 2022, the state has made improvements in increasing access to regulated early childhood education programs due to investments and programs over the last several years. However, there is still a significant unmet demand for Windham County families, in particular for programs that offer care for infants (6 weeks – 23 months). The primary barriers for families to accessing child care include location, hours, and ages served. The study notes that there is a particular need for programs that offer care for infant (6 weeks – 23 months) and for full-day and full-week programs that accommodate the needs of working families.

Several components need to be factored into locating additional or expanding existing child care facilities. Transportation concerns, including the rural nature of the road network and existing commuting patterns, location of employment centers, and population growth trends, all contribute to a unique environment for assessing specific child care facility location needs.

The [Windham Child Care Association](#) is a child care resource and referral agency of child care providers serving the Windham Region. Among other efforts, this association helps parents identify and locate quality child care that meets their needs, helps parents access the state child care financial assistance program, and builds partnerships with the business community and other community service agencies to support the needs of families and children. The organization manages a licensed child care center for children age 6 weeks to 5 years in Brattleboro and operates the Early Learning Express, the county’s bookmobile program.

## ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

There are five supervisory union districts serving towns in the Windham Region: Windham Central, Windham Northeast, Windham Southeast, Windham Southwest and Bennington Rutland (see the [Educational Facilities Map](#)). There are four public secondary schools in the region. Three are operated by union high school districts: Brattleboro Union High School District (Brattleboro), Bellows Falls Union High School District (Rockingham), and Leland and Gray Union High School District (Townshend). Wilmington and Whitingham formed the Twin Valley School District for the purpose of jointly providing secondary education for their towns. The Twin Valley High School is located in Whitingham. The region is also home to numerous independent elementary and secondary schools.

Following the adoption of Act 46 in 2015, the region has seen the consolidation of local schools with other districts which has had an impact on the governance and administrative structures of elementary and secondary schools. Many local school districts have merged in the region so that there are now school districts representing multiple

towns while other school districts serve a single elementary school. School systems are governed by local school boards that provide oversight and policy guidance for school districts and supervisory districts. The supervisory unions boards are responsible for district-wide operations, such as central office administration, special education, and transportation. School boards govern operations for specific schools.

Some towns that do not have their own elementary school pay the tuition for resident children to attend nearby public or independent elementary schools. Towns which do not have their own high school, or which do not belong to a union high school district, pay tuition for high school age students to attend nearby public or independent high schools.

School enrollment figures fell in the region over the last ten years, although not as significantly as the previous ten years. Total enrollment in the region dropped by 7 percent from 5,774 in the 2013-2014 school year to 5,349 in the 2023-2024 school year. The consolidation of schools as well as aging facilities has still led to new school construction projects in the region. The location of schools has a large impact on the community where they are located. Building new schools away from existing villages, town centers, and surrounding neighborhoods can result in a loss of vitality in these centers and increases public expenditures and vehicle trips.

In 2021, the Vermont legislature passed Act 74 requiring schools built or renovated before 1980 to test indoor air for the presences of Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Schools that were built or renovated before 1980 are more likely to have PCBs in building materials, commonly in caulk and fluorescent light ballasts. The Department of Environmental Conservation has authority to require schools to make fixes if PCB levels are high. All testing must be completed by 2027. The legislature granted funding to test for PCBs, however there are not currently funds allocated for determining the source of PCBs or to make fixes to lower elevated levels.

## POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Three public post-secondary schools in the region offer courses or programs. The Community College of Vermont in Brattleboro offers Associates Degrees and provides a wide range of courses and workshops. Vermont Technical College has a satellite campus in downtown Brattleboro that offers Associate Degrees, career-related certificates, and training programs. In July 2023, Vermont Technical College joined Castleton University and Northern Vermont University to become Vermont State University. Lastly, the University of Vermont operates a regional Extension office and continuing education center at the Winston Prouty campus in Brattleboro.

The region hosts the campuses for two independent colleges. Landmark College in Putney offers programs designed to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. The School for International Training has a low-residency campus in Brattleboro and offers undergraduate study abroad programs and graduate programs. Marlboro College in Marlboro was a small independent liberal arts college that closed in 2020.

