

Westford Act 181 Working Group

April 1, 2025

Agenda

1. (6:00pm) – Welcome & (Re) Introductions
2. (6:05pm) – Recap of Last Meeting
3. (6:15pm) – Review of Draft Regional Plan Future Land Use Map, Consideration of Tier 1B Areas for Partial Act 250 Exemption
4. (7:00pm) – Review of Draft Regional & Municipal Housing Targets
5. (7:25pm) – Wrap-Up, Next Steps, & Future Meeting Scheduling
6. (7:30pm) – Adjournment

In attendance/introductions

- Working Group Members
 - Lori Johnson – resident (lives in Town Common)
 - Mark Letorney – resident, owner of Rovers North
 - Rebecca DeVanon – resident (lives in Town Common)
 - Ben Bornstein, representative to CCRPC & resident
 - Sarah Pinto – resident
 - Max Tyler, Westford Planning Commission
 - Arlo Pouliot – resident
- Municipal Staff
 - Harmony Cism - Town of Westford, Administrative Officer and Planning Coordinator
 - Holly Delisle - Town of Westford, town administrator
- CCRPC Staff
 - Darren Schibler
 - Kate McCarthy
- Members of the Public
 - Susan Schmidt – lives on the town common
 - Glenn Rogers - former resident and interested landowner
- *Absent:*
 - *Pat Haller, Selectboard – interested in staying plugged in*
 - *Bree Drapa, Library Director and resident*

Welcome and recap of last meeting

- Darren welcomed the group, confirmed we are taking meeting notes, and invited suggestions for how to spread the word. Harmony pointed out that it will all be online as well: <https://westfordvt.us/administration/planning-zoning/>
- The draft regional future land use map has been published. CCRPC is welcoming comments until May 19. While this meeting is not a formal public meeting with a public comment period, the online draft future land use map is a way to provide comments. Darren also highlighted that since the last meeting, the housing targets have been released.
- Darren recapped the last meeting, which included:
 - A presentation about Act 181 and updating regional future land use maps.
 - Discussion of how these maps will relate to Act 250, the state’s Community Investment Program, local goals, and housing targets.
- Committee members had several questions:
 - *Could you clarify the purpose of the group?* It’s a way for CCRPC to share information and receive feedback.
 - *How much of an outreach role is this group expected to have? Will there be outreach to the larger community?* Darren said this group can highlight specific concerns they are hearing from the community. The group can also provide ideas to CCRPC about how to do outreach.
 - Darren explained that the group is also contributing to three other things:
 - Feedback on the map itself, and boundaries of the different areas
 - Discussing whether/how Westford wishes to identify areas as Tier 1B
 - Considering where housing aimed for with the targets should go to advance both housing and other community goals.
 - *Is the regional future land use map zoning?* No.
 - *What if Westford’s zoning conflicts with the map?* Ex: There is a lot of rural agriculture in Westford’s zoning, which may show as “rural general” or “rural conservation” on the regional map. CCRPC staff noted there is overlap between the statutory definitions of rural categories, and therefore flexibility in how they can be mapped. Also, municipal plans and zoning districts can be much more specific to local context than the regional plan. When CCRPC reviews the municipal plan for approval, it looks for compatibility, rather than the specific names.
 - *If there’s a local change that should be reflected in the regional future land use map, what’s the process?* The regional plan and map are adopted for eight years, but we expect an update between adoption and eight years, knowing that this is a new process and we may need updates.

- A point to highlight regarding using Current Use as a starting point for mapping: Participation is voluntary and does not remove rights or uses of that property. Darren responded that the rural categories have no regulatory implications within the regional plan and regional future land use map, but RPCs are required to map them to reflect general intention for these areas.

Mapping discussion and feedback

- In the rural areas, would it make sense for some rural parcels to be in two categories, to get more precise about what's working land vs. conservation. There may be a lot happening on one parcel.
- Darren reviewed the mapping criteria for the "rural agriculture/forestry" category, and the "rural conservation," category. He showed the different underlying natural resources that indicate something is "rural conservation."
 - Working group members raised questions about how the general public will understand how these layers were created, and how different categories were prioritized. It's hard to look at a map and remember that there's flexibility between categories.
 - Maybe we need more explanation – another outreach meeting? A video?
- Osgood Hill was raised as an example of a *type* of area that needs more attention. It's currently labeled as Rural Conservation. There are parcels that are developed where the street frontage should be Rural General. Go through and review this.
 - Darren notes that CCRPC will review this and consider changes within the bounds of statute. He noted that there may be conservation values in these areas as well. We need to consider which category to focus on to be consistent with local goals and what is on the ground.
- Once CCRPC gets feedback and makes changes, it will summarize feedback and changes made so public can see how feedback was used.
- Comments on the public map may reflect people's concerns about perceived restrictions on property use. This means it's important to make sure the general public knows what the implications are – not just what the map *shows*, but what the map *means*.
- Darren summarized: We have heard feedback on the rural areas, and will make some changes so that it is less splotchy.

