

Town of Westfield, Vermont

Municipal Plan Amendment Planning Commission Report November 1, 2018

This report is in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4384(c):

*“When considering an amendment to a plan, the planning commission shall prepare a written report on the proposal.” **The report shall address the extent to which the plan, as amended, is consistent with the goals established in §4302 of this title.***

The proposed plan amendment updates the December 2013 Town Plan, which was deemed consistent with the goals of 24 VSA §4302 and approved by the regional planning commission in 2015. The proposed plan amendment has been updated to meet new statutory requirements, including information on priority forest blocks and wildlife connectivity blocks; and flood resilience.

The plan has also been amended to meet the requirements for substantial deference under Act 174. The plan contains energy usage information across sectors, targets and strategies in support of statewide 2050 energy goals, and maps. The proposed plan contains general siting considerations for renewable energy generation. The Town of Westfield intends to seek certification of compliance with enhanced energy planning standards upon approval of the plan.

The proposed amendment includes recommendations for Village Center designation.

Considerations for change of designation of any land area:

1. The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.

The proposed amendment is likely to reinforce desired development patterns of compact village centers surrounded by open countryside and low densities of development. This is due to two recommendations:

- **Village Center Designation:** tax credits and priority consideration for grant funding opportunities may help encourage reinvestment in the existing village center.
- **Continued support for low-density development in other areas:** The plan maintains the existing density for all zoning districts. However, the plan does suggest exploring more flexible alternatives to minimum lot sizes. Alternatives include clustering, the use of conservation easements, enrollment in Current Use, and permitting for accessory housing/tiny houses, and for interior modifications of existing houses to support aging in place through home sharing.

2. The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on:

(A) the municipal tax base; and

It is possible that Village Center Designation may add to the tax base by providing incentives for adaptive reuse for income-producing properties. It is not possible to quantify the effect on the tax base.

(B) the need for public facilities;

The plan recommends a park and ride, near the village center on Route 100; EV charging stations in the village and/or park and ride. Access to funding for this infrastructure could be improved by Village Center Designation. The plan recommends exploring need and options for shared office space to encourage home-based businesses with inadequate internet access; conducting a feasibility study to convert the former Scenic View Care facility into affordable housing, and; exploring options to improve walkability and pedestrian/cyclist safety in the village center.

3. The amount of vacant land which is:

(A) already subject to the proposed new designation; and

There is no vacant land subject to a new designation. The proposed designations are for existing village center development.

(B) actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.

This is not applicable.

4. The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of:

(A) appropriate alternative locations;

(B) alternative uses for the area under consideration; and

(C) the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated

The proposed Village Center designation areas will be determined in accordance with the Village Center program guidelines, e.g. compact centers of development with a mix of uses. There are no alternative locations to be considered.

5. The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability and existing development in the area.

See 4C above.

The proposed plan amendment contains a Flood Resilience section to comply with state mandates and ensure ongoing compliance with the National Flood Insurance Program. The proposed plan amendment contains the following recommendation: *Consider regulation that protects erosion-prone and floodwater storage areas.* However, no specific regulatory measures are proposed at this time.