## ADULT EDUCATION

There are several opportunities for adult education in the region. In addition to the various programs offered through community libraries and individual groups, the [Community College of Vermont](#) has a learning center in Brattleboro that offers associate degrees, career-related certificates, and credit and non-credit training programs. [Vermont Adult Learning](#), which has an office in Brattleboro, provides instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, math, reasoning and problem solving, occupational and workplace skills and information technology to adults 16 years and older who are not enrolled in secondary school. Finally, the University of Vermont offers online continuing education courses through its Professional and Continuing Education program. Adult education programs can be important for helping out-of-work individuals re-enter the workforce. These programs are also beneficial to adults looking to change career paths.

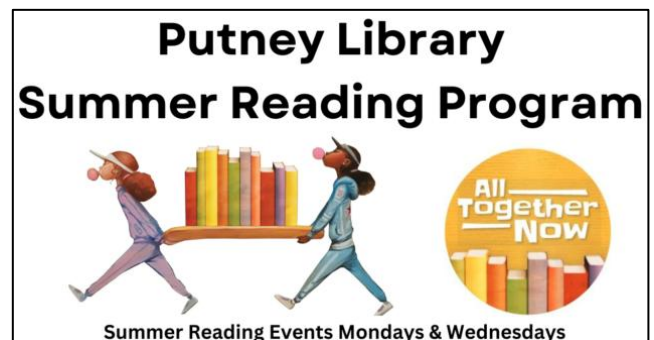
An additional piece of adult education is pairing training programs with businesses in the region so that workforce skills are being developed to meet the current and future needs of local businesses. The Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) has designed and implemented a number of workforce development programs through its Southern Vermont Workforce Center of Excellence that bring together private, public, and social sectors. BDCC has focused on job pathways in industries with high wages, demand, need, and opportunities.

## LIBRARIES

The region's libraries play an important role in serving the learning and information needs of its citizens, as well as providing community centers for meetings and cultural events. Story times, after school programs, book discussions, lectures and films, and internet access are common programs at many of the region's libraries. Increasingly, libraries are taking on expanded roles as well, such as assisting residents with accessing social service needs.

### PUTNEY LIBRARY SUMMER READING AND MEAL PROGRAM

The Putney Library offers a Summer Meal program with free pre-packaged bagged lunches for those aged 18 and younger, five days a week during the summer months. The Library also hosts a Summer Reading Program with different weekly activities and events for families throughout the summer. The Summer Reading Program receives funding from the Vermont Department of Libraries, the Vermont Community Foundation, and the Children's Literacy Foundation.



*Source: Putney Library Website*

There are 21 public libraries in the Windham Region with seven towns not having any libraries within their borders.

Brooks Memorial Library in Brattleboro and Rockingham Library are the region's largest libraries. Most libraries in the region are linked in an electronic network designed and supported by the Vermont Department of Libraries to bring the entire state's resources, state library holdings, college, university and public libraries, to citizens of the region.

Adequate funding is a struggle for libraries in the region. Federal and state funds do not pay for basic local public library services. Many towns in the region depend on volunteers to operate the town library. Collaborations between local libraries and educational institutions may aid in providing other avenues for support.

## CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

### ARTS

The Windham Region is home to nationally recognized musicians, artists, writers and craftspeople. The presence of the arts community enriches the lives of residents and visitors, helps define the region, and adds to the local quality of life. The strength of the region's cultural resources also has a direct link to the well-being of our economy through spending by arts organizations and by audiences attending events. As noted in the Economic Development Chapter, the arts and cultural sector adds approximately \$1.1 billion to Vermont's GDP, ranking it third in the state only behind retail and construction.

The Windham Region hosts many concerts, festivals, and performances. Summer concerts are held by the Yellow Barn in Putney, Friends of Music at Guilford, and Marlboro Music. The Brattleboro Music Center also hosts a series of choral, symphonic, and chamber works. Mount Snow and Stratton resorts also sponsor summer musical festivals. The Weston Theater Company is well known for their summer theater productions, but was significantly impacted by flooding in July 2023 and is working on reopening the Playhouse.

Several other theater companies, such as the New England Youth Theater and Sandglass Theater, offer workshops and perform in the region. The Brattleboro Museum and Art Center offers exhibits of work in a variety of media, often coupled with lectures or performances. Bellows Falls and Brattleboro have instituted popular monthly events in their downtowns with open art galleries and other community activities, known as Gallery Walk in Brattleboro and 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday in Bellows Falls. Finally, many artists region-wide also hold open studio events.