Housing targets

- How will Westford fit the housing target in the area identified for growth on the map? The town could fit the targets throughout the town – that would be a way to achieve the target – but that doesn’t align with goals for compact growth.
- One committee member notes the current growth rate exceeds the low target.
- *Under the HOME Act, what percentage of the buildings need to be affordable?* Darren explained that since Act 181, the regional plan’s housing chapter needs to talk about housing, with the goal of achieving more housing options for people at all incomes. Committee member notes that it would be helpful for a town like Westford to have targets for affordability, knowing that younger people as well as older downsizing adults need housing they can afford.
- Discussion about ways to achieve the target
 - A working group member noted there is demand in rural communities for affordable housing.
 - Benefits available through Community Investment Program and Act 250 could help achieve local goals.
 - Towns can take local action, such as ADUs, water/wastewater investment, incentivizing property owners to produce housing, etc. The qualitative difference between living in an ADU vs other options should be considered.
- *Where does the equitable or environmental justice aspect of the housing targets fit in?* Darren reported that CCRPC is looking at environmental benefits and burdens that stem from different land use choices, and will evaluate whether the regional future land use map exacerbates or improves environmental conditions. Darren added that CCRPC’s division of housing targets considered what communities have planned for and have infrastructure for, and what’s consistent with the regional plan.
- Darren walked through how the municipal-level housing targets were created from the regional target.
 - 60% of regional target goes to the urban municipalities – based on land area as well as current share of housing stock.
 - 3.8% of the regional target goes to the rural municipalities – based on historic annual growth and trying to maintain production.
 - 36.2% of regional target goes into the suburban municipalities – based on the areas planned for growth there on the future land use map.
- Darren explained the low/mid/high targets
 - Low is essentially status quo – high cost, low affordability, limited choice
 - High range – If we wanted to address every part of the housing market and needs – future demand, in-migration to help with demographic shifts, accommodate workforce, housing the homeless.

- CCRPC developed a midrange target as well
- Recent housing development in Westford hasn't been in areas planned for growth.
- Which of the three targets feels right in Westford?
 - Eight (lower target) seems like a reasonable number – doesn't seem unattainable if we've been doing six. Areas planned for growth may not be immediately available. It seems like this growth will happen in outlying areas.
 - What good does it do to exempt the Village Center / Village Area if it's not suitable / sufficient? Might like to exempt another area instead.
 - How can you equitably serve people where we're currently able to build homes, even if they're not supported by infrastructure, services, transportation, etc.
 - It may take time to set the stage – growth may continue as it has in the rural areas, while planning takes place over time for additional growth areas.
- Tiers and village growth
 - How does the Act 250 Tier system incentivize Westford? It's one of many tools in the box for the Town to signal where growth should happen, and can reduce the cost of housing development by streamlining permitting. Other tools may be needed to reach housing goals.
 - One committee member expressed that the village center is not good for growth; it is constrained. What about identifying another area that's suitable for development, like Plains Road? That location may be closer to services and be more convenient. It is possible that this area could be developed more quickly, with infrastructure provided by developers rather than taxpayers.
 - Putting the housing target in Westford Village just won't work, so the town needs to come together and decide where development should go instead.
 - During the wastewater conversation, it was thought that it could accommodate 20-60 units – far less than the target.
- Where should development go?
 - One idea is to focus on areas where there is already a paved road.
 - Old Stage and Woods Hollow has seen some development lately.
 - Where 104 and 15 come together – was traditionally a hamlet (where Cloverdale used to be)
 - It may be premature to think about where more development will go. But another village center is a useful idea. One committee member hopes that one of the things people want to focus on is clustering, or you're setting yourself up for sprawl.

- Are we looking at surrounding areas and thinking collaboratively about land on town boundaries that could accommodate housing? Some of those parcels might have infrastructure from the other towns.
- If Westford picks a land use designation and area to apply Tier 1B exemptions now, can it be changed in the future when local plans are updated? Yes.
- People have ideas on where development should happen, and it's not generally the village center. If it takes a few years to settle on areas for growth, can we designate potential areas as something other than a village center.
 - Darren - One of the future land use categories is a "transition" zone. We've done this in towns that have done some planning already.
 - CCRPC could use the "transition" category on the map, in the R3 zone where some thinking has already been done. By assigning it "transition," it would communicate that it needs more study.
- The solution to housing will be multifaceted.

Tier 1B and designation benefits

- Village Centers and Village Areas are eligible to be Tier 1B areas.
- If there was partial Act 250 exemption (which is what Tier 1B is), requirements of local zoning, as well as state permits (wetlands, wastewater, stormwater, etc.) would still apply as they do today.
- With statutory criteria, in Westford the only eligible areas are the Village Center and Village area around the Common.
- With sufficient planning over time, other areas may become eligible.
- Darren notes that the Tier 1B request is optional, and can be made at another time.
- Does Westford lose anything by not adopting Tier 1B at this point? No.
- Question to consider re: Tier 1B decision: Are Westford's development regulations more or less stringent than Act 250? This should be contemplated when deciding about Tier 1B. Look at the interplay between them, to understand what's still in place if Act 250 is reduced in Tier 1B areas.

Closing and summary

- CCRPC will look at a possible transition area where R3 zoning is located. Is that an appropriate starting point? People generally agree to this as a starting place.
 - There are some transportation challenges on unpaved roads.
 - It would be important to hear from people who live in the area

- R3 development came about when the planning commission was also the ZBA; at that time CCRPC suggested growth areas, which led to the R3 growth area, and its particular form with PUDs, etc, that is in place today.
- At the next meeting, we will try to get to some decisions about the map, decision around Tier 1B, and discussion about how it relates to housing targets.
- *Scheduling our next meeting:*
 - Public comment ends May 19th.
 - The group will meet either April 15th or 16th, pending further coordination with members who were absent.