



**PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
WESTFORD TOWN OFFICE & ZOOM
MONDAY, JUNE 1, 2026**

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://zoom.us/j/94052797756?pwd=Xjs1YgcF7hToKD4BFvS69JBUcW51yH.1>

Meeting ID: 940 5279 7756 | Passcode: 5B6PMY

Please note that agenda times are approximate and subject to change.

1. **(6:30) – Call to Order**
 - a. Roll Call
 - b. Amendments to the Agenda
2. **(6:33) – Citizens to be Heard - *Items not on agenda***
3. **(6:40) – Approval of Minutes**
 - a. May 18, 2026
4. **(6:45) – Continued Discussion: Updates to Land Use & Development Regulations**
 - a. Campgrounds
 - b. WRO Buffers
 - c. Review/Edit List of Additional Potential Amendments
5. **(7:15) – Discussion: Town Plan Update**
 - a. Municipal Planning Grant Application
6. **(7:45) – Discussion: 1705 Property**
 - a. UPWP Approvals
7. **(8:10) – Update: Town Planner**
8. **(8:15) – Commissioner Administrative Matters**
9. **(8:20) – Correspondence**
10. **(8:30) – Work Plan Review**
11. **Adjournment**

Next Regular Meeting: Monday, June 15th at 6:30pm

Disclaimer:

If a quorum of the board is present in person, the meeting will continue even if electronic participation is disrupted or disconnected. The Vermont Department of Health advises individuals to assess their own risk and decide whether to take precautions, such as wearing a mask. Please stay home if you are feeling unwell.

Individuals requiring reasonable accommodation may request assistance from the Planning & Zoning Department. The Town will evaluate each request to determine if the accommodation is necessary for access to a Town service, program, or activity; if an alternative accommodation could provide equivalent access; if the requested accommodation would cause an undue financial or administrative burden; or if the accommodation would fundamentally alter the nature of the Town's service, program, or activity.

**TOWN OF WESTFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
MINUTES FOR MAY 18TH, 2026
APPROVED ON ***, 2026**

Commissioners Present: Max Tyler, Ben Bornstein, Art Woolf, Kirsten Tyler, Will Dunkley

Commissioners Absent: None.

Also Present: Harmony Cism (Planning Coordinator & Zoning Administrator), Maria Barden (Minute Clerk), G. Lamphere, B. Peck, L. Johnson, Maureen Wilcox

The meeting began at 6:30pm.

Amendments to the Agenda

B. Bornstein brought up an email from Kickback Brewery that was sent. This would normally be discussed under correspondence, and it was responded to by **H. Cism. M. Tyler** thinks this is out of the Planning Commission's hands.

Planning Commission Membership Updates

a. The Planning Commission thanked George Lamphere for his time on the board:

“On behalf of myself and other commissioners who have served with you, I would like to thank you and recognize your many years of service to the commission and to the Town of Westford. Your service spanned periods of energetic development of the town plan and zoning regulations, complex development of community wastewater funding mechanisms, and vigorous, sometimes discordant, public debate. In addition, you assumed the leadership of the Commission through difficult periods of membership transition. Throughout these challenges, your fellow commissioners have recognized your openness, fairness and professionalism. Your tenure is marked by dedication to the Town, transparency, and efforts to seek compromise and build consensus. I, for one, will miss your thoughtful deliberations and guidance and thank you for your service to the Town and the Commission.”

Max Tyler

Westford Planning Commission, Chair

G. Lamphere has enjoyed working for the Planning Commission and the Town. His parting knowledge for the board was to try and prioritize outreach within the community and serve all the community.

b. The Planning Commission welcomed the new commissioners to the board.

M. Tyler thanked them all for joining the board.

Reorganization

a. Election of chair, vice chair & clerk:

B. Bornstein motioned that **M. Tyler** continues to serve as chair the Planning Commission, **A. Woolf** seconded; Motion carried 5-0.

M. Tyler motioned to nominate **W. Dunkley** to continue to be vice chair of the Planning Commission, **B. Bornstein** seconded; Motion carried 5-0.

W. Dunkley motioned to nominate **B. Bornstein** to be Clerk of the Planning Commission, **A. Woolf** seconded; Motion carried 5-0.

b. Review and approve the 2026 rules of procedure:

There was one small change to the rules of procedure regarding it being adopted prior to May 1st, since newly appointed terms don't begin until May 1st, this language was slightly changed.

M. Tyler motioned to approve the rules of procedure as written, **W. Dunkley** seconded; Motion carried 5-0.

c. Discussion of Planning Commission meeting packets & information sharing:

H. Cism asked if the Planning Commission wants DRB info added to each packet for Planning Commission meetings. The Planning Commission discussed how they'd like to go about this, **H. Cism** will send them DRB plans and decisions as they happen, so they have more time to look it over in real time. **B. Bornstein** wanted to put his phone number out to the public for anyone who would like to reach out to him - 240-506-5286.

L. Johnson recommends the Planning Commission includes the packet online so that members of the public can be informed as well.

This is something that **H. Cism** can do.

B. Peck agrees with **L. Johnson**.

Citizens to be Heard - Items not on agenda.

None.

Approval of Minutes – March 16th, 2026

M. Tyler motioned to approve of the March 16th, 2026 minutes as amended.

W. Dunkley seconded; Motion passed 4-0.

Continued Discussion – Updates to Land Use & Development Regulations

a. *Overview of land use regulation adoption process:*

M. Tyler gave a brief overview on the process of how the Planning Commission would amend the Land Use & Development Regulations and discussed what the Planning Commission's responsibilities are when it comes to the adoption process of Land Use & Development Regulations.

A. Woolf asks why this is something they're currently doing.

M. Tyler says because of issues that have come up and because they haven't been looked at for a while. **M. Tyler** mentions that they have a long list of items in their packets that were brought to them by multiple sources such as CCRPC to comply with the HOME ACT, some issues were brought from the DRB to the Planning Commission, and other questions came to **M. Tyler** from other sources. These items have all been discussed by the Planning Commission and they've made a list of which ones they should look at and work on currently.

M. Tyler says his starting position is that these rules were written the way they were for a reason, there was outreach at the time they were made.

K. Tyler asks if smaller towns tend to have simpler regulations over bigger towns in VT?

M. Tyler says it really varies; some towns have no regulations whatsoever; this would have to be researched a little bit more. These regulations have been in place for five years out of an eight-year plan and **M. Tyler** doesn't feel it's unreasonable to start looking at them.

W. Dunkley is excited to dive in and look at the regulations.

B. Peck wants the Planning Commission to keep in mind that zoning and planning should be fair and felt it was unfair that points were reduced for a developer who got approval from the DRB and reminds them others were only able to get the reduced points because she pointed it out at a DRB meeting.

H. Cism and **M. Tyler** clarified that this had happened when they thought major updates would have been made to the regulations prior to that decision, they ended up meeting the twenty-seven points, and anyone in that zone was welcome to use the reduced points for the time frame that they were reduced.

B. Bornstein says from a CCRPC perspective that whatever changes will be made does have to be reviewed by CCRPC, and in April, CCRPC included updated plans of Underhill, Jericho and Colchester. He thinks it would be beneficial for the Planning Commission to look at those to see the processes, potential issues that CCRPC had, and see what neighboring towns are doing.

b. *Review of prior draft revisions:*

M. Tyler goes over and gives a brief overview of each item on the list of draft revisions.

Public Comment

L. Johnson asked if they had decided to work on any Land Use & Development Regulations.

No, they had not, that would be a further agenda item.

Correspondence

- DRB Waiver approval of an accessory structure on Old Stage Rd.
- DRB Conditional Use approval for a driveway on Cambridge Rd.
- ACT 181 Correspondence
- CCRPC will be giving an educational session on planning on the 15th of June
- CCRPC newsletter was sent
- M. Tyler sent an email to Taylor Newton regarding logistical planning

B. Peck says maple shade was a no vote and if the Planning Commission is interested in resurrecting it, they need to have proper outreach.

- **M. Tyler** asked the SB to give a report on what is happening with the EWSD.
- Draft plans from the capstone project with the SB
- **L. Johnson** correspondence about being careful with river access.
- Ex-Parte communication emails - SB's jurisdiction
- Spring planning and zoning forum
- *H. Cism will send a recording to those who can't make it if a recording is available.*
- Ethics training email from **M. Barden**

W. Dunkley plans to post a short update to FPF after each Planning Commission meeting to keep people in town updated on their discussions.

Work Plan Review

- Land Use Regulations - **H. Cism** asked how they'd like to share the document, Google Docs doesn't do great with track changes. They will table this for now and bring it back up when they get a little closer to making those changes. **M. Tyler** says they're taking the land use regulations and discussing changes in relation to the current Town Plan. **B. Bornstein** asks if they want to divvy up the list.
***B. Bornstein** will share his list for the next meeting, and it will be added to the packet. They will split up items at the next meeting.*
- **W. Dunkley** would like to discuss the WRO with other commissioners to see what they have to say about it; he'd like to make it smaller and more aligned with what other Towns are doing.
***M. Tyler** asks that **W. Dunkley** bring specific language to the next meeting on what he'd like to change.*
- **W. Dunkley** sees that Westford is a hard place to move to based on zoning/lack of rentals and would like to see Westford become more accessible to a wider array of people. He would be interested in looking at the R10 and R5 zoning districts to see if there was a way someone could subdivide and build easier.
- **K. Tyler** wants to explore how the Planning Commission can help and become more involved with 1705; she doesn't want the house to just sit there. She would like to do a deep dive into creative ways to reach the public that aren't just surveys. She feels if we want to look at the Town Plan and the Zoning Regulations there should be serious discussions with many people in Town. They should try and reach everyone in town, including the people who can't always show up. **K. Tyler** would like to see all the committees/boards in town be more connected so they can all help each other and be more cohesive as a town in general.
- **A. Woolf** wants to help make it easier for people to build housing. We might need more flexibility and creativity to find some ways to promote these builds. Are there some sort of bonuses they can give to developers/builders to promote those buildings? **H. Cism** says we do give density bonuses. **A. Woolf** asks what the Planning Commission can do to bring attraction to Westford; perhaps some of the open land doesn't have to just be about agriculture but could be open land to bring more attraction to Westford and continue to keep the rural feel to draw people to the town.
- **M. Tyler** thinks most DRB members feel our regulations require landowners to go through an expensive process to build a home.
- **B. Bornstein** discusses CCRPC and its response to the LURB comments and he believes we want to identify other areas that could have the potential and be approved as developed areas or town centers.
B. Bornstein also feels we should encourage implementation and mounting of solar energy, he thinks we should be concerned about climate change and impact.

- **M. Tyler** says he thinks there are two big underlying efforts that they should be engaged in. One is 1705 and the other is the work on the new town plan adoption process. He feels there are things that are independent to the town plan, including 1705, UPWP for assistance - transportation related, updating the feasibility study from ten years ago, and stormwater grant money. He feels these are some smaller projects that aren't necessarily related to the Town plan update.
M. Tyler believes the SB will be requesting a joint Planning Commission and SB meeting to discuss how to coordinate the beginning of the 1705 project. Right now, the SB oversees 1705 and the Planning Commission has nothing to do with it until they are engaged by the SB.
M. Tyler would also like to have regular information and education going out to the town, such as what **W. Dunkley** mentioned with FPF.
M. Tyler would love to work on the Municipal Planning Grant and kickoff of a town plan update process; and help facilitate bringing more activities to Westford, collaborate with other commissions/boards to put things on for the town to bring more engagement and interest to Westford.
- Next meeting is June 1st followed by June 15th
- Proposed project charter that M. Tyler brought for review, which will be added to the June 1st meeting.
K. Tyler wonders if **M. Tyler** can share responses from the public regarding his FPF posts so they know how people are feeling.

M. Tyler moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:58pm, B. Bornstein seconded; Motion passed 5-0.
Meeting Adjourned at 8:59pm

Draft Campground Standards:

4a

Section 308. Campgrounds

308.A Campground Standards

Any parcel of land occupied by transients using single-axle towed campers, travel trailers, cabins, yurts, lean-tos, or tent sites for seasonal occupancy, vacation, or recreational use is considered a campground.

A new or expanded campground with 4 or more campsites may be allowed in designated zoning districts subject to site plan and conditional use review under Sections 421 and 422, applicable state agency referral requirements, and the following provisions:

1. A campground shall meet minimum setback requirements for the district in which it is located. No building, campsite, parking, or service area shall be located within required setback areas.
2. Landscaping and/or fencing shall be required along property boundaries or within designated areas of the campground as necessary to provide security, privacy, and screening from adjoining properties.
3. Campground density shall not exceed 18 campsites per acre.
4. Adequate access and parking shall be provided. Campground roads shall be designed in accordance with minimum standards set forth in Figure 3-6.
5. Campgrounds shall provide lavatory facilities sufficient to serve all campsites. Water and wastewater disposal systems shall be designed and installed in accordance with applicable state regulations. An enclosed area for the collection, storage, and disposal of trash and recyclables shall be provided.
6. The campground may include as accessory to the campground, subject to conditional use review, an office, communal dining, laundry, indoor recreation, and/or camp store facility, and outdoor recreation facilities for the use of campers.

308.B Undeveloped Campgrounds

For substantially undeveloped camping areas consisting only of designated tenting areas, tent and yurt platforms, or lean-tos, the Development Review Board may waive or modify any or all of the requirements of Section 308.A above if it is demonstrated to the Board's satisfaction that access, total lot area, campsite area, setback distances, and buffers are adequate to:

1. Support the intended level of use; and
2. Avoid any undue adverse impacts to water quality, critical wildlife habitat areas, or adjoining properties and uses.

Undeveloped, primitive camping areas may only consist of structures that are:

1. A single floor,
2. Less than 500 square feet in total area, and
3. Without interior plumbing or wastewater facilities.

Timeline: History of Water Resource Protection in Westford Regulations

4b

1972 Zoning Ordinance

- **Open Space District:** 100 feet on each side of all rivers, streams, and waters.
- **Flood Plain Areas:** Any area “now or hereafter” designated by the VT Dept. of Water Resources as subject to periodic flooding.

1974 – Zoning Ordinance

- **Open Space District:** Unchanged from 1971
- **Flood Plain Areas:** Unchanged from 1971

1982 – Zoning Regulations

- **Wetland District:** Created with mapped zones (Osgood Hill Rd, Brown’s River, Woods Hollow Rd); limited use allowed.
- **Open Space/Shoreland District:** *Increased* to 250 feet around Westford Pond; 200 feet on each side of key streams/brooks

1985 – Zoning Regulation Amendments

- **Wetland District:** Length of Osgood Hill Rd wetland area *reduced* (width remains 2000 feet).

1987 – Zoning Regulations

- **Open Space/Shoreland District:** *Reduced* to 75 feet around Westford Pond and 75 feet on each side of Rogers Brook, Brown’s River, Morgan Brook, Pond Brook, Beaver Brook.
- **Wetland District:** Unchanged.

1991 – Zoning Regulations

- **Wetland District:** *Reduced* on westerly side of Route 128 and Osgood Hill Rd.
- **Open Space/Shoreland District:** Still 75 feet around Westford Pond, *increased* to 125 feet each side of most streams and brooks, 200 feet each side of Brown’s River).

1995 – Zoning Regulations

- **WRO adopted:** replaces wetland and open space/shoreland districts
 - 100 feet from center of Brown’s River, all other streams, and ponds.
 - 100 feet around wetlands (per NWI or VT Wetlands Rules).