## DOVER SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

The Town of Dover hosts an annual Summer Concert Series at the Dover Park in West Dover. These events are funded entirely from the Local Option Meals and Rooms Tax the Town collects. Concerts are offered on Sunday afternoons and Wednesday evenings throughout the summer months.



SUMMER CONCERT AT DOVER PARK  
*Photo Credit: Town of Dover Facebook Page*

The Stone Church in Brattleboro, Next Stage in Putney, Latchis Theater in Brattleboro, Opera House in Bellows Falls, and Memorial Hall in Wilmington are all exceptional historic facilities that have undergone restoration and have been developed as performing art centers. There are several other small performance venues through the region including the Hooker Dunham Theater in Brattleboro and the Windham Hotel in Bellows Falls.

Craftspeople form a significant segment of the region's culture and economy, and play a major role in the heritage tourism that continues to grow in the region. A number of art and craft festivals are held annually that help support local artisans. The region also sustains professional storytellers, mimes, puppeteers, traditional and folk musicians, and folk, contra and Morris dancers. The Arts Council of Windham County is a volunteer organization that works to foster an inclusive, connected, and dynamic creative community in Windham County. The Arts Council provides targeted resources, services, and connections to help growth and strengthen the local arts community. One example of their work is the Brattleboro Arts Fund that received funding from the Town of Brattleboro and offers small grants for individuals and organizations for creative projects that contribute to the greater Brattleboro community.

## HISTORIC RESOURCES

Historic structures and sites are an integral part of the Windham Region's character and quality of life. They serve as a link to the past and through preservation and rehab efforts can help strengthen the local economy by promoting investment in other properties and tourism. It is in the public interest to preserve and enhance these historic resources. One way this is done is through support of local historic societies in the region, and collaborating with these societies on town projects when it is appropriate. There is also an



BROAD BROOK COMMUNITY CENTER,  
GUILFORD CENTER

opportunity to take advantage of the adaptive reuse of historic structures to put them back into productive use and reduce the need for new construction.

There are several examples of towns that have invested in rehabilitating historic structures within village centers to host community functions, meetings, and events. One example of this is the Broad Brook Community Center in Guilford Center, which was a Grange Hall and now is used for community events, concerts, classes, and meetings. There are a variety of preservation tools available at the local, state and federal level. The following are just a sampling of tools available to towns in Vermont:

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the nation's resources worthy of preservation. Resources may be nominated individually, or in groups, as districts or as multiple resource areas and must generally be older than 50 years. Over 100 of the region's historic structures and districts are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Inclusion on the National Register affords the property special recognition of its contribution to local resources, provides a review of effects which any federally funded project may have on the property (most notably highway projects), and may enable property owners to receive federal tax advantages for historically appropriate improvements. These tax advantages are critical for supporting the costly improvements to bring historic structures up to current codes.

## VERMONT STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Sites listed on the State Register of Historic Places are given due consideration during Act 250 reviews. During the permit process, the Vermont Division of Historic Preservation will make recommendations to the District Environmental Commission on the impact to the historic resource. In addition to the sites listed on the National Register, there are numerous other sites and structures are recognized in the State Register.

## VERMONT DESIGNATION PROGRAM

The Vermont Designation program is managed by the State Agency of Commerce and Community Development and seeks to recognize and protect the cultural and economic investments in villages and downtowns by offering technical assistance and tax credits.

Act 181 includes significant reforms to the State Designation program. Under the new designation program there will be two types of designations: Centers and Neighborhoods. The Center designation supports revitalization efforts of downtowns and village centers and the Neighborhood designation supports revitalization and development in neighborhoods surrounding Centers. Currently in the Windham Region there are three designated

downtowns (Brattleboro, Bellows Falls and Wilmington) and 27 designated village centers. All existing Village Centers and Designated Downtowns approved by the re-named Downtown Board (now called the Community Investment Board) will automatically become Centers and existing Neighborhood Development Areas (Brattleboro and Putney) will become Neighborhoods.

With Act 181, eligibility for the designation program is determined based on the Regional Future Land Use Map. Areas mapped by WRC as a Downtown Center or Village Center become eligible for Center designations, and areas mapped as Planned Growth Area or Village Areas become eligible for the Neighborhood designation. As part of the 2026 Regional Plan update, these areas were mapped in coordination with town input and they become effective in conjunction with this Plan being approved by the Land Use Review Board.

## LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Vermont State law ([24 V.S.A. § 4414](#)) allows towns to create and administer a local historic district (see the [Historic District Map](#)). The purpose of a historic district is to protect and preserve areas of outstanding architectural and historic value from inappropriate alterations and additions which might otherwise detract from the character. Towns may also designate historic landmarks and enact Design Review Districts. Wilmington is an example of a town that has adopted a Design Review District for its historic downtown area.

## PRESERVATION TRUST OF VERMONT

The Preservation Trust of Vermont is a charitable, non-profit organization that initiates and assists local and statewide efforts to preserve Vermont's historic, architectural, and community resources. Through educational programs and technical and financial assistance, the Preservation Trust works to protect and restore significant historic properties, downtowns and community centers.

## CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT (CLG) PROGRAM

The CLG Program is a federally funded program administered by the state. A local government can participate in the program once the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation certifies the municipality. Matching grants are made each year to CLGs for survey and planning projects, including National Register nominations and education and advocacy projects. Rockingham is the only CLG in the Windham Region.

## RECREATION RESOURCES

The State of Vermont completed an update to the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) in

2019. The SCORP outlines the state’s priorities and goals to guide outdoor recreation planning, policies, programs, and investments for the 2019-2023 period. In the public survey completed for the plan, 93 percent of respondents ranked outdoor recreation as essential or very important in their households and 92 percent of respondents indicated they recreated outdoors 2 or more times per week. Hiking was ranked the highest for favorite activities (17%) followed by hunting (15%), mountain biking (11%) and walking (9%).

Within the towns of the Windham Region, there are varying levels of community facilities for recreation. Some communities, such as Brattleboro and Rockingham, have municipal recreation departments and provide a wide range of recreational activities for various ages. Other towns rely on volunteer groups to organize recreational leagues. In 2023, the towns of Landgrove, Londonderry, Peru, Weston, and Winhall created a new Mountain Towns Recreation Director position that is responsible for administering youth sports programs, overseeing Londonderry’s 4 town parks, and expanding and coordinating recreational opportunities for all residents in these towns. Many of the region’s athletic fields are public and are located at school properties.

## DOVER TRAILS & RECREATION MASTER PLAN

The Town of Dover completed a Trails & Recreation Master Plan in 2020. The Plan notes how climate change has made consistent and adequate snowfall less predictable and the Town of Dover has recognized a need to offer a greater variety of recreational activities to make their winter recreation economy more resilient. Dover depends heavily on visitors coming to the Mount Snow Resort to support the local economy. The Plan calls for exploring new and building on existing opportunities, including a disc golf course, mountain biking, and hiking trails.



Ski resorts play an important role in the Windham Region by providing recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. The ski resorts have become a destination for all four seasons, marketing sports such as mountain biking and golf, in addition to traditional winter activities, to attract visitors. The region is seeing the impacts of climate change on annual snowfall amounts which is influencing ski resort operations including an increased reliance on snowmaking.

An important recreational resource to the Windham Region is its trail network. A wide variety of trails exists for a variety of recreational use. Long distance trails include the Appalachian Trail/Long Trail (hiking) and Catamount Trail (cross country skiing), which pass through the western part of the region, largely through the Green Mountain National Forest. The Velomont Trail is currently under development and would be a long distance mountain bike trail.

New trails designed to meet the needs of various recreation users are being created, in large part by municipalities and non-profit groups. Examples of this include the Putney Mountain Association's preservation and trail development work in Putney, Dummerston, and Brookline and the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association's work in Westminster, Brookline, Athens, and Grafton.



PUTNEY MOUNTAIN TRAILHEAD

The Windham Region is also home to five state parks with developed visitor facilities: Fort Dummer State Park (Brattleboro), Molly Stark State Park (Marlboro), Townshend State Park, Jamaica State Park, and Lowell Lake State Park (Londonderry). The state parks offer opportunities for hiking, bike riding, swimming, canoeing, fishing, and camping. Sweet Pond State Park in Guilford and Dutton Pines State Park in Dummerston have trails and picnic shelters.

Bicycling and walking are expected to continue to grow in popularity along with support for multi-use paths and trails. Several efforts are underway to expand or create trails and paths including the Valley Trail along the North Branch of the Deerfield River connecting West Dover and Wilmington and the West River Trail which connects 4,500 acres of public land in Jamaica, Townshend, and Londonderry. Class IV roads and legal town trails provide important recreational resources throughout the region's communities, although these facilities are often unmanaged. Hiking, biking, mountain biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling are just some of the recreational activities that take place on these roads and trails.

The Windham Region is rich in water resources. Residents and visitors utilize the many rivers, streams, lakes, reservoirs, and ponds for water recreation such as swimming, boating, and fishing. Thirty-three lakes and ponds in the Windham Region are over 20 acres; among these major water bodies, there are a total of 102.1 miles of shoreline (half of which are on just 2 lakes). Approximately 80 percent of this shoreline, 81.4 miles, is public or conserved. Nearly all of these water bodies have public access or road frontage, and many of them have developed public fishing access sites or boat launches. Water quality and shoreland protection must be maintained and enhanced as the demand for water recreation increases.

As the region continues to invest in its trail networks, there is an opportunity to make connections between these different trails to increase accessibility. An additional need is to improve wayfinding and signage to enhance the user

experience at recreational areas and increase participation rates. Lastly, more recreational opportunities are needed for people with mobility issues and the elderly population. A component of this is promoting and improving existing recreational facilities that may be suitable for these groups.

## EDUCATIONAL, CULTURAL, AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES POLICIES

### EDUCATION AND LIBRARY RESOURCES

1. Support efforts to increase the availability, affordability, and accessibility of childcare, and in particular for infant programs.
2. Encourage school renovation and building projects in existing developed areas such as downtown centers, village centers, and surrounding neighborhoods in order to take advantage of existing infrastructure, encourage walking and bicycling to school where appropriate, and to enhance revitalization of communities.
3. Facilitate town discussions around school consolidation and reuse of former school buildings as requested.
4. Support efforts to provide sufficient funding to modernize school facilities and complete remediation work at schools to address the presence of contaminants, such as PCBs and PFAS.
5. Support efforts to retain the public and private libraries in our towns. Libraries are important pieces of social infrastructure, they provide free and open access to materials and technology, they offer safe, welcoming spaces that foster independent and community-based learning, they nurture public trust and support life-long education, and they empower diverse communities.
6. Support BDCC's workforce development programs which work with educational organizations and employers and are designed to train young people for employment opportunities and to attract others, including new Americans, to the region.

### CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES

7. Foster and encourage a vibrant local arts and cultural community through assistance and support for local arts and cultural facilities, organizations, education, art marketing, and distribution efforts.
8. Protect places of outstanding educational, aesthetic, archeological, or historical value from adverse impacts and require mitigation measures when they cannot be avoided. Encourage preservation of significant

historic sites or structures through support of ownership, protective easements, and/or other regulatory options.

9. Support local, regional, and State non-profit historic preservation trusts and private property owners' efforts in the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of significant historic sites and structures.

## RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

10. Provide varied and accessible opportunities for outdoor recreation.
11. Facilitate the orderly development of public and private recreational facilities and resorts.
12. Recognize the recreational potential of watercourses and shorelines and encourage provision of facilities for sustainable water-oriented day use that does not impair the resource or related habitat.
13. Protect existing trail corridors with a focus on sustainable trail systems.
14. Work with towns to manage and utilize Class 4 roads and other public rights-of-way for future trail development and public access.
15. Support federal, state, and local acquisition and management of land and facilities well-suited for outdoor recreation.
16. Support increasing public opportunities for multiple-use recreation and for public access to recreation lands. Ensure provision of separate areas or facilities for conflicting uses of recreational resources when such conflicts create safety hazards or significantly impair the use or enjoyment of the resource.
17. Encourage the development of wayfinding signage and other ways to increase access of recreational resources and equity of access.
18. Promote expanding accessibility of recreation resources for people with mobility issues and our aging population.