2009 – Zoning Regulations

- **WRO buffer *reduced*:** From 100 feet to 50 feet for some streams, ponds, and lakes

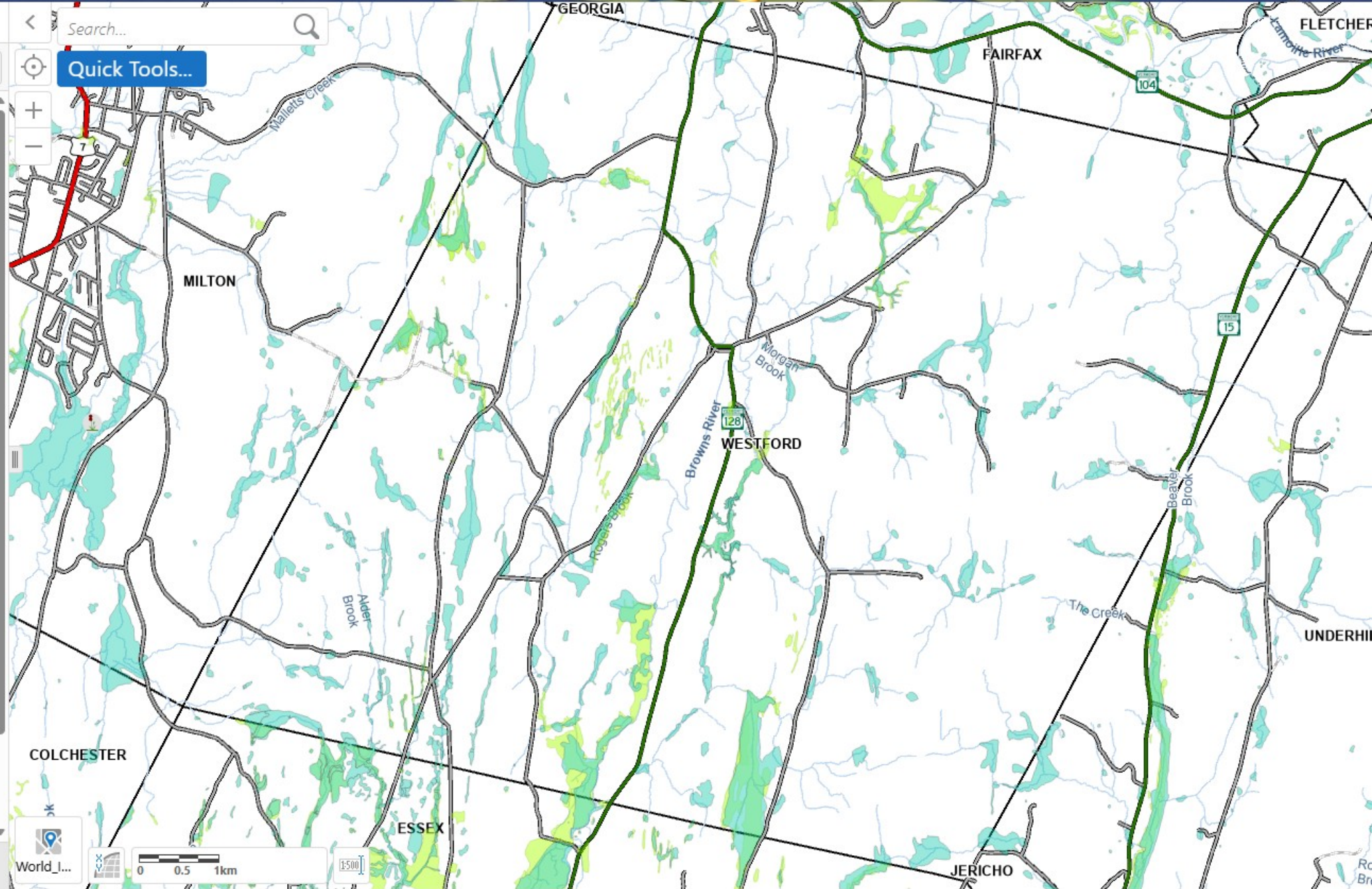
2021 – Zoning Regulations

- **Wetland buffer *reduced*:** From 100 feet to 50 feet in the **Common** and **Village** Zoning Districts.

Legend

Filter Swatches...

- Wetland
 - Wetland
- Wetland Map
- Wetlands - VSWI
 - Class 1 Wetland
 - Class 2 Wetland
 - Buffer
 - Wetlands - VSWI Advisory Layer
- ANR Basemap Data
- Roads
 - Interstate
 - US Highway, 1
 - State Highway
 - Town Highway (Class 1)
 - Town Highway (Class 2,3)
 - Town Highway (Class 4)
 - State Forest Trail
 - National Forest Trail
 - Legal Trail
 - Private Road/Driveway
 - Proposed Roads
- Stream



Harmony Cism

From: Max Tyler <maxxtyler@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 27, 2026 11:01 AM
To: PlanningCommission
Cc: Harmony Cism
Subject: Fwd: Westford Water Resource Overlay District

George, Will:

This is the information I received from Darren Shibler on WRO and FHO district discussion I had with him.

Max

Begin forwarded message:

From: Darren Schibler <DSchibler@ccrpcvt.org>
Subject: RE: Westford Water Resource Overlay District
Date: January 14, 2026 at 11:54:03 AM EST
To: Max Tyler <maxxtyler@gmail.com>
Cc: Taylor Newton <TNewton@ccrpcvt.org>, Dan Albrecht <dalbrecht@ccrpcvt.org>, Maya Balassa <mbalassa@ccrpcvt.org>, Kate McCarthy <kmccarthy@ccrpcvt.org>

Hi Max,

Nice to chat just yesterday, and glad we were able to clear up some of the potential changes to the state wetlands maps and rules, and to distinguish those from the changes to floodplain regulation. Let us know if you have further questions about how Westford may want to modify its own regulations in light of these changes.

Below is more information you can choose to share with the wider Westford community (let me know if the links are problematic). The big takeaway is: there are new maps and rules under consideration for both wetlands and floodplains / river corridors.

Best,
Darren

Wetlands - 2 separate topics

1. The Agency of Natural Resources has drafted a rule implementing Executive Order 06-25 that would, in brief, reduce wetland buffers in designated centers (i.e., in or near Westford's Village). Information on that rule and ways to submit comments can be [found here](#). An [interactive map](#) showing where the reduced buffer protections would apply is available here, but note that these areas will change to align with the Chittenden County Regional Future Land Use Map once adopted in summer 2026.

2. In spring / summer of 2025 (prior to EO 06-25), the Vermont Wetlands Office updated maps of the Vermont Significant Wetlands Inventory in select watersheds such as the Winooski River, which in Westford includes Alder Brook (encompassing the southwest corner of town). This update reflected a

combination of data collected on-site by Wetlands Office staff and consulting ecologists as well as a desktop (remote) analysis of wetland areas that likely meet the threshold for regulation under the Vermont Wetland Rule. These maps were officially adopted on August 8, 2025 as noticed through the [Vermont Environmental Notice Bulletin](#).

Floodplains and River Corridors - 2 separate topics

1. Under Act 121 (the Flood Safety Act), the Agency of Natural Resources is charged with implementing a new system for regulating development in and near streams. This includes publishing a new statewide standard for municipalities to regulate floodplain areas under the FEMA National Flood Insurance Program, which protects people and property from flood inundation hazards. Act 121 also instructs ANR to create a statewide regulation for river corridors to protect people and property from erosion by streams; details of how this regulation will be implemented are still under consideration by ANR. Each type of regulation is important, related, and separate from how the state regulates wetlands, as well as how municipalities such as Westford regulate development in and near these areas. More information on the Flood Safety Act is [available here](#).

2. Separate from state actions, FEMA is updating its maps of flood inundation hazard areas throughout Vermont. Using higher-resolution LiDAR data and limited field data collection, this process will make mostly minor adjustments to the boundaries of mapped floodplains. These are areas where municipalities regulate development to prevent flood damage as part of their participation in the National Flood Insurance Program, which makes flood insurance available to property owners; it also makes available more federal and state disaster assistance for public infrastructure when flood damage occurs.

In addition to the changes to *regulated* floodplains, FEMA maps will also show areas ("Zone X") where flood hazards are likely, but where development is not required to be regulated by municipalities (though they may choose to do so). There are many new areas of Zone X mapped in Westford, including areas with a 1% annual chance of flooding in a small area (especially due to high-intensity rainfall events). Note that these areas may overlap with wetlands that are regulated separately by the state under the Vermont Wetlands Rule.

The draft FEMA maps, which will go through a formal adoption process in 2027, can be viewed [here](#).

Darren Schibler
Senior Planner & Project Manager, CFM®
Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission
110 West Canal Street, Suite 202
Winooski, VT 05404
(802) 846-4490 ext. 3-135
Direct: (802) 540-2508
www.ccrpcvt.org

Please be advised that your email communication with CCRPC staff, including any attachments, are considered public record and may be subject to disclosure under the Vermont Open Public Records Act or other applicable public disclosure laws.

-----Original Message-----

From: Darren Schibler
Sent: Tuesday, January 13, 2026 11:19 AM

To: 'Max Tyler' <maxxtyler@gmail.com>
Subject: RE: Westford Water Resource Overlay District

Hi Max,

Just left you a voicemail - so sorry I missed our 11:00am, I had thought it was for 11:30am. Happy to hop on now, or talk on the phone. You can reach me at (802) 540-2508.

Darren

Darren Schibler
Senior Planner & Project Manager, CFM®
Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission
110 West Canal Street, Suite 202
Winooski, VT 05404
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-----Original Message-----

From: Max Tyler <maxxtyler@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, January 9, 2026 2:13 PM
To: Darren Schibler <DSchibler@ccrpcvt.org>
Subject: Re: Westford Water Resource Overlay District

EXTERNAL MESSAGE: Think Before You Click

Thanks Darren,

I need to do some refresh on my part so I don't waste your time. How about Tuesday, 11:00 - 11:30?

> On Jan 9, 2026, at 2:10 PM, Darren Schibler <DSchibler@ccrpcvt.org> wrote:

>

> Hi Max,

>

> Just left you a voicemail - happy to talk about this. I'm available the rest of today as well as the following times next week:

>

> - Monday before 11:00am and after 2:00pm

> - Tuesday between 10:30am-2:00pm

> - Wednesday before 2:00pm

>

> Looking forward to chatting,

> Darren

>

> Darren Schibler

> Senior Planner & Project Manager, CFM® Chittenden County Regional

> Planning Commission
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> <https://nam02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ccrpcvt.org%2F&data=05%7C02%7CDSchibler%40ccrpcvt.org%7Cdb15e8418c2f4fc75a6408de4fb332a3%7C1ca1d35b3ef945ad9a5fa8b58de4c6ab%7C0%7C0%7C639035828244126113%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIslIAiOiJXaW4zMilslkFOljoITWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=GYfvgQLUd6pBnxnr1sTWqRaNTx46KamRxUURrKbSJ%2Bk%3D&reserved=0>
>
>
> Please be advised that your email communication with CCRPC staff, including any attachments, are considered public record and may be subject to disclosure under the Vermont Open Public Records Act or other applicable public disclosure laws.
>
> -----Original Message-----
> From: Max Tyler <maxxtyler@gmail.com>
> Sent: Friday, January 9, 2026 2:04 PM
> To: Darren Schibler <DSchibler@ccrpcvt.org>
> Subject: Westford Water Resource Overlay District
>
> EXTERNAL MESSAGE: Think Before You Click
>
> Darren,
>
> Can we arrange some time next week for you to give me your thoughts on Westford's WRO district, upcoming changes to wetland and river corridor delineations, etc.? Basically, I want to make sure on understand our current regulatory position and the direction the state and region are heading in. I suspect 1/2 hour will be sufficient.
>
> If this is acceptable to you can you suggest some days and times next week?
>
> Thanks,
>
> Max
> Westford Planning Commission

Regulation Amendments Lists

As of 9/22/25

“A” List:

1. Update Residential language – ongoing – to be done when updating formatting
2. Update Parking language to conform with 2024 legislative revisions
3. Investigate ADU Changes
4. Reevaluate T5 FBC setbacks
5. Reevaluate public water source language
6. Clarify boundary line adjustment standards and requirements
7. Increase threshold for accessory structure size requiring DRB review – addressed – edits recommended
8. Review definition of “bedroom” – addressed briefly – likely will not change
9. Review restrictions around steep slopes – addressed briefly – similar to other towns
10. Review definition of “Recreational Vehicle”
11. Revamp language around energy efficiency for housing bonus
12. Add section on campground regulations – in progress

“B” List:

1. Reevaluate Agricultural Enterprise language
2. Incorporate river corridor language into regs
3. Explore law of exaction for payment in lieu of fire ponds

“C” List:

1. Incorporate private helipad/airstrip language
2. Revamp density calculation language
3. Investigate reducing district density requirements

“TBD” List:

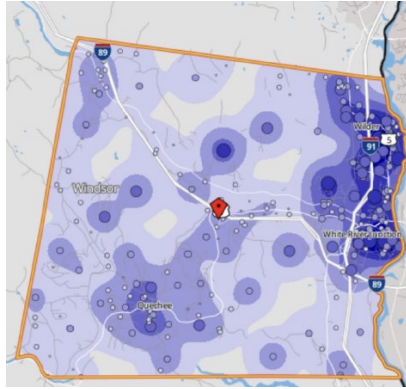
1. Discuss cannabis production language
2. Investigate solar and wind decommissioning language
3. Revamp Sign language
4. Revamp lighting language
5. Update stormwater and erosion control language
6. Allow public facilities/essential services in WRO
7. Reevaluate home occupation parking thresholds
8. Clarify administrative amendment standards and requirements
9. Investigate Forest District

Municipal Planning Grant

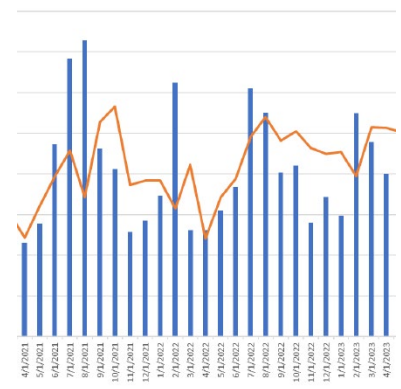
Fiscal Year 2026 Program Description



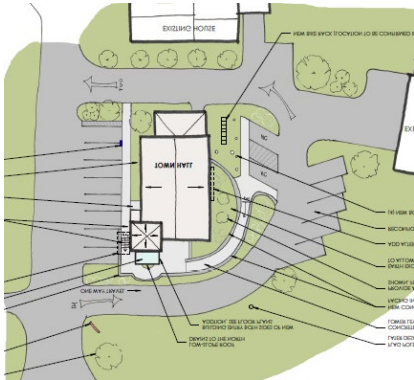
Ferrisburgh Trails & Travel Plan



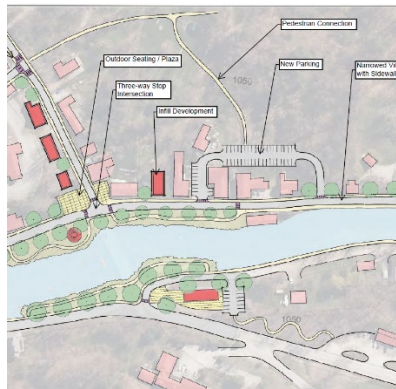
Hartford Economic Development Plan



Kingdom Corridor Lodging Study



Middlesex Town Hall Capital Plan Study



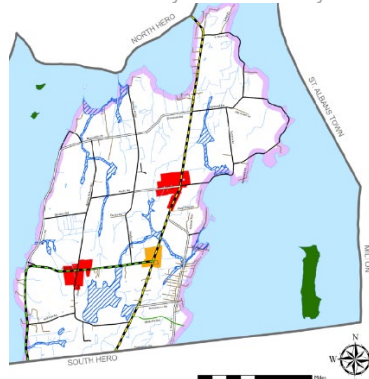
Londonderry Main St. Study



Williston 2050 Engagement



Historic Wolcott Schoolhouse Study



Grand Isle Town Plan



Pownal Village Improvement Plan

**Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development
Department of Housing and Community Development
Community Planning + Revitalization Division
Issued: August 2025**

Program Basics

In fiscal year 2026 (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026)¹, the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) will grant funds to municipalities to promote planning, revitalization, and development activities that maintain Vermont’s land use goal of compact settlements separated by rural lands.

The Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) Program funds a wide range of municipal planning projects as allowed by [Title 24 of Vermont Statutes Annotated \(V.S.A.\) Section 4306 \(b\) and \(c\)](#). Projects that promote Vermont’s historic pattern of compact settlements surrounded by working farms, forest, and open space are given priority.

Each municipality may submit one application per year. The maximum grant amount is \$30,000 for individual municipalities and \$45,000 for group (consortium) applications. All applications are required to provide a minimum cash match of 10%, unless an application is for zoning/subdivision bylaws in municipalities without zoning/subdivision bylaws.

Grant funds are regionally apportioned based on the percentage of municipalities with confirmed planning processes within each of Vermont’s [11 regional planning commission \(RPC\) regions](#). Municipal planning processes are confirmed by the regional planning commission. Eligible municipalities compete within their region for grant funding. Funding decisions are made by the DHCD Commissioner based on the competitive criteria listed under the *Grant Selection Process* later in this guide.

Grant Timeline

MPG projects must be completed within 24 months.

- October 31, 2025: Deadline for RPC confirmation of municipal planning process
- July 2025: Program announced
- September 1, 2025: Online application opens
- **November 3, 2025: Application deadline, 6 p.m.**
- December 30, 2025: Award decisions
- January 1, 2026: Start of grant term
- December 2026: Mid-project report due

¹ Act 74 <https://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/acts/2022>

Purpose of MPGs: To Carry out Statewide Planning Goals (24 V.S.A. § 4302)

b) It is also the intent of the legislature that municipalities... shall engage in a continuing planning process that will further the following goals:

- (1) To establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework to guide decisions by municipalities, regional planning commissions, and state agencies.
- (2) To encourage citizen participation at all levels of the planning process...
- (3) To consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development...

(c) In addition, this chapter shall be used to further the following specific goals:

- (1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside...

- December 31, 2027: End of grant term; Project is complete, and all funds spent
- January 31, 2028: Final report and products submitted

Eligible Applicants

Single Municipality

Individual municipalities with a local planning process confirmed by the RPC (including an unexpired plan) on or before October 31, 2025, are eligible to apply. To be confirmed, a locally adopted plan must be approved by the RPC, and the municipality must maintain efforts to provide local funds for municipal and regional planning purposes as required by [24 V.S.A. §4350](#). The Department does not require the submission of a plan confirmation letter from the RPC.

Municipalities without a confirmed local planning process may apply for funding only to create a municipal plan approvable by the RPC and must have voted to provide local funds for municipal and regional planning purposes. Grant proposals from municipalities that have received RPC recommendations to bring their plan into compliance with statewide requirements must propose to address the changes identified by the RPC.

Municipal organizations other than the governing body and the planning commission (such as the conservation or economic development commission) may also apply for a grant, but only with prior approval of the municipal governing body and planning commission.

Municipalities may not receive funding if they are suspended or debarred by the State or Federal Government; delinquent in submitting their subrecipient annual report; or delinquent in submitting their single audit reports (if required).

Consortium

Two or more municipalities may apply jointly for a consortium application (requests of up to \$45,000). The application must address a shared issue and identify a lead municipality for financial administration of the project. The RPC may serve as grant administrator for a consortium (see consultant selection below). All municipalities in the consortium must have a confirmed planning process by October 31, 2025, and each municipality must submit a separate resolution form in support of the project. The consortium may involve or benefit municipalities that are not identified as a consortium member in the application. No member of a consortium application may apply for an individual MPG the same year. A municipality can only serve as a lead municipality for one application but may be part of multiple consortia.

Eligible Municipalities

For the purposes of the Municipal Planning Grant Program, a municipality is defined by [24 V.S.A. §4303\(12\)](#). Under this definition an incorporated village is not considered a separate municipality unless the village adopts its own plan one or more bylaws either before, concurrently with, or subsequent to such action by the town.

Funding Amounts & Match

Single municipalities may apply for a grant of any amount between \$2,500 and \$30,000 with a minimum local cash match requirement of 10%, based on the total project cost. The local match is not required for applications seeking funding for zoning/subdivision bylaws in municipalities without existing zoning/subdivision bylaws

A consortium of municipalities may apply for a grant of any amount between \$2,500 and \$45,000 with a minimum local cash match of 10%, based on the total project cost. The local match is not required for applications seeking funding for zoning/subdivision bylaws in municipalities without existing zoning/subdivision bylaws

Any source of cash match funds may be used: federal, other state grants, municipal, private, or non-profit. Projects that demonstrate financial partnership with outside organizations or propose a local match that exceeds the minimum match amounts are considered to have higher levels of community support in the competitive criteria listed under the *Grant Selection Process* later in this guide.

In-kind contributions or contributions of municipal staff or others' time **cannot** be offered as a match. Documentation of total expenditures (including grant and match funds) are required at the close out of the grant. If a project is completed with less than the total project cost expended, the grant award and match funds required will be reduced proportionately.

Grant Amount	10% Match Amount	Total Project Cost
\$2,500 (Minimum)	\$278	\$2,777+
\$30,000 (Max. for Single Applicant)	\$3,333	\$33,333+
\$45,000 (Max. for Consortium)	\$5,000	\$50,000+

Municipalities seeking funds for large, multi-year projects are encouraged to separate projects into related, stand-alone phases, each with a defined product upon completion, and apply for a grant each year to complete the phases (*See Single Project Scope Requirement* below). Because funds are allocated competitively each year, MPG support for subsequent phases cannot be guaranteed.

DHCD reserves the right to award less than the amount requested, based on the availability of funds.

Note: Please keep in mind that municipalities that accept MPG funding are not eligible to apply for a [Better Connections Grant](#) for the same state fiscal year as the MPG award.

Eligible Activities

The Municipal Planning Grant Program supports a wide range of projects relating to planning, land use, and resilience and promotes cooperation, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas. Eligible projects must have a clear connection to planning and implementation of the municipal plan and will be reviewed for conformance with the

regional plan, as well as statewide smart growth principles, planning goals, and land use policies.

Funds *may* be used to:

- ✓ Underwrite expenses for public meetings and hearings, informational workshops, citizen surveys, outreach, and notification costs
- ✓ Support research, data collection, capacity studies, inventories, and mapping
- ✓ Pay consultants, interns, regional planning commission staff, or legal fees associated with the project
- ✓ Purchase development rights, easements, and titles of properties for housing and conservation purposes identified in the municipal plan
- ✓ Purchase materials needed to produce a plan, bylaw, or implement or administer the project -- like writing supplies, maps, and copies
- ✓ Conduct other non-prohibited activities
- ✓ Pay an RPC with 'agent' status for project management expenses up to 5% of sub-contracted (non-RPC) expenses. This **must** be disclosed in the application and be included as a line in the work plan and budget.

Funds *may not* be used to:

- ✗ Support political activities
- ✗ Support projects incompatible with the Regional Plan
- ✗ Pay regional planning commission dues
- ✗ Reimburse expenses incurred before the grant is awarded
- ✗ Subsidize tax mapping (see *Mapping Requirements* below)
- ✗ Pay municipal officials or municipal staff
- ✗ Capitalize a "reserve" fund for use beyond the grant period
- ✗ Purchase computer hardware, software licenses or subscriptions, or other equipment not related to a specific grant funded planning event
- ✗ Pay for the cost of administering the MPG grant such as municipal or regional staff time for documenting grant expenditures and submitting the progress report and close-out, except as noted for 'agent status' above
- ✗ Support plans, bylaws and policies that violate the State or Federal Fair Housing Act. Fair housing training is available to all grantees and is encouraged for projects relating to housing and/or revisions to zoning bylaws. Please contact Shaun Gilpin, Housing Policy Specialist at shaun.gilpin@vermont.gov if you are interested in training opportunities.

Mapping Requirement

- All GIS mapping must follow applicable [VCGI data guidelines or standards](#).
- Parcel mapping projects may not be funded through MPGs.

Single Project Scope Requirement

MPG grants are limited to projects with a singular and well-defined focus – even if the proposal is part of a larger project (see example below). If multiple products or separate consultant projects are proposed for MPG funds, the application may not meet the single project scope requirement. This finding will result in a lower score and only one of the projects will be funded if a grant is awarded. Applicants with questions about scope should call the program's staff.

Example: work on both a municipal plan and bylaws in the same application will usually be considered two separate projects and typically both are not funded. However, a focused issue-oriented amendment of a plan element and the associated bylaws to implement that section of the plan, can be proposed as one project. For instance, a housing element of a plan and a bylaw amendment to adopt housing-ready regulations may be considered one project.

Use of MPG as Part of a Larger Project

MPGs may be used as part of a larger or phased project. An MPG may also be used in conjunction with grants from other programs. If you propose to use the MPG for a larger project, begin by assigning a discrete part of the larger project to the MPG. Choose a component that best meets the competitive criteria and can easily be completed within the 24-month MPG timeframe. If applicable, applicants must explain use of an MPG as part of a larger project. Applicants may contact DHCD to ensure that the activity will meet the grant requirements.

Example: A municipality could use an MPG for the community outreach component of a major public project. In this instance, include the workplan for just the MPG portion of the project in the online application, explain the project in the application, and submit the overall work plan for the larger project as an attachment.

Coordination with State Agencies

Some local planning and regulatory projects require coordination with state agencies that have planning and regulatory authority over the project. For projects where state authority can be anticipated, applicants must identify the relevant agencies as project partners and include a task for coordinating with that agency in the work plan. Applicants are also encouraged to review the work plan with any such agency and include comments from the agency as an attachment to the application.

Example 1: Any project (streetscape, traffic calming, sidewalk, water, wastewater etc.) that proposes work within a state highway right-of-way must coordinate with appropriate sections at the Agency of Transportation. At a minimum, the District Transportation Administrator and the Permitting Services section should be involved. Early coordination will increase the likelihood that the work product(s) can be implemented in the future.

Example 2: A project to consider village wastewater solutions must coordinate with the [Department of Environmental Conservation \(DEC\) Water Infrastructure Financing Program](#) before submitting an MPG application, to ensure the work plan will result in a

product that can be used to obtain state and federal infrastructure funding. The best evidence of this coordination is an email from DEC indicating review of the work plan. This can be attached to the application.

Grant Selection Process (Competitive Criteria)

DHCD uses competitive criteria to score and rank applications. The statewide priorities are updated annually to comply with policy initiatives, legislation, or current events. Grants are awarded based on the application’s score and ranking compared to the scores from the other applications in the same region, as well as the amount of grant funds available. Applications scoring at or below 60 points will not be funded, and regional funds may be reallocated to high-scoring projects in other regions. The DHCD Commissioner reserves the sole right and responsibility to allocate grant funding. Applications are scored as follows:

Competitive Criteria Scoring Summary	Points
Project Readiness & Need	Section: 20
Issue & Urgency	5
Funding Need	5
Project Readiness	5
Project Management	5
Public Outreach & Project Partnership	Section: 15
Public Outreach	10
Project Partnership & Support	5
Statewide Priorities	Section: 40
Project Outcomes & Goal Consistency	5
Priority Projects	15
State Designated Area Projects	20
Project Approach	Section: 35
Work Plan	20
Budget & Cost Estimates	15
Application Quality & Past Performance	Section: 10
	TOTAL: 120

Project Readiness & Need (20 points)

Projects with a specific and documented problem the community is trying to solve, and a well-organized management team, demonstrate project readiness. Projects that are unable to qualify for funding through other sources demonstrate need, as well as projects that address an urgent matter.

Public Outreach & Project Partnership (15 points)

Planning projects are more successful: 1) when there is sustained public outreach throughout a project that involves those affected, including harder-to-reach and under-represented, lower-resourced or under-served people, 2) when they begin with strong community support, and 3) when they are done in partnership with organizations outside the municipal government. Competitive applications will demonstrate how the

project's work plan will outreach to the broader public and who supports and is part of the project from the outset.

Statewide Priorities: Outcomes, Projects & Designation (40 points)

Each year the program recognizes projects with outcomes that meet statewide priorities and the Vermont [Planning & Development Act's purpose and](#) goals (24 V.S.A. 4302).

Projects that meet one priority project category receive 5 points. Projects meeting more than one priority project category score up to 15 points. Because housing continues to be a concern statewide, projects that expand housing opportunity will receive highest priority. Refer to the [Application Guide](#) for examples of diverse projects that meet these categories:

- Projects focused on the implementation of the Act 47 of 2023 and Act 181 of 2024
- Projects related to climate resilience and flood recovery
- Projects related to housing development
- Capital programs and plans for municipal improvements
- Physical improvement plans for a designated area, which may include pre-engineering water/wastewater visioning
- Pre-requisite planning to prepare for a downtown/village center or center 'step-up' designation application (please coordinate with DHCD designation program staff on resources to support new historic preservation best practices for Step 3 Downtown Centers)
- Innovative and statewide projects that serve as a replicable model for other communities

Projects that relate to and have a clear connection to [state designated areas](#) receive priority in accordance with 24 V.S.A. Chapter 76A. Refer to the [Application Guide](#) for scoring specifics.

Project Approach (35 points)

Projects should have a well-considered work plan and budget. Once grants are awarded, the work plan can only be changed via a grant amendment, so the scope of work and tasks described should be as accurate as possible. The work plan and budget submitted with the application will become part of the grant agreement. It should not be overly broad.

Application Quality & Past Performance (10 points)

Reviewers consider the overall quality and clarity of the application, as well as applicants past performance on timely grant reporting, accurate and complete closeout documentation, and completion of past projects that were awarded funds.

Application Guide

The [Application Guide](#) assists applicants in preparing a competitive application and allows applicants to prepare draft responses before submitting the application online.

Applicants can see each application question, read advice on answering the question, view how the response will be evaluated and scored by DHCD, and prepare a draft response -- all on one form. DHCD recommends applicants prepare their responses offline in the Word document provided, to be able to copy and paste narrative responses into the online form later. The GEARS system will time out after forty minutes on one-page, even if you are actively entering in information. Please “save” often so applicants do not lose their work.

Grant Awards and Administration

Award notices are sent via email to successful applicants through the online **Grants Management System**. In the event of partial funding, applicants are asked to submit a modified work plan and budget. Grant agreements and other required documents will be available shortly thereafter. Completion and electronic submittal of these forms will be required for payment. All grants management forms and instructions will be available through the Grants Management System. Grant payments and reporting requirements are as follows:

- **First Payment** – Upon execution of the grant agreement, a requisition may be submitted for an advance payment of 40% of the award amount.
- **Second Payment** – Mid-project reports are due December 2026. Requisition for 30% of the award may be submitted along with a progress report.
- **Final or Close Out Reimbursement** – Up to 30% of the award is made on a *reimbursement basis*. The reimbursement is made when the project and its deliverables, as detailed in Attachment A of the Grant Agreement, are complete, and the expenditures are properly budgeted and documented (copies of invoices and canceled checks or a detailed transaction report) showing that the funds were spent for the purposes specified in the grant agreement. Invoices must show that grantees have spent all grant funds and match funds, if applicable, no later than December 31, 2027. Funds that are unused as of that date, as well as expenditures that are ineligible or are not documented, must be returned to DHCD.

While grant activities must be completed by December 31, 2027, grantees have up to one month after that date to assemble a final report. Final reports must be submitted online no later than January 31, 2028.

Purchase of goods and services through the grant must conform with the procurement requirements defined in [Attachment D to the Grant Agreement](#). In most cases, consultants must be selected through a competitive process.

All final products and public communication must acknowledge funding from the Municipal Planning Grant Program, administered by the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, Agency of Commerce and Community

Development. This means there must be a statement, usually on the cover page of the final plan or product, such as “*This project was funded in part by a Municipal Planning Grant, administered by the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development.*”

Amendments

Amendments include the following options:

- 1) Minor alterations to the work plan or the approved budget may be allowed, but only upon request and approval from DHCD. Substantial alterations are not allowed, and the final product must remain the same.
- 2) Time extensions are offered for up to one additional year only. Projects that cannot be completed within the grant period under the terms of the grant agreement are closed out. The grant will cover eligible work completed for documented costs; however, ineligible or undocumented costs will not be funded, and associated funds must be returned.

Consultant Selection

The rules for consultant selection are detailed in the grant agreement’s procurement provisions (see [Attachment D of the MPG Grant Agreement](#)). A Regional Planning Commission may help a municipality prepare a grant application and bid on a grant-funded project; this is not a prohibited activity.

Pre-Application Process

Consultants may be selected before the application is submitted. If a municipality is engaged in a competitive procurement process while developing the grant application and selects a contractor at that time, there is no requirement to re-open the selection process if the grant is awarded, provided the scope of work remains substantially similar to what was in the contractor’s proposal.

Simplified Bid Process

For contracts up to and including \$10,000, the grantee is required to obtain price or rate quotations from a reasonable number of sources, but no less than two, and maintain a record of the same in its files.

Regional Planning Commission as Agent

For [rural towns](#) with a population of less than 2,500 as defined in [24 V.S.A. §4303\(25\)](#), the regional planning commission may serve as an agent of the town for the Municipal Planning Grant.

The agent is expected to prepare the application, support grant administration and will be exempt from competitive selection if serving as a project consultant, but the municipality must remain the financial administrator. RPCs may also serve as the agent for any consortium project.

Competitive Bid Process

For contracts more than \$10,000, the grantee is required to use a competitive selection method. A Request for Proposals (RFP) or Request for Qualifications (RFQ) should be broadly publicized to permit reasonable competition. The grantee must maintain records in its files to document how the decision was made.

Exceptions

If the grantee is a “[rural town](#)” or a multi-town consortium and has identified the regional planning commission as its agent, the simplified bid and competitive processes for hiring the RPC are not required.

Consultants working on an earlier phase of a multi-phase project may be re-selected for the project phase funded by the MPG, to maintain continuity between phases.

Information

MPG Application Webpage - instructions and resources:

<https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant/applicant-guidance>

Jenni Lavoie
DHCD Contracts & Grants Administrator
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Under **24 V.S.A. § 4382**, a Vermont municipal plan must be consistent with the statewide planning goals in **24 V.S.A. § 4302**, compatible with approved neighboring municipal plans and the regional plan, and must contain the following elements: ([Vermont General Assembly](#))¹

1. **Statement of objectives, policies, and programs**
To guide future growth and development of land, public services, facilities, and environmental protection.
2. **Land use plan**
A map and statement of present and prospective land uses, including areas for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public/semi-public uses, open space, floodplains, aquifer protection, wetlands, forest blocks, wildlife habitat, habitat connectors, and other conservation purposes. It must also address the amount, intensity, character, timing, and sequence of development.
3. **Transportation plan**
A map and statement of existing and proposed transportation and circulation facilities, including highways, streets, parking, transit, bicycle paths, trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads, ports, and priorities of need.
4. **Utility and facility plan**
A map and statement of existing and proposed community facilities and public utilities, including schools, recreation, public buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generation/transmission, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, future needs, priorities, costs, and financing methods.
5. **Natural, scenic, and historic resources policies**
Policies for preserving rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic features, historic features, and resources.
6. **Educational facilities plan**
A map and statement of present and projected uses of the local public school system.
7. **Implementation program**
A recommended program for carrying out the objectives of the plan.
8. **Relationship to surrounding plans and trends**
A statement explaining how the plan relates to development trends and plans for adjacent municipalities, adjacent areas, and the region.
9. **Energy plan**
Analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems; policies on energy conservation; policies on renewable energy; and land-use patterns and densities likely to conserve energy.
10. **Housing element**
A recommended program of public and private actions to address housing needs and targets identified by the regional planning commission, using year-round and seasonal dwelling data, with specific actions for low- and moderate-income housing needs and accounting for permitted residential development under § 4412.
11. **Economic development element**
Description of present economic conditions; location, type, and scale of desired economic development; and policies, projects, and programs needed to foster economic growth.

¹ Created with AI assistance

12. **Flood resilience plan**

Identification of flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas, including floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, plus policies and strategies to protect those areas and reduce risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments. The plan may reference an approved local hazard mitigation plan. Beginning **January 1, 2028**, the flood resilience strategies must include adoption and implementation of the **State Flood Hazard Area Standards**. ([Vermont General Assembly](#))

The statute also says required maps may be combined into one or more maps, and, where appropriate, the plan should be based on inventories, studies, and analysis of current trends, including population, housing needs, growth patterns, and the municipality's ability to finance and provide services. ([Vermont General Assembly](#))

Westford Planning Commission Town Plan Update¹

Project Duration: 20 months

Proposed Period: June 2026 – January 2028

Project Sponsor: Westford Planning Commission

Project Lead: Planning Commission Chair, Town Planner (if hired) with Planning Coordinator / Town staff support

Primary Deliverable: Updated Westford Town Plan and Implementation Plan ready for adoption and regional approval

1. Purpose

The purpose of this project is to prepare a new or substantially updated **Westford Town Plan** that:

1. Meets all requirements of **24 V.S.A. § 4382**.
2. Reflects the community’s current priorities, values, and constraints.
3. Provides a practical implementation roadmap for the next eight years.
4. Supports continued local control over land use regulation, zoning, capital planning, and municipal policy.
5. Positions Westford to respond clearly to state, regional, housing, wastewater, conservation, tax, infrastructure, and rural viability pressures.

Westford’s current Town Plan is described by the Town as an **eight-year visioning/planning tool** developed by the Planning Commission with town officials and residents, used to prioritize regulations, policies, ordinances, studies, services, and projects. Vermont municipal plans expire every eight years unless readopted through the statutory process.

2. Project Need and Background

Westford should begin the update well before the current plan expires in order to avoid a rushed re-adoption, allow meaningful community engagement, and ensure the plan addresses major current issues. Under Vermont law, a municipal plan must include, among other things, objectives and policies, land use, transportation, utilities and facilities, preservation of natural and historic resources, education, implementation, energy, housing, economic development, flood resilience, and other required statutory elements.

The Planning Commission is the appropriate lead body because Westford identifies the Commission as responsible for preparing the Town Plan, Land Use & Development Regulations,

¹ Prepared with AI assistance

and other planning studies. The project should also recognize that Westford already has active planning questions in motion, including 1705 future direction, WES to town center pedestrian path, land-use regulation amendments, and Act 181/designation issues. The Town has acknowledged that wastewater capacity in and around the Village Center has been a concern since at least 1992, that the 2023 wastewater bond vote failed, and that the underlying wastewater challenges remain at least with respect to municipal building capacity.

3. Project Objectives

The updated Town Plan should accomplish the following:

A. Establish a clear community vision

Define what Westford means by remaining a **rural, agricultural, conservation-minded, fiscally sustainable community**.

B. Update the factual foundation

Refresh demographic, housing, land use, school enrollment, transportation, tax, infrastructure, natural resource, economic, climate, and capital-planning data.

C. Resolve major policy questions

The process should directly address:

- Where growth should be encouraged, limited, or discouraged.
- Whether and how the Village Center should remain the principal focus for civic, commercial, housing, and community investment.
- What role, if any, community wastewater should play.
- How to balance private property rights, conservation, agriculture, housing, and fiscal sustainability.
- Whether current zoning and overlays are too restrictive, too complex, or misaligned with the Town's goals.
- How Westford should position itself under Act 181, regional planning, state housing policy, and future designation systems.
- How to preserve rural character while avoiding stagnation, tax-base erosion, and exclusionary outcomes.

D. Produce an implementation-oriented plan

The final plan should not merely describe values. It should include a ranked **Implementation Program** with responsible parties, estimated timing, dependencies, and likely funding sources.

E. Preserve regional approval and planning-process confirmation

Regional plan approval requires that the plan be consistent with state planning goals, compatible with the regional plan and neighboring municipal plans, and contain the required elements of 24 V.S.A. § 4382(a)(1)–(12).

4. Project Scope

In Scope

The project includes:

1. Full review of the 2021 Town Plan and Implementation Plan.
2. Updated mapping, including land use, natural resources, transportation, utilities, community facilities, zoning, village areas, water resources, conserved lands, and growth areas.
3. Community engagement program.
4. Issue papers or briefing memos on key planning topics.
5. Drafting of revised plan chapters.
6. Statutory review for compliance with 24 V.S.A. § 4382.
7. Compatibility review with the CCRPC regional plan and adjoining municipal plans.
8. Selectboard, Town staff, committee, and public coordination.
9. Planning Commission public hearing.
10. Final transmittal to the Selectboard.
11. Support for Selectboard adoption process and CCRPC approval.

Out of Scope

This project does **not** itself adopt zoning amendments, fund capital projects, authorize wastewater infrastructure, or bind the Town to specific expenditures. However, it should identify recommended follow-on actions, including possible bylaw amendments, capital planning steps, studies, grant applications, and public votes.

5. Governance and Roles

Planning Commission

The Planning Commission should serve as the project steering body. It should:

- Approve the project schedule.
- Define the public engagement process.

- Assign chapter leads or topic leads.
- Review draft materials.
- Conduct the statutory public hearing.
- Vote whether to transmit the proposed plan to the Selectboard.

Planning Commission Chair Or Town Planner

The Chair or Town Planner should:

- Coordinate agendas and work sequencing.
- Serve as primary process manager.
- Maintain alignment between meetings, staff work, consultants, and public engagement.
- Ensure draft decisions are captured and brought back for Commission confirmation.

Planning Coordinator / Town Staff

Town staff should:

- Maintain project files.
- Coordinate public notices, records, website posting, and meeting logistics.
- Assist with data, maps, consultant coordination, and statutory process tracking.

Selectboard

The Selectboard should:

- Be consulted early on scope, budget, and major policy issues.
- Receive periodic updates.
- Ultimately conduct its required adoption process after Planning Commission transmittal.

CCRPC

CCRPC should be engaged early and periodically to:

- Review statutory compliance.
- Assist with mapping and data.
- Flag regional-plan compatibility issues.
- Advise on confirmation of planning process and regional approval.

Community Stakeholders

Engagement should include residents, landowners, farmers, business owners, school representatives, conservation interests, seniors, younger families, village-area property owners, housing advocates, and residents who may not normally attend Planning Commission meetings.

6. Guiding Principles

The update should be guided by the following principles:

1. **Rural character is an active planning goal, not an excuse for inaction.**
 2. **The Village Center should be evaluated honestly as both an opportunity and a constraint.**
 3. **Housing policy should be realistic, locally scaled, and legally defensible.**
 4. **Agriculture and working lands should be treated as economic infrastructure, not merely scenery.**
 5. **Natural resources should be protected through clear, understandable, and proportionate regulation.**
 6. **Infrastructure decisions should be linked to fiscal capacity and community mandate.**
 7. **The plan should distinguish between what Westford wants, what Westford can afford, and what Westford can legally require.**
 8. **Implementation should be prioritized; not every aspiration should become an action item.**
-

Essex Junction

2027 Comprehensive Plan Update

Public Engagement Plan

Background & Context

In Vermont, municipal plans are the community’s primary policy documents for guiding growth, development, and investment. They shape land use, housing, transportation, energy, natural resources, and other local priorities, and serve as the basis for zoning, capital planning, and project review by local, regional, and state bodies. State law ([24 V.S.A. § 4387](#)) requires towns to readopt or update their plans at least once every eight years, creating a regular opportunity to assess progress, respond to new challenges, and ensure local goals align with statewide planning requirements.

Essex Junction is updating its [2019 Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan](#), set to expire in August 2027, with funding from a Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and with support from the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) through the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

CCRPC provided an Initial Town Plan Review in January 2025 with comments on how to improve the plan and meet state requirements and has been contracted to design and carry out community engagement and to update the plan to reflect the needs and interests of Essex Junction residents. This engagement plan outlines CCRPC’s strategy for supporting that process.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles outlined in [Strengthening and Sustaining Public Engagement in Vermont](#) helped inform CCRPC’s engagement approach. CCRPC strives to uphold these principles in its engagement efforts, recognizing that unproductive engagement is damaging and often results in decreased trust in government and decision-makers. Productive engagement, when done respectfully and thoughtfully, results in better and more resilient policies, robust local citizenship networks, and stronger communities.

ENGAGEMENT WORKS BEST WHEN IT IS:

	INTERACTIVE	Everyone has a chance to contribute.
	TIMELY	It happens at a point when people can have an influence on important decisions.
	INCLUSIVE	It brings together a wide range of people, including people who may have been excluded or not engaged before.
	AUTHENTIC	People value one another's input and know the process will have meaningful results.
	TRANSPARENT	It is open, honest, and understandable.
	INFORMED	Everyone has access to the knowledge and data they need, and there is balanced information describing the pros and cons of different opinions.
	ACCESSIBLE	The barriers to participation, including location, time, language and other factors that might deter people, are as low as possible.
	RESPONSIVE	What people say is documented and decision-makers report back to participants on the outcomes of engagement.
	NETWORK-BUILDING	Engagement helps to build relationships and networks over the long term.
	EVALUATED	People are able to track and measure how engagement is working.

To uphold these principles throughout engagement, CCRPC will:

- Offer multiple opportunities to engage, directly and indirectly.
- Provide clarity at the start with communities about what can and cannot change about the plan, so that community input focuses on the elements where it would hold influence.
- Present and discuss the information in understandable, simple, and visual terms whenever possible, and share all relevant information with community members before asking for input.
- Emphasize and prioritize relationship building in and throughout engagement.
- Share all collected information back to participants to offer opportunities for corrections, additional comments, and accountability to build trust.
- Connect community members, municipalities, and organizations to one another when and where it makes sense to support their own work.
- Respect community members' time and lived experience by providing stipends, language services, food, childcare when requested, and other support to reduce participation barriers.

GOALS OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

1. **Enhance awareness** of the Comprehensive Plan: what it is and why it matters.
2. **Center the voices and viewpoints** of Essex Junction communities in the Plan, with a focus on communities' voices historically not included in decision-making and on issues not recently asked of the community.

3. **Build relationships and trust** between community members and City staff and the community through a transparent and collaborative process.

Methodology

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 and subsequent events ignited significant changes in the social and political fabric of Chittenden County. Communities fractured as social isolation became a norm, and inequities deepened, especially for communities already struggling. Since then, the climate crisis has continued to visibly shape our landscapes, as the State has seen record flooding, drought, and poor air quality due to wildfires. Meanwhile, income inequality has continued to rise, political divides worsened, and Vermont has become the site of one of the nation's greatest housing crises.

Essex Junction reflects many of the same statewide and regional dynamics as other Chittenden County communities, while also having a distinct history and urban character. Located in the center of the county, Essex Junction functions as a historic railroad village and a regional employment and transportation hub. With a population of roughly 10,000 residents within just over four square miles, it is one of the most densely populated municipalities in Vermont. The Junction is characterized by a compact downtown, established residential neighborhoods, a strong street grid, and proximity to major employment centers. Its development pattern reflects its origins as a rail center and mill village, resulting in a more urban form than many neighboring communities. Today, Essex Junction is known for its walkable downtown, Five Corners, local parks and trails, civic institutions, and community events that contribute to a strong sense of place.

Essex Junction's population is younger and more diverse than much of Chittenden County. The median age is slightly lower than the county average, with a higher share of residents under 18 and working-age adults, reflecting the community's role as a residential and employment center. The Junction is one of the more racially and ethnically diverse municipalities in the county. A meaningful portion of households speak a language other than English at home. Median household income is lower than the county average, and the community has a much higher proportion of renters, including many households facing housing cost burdens. While Essex Junction hosts substantial employment nearby, many residents still commute out of the municipality for work, while workers from across the region commute in. These dynamics underscore the importance of housing affordability, transportation access, and inclusive economic development strategies tailored to Essex Junction's urban context.

Essex Junction has already conducted several community outreach efforts in recent years to lay out a vision for the City's future, both in its governance and its built environment.

ASSESSMENT OF PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

To repair past harms, prevent future ones, and center local knowledge in policy, CCRPC recognizes the critical importance of organizational equity and community engagement. CCRPC is also

mindful of the growing fatigue among community members driven by unmet basic needs and the high volume of overlapping engagement initiatives. To avoid placing additional burdens on already overextended individuals and organizations, CCRPC staff reviewed engagement activities conducted in Essex Junction since 2020 and incorporated existing community-informed insights into engagement results, including efforts conducted at a statewide, regional, and local level. This approach emphasizes clarity in outreach by focusing engagement on filling identified gaps and not replicating previous efforts. Insights from these efforts relevant to the Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan Update are summarized in Appendix A.

- Statewide
 - [State of Vermont Climate Action Office Engagement](#)
- Regional
 - [2024 Chittenden County Regional Plan Update Engagement](#)
 - [2025 Chittenden / Grand Isle County Community Health Needs Assessment](#)
 - [2022 Chittenden County Active Transportation Survey Report](#)
 - [2025 Chittenden County Regional Future Land Use Map Update Engagement](#)
- Local
 - 2024 Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan
 - Connect the Junction Transit-Oriented Development Master Plan
 - 2025 Essex Junction Rebranding Project & Community Survey

CCRPC staff also reviewed the FY2026 Prioritization List & Department Work Plans (Budget Day Packet) specifically for current actions being undertaken by City government.

For a full and ongoing database of community engagement efforts conducted within Chittenden County, please see this [Community Engagement Tracker](#).

ENGAGEMENT THEMES & APPROACH

After conversations with local community leaders and planning commission members, it is apparent that Essex Junction has already conducted extensive engagement around key planning issues and established a vision for the future.

The 2024 Strategic Vision and Action Plan sets clear goals for the community around the six thematic pillars:

1. Housing and Urban Design
2. Public Services and Facilities
3. Economic and Business Development
4. Transportation and Connectivity
5. Environmental Stewardship
6. Community Engagement and Decision Making

CCRPC staff will incorporate the Key Actions into the plan alongside new statutory requirements and discussion of current trends (as noted in [CCRPC's initial review of the 2019 plan](#)). However, the specific actions that will advance the Key Actions need significant updates. While some of

these are already identified by the City in the [2026 Prioritization List and Departmental Work Plans](#), others have no associated actions, or actions that are vague. In particular, the Economic and Business Development, Environmental Stewardship, and Transportation and Connectivity pillars would benefit from additional public engagement around crafting specific actions.

Before embarking on plan drafting, CCRPC staff will seek input from community focus groups on key topics related to these Strategic Pillars to craft actions that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. CCRPC has developed discussion guides with context narratives, potential focus group membership, and guiding questions for these three pillars.

In addition to these themes and questions, CCRPC staff will ask residents broader visioning questions about their community to highlight what residents love the most about the Junction and hopes they have for the future, including:

- What do you value most about living in Essex Junction? If you moved to the Junction recently, why did you move here?
- What are your favorite places in the Junction? Why?
- What are the biggest challenges you face living in Essex Junction?
- What are the areas of the city you'd like to see improvements to?
- What should be the City's #1 priority?
- List three small actions your local government could take to improve the quality of life in your community.
- It's the year 2050. What do you hope is different about Essex Junction?

INTERESTED & AFFECTED PARTIES (IAP)

To identify impacted communities and community assets, CCRPC staff used the [Chittenden County Community Asset Map](#) and collaborated with local partners to identify communities and voices who should be included in outreach and engagement efforts. This includes consulting with the CCRPC Community Engagement Advisory Committee to identify other potential IAPs and voices that may be missing from the conversation. CCRPC will use this list to recruit members to the three topical focus groups and to ensure that broader community engagement reaches all community stakeholders.

- Working Parents + Families / Youth
 - Tamara Eklof, EWSD EL Program Coordinator / Mckinney-Vento Liaison and Erin Maguire, Director of Equity & Inclusion / Co-Director of Student Support Services
 - School events (Hiawatha, Thomas Fleming, Albert D Lawton, Essex High School)
 - Essex Junction Recreation & Parks events
- Low(er)-Income (Renters, Affordable Housing Residents, Houseless Population, etc.)
 - Heavenly Pantry
 - Brownell Library

- Residents of subsidized housing communities (Monarch Apartments, Whitcomb Woods / Whitcomb Terrace)
- BIPOC Communities
- New Americans / English Language Learners
- LGBTQ+ Communities
- (Dis)Ability Community
- Elderly
 - Essex Senior Center
 - HomeCare Assistance of Greater Burlington
 - Essex Rotary
- Communities of Faith
 - Holy Family Church Community Center
 - First Congregational Church
 - Calvary Baptist Church
 - St. Lawrence Catholic Church
 - Essex Alliance Church
 - St. James Episcopal
 - Grace United Methodist Church
 - All Nations for Jesus Christ Church
 - Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
 - Other (non-Christian) religious communities
- Small / Locally Owned or Franchised Businesses
- Farming & Agriculture
 - Whitcomb’s Land of Pumpkins and Corn Maze
- Environmental groups – connect with Siler Climate Consulting / residents interested in energy / climate topics
- Tourists/Visitors
 - People attending events at Fairgrounds
 - People eating at restaurants
 - Amtrak & GMT users
- Other

Engagement Plan: Timeline & Activities

STEP 1 | Situation Assessment (January 2026)

- **Research the community context** in Essex Junction leading up to this comprehensive plan update and review previous engagement efforts with Essex Junction communities since 2020 to avoid duplication and inform engagement priorities.

STEP 2 | Collaborative Design with Community & Planning Commission (February – March 2026)

- **Develop an engagement strategy** in collaboration with the Essex Junction Planning Commission, City Staff, CCRPC’s Community Engagement Advisory Committee (CEAC), and local partners.
 - This may include meeting with all City department heads to understand engagement context, confirm department priorities and challenges, and coordinate upcoming engagement activities.

STEP 3 | Planning & Coordination (January – March 2026)

- **Coordination** with Planning Commission, Staff, and partners.
- Develop engagement materials. Depending on the strategy identified in Step 2, this may or may not include:
 - Comprehensive plan overview for education (what is a town plan, what is included in the town plan, what does it do/why does it matter?)
 - Discussion guides for focus groups and interviews
 - Presentations for focus groups and events
 - Printed maps of Essex Junction (for dot activities)
 - Flyers for events
 - Tabling materials
 - Bar coasters
 - Community survey text / questions

STEP 4 | Engagement Activities (Spring – Fall 2026)

- **Ongoing Partnerships** with key organizations and community members.
- **Focus Group Conversations** | Organize and facilitate 3 focus groups that will meet 2-3 times each around the identified Strategic Action Plan pillars. Invite priority populations to all, but in particular to the Economic and Business Development sessions which will focus on economic mobility.
 1. Housing and Urban Design
 2. Business and Economic Development
 3. Energy and Climate Resilience
- **One-on-One Interviews** | Offer one-on-one interviews with additional interested and affected parties (e.g., small business owners, indigenous community members, City Council members, first responders, etc.) on topics of interest to them.
- **Public Meeting** | Host one open house / public meeting for any member of the public to participate in.
- **Community Events + Gatherings** | Table at / attend up to 10 community events with engagement activities to assess support for SMART actions identified in focus group sessions and by City staff or the Planning Commission. Activities may include:

1. Dot Activities can be used both for ranking priority actions and for community values mapping (i.e. identify your favorite places in town, areas you'd like to see improvements, areas you feel unsafe walking or biking in town, areas you feel unsafe driving, areas you'd like to see more housing, etc.)
2. Money in a Jar: every participant gets a set amount of "Monopoly" money to add to jars representing how they'd like to invest public dollars.
3. Targeted conversations.

Events may include:

- Library Events
- Memorial Day Parade
- 4th of July at the Expo
- National Night Out on Tuesday, August 4, 2026, from 5:00PM to 7:00PM at Essex High School
- Champlain Valley Fair?
- Meet Me on Main
- Train Hop
- School sports events
- Small Business Saturday
- Annual Meeting (4/14/2026)
- **Public Surveys** | Consider using targeted surveys to reach specific groups or ask questions around specific topics, if appropriate.
- **Other Activities** | Offer additional, creative, forms of engagement to target additional populations and feedback.
 1. Support elementary youth through partnering with the public schools to draw their future Essex Junction.

STEP 5 | Results & Recommendations (Fall / Winter 2026)

- **Synthesize feedback** gathered through engagement.
- **Develop recommendations** to integrate feedback into the Comprehensive Plan.
- **Report changes** back to interested and affected parties to ensure accountability.
- The finished Comprehensive Plan will go to the City Council for adoption in August 2027.

Appendix A: Results from Previous Engagement Efforts

Essex Junction Community Vision & Strategic Action Plan (2024)

In August 2023, the City of Essex Junction embarked on the City of Essex Junction Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan process to deliver a 5-year Strategic Action Plan. The following is a summary of the results from the final plan, specifically the community engagement results.

- A repeated theme is the desire to retain a “neighborhood village” feel while planning responsibly for growth.
- Many residents support growth that is community-led, inclusive, and aligned with local values, while others are concerned about the impacts and change to community identity that growth will bring.
- Strong interest in improving transparency, civic engagement opportunities, and trust in decision-making.
- Many residents noted confusion about City governance following independence and want clearer civic information.
- Public amenities, community events, and shared spaces are seen as critical to civic pride and social connection.

Essex Junction Community Survey Summary Results

The City worked with Place Creative on a rebranding initiative following the City’s separation from Essex Town and the creation of its new identity. The following is a summary of the Community Survey taken by approximately 200 people (mostly but not all residents).

- Respondents generally report satisfaction with living and working in Essex Junction and see potential for future growth and opportunity.
- Many respondents emphasized the importance of maintaining a family-friendly, walkable, livable community.
- There is support for thoughtful growth (especially among newer / younger residents) paired with concern about the pace of change (especially among older / established residents).

Connect the Junction (Transit-Oriented Development Plan, 2025–2026)

This transit-oriented development (TOD) master plan, developed by the City of Essex Junction, works toward the vision of a more pedestrian-friendly City Center with more diverse housing options, vibrant public spaces, and safe and accessible options for walking, biking, and busing. The following are key engagement results:

- Common concerns include traffic congestion, lack of safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and limited affordable housing options.

- There is a desire for a denser, more walkable 5 Corners and Pearl Street corridor, with the biggest challenge being seen as funding and the second being resistance to change.
- There is a desire for more green space, including programming and activities in that green space.
- More pedestrian and bike lanes, especially those that feel protected/safe, are desired. However, changes to vehicle circulation should be supported by studies to minimize further impacts to traffic problems.
- There is attention to preserving the character of the City while allowing for increased density and height.
- Businesses are highly valued, and more restaurants are desired.

Chittenden County 2026 Regional Plan Update Engagement – Phase 1

The first phase of regional plan community engagement focused on elevating the voices of those whose needs, priorities, and experiences were not adequately reflected in previous versions of the ECOS Plan. Feedback was summarized by regional plan chapter; the following selection includes those that align with the Essex Junction Strategic Vision and Action Plan pillars.

- **Ecological Systems and Climate Change:** Participants emphasized urgent action on climate change and environmental protection. Specific needs identified were: greater collaboration and transparency among decision-makers, affordable renewable energy for all income levels, and comprehensive climate education. Addressing the immediate needs of vulnerable populations and the inequitable impacts of climate change was highlighted as critical.
- **Land Use:** Participants supported denser downtowns with greater access to services, focusing on infrastructure and public transit while preserving Vermont’s natural landscapes. With denser downtowns, participants emphasized the importance of including urban green spaces and trees to mitigate the heat island effect.
- **Transportation:** There were major concerns about the inadequacy of public transportation, especially its failure to reach rural areas effectively and the lack of connectivity to essential services and town centers. Participants called for expanded routes and more frequent services to accommodate community needs, particularly for lower-income residents pushed out of town centers due to high housing costs.
- **Housing:** Many concerns were centered on the lack of affordable housing and tenants' rights. Maintenance issues were rampant, with reports of slow responses to repair requests, impacting living conditions. The need for housing that accommodates larger families was a recurring theme, highlighting the mismatch between available housing types and community needs, particularly among immigrant communities. Feedback highlighted a critical need for housing development strategies that cater to larger family units and consider cultural sensitivities, such as private cooking spaces. Participants also stressed the importance of safe neighborhood locations for new housing and the utilization of vacant lots for community housing projects.

- **Economy & Household Financial Security:** Input indicated that current wage levels do not meet the cost of living. Participants called for more job training programs and access to part-time work opportunities, reflecting the diverse needs of the community, especially among those who cannot commit to full-time employment due to family obligations.
- **Civic Engagement:** Feedback showed a desire for more accessible civic education programs that reduce bureaucratic jargon and make governance understandable and engaging for all community members. This includes providing education on how local and regional governments function and how residents can participate effectively in decision-making processes.

2025 Chittenden County Regional Future Land Use Map Update Engagement **– Phase 2 – Essex Junction**

The second phase of regional plan engagement focused on working with municipalities and partners to collaboratively re-create a Regional Future Land Use Map that aligns with Act 181 requirements and reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of all 19 Chittenden County municipalities. The following summarizes common themes heard specifically in Essex Junction.

- There was support for growth in the TOD study area and regionally-mapped Planned Growth Area to support housing availability, along with a desire for consistent walkability, transit access, and neighborhood services throughout the City. At the same time, there were concerns about building height, maintaining neighborhood character, managing growth, and traffic, particularly in existing residential neighborhoods.
- There was strong support for municipal housing targets as a meaningful, long-term planning goal, particularly when paired with infrastructure investment and permitting reform.
- There were concerns about equity, particularly from regional focus groups, about exclusionary zoning, housing affordability, and the need for supporting communities in achieving homeownership.
- Desire for increased certainty and predictability in the development process for both community members and developers.

2022 Chittenden County Active Transportation Survey Report

The purpose of this survey was to capture key insights from a statistically representative sample of Chittenden County residents that will inform decisions regarding walk/bike policies, conditions, and improvements.

- Most people rely on a personal vehicle for transportation, but people of color, those with lower incomes, and young people are generally twice as likely to carpool, bus, bike or walk compared with their counterparts.

- Older residents are less likely to use alternative forms of transportation and may not have access to secondary options if their main option is not available. They are also more likely to support improved bike / walk facilities than any other age group.
- Respondents generally rated transportation infrastructure as average or poor in terms of condition, efficiency, and safety. The top investment priority was maintaining existing infrastructure, followed by efficiency improvements, expanding capacity, and improving safety. Expanded public transit, improvements to bike / walk facilities, and TDM incentives ranked the lowest. Still, respondents are strongly supportive of bike / walk infrastructure.
- The top two design priorities for commercial streets among survey respondents were “safety of all users” and “creating a place where people want to spend time and money.” Still, respondents were mixed in their support for reducing vehicle parking and travel lanes in favor of protected bike lanes.

Chittenden 2025 Chittenden / Grand Isle County Community Health Needs Assessment

Health is a foundational need for individuals that can be influenced, positively or negatively, by public policy decisions. A Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) is a process that non-profit hospitals complete every three years in partnership with community-based organizations to learn more about the significant health needs in the greater community. The following is a summary of some key findings relevant to the City’s Comprehensive Plan Update from the CHNA for UVM Medical Center, whose service territory includes Essex Junction.

- **Mental Health:** Loneliness and social isolation were highlighted by focus groups as root causes of poor mental health and barriers to wellbeing. Health indicator data show an increase in the number of adults experiencing mentally unhealthy days, and 46.1% of adult survey respondents age 65 and older in Chittenden County live alone.
- **Youth and Schools:** Expanding youth mental health programs was the top choice among survey respondents for improving schools. 1 in 4 high school students in the UVM Medical Center Health Service Area reported experiencing bullying in 2023.
- **Built Environment:** In the Community Survey, 20% of respondents selected “more safety options for walkers and bikers” as their top choice for improving their community. More than 60% of Community Survey respondents said increasing affordable housing units is essential to improve health and wellbeing
- **Economic Mobility:** Gaps in median income by race, ethnicity, and gender continue to undermine economic security and equitable health outcomes. Over half of respondents reported that affordable childcare is not available in their community, limiting families’ stability and workforce participation

State of Vermont Climate Action Office Engagement

Vermont Voices on Climate quarterly reports share climate stories of those who call Vermont home. They are generated through conversations between Vermonters and the Climate Action Office, supported by Consensus Building Institute. The focus is to communicate the perspectives of those whose voices haven't historically been represented in government processes. The following is a selected summary of themes that align with the Essex Junction Strategic Vision and Action Plan pillars.

1. Equity and Accessibility

- Strong concerns about the cost burden of climate solutions (EVs, heat pumps, weatherization) on low- and moderate-income Vermonters.
- Rebates/tax credits don't reach the lowest-income residents; upfront costs are a barrier. Calls for direct, accessible funding and support.
- Climate programs should be simple, transparent, and easy to navigate; too much bureaucracy excludes those most in need.
- Need for plain language materials and communications.
- Renters and mobile home residents face specific barriers (split incentives, outdated infrastructure, lack of landlord investment).

2. Housing & Resilience

- Strong connections made between housing insecurity and climate vulnerability (mobile homes in floodplains, lack of weatherization for renters, post-flood displacement).
- Calls for better building codes, zoning, and land use regulation to prevent siting of affordable housing in high-risk areas.
- Requests for more resilient, affordable housing and climate-responsive infrastructure.
- Many Vermonters tied climate resilience to basic needs: safe housing, food security, healthcare, and community support systems.

3. Transportation

- Skepticism about EVs as the sole solution; concerns about affordability, waste, and global supply chains.
- Strong calls for expanded public transit, better bike/pedestrian infrastructure, and multimodal options.
- Rural residents stress the challenge of long commutes and lack of transit alternatives.

4. Energy & Utilities

- Desire for expanded weatherization and energy efficiency programs, with simpler processes and more local support.
- Interest in solar panels on every building, geothermal networks, and alternative clean energy systems.
- Frustration with complicated application processes; calls for "one-stop" resource hubs.
- Skepticism about biomass; interest in renewables that are accessible and equitable.

5. Agriculture, Food, & Land Use

- Recognition that farms and farmworkers are highly vulnerable to flooding and climate change.

- Calls for support for farmers using climate-friendly practices and for stronger regulation of pesticides and runoff.
 - Indigenous voices highlighted the importance of seed sovereignty, native knowledge, and protection of traditional practices (e.g., Abenaki basketmaking trees, resilient corn varieties).
 - Food systems seen as central to resilience: hunger councils, community gardens, and access to local food.
6. Resilience, Disaster Response, and Community Health
- Trauma from flooding and extreme weather is widespread. Calls for better state disaster response that reduces bureaucratic hurdles and provides direct support.
 - Resilience is framed broadly: includes mental health, disability inclusion, youth engagement, and immigrant support.
 - Strong appreciation for community-based organizations (CBOs) and desire to fund them directly as trusted messengers.
7. Trust & Governance
- Many expressed skepticism about government and corporate interests; climate solutions should not be driven by profit.
 - Strong desire for community-led, locally based solutions.
 - Importance of consistent presence—“show up, and keep showing up”—to build trust.
8. Youth, Education, and Future Generations
- Youth want more involvement in climate conversations.
 - Calls for better climate education in schools and youth leadership programs.
 - Youth Climate Leaders Academy created momentum for integrating youth voices in state processes.

STRENGTHENING AND SUSTAINING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN VERMONT

A guide from
Public Agenda

A Planning Guide for Communities



Photo: Courtesy of the Intervale Center, www.sevendaysvt.com

**Strengthening and Sustaining
Public Engagement in Vermont:
A Planning Guide for Communities**

A Guide from Public Agenda

“Strengthening and Sustaining Public Engagement in Vermont” was supported by the Innovations and Collaborations program at the Vermont Community Foundation. Matt Leighninger was the lead author, and Nicole Cabral, Susan Clark, Sue McCormack, Helen Beattie, Harry Frank, Paul Costello, John Castle and Jennifer Botzjorns provided invaluable advice, suggestions and text.

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STRENGTHENING AND SUSTAINING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN VERMONT

A Planning Guide for Communities

Introduction	2
Common Setting for Engagement	3
What is Engagement?	4
Why Does Good Engagement Matter?	6
When is Engagement Really Important?.	7
Types of Engagement: Conventional, Thick and Thin.	8
Taking Stock of How Engagement Happens in Your Community	9
Building Blocks for Stronger Systems of Engagement	11
Tools and Structures to Consider	13
Appendix: Public Engagement Tactics and Goals	17

INTRODUCTION

On all kinds of issues, people want more choices, more information and more of a say. This is true in many places across our country, and it certainly seems to be true in Vermont. Whether the topic is how schools should work or what should be in the local budget, Vermonters want their voices to be heard. And residents have a lot to contribute, not only with their input and ideas but with their volunteer time and willingness to work together to solve problems. In a variety of ways, people want to be engaged.

Vermont has a long history of public engagement. For one thing, Vermont towns have been holding town and school meetings for hundreds of years. Vermonters also engage in ways that are less formal but equally significant: working with teachers to help their kids, volunteering on projects to improve their communities, and more recently, connecting online with neighbors in order to share ideas and address local problems. This long tradition of engagement gives the state a leg up on other places: while local democracy in Vermont, as in most places, has room for improvement, Vermonters aren't starting from scratch.

But while Vermonters may feel that they want to engage, it is also clear that many of the conventional opportunities for engagement aren't working so well. In fact, many people are highly frustrated with the kinds of engagement they have experienced. Residents sometimes feel like public officials or school administrators have made all the key decisions before the engagement even begins. Meanwhile, people who work in government or the schools are often frustrated that only a few people show up to public meetings—and the people who do show up are mainly there to complain. Even the parent-teacher conference, one of the most common examples of engagement in the education system, sometimes seems like a waste of time: parents and teachers alike often say that these meetings are too short and too unfocused to result in any real cooperation to help the student. Overall, participation in these traditional engagement opportunities has been declining for years.

Is This Guide for Schools? Local Governments? Both?

This is a guide for all Vermonters—including people working in school systems or local governments, elected officials and all Vermont residents who want to be meaningfully engaged in the public life of their communities.

In this changing environment, Vermonters should take time to think through what kinds of engagement we want today. What kinds of meetings, events or online connections might be attractive to residents, and help make Vermont communities more informed, empowered and connected?

Two recent pieces of legislation have made this question even more timely:

- Act 77, passed in 2013, requires all schools to adopt practices of student-centered learning. Student-centered learning works best when a wide variety of people and organizations are engaged in helping students.
- Act 46, passed in 2015, requires Vermont communities to make big decisions about school district consolidation, affecting not only educators, parents and students, but every taxpayer.

The major decisions and changes prompted by both laws are best made when a wide variety of people and organizations are engaged in the process.

This guide is intended to help Vermonters decide what kinds of engagement we want. It is also designed to help Vermonters plan for an overall system for engagement that features those opportunities—and is supported by local governments, school systems, businesses, faith communities, other organizations and by citizens themselves.

WHAT IS ENGAGEMENT?

Engagement can mean many different things. Most people use the word to describe situations where people are coming together to make a decision or solve a problem. Usually, but not always, they are thinking of situations where people who represent government, the schools or some other institution are at the center of the process.

But those aren't the only kinds of engagement. There can also be engagement between teachers and students, parents and other family members. Engagement can also be between neighbors working to sustain a volunteer fire department, make decisions about land use or plan a town barbecue.

Some of the most common settings for engagement are:

- Town meetings and school meetings.
- Front Porch Forums and other online spaces, like email listservs or Facebook group pages.
- Meetings of Parent-Teacher Associations and other parent groups.
- Town or city commissions or advisory boards set up to make decisions about planning and zoning, public lands or other issues
- Parent-teacher conferences or, increasingly, parent-teacher-student conferences.
- One-on-one interactions with government or school staff.
- Discussions in the community—in diners, general stores and other places people gather.



Discussions in the community



Town meeting and school meeting



Parent-teacher organization



One-on-one



Parent-teacher conference



Planning commission



Local online networks

COMMON SETTINGS FOR ENGAGEMENT

The most productive, intensive kinds of engagement allow people to share hopes and concerns, learn from each other and make decisions or recommendations. In some cases, people also come up with new ideas and work together to implement them.

Engagement Works Best When It Is:

Interactive	Everyone has a chance to contribute.
Timely	It happens at a point when people can have an influence on important decisions.
Inclusive	It brings together a wide range of people, including people who may have been excluded or not engaged before.
Authentic	People value one another's input and know the process will have meaningful results.
Transparent	It is open, honest and understandable.
Informed	Everyone has access to the knowledge and data they need, and there is balanced information describing the pros and cons of different options.
Accessible	The barriers to participation, including location, time, language and other factors that might deter people, are as low as possible.
Responsive	What people say is documented and decision-makers report back to participants on the outcomes of engagement.
Network-building	Engagement helps to build relationships and networks over the long term.
Evaluated	People are able to track and measure how engagement is working.

It may be a mistake, however, to expect every single engagement opportunity—every meeting, every online discussion, every parent-teacher conference—to fit all of the principles listed above. The entire list may be necessary for the most intensive, high-stakes engagement processes, but not for others. Instead, use this list to take stock of all the different kinds of engagement happening in your community: the whole system of engagement. As a whole, does the system reflect these principles?

WHY DOES GOOD ENGAGEMENT MATTER?

Because unproductive engagement is damaging. In most conventional public meetings, such as public forums and hearings, the only real interaction between citizens and officials is the opportunity for residents to ask questions or make statements. These kinds of meetings are frustrating to citizens, officials and staff, and they have been shown to decrease trust in government. When citizens do not trust governments or school systems, they are less likely to volunteer and less likely to support those institutions financially.

Because productive engagement results in better policies. When people come together in well-structured processes, where they can talk in small groups about what they have learned and what they want to recommend, the resulting policies and plans are smarter, more broadly supported and better reflect what citizens want. Communities can avoid the confusion, misinformation and anger that come from the “decide and defend” approach to making public decisions.

Because productive engagement strengthens citizenship. When engagement goes well, it has positive effects on people. Participants become more knowledgeable about issues, they sometimes change their opinions and they become more likely to vote and volunteer.

Because productive engagement strengthens our communities. When the whole system of community engagement is working well, there are a number of benefits:

- **Improved collaboration.** When there are stronger connections between people and groups in the community, they are more likely to work together to solve problems. This is one reason why community engagement is important to student-centered learning, which requires that students have access to internships, apprenticeships and other opportunities to learn on the job or in the community. When community members feel invested in schools and schools are strongly connected to businesses and other organizations, high-quality, meaningful learning opportunities are more likely to happen.
- **Stronger social networks.** When people interact with one another on a regular basis, over a long period of time, this seems to have beneficial impacts on the community as a whole. One term that describes the networks that get built through this interaction is “social capital.” Communities with stronger networks and higher social capital have higher rates of economic growth, lower levels of unemployment and lower crime rates. Residents are physically healthier and the communities are more resilient and better able to deal with natural disasters and other crises.

-
- **Improved student achievement and well-being.** We know that when parents, students and other family members are fully engaged in student learning, this results in higher test scores, lower dropout rates, safer schools and many other positive impacts on student achievement and well-being. Clearly, these outcomes benefit not only students and their families, but society as a whole.

Engagement is a Two-way Street

One of the most common mistakes people make is to assume that engagement is all about speaking and not about listening. Engagement opportunities are not just for officials to inform or “educate” citizens, or for citizens to instruct or complain to officials. A good system for engagement should help everyone become more informed, educated and ready to collaborate.

WHEN IS ENGAGEMENT REALLY IMPORTANT?

Ideally, public engagement is always ongoing through a variety of structures and avenues. However, there are some situations that call for more intensive, targeted engagement efforts.

Engagement is particularly important if:

The issue or decision is particularly complex or controversial. Successful engagement will help the community understand issues better, help defuse tensions and make it more likely that people can work together.

The issue or decision will impact a large group of people. A stakeholder is anyone who can affect, or who will be affected by, your project. More intensive, interactive types of engagement are helpful if you are still in the process of defining the stakeholder group or if you know there are many different kinds of stakeholders.

Some of the stakeholders are much more powerful than others. Effective engagement can help build trust and with effort can invite in stakeholders who have felt powerless to get involved.

Adapted from “Community Engagement: Guidelines for Excellence,” North American Association for Environmental Education, https://naaee.org/sites/default/files/community_engagement_-_guidelines_for_excellence.pdf

TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT:

Conventional, Thick and Thin

There are three kinds of engagement happening in most communities today. “Conventional” engagement is by far the most common type, but “thick” and “thin” engagement are both on the rise.



Conventional engagement is what happens in most public meetings today. Citizens and officials are separated from one another, there are no breakouts or small-group discussions and citizens have brief opportunities, typically limited to two or three minutes, to address the whole group.



Thick engagement is more intensive, informed and deliberative. Most of the action happens in small-group discussion. Organizers assemble large and diverse numbers of people; give participants chances to share their experiences; present them with a range of views or policy options; and encourage action and change at multiple levels.



Thin engagement is faster, easier and more convenient. It includes a range of activities that allow people to express their opinions, make choices or affiliate themselves with a particular group or cause. It is less likely to build personal or community connections. One way of summarizing the difference is to say that thick engagement empowers small groups and thin engagement empowers individuals.

Thick participation opportunities are more likely to be face-to-face and thin ones are more likely to happen online. However, many thick processes include both online and face-to-face elements, and some examples of thin participation, such as signing a petition, certainly existed long before the internet.

Thick, thin and conventional engagement have different strengths and limitations, and they complement each other well. All of them could be part of an effective “multichannel” system for engagement.

Unfortunately, most communities do not treat engagement as a regular, sustained part of community life. People think of it mainly as a way to make big decisions and big plans—and because those things are usually done in conventional ways, residents often do not think positively about engagement. Taking stock of how engagement is working—the channels you have and the ones you want—can be helpful for creating a better system of engagement.



Thick



Thin



Conventional



Thick



Thin



TAKING STOCK OF HOW ENGAGEMENT HAPPENS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Any attempt to improve public engagement in a community should begin with some questions on how engagement is working today. Much of the engagement focuses either on school issues or on local government issues. Here are some questions to consider in each of those areas.

(The list on p. 5 of criteria for productive engagement may be helpful for thinking about these questions.)

Engagement in Schools and Education Issues

1. What kinds of engagement opportunities are available for students, families and other residents in the school district? Are they thick or thin? (or a combination of both?)
2. Where do people engage with each other outside the official engagement opportunities—in diners, at the general store or in other places? How are those conversations different?
3. How effective are the public meetings and other official interactions between citizens and district leaders, such as the superintendent and school board? What is working well? What isn't working well?
4. How effective are the public meetings and other official interactions between citizens and school leaders such as the principal? What is working well? What isn't working well?
5. Do the people who are getting engaged reflect and represent the full diversity of the parents or community?
6. How well are parent-teacher associations, school councils and other parent groups working?
7. Are people engaging on school and education issues online? If so, how well is that working?
8. What are some ideas for improving engagement in schools and education? How can you help?

Engagement in Local Government Issues

1. What kinds of engagement opportunities are available for residents in planning and zoning processes?
2. Where do people engage with each other outside the official engagement opportunities—in diners, at the general store or in other places? How are those conversations different?
3. How effective are the official public meetings on land use decisions and other public issues?
4. What kinds of engagement opportunities are available for voters in budgeting processes?
5. Do the people who are getting engaged reflect and represent the full diversity of the people affected?
6. How well are neighborhood associations, homeowners' associations and other grassroots groups working?
7. Are people engaging on local government issues online? If so, how well is that working?
8. What are some ideas for improving engagement in local government? How can you help?

How is Engagement Working?

More questions:

- Are there segments of the community that have historically been ignored or excluded?
- How effective is the community in engaging the full range of residents, including newcomers, long-time residents, immigrants, seniors, young people, young families, people of all income levels and business owners?
- How well are young leaders, such as teens and 20-somethings, supported, and is their potential being tapped effectively?
- Is school and government data available online or at a public location and how effectively does it complement and inform public engagement?
- How much is the school system spending—in money and/or in staff time—on public engagement annually? How much is local government spending?
- How are engagement activities and initiatives evaluated and assessed?
- What are the legal mandates and restrictions on public engagement? (See <http://bit.ly/ceillegal> for more on legal frameworks for engagement.)
- Do school and local government staff have the skills, cultural awareness and organizational support to work productively with citizens?

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR STRONGER SYSTEMS OF ENGAGEMENT

What kinds of engagement activities do Vermonters want? Where should those activities take place? How could leaders help initiate and/or support the activities?

Summarized in the chart below are six overarching categories of engagement, grouped with some activities or tools that can help make them successful. All six of these building blocks are important! You should consider ways to support each of them:

Enabling Family Decision Making

- Student-led parent-teacher conferences
- Student-centered learning teams
- Online tools
- Opportunities to interact with government and school officials around questions and concerns

Enabling Community Decision Making

- More participatory public meetings (school boards, planning commissions, budgeting)
- Participatory Budgeting
- More participatory homeowners associations, PTAs and other grassroots groups
- Youth councils
- Advisory committees that engage residents

Encouraging Public Work

- Large-scale volunteering activities
- Coordination among organizations and groups that recruit and support volunteers
- Crowdfunding and mini-grant programs
- Apps and platforms for teams and tasks

Gathering Input and Data

- Crowdsourcing exercises
- Apps for identifying problems with physical infrastructure
- Surveys, polls, interviews and focus groups

Discussing and Connecting

- Regular social events
- Local online forums, including social media
- Welcoming public spaces

Disseminating Information

- School and local government websites
- Dashboards and apps for school and government data
- Serious games
- Partnering with media organizations
- Interactive maps

Each of the six categories may be necessary, at least to some extent, for any good system of engagement. At first glance, this might seem overwhelming. However, many of the settings and tools for these activities already exist, at least to some degree, in every community. Look at the chart on the previous page and ask:

- Are these the right categories to be thinking about? Are there others?
- What kinds of activities are already working well in each category?

Some groups, like commissions, parent groups, homeowners' associations and local online forums, are central and versatile—they could potentially play a vital role in all six categories. But for most of the leaders in charge of these existing groups, supporting engagement more effectively will require changes—sometimes significant ones—in the way they operate and how they think about engagement.

TOOLS AND STRUCTURES TO CONSIDER

Once you have a vision for what kind of engagement system you want, the next step is to think about the specific tools, strategies and structures you could use to make that vision a reality.

Here are some possibilities:

1. Guidelines for more productive public meetings.

Official public meetings of school boards, select boards and other public bodies can work more smoothly when they use strategies to make those meetings more participatory, transparent and effective. Public officials can:

- Adopt a small-group format for some topics. Depending on state and local law, small-group formats can be used as part of the main meeting or as a separate session before or after the formal proceedings. Public officials can take part or simply observe, though active participation is usually more valuable.
 - Hold the meetings in places other than a town hall. Allow different community groups and institutions to host these meetings and invite them to recruit attendees from their networks.
 - Televisе or live-stream the meetings and allow people to participate online or by phone. Televised community conversations can reach a broad audience and participation can be increased by allowing questions, comments or poll responses to be given by phone, social media or text message. Crowdsourcing techniques can be used to prioritize questions and comments.
 - Change the room layout. Rather than classroom-style with officials facing participants, consider a circle of chairs, small groups at tables or seating set up in a chevron-shape so more people can see each other. Changing the physical setup so that public officials are not removed from citizens sends an important signal about the value of public participation.
- Use a moderator or facilitator. A skilled moderator who is trusted and respected by all parties can facilitate and improve the interactions between board or council members and the public by ensuring that conflicts are addressed productively and all voices are heard.
 - Frame issues broadly and provide balanced information. Policy decisions are often framed in very narrow terms, without an adequate description of the data, assumptions and broad goals that brought the public body to the particular decision. Without this background information, citizens (and sometimes public officials and employees) can lose sight of what is being decided and why. Make this information available online and at the meeting.
 - Be clear with yourself and with participants about the purpose of engagement, and match the right tool to the purpose. Adopt a protocol or framework (see #4, on next page) that helps public officials decide when an issue requires a broader, more intensive, more participatory process before a final decision is made. If this framework is itself produced through some sort of public participation process, it will help set clearer expectations for how people will be involved in governance.
 - Follow up and report back. Public boards and councils should always report on how citizen input was used, the reasons behind officials' decisions and the ways that people can get involved in the issue in the future. Reporting back should be done in a range of ways, including social media, other online tools and face-to-face meetings.

2. An engagement committee or commission. A local engagement commission or advisory board can help advise public institutions on the design, implementation and evaluation of public engagement. The charter for this body could direct it to accomplish one or more of the following responsibilities:

- Develop and propose a multi-year plan to guide public engagement activities, programs and policies.
- Develop guidelines and policy recommendations for public institutions.
- Provide advice and recommendations regarding the implementation of engagement guidelines and practices.
- Review process evaluation results to provide advice and recommendations regarding continuous improvement of engagement policies and practices.
- Provide an annual report regarding the status of public engagement in the community.

3. Resources for revitalizing grassroots groups and informing community conversations.

There are many groups, clubs and organizations—and even just places people gather, like diners, bars and general stores—that have great potential as part of the ground floor of local democracy. In some places there are neighborhood, homeowners and parent-teacher associations. However, these groups face several difficulties that can limit their ability to effectively impact schools and communities. First, some of these groups follow conventional engagement formats such as Robert’s Rules of Order, which can limit dialogue and creativity. Second, recruitment efforts are often minimal, which means the usual suspects turn out again and again, and meetings lack diversity and a critical mass. Participants are seldom provided with opportunities to share information and stories, let alone to make choices or take action. These groups can be revitalized in several ways:

- Training programs that provide recruitment, facilitation and organizational skills.
- How-to materials that reinforce those skills.
- Policies that delineate the role(s) of these groups in policymaking—on what kinds of issues and decisions will the association be asked to advise the school board, town council and other elected and appointed officials? What will the process be for those interactions? How will their opinions be incorporated into final decisions?
- New meeting formats that are more social, child-friendly and fun.

4. A public engagement protocol to help public officials and employees decide what kinds of decisions and situations warrant citizen involvement, what level or kind of engagement would be appropriate and what they might accomplish by engaging. The protocol should describe potential engagement goals and then select the appropriate actions to meet their goals. Examples of possible engagement goals include:

- Informing the public.
- Gathering public input, feedback and preferences.
- Helping citizens generate new ideas.
- Supporting volunteerism and citizen-driven problem solving.
- Making a policy decision.
- Developing a budget or a plan.

In addition to helping officials and employees set their engagement goals, the protocol should help them understand the goals that residents might bring to the process, and how—by adapting the process and/or by clarifying expectations—they can ensure that the process or projects meets the goals of both “engagers” and “engaged.” See Appendix for a chart that suggests engagement tactics to meet each goal.

5. Guidelines for working with online forums.

School groups, homeowners associations and other groups are more likely to succeed if they work with, or establish, local online forums that connect residents who live in the same area or parents whose children attend the same school. These forums have spread dramatically in the last ten years, starting with simple listservs, then Facebook groups, then slightly more sophisticated platforms (such as Front Porch Forum and NextDoor). They combine the convenience of the internet with the power of local face-to-face relationships. Members of these online forums may talk about what the school board did, or what the mayor said, but they also ask questions like “Who has a plumber they can recommend?” or “Has anyone seen my lost cat?” People stay involved in these virtual spaces for many reasons: they are convenient, they allow for interaction, they deepen and complement face-to-face relationships, they are adaptable by the participants and they give people a powerful sense of membership. However, these simple formats are not designed for deliberation. In fact, Front Porch Forum moderators occasionally have to shut off discussion threads that become too heated, suggesting that interested participants call a meeting. As with face-to-face associations, these forums are more likely to thrive if all users understand basic ground rules, and if the people organizing them have access to training, how-to materials, and policies that define the relationship between the forum and the official decision-makers.

6. Resources for school redesign and student-centered learning. To fulfill the potential of student-centered learning, the system of engagement should include activities and structures that work inside schools. UP for Learning has been working with high school youth-adult teams to help them build public understanding and support for student-centered learning since the inception of Act 77. They have a host of tools and dialogue strategies to help participants understand the basics of both flexible pathways and proficiency-based learning. They also have a variety of activities to explore both why schools are changing, and what a redesigned school looks and sounds like. These can be found on their website at www.upforlearning.org/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign. (See “Shaping Our Future Together” link from this page).

7. A public participation ordinance that defines engagement, describes the principles that make it productive and meaningful, and gives public officials and staff the backing to try new forms of engagement that live up to those principles. A model ordinance (<http://bit.ly/mpplegal>) with these components was developed by a coalition that included representatives of the National League of Cities, American Bar Association, International City/County Management Association, International Municipal Lawyers Association and Deliberative Democracy Consortium. The ordinance must be in accordance with state open meetings laws; however, it can include more specific guidelines in areas where open meeting laws are hard to interpret. For instance, since most open meetings laws predate widespread Internet use, applying them to situations in online engagement is difficult. A local ordinance could include language that allows public officials to communicate with constituents, and with one another, in an online forum as long as that communication is documented and immediately open to the public. Many online forums and some social media platforms already have that kind of instantaneous, verbatim transparency built into the way they operate; because they make this information so accessible and searchable, they may already be more transparent than conventional public meetings. Ordinances can also allow for small-group discussion as part of public meetings (such as this example: <http://bit.ly/calabasas1>).

8. A public engagement resolution that school and government officials can use to declare their commitment to productive public participation. These kinds of declarations can help selectboards, school boards, planning commissions and other official entities show that they value the roles that citizens can play in public life. In most cases, these are non-binding statements. However, especially if they are accompanied by some of the other measures on this list, they can be effective for showing that officials value and expect productive contributions by citizens to local governance.

9. Job descriptions for professionals supporting engagement. Many communities have people working in local governments or school systems with job titles that include terms like “public engagement” or “citizen involvement.” In many institutions, those sorts of terms are listed under the broad heading of “communications.” But because engagement is usually so ill-defined, and because the profession of public engagement practice is so underdeveloped, the people serving in those roles are often unaware of the kinds of ideas and processes described in this document. Furthermore:

- Designating a single public employee or department as the center for engagement may create bottlenecks and give the impression that all other public employees are free from having to interact with citizens. Some of the best examples of engaged local governments (such as this small town in Spain: <http://bit.ly/guardspain>) have been able to create connections between citizens and a wide variety of city staff.
- Given that a system for engagement is more likely to be successful if it is supported by a set of organizations rather than one institution, it may be more beneficial for engagement staffers to be housed outside government as part of a cross-sector coalition.

Job descriptions that describe the skills necessary to organize and support engagement and that establish performance benchmarks to be used in professional development and promotion, can be beneficial no matter which organization is hiring engagement staff. One example is the job description created by the City of Santa Rosa, California (<http://bit.ly/santarose>).

10. A map of civic assets can help communities assess their current civic infrastructure and envision better systems for engagement. It is also an area where new technologies can be particularly beneficial. Interactive, “wiki” maps can encompass a wide range of local information, including opportunities for engagement. They can allow users to: map organizations and institutions, such as nonprofits, schools or congregations, in relationship to needs in the community; overlay community indicators such as

unemployment rates, housing costs, health insurance, income and poverty; assemble a centralized directory of services and volunteer opportunities; map specific problems like potholes or playgrounds that require maintenance; view publicly available financial information on community organizations; map schools and youth programs; and track quantifiable program outcome indicators, such as graduation rates or the number of families served; and connect with a national clearinghouse of resources. One example is LocalWiki; the version of the technology used in Saranac Lake, New York (<http://bit.ly/saranaclake>) might be the most appropriate model for Vermont communities. In addition to their capacity for illustrating civic infrastructure, the creation of these maps—since they invite contributions and edits from citizens—can in themselves be an effective form of public engagement.

11. An annual Participatory Budgeting process.

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a type of engagement in which citizens decide together how to spend public money from a special fund. The process typically begins in the fall with a forum at which people generate project ideas. Then people form teams to research and refine the most promising ideas, often working with public officials, staff and experts. In the spring there is an idea fair where the teams promote their ideas, followed by a community-wide vote on how the money should be allocated among the projects. See www.participatory-budgeting.org for more details.

12. Citizen advisory boards that engage, rather than simply represent.

Citizen advisory bodies (CABs) include advisory boards, committees and commissions. Most CABs work in purely representative ways: members make decisions based on what they think is right and what they think citizens want, rather than engaging citizens directly. With the aid of training, how-to resources and changes in their charters, CABs could engage citizens directly through thick and thin forms of engagement. With this shift, they could strengthen the accountability of officials while also creating responsive, two-way communication between government institutions and the community.

APPENDIX

Public Engagement Tactics and Goals

TACTICS	GOALS					
	Inform the Public	Gather Input, Feedback & Preferences	Generate New Ideas & Info	Support Volunteerism & Problem-solving	Make a Public Decision	Create a Plan or Budget
Surveys and Polls		YES			YES with other tactics	YES with other tactics
Focus Groups		YES			YES with other tactics	YES with other tactics
Online Problem— Reporting Platforms (such as www.seeclickfix.com)			YES	YES with other tactics		YES with other tactics
Idea Contests			YES	YES		YES with other tactics
Crowdfunding and Minigrants (such as www.ioby.org)			YES	YES		YES with other tactics
Serious Games	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES with other tactics	YES with other tactics
Asset Mapping	YES		YES	YES	YES with other tactics	YES with other tactics
Local Online Networks	YES	YES	YES with other tactics	YES	YES with other tactics	YES with other tactics
Charrettes and other Collaborative Planning Processes (see www.pps.org)			YES	YES		YES
Participatory Budgeting (see www.participatorybudgeting.org)	YES		YES	YES	YES with other tactics	YES
Study Circles and Deliberative Forums (see www.everyday-democracy.org)	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Adapted from Public Participation for 21st Century Democracy, Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015.



Public Agenda helps build a democracy that works for everyone. By elevating a diversity of voices, forging common ground, and improving dialogue and collaboration among leaders and communities, Public Agenda fuels progress on critical issues, including education, health care and community engagement. Founded in 1975, Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in New York City.

Find Public Agenda online at PublicAgenda.org, on Facebook at facebook.com/PublicAgenda and on Twitter at [@PublicAgenda](https://twitter.com/PublicAgenda).

Contact: PE@publicagenda.org • tel: 212.686.6610

May 22, 2026

Harmony Cism
Administrative Officer & Planning Coordinator
Town of Westford
1713 VT Rte. 128, Westford, VT 05494

RE: CCRPC FY27 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

Dear Harmony,

Thank you for your project request as part of the CCRPC's FY27 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) development process. The approved Fiscal Year 2027 UPWP which details the recommended projects, initiatives and budget amounts, is available here:
<https://www.ccrpcvt.org/about-us/commission/annual-work-plan-budget-finances/>

Below is a summary status of your request:

Project Name	Brief Description	Total Budget	Recommendation
Brookside Road Path Study	This project will update a 2003 scoping study for a pedestrian pathway on Brookside Road.	\$35,000	Approval of \$35,000 budget which includes a \$7,000 local match.
Town Center Historic 1705 Property Planning	This project will support Phase 1 of a multi-year effort to evaluate future uses of a recently acquired historic property in its town center.	\$21,000	CCRPC staff will provide assistance as a fee for service project for \$21,000 from the town.
Westford Grant Writing Assistance	This project will support grant research and application development to address staffing limitations in pursuing funding for planning, infrastructure, and community needs.	\$5,600	CCRPC staff will provide assistance as a fee for service project for \$5,600 from the town.

The CCRPC Board warned a public hearing for May 20, at which time they voted to approve the Fiscal Year 2027 UPWP and Budget, effective July 1, 2026.

Thank you for your ongoing partnership, and for participating in this process. Please let me know if you have any comments or concerns.

Sincerely,



Charlie Baker
Executive Director

PROJECT APPLICATION FORM FY2027 Unified Planning Work Program

Applications should be **no longer than 6 pages** – this does not include any maps or letters of support for the project(s). Please provide documentation from your governing body/board to confirm that you have the local funding and staff availability to work on the proposed projects.

A Project Application Form must be submitted for each project. If you are submitting more than one application, please show the priority order of each project. There are separate forms to request transportation counts and infrastructure inventories. The deadline for submissions is Friday, January 23, 2026. Please email completed forms in Word format to mdistel@ccrpcvt.org. All forms can be found on the CCRPC website: <https://www.ccrpcvt.org/about-us/commission/annual-work-plan-budget-finances/>.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Submitted by (Name, Title): Harmony Cism, Administrative Officer & Planning Coordinator
Municipality/Agency/Organization: Town of Westford
Telephone: (802) 878-4587
Email: zoning_admin@westfordvt.us

2. PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title: Town Center Historic 1705 Property – Public Outreach and Planning (Phase 1)
Project Location: 1705 VT Route 128, Westford, Vermont
Project Description and Expected Outcomes (250 words max):

What issue or problem is proposed to be addressed? Please state whether this is a multi-year effort and identify each phase, and for which phase this application is requesting funding.

The Town of Westford recently acquired a historic property located in the heart of its town center. The Town seeks UPWP assistance to support Phase 1 of a multi-year planning effort to evaluate potential future uses of this municipally owned site. This initial phase will focus on information gathering and public outreach to inform subsequent planning and implementation efforts. The property presents known environmental and geological constraints, making early analysis and community engagement critical to identifying feasible and sustainable options.

The proposed Phase 1 project will include facilitated public outreach, stakeholder engagement, and coordination with municipal boards to identify community priorities and planning considerations related to the site. This effort will focus on aligning potential uses with documented municipal needs, adopted planning goals, and opportunities to support village center vitality and local economic resilience.

Specific Phase 1 outcomes include:

- Identification of municipal needs and planning priorities relevant to the site;
- Collection and evaluation of community input to inform realistic land use and development options; and

- Development of a shared, community-supported vision to guide future planning, investment, and implementation decisions for the property.

The results of this initial phase will provide a clear foundation for future planning, investment, and implementation decisions related to this significant community asset. The town seeks to engage residents in a robust public discussion to explore the possibilities the 1705 Property holds.

Westford requests CCRPC's assistance in providing staff expertise and technical support for public outreach to ensure the engagement process is effective, inclusive, and well-informed.

3. REGIONAL AND LOCAL BENEFITS (please keep your responses brief)

- Identify at least one of the CCRPC's top 10 actions or 8 ECOS strategies that this project will address (you can find them at http://www.ecosproject.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2018-ECOS-Plan-Summary_20180807_FINAL.pdf).

Reflective of the 2018 ECOS Vision Statement, Westford's acquisition of the 1705 property holds tremendous potential in furtherance of a healthy, inclusive, and prosperous community. It is essential that Westford successfully engage in outreach to the community to achieve the best understanding and integration of fundamental natural systems, social community benefits, enhancement of economic infrastructure, and controlled development. Any future use, projects, design, and development potential must be based upon the inclusivity of all populations.

This project aligns with multiple ECOS strategies identified by CCRPC, including **concentrating growth in town and village centers** by evaluating a key village property, **ensuring equity across planning processes and outcomes** through an inclusive engagement approach, and supporting **environmental stewardship** by evaluating public access to natural resources such as Brown's River. The project's community outreach process also contributes to building resident capacity and civic engagement.

- Explain how the need for this project is documented or identified. Is it a part of a local plan, or is it a newly identified need? Please provide details.

The need for this project is well documented in the Westford 2021 Town Plan, particularly in Section 1.4 – *Priorities*. The Town Plan identifies the following two implementation priorities, both of which are directly supported by this project.

1. **Town Center Area Vitality:** This project would support redevelopment of a key village property by assessing community needs and preferences and by evaluating potential improvements to the Town Office to enhance its usefulness and accessibility for residents.
2. **Natural Resource Conservation:** The Town-owned 1705 Property provides access to the Brown's River. With thoughtful planning and design, this project could evaluate opportunities for appropriate public access to the river while protecting natural resources.

In addition, this project would advance two *General Goals* of the Town Plan. The 1705 Property includes a historic residence, and the planning process would allow the community to determine whether the structure should be preserved, adaptively reused for a community purpose, or removed to make space for a new community use:

-
- **General Goal #2:** Improve a strong sense of community spirit to bolster volunteerism, citizen participation, cohesion among residents, and an overall sense of Westford as a unique and valuable town and encourage the development of spaces where connection can occur and relationships develop.
 - **General Goal #5:** Recognize the importance of our history and historic structures and support and encourage the preservation and protection of our historic and cultural resources.
 - Please describe the demographics of the project area, including historically excluded or underserved populations (e.g. age, race, income, ethnicity, language, etc.). Please be as specific to your community as possible. You can reference [CCRPC's Demographic Map Viewer](#) for census data on your community.

Westford is a small, rural community with limited racial and ethnic diversity and does not have a significant BIPOC population. According to census data referenced in the Westford 2021 Town Plan, approximately 2% of residents live below the federal poverty line. While income-based poverty is relatively low, Westford experiences other forms of exclusion common to rural towns.

Underserved populations in Westford include seniors, youth, lower-income households, residents with disabilities or mobility limitations, and residents without reliable transportation. The Town's dispersed settlement pattern and rural character can also limit access to public facilities and participation in civic life.

- Please describe how this project will benefit your community and different populations.

The project area has the potential to function as an accessible, inclusive community space. This project would evaluate opportunities to improve physical accessibility, universal design, and public access, while supporting community gathering and engagement for residents of all ages and abilities. The planning process would emphasize broad public participation to help ensure that future use of the site reflects the needs of the entire community.

- What potential unintended negative impacts could arise, which populations or neighborhoods might be most affected, and how will you minimize harm and ensure fair access to project benefits?

As a planning-level project, potential unintended negative impacts are limited and primarily related to access to and participation in the planning process. Populations that could be disproportionately affected include residents without reliable transportation, seniors, individuals with mobility limitations, lower-income households, and residents who do not regularly participate in municipal planning activities.

To minimize harm and ensure equitable access to project benefits, the Town hopes to implement inclusive public engagement strategies, including accessible meeting locations, remote participation options, and outreach through multiple communication channels. Engagement opportunities should be coordinated, where feasible, with existing community events and locations to reduce transportation barriers. Project recommendations should incorporate physical accessibility, universal design principles, and safe access considerations to support equitable use of the 1705 Property by residents of all ages, abilities, and income levels.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Please check CCRPC's 2014 (amended 2017) Public Participation Plan for resources:

https://www.ccrpcvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CCRPC_2014_PPP_Amended_2017.pdf

Does this project require any public engagement?

YES: X

NO:

For transportation technical assistance requests and projects that do not involve public engagement, please skip the questions below. Examples of these projects include but are not limited to technical assistance requests (speed studies, road safety audits, signal timings, etc.); water quality projects with transportation nexus; and stormwater and other data gathering for municipal capital planning purposes.

For projects that involve public outreach and engagement, please ensure that your budget and timeline include sufficient funds and staff/consultant time to support a meaningful and inclusive process. Please consider the following questions as you develop your budget and timeline. These questions will be revisited when the scope of work is developed.

- Who are the key partners and populations that should be involved in this project?
- What outreach and engagement tools and methods should be considered to ensure that all affected groups, including historically excluded or underserved populations, are informed and have meaningful opportunities to participate?
- Does public outreach for your project need to include translation/interpretation, facilitation, outreach materials, stipends, childcare, etc.? Did you budget for these services?
- How will your public engagement process build upon or be informed by past community engagement?

Key partners for this project will include the Planning Commission, Selectboard, Town staff, and Westford residents, with particular attention to engaging seniors, families with children, youth, residents with mobility or transportation limitations, and individuals who do not regularly participate in municipal planning processes. Public outreach will be supported by Town staff and a CCRPC consultant and would use engagement methods including facilitated public meetings, surveys, and online and print outreach materials.

To reduce participation barriers, the project should incorporate child-friendly engagement strategies, such as providing childcare at in-person meetings where feasible and/or designing outreach activities that allow children to attend and participate alongside caregivers. The budget and timeline will include sufficient consultant and staff time for meeting facilitation, preparation of accessible outreach materials, and flexible participation options, including remote engagement. Based on Westford's demographics, translation or interpretation services are not anticipated at this time, but outreach methods will remain adaptable as needed.

The public engagement approach will build upon community input gathered through the Westford 2021 Town Plan and related municipal planning efforts, while providing targeted opportunities for discussion focused on the future use of the 1705 Property.

5. PROJECT COSTS & MATCH REQUIREMENT

Please see the **FY27 UPWP PROGRAM SUMMARY** and the **Technical Assistance and GIS Pricing Policy** for a description of match requirements and check below to get an idea of which applies to your proposal. If matching funds are required, **municipalities** should attach a letter of support from their governing body to show that they have the required local match and staff availability. **Non-municipal transportation partners** should include a letter from their Board or other governing body that shows their support and commitment to providing the matching funds.

- **Transportation-Related Projects (Federal Transportation Planning Funds)**

- Transportation and transportation-related land use and water quality projects – 20% non-federal cash match required.
- The CCRPC may waive the local match requirement for municipal projects deemed to be regionally significant.
- Transportation Technical Assistance – no local match required.
- Non-Municipal Transportation Partner – 20% non-federal cash match required.

For PL funded transportation projects requiring consultants or for non-municipal partners:

Total Project Cost Estimate (100%)	\$ N/A
Local Match Required (20% of Total Cost)	\$ N/A

Examples:

	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Total Project (100%)	\$25,000	\$50,000	\$75,000
Local Match (20%)	\$5,000	\$10,000	\$15,000

- **Land Use and Energy Implementation Assistance (ineligible for federal transportation funding)**

- Non-transportation projects (including municipal plans and bylaws) – This is a fee-for-service program. There is no fee for projects requiring less than 12 hours of CCRPC staff time. Projects over 12 hours will be charged a rate of \$70 per hour. We encourage municipalities to also seek [Municipal Planning Grants](#).
- Energy Implementation Assistance – this program provides CCRPC staff assistance to the municipality. Depending upon state grant requirements, this may have no local match requirement.

Is the project request for CCRPC staff assistance only? (Yes/No)	YES
CCRPC staff hours requested:	300

For Non-Transportation Land Use Project Requests, please contact Taylor Newton (TNewton@ccrpcvt.org, (802) 846-4490 ext. 115 to discuss project and budget needs.

For Non-Transportation Water Quality Project Requests, please contact Dan Albrecht (dalbrecht@ccrpcvt.org, (802) 861-0133 to discuss project and budget needs.

6. GOVERNING BODY MEETING REQUIREMENT

All **municipal** applications (local or regional), including match amounts, must be presented to, and approved by the governing body at a warned public meeting by the end of March 2026. **Non-municipal transportation partners** are not required to have a public meeting, but their applications should be approved by their Board or similar governing body. If available, please provide documentation by the January 23, 2026, deadline. The governing body meeting requirement is not applicable for Transportation Technical Assistance projects.

PROJECT APPLICATION FORM FY2027 Unified Planning Work Program

Applications should be **no longer than 6 pages** – this does not include any maps or letters of support for the project(s). Please provide documentation from your governing body/board to confirm that you have the local funding and staff availability to work on the proposed projects.

A Project Application Form must be submitted for each project. If you are submitting more than one application, please show the priority order of each project. There are separate forms to request transportation counts and infrastructure inventories. The deadline for submissions is Friday, January 23, 2026. Please email completed forms in Word format to mdistel@ccrpcvt.org. All forms can be found on the CCRPC website: <https://www.ccrpcvt.org/about-us/commission/annual-work-plan-budget-finances/>.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Submitted by (Name, Title): Harmony Cism, Administrative Officer & Planning Coordinator
Municipality/Agency/Organization: Town of Westford
Telephone: (802) 878-4587
Email: zoning_admin@westfordvt.us

2. PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title: FY27 Municipal Grant Writing Assistance

Project Location: Town of Westford

Project Description and Expected Outcomes (250 words max):

What issue or problem is proposed to be addressed? Please state whether this is a multi-year effort and identify each phase, and for which phase this application is requesting funding.

The Town of Westford seeks CCRPC assistance to support municipal grant research, application development, and submission during FY27. Westford has limited staff capacity to monitor funding opportunities and prepare competitive grant applications, despite having multiple identified needs related to planning implementation, community facilities, infrastructure, transportation, and public engagement.

This project is a one-year request for targeted, on-call grant writing support. Assistance would include researching relevant state and federal grant opportunities; drafting and refining grant narratives, budgets, and required attachments; and coordinating with town staff and boards to ensure applications are complete, accurate, and aligned with municipal priorities and adopted plans

Expected outcomes include the submission of multiple high-quality grant applications during FY27, increased competitiveness for external funding, and reduced administrative burden on town staff and volunteers. While this application is limited to FY27, the assistance will help position the Town to better pursue similar funding opportunities in future years.

3. REGIONAL AND LOCAL BENEFITS (please keep your responses brief)

- Identify at least one of the CCRPC's top 10 actions or 8 ECOS strategies that this project will address (you can find them at http://www.ecosproject.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2018-ECOS-Plan-Summary_20180807_FINAL.pdf).

Grant writing assistance would support ECOS actions focused on building municipal capacity to implement adopted plans and policies. This would enable the Town of Westford to pursue external funding needed to advance priority planning, infrastructure, and community projects identified in local and regional plans.

- Explain how the need for this project is documented or identified. Is it a part of a local plan, or is it a newly identified need? Please provide details.

The need for grant writing assistance is documented through the Town of Westford's adopted plans and the priorities identified by the Selectboard and other municipal boards, which highlight multiple projects that require external funding to advance. While the Town has made progress in adopting and updating plans, bylaws, and policies, implementation of those priorities is often constrained by limited staff capacity and local financial resources. At the same time, state and federal grant programs have become increasingly competitive and administratively complex, requiring significant time to identify appropriate opportunities and prepare complete, high-quality applications. As a small municipality without dedicated grant writing staff, Westford relies on existing staff and volunteers to absorb these responsibilities in addition to their regular duties. This project responds to an ongoing and clearly identified need to improve the Town's ability to pursue outside funding in order to implement adopted plans and advance municipal priorities in a timely and effective manner.

- Please describe the demographics of the project area, including historically excluded or underserved populations (e.g. age, race, income, ethnicity, language, etc.). Please be as specific to your community as possible. You can reference [CCRPC's Demographic Map Viewer](#) for census data on your community.

The project area is the Town of Westford as a whole. Westford is a small, predominantly rural community with a mix of households, including families with children, older adults, and residents with varying income levels. As is typical of small rural towns, access to resources, services, and funding opportunities can be limited, particularly for lower-income households, older residents, and those with limited mobility or transportation options.

- Please describe how this project will benefit your community and different populations.

Because this project would support the Town's ability to pursue grant funding for a range of municipal priorities, the benefits of the work are intended to reach the community broadly, including populations that may otherwise face barriers to access or participation in municipal improvements and programs. Improved access to grant funding can support investments in community facilities, infrastructure, planning implementation, and public programs that benefit residents of all ages and income levels.

- What potential unintended negative impacts could arise, which populations or neighborhoods might be most affected, and how will you minimize harm and ensure fair access to project benefits?

There are no anticipated unintended negative impacts associated with this request. The work is intended to support equitable access to future funding opportunities and municipal improvements, and no populations are expected to be disproportionately affected.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Please check CCRPC's 2014 (amended 2017) Public Participation Plan for resources:

https://www.ccrpcvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CCRPC_2014_PPP_Amended_2017.pdf

Does this project require any public engagement? YES: **NO: X**

For transportation technical assistance requests and projects that do not involve public engagement, please skip the questions below. Examples of these projects include but are not limited to technical assistance requests (speed studies, road safety audits, signal timings, etc.); water quality projects with transportation nexus; and stormwater and other data gathering for municipal capital planning purposes.

For projects that involve public outreach and engagement, please ensure that your budget and timeline include sufficient funds and staff/consultant time to support a meaningful and inclusive process. Please consider the following questions as you develop your budget and timeline. These questions will be revisited when the scope of work is developed.

- Who are the key partners and populations that should be involved in this project?
- What outreach and engagement tools and methods should be considered to ensure that all affected groups, including historically excluded or underserved populations, are informed and have meaningful opportunities to participate?
- Does public outreach for your project need to include translation/interpretation, facilitation, outreach materials, stipends, childcare, etc.? Did you budget for these services?
- How will your public engagement process build upon or be informed by past community engagement?

5. PROJECT COSTS & MATCH REQUIREMENT

Please see the **FY27 UPWP PROGRAM SUMMARY** and the **Technical Assistance and GIS Pricing Policy** for a description of match requirements and check below to get an idea of which applies to your proposal. If matching funds are required, **municipalities** should attach a letter of support from their governing body to show that they have the required local match and staff availability. **Non-municipal transportation partners** should include a letter from their Board or other governing body that shows their support and commitment to providing the matching funds.

- **Transportation-Related Projects (Federal Transportation Planning Funds)**
 - Transportation and transportation-related land use and water quality projects – 20% non-federal cash match required.
 - The CCRPC may waive the local match requirement for municipal projects deemed to be

regionally significant.

- Transportation Technical Assistance – no local match required.
- Non-Municipal Transportation Partner – 20% non-federal cash match required.

For PL funded transportation projects requiring consultants or for non-municipal partners:

Total Project Cost Estimate (100%)	\$ N/A
Local Match Required (20% of Total Cost)	\$ N/A

Examples:

	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Total Project (100%)	\$25,000	\$50,000	\$75,000
Local Match (20%)	\$5,000	\$10,000	\$15,000

• **Land Use and Energy Implementation Assistance (ineligible for federal transportation funding)**

- Non-transportation projects (including municipal plans and bylaws) – This is a fee-for-service program. There is no fee for projects requiring less than 12 hours of CCRPC staff time. Projects over 12 hours will be charged a rate of \$70 per hour. We encourage municipalities to also seek [Municipal Planning Grants](#).
- Energy Implementation Assistance – this program provides CCRPC staff assistance to the municipality. Depending upon state grant requirements, this may have no local match requirement.

Is the project request for CCRPC staff assistance only? (Yes/No)	YES
CCRPC staff hours requested:	80

For Non-Transportation Land Use Project Requests, please contact Taylor Newton (TNewton@ccrpcvt.org, (802) 846-4490 ext. 115 to discuss project and budget needs.

For Non-Transportation Water Quality Project Requests, please contact Dan Albrecht (dalbrecht@ccrpcvt.org, (802) 861-0133 to discuss project and budget needs.

6. GOVERNING BODY MEETING REQUIREMENT

All **municipal** applications (local or regional), including match amounts, must be presented to, and approved by the governing body at a warned public meeting by the end of March 2026. **Non-municipal transportation partners** are not required to have a public meeting, but their applications should be approved by their Board or similar governing body. If available, please provide documentation by the January 23, 2026, deadline. The governing body meeting requirement is not applicable for Transportation Technical Assistance projects.

PROJECT APPLICATION FORM FY2027 Unified Planning Work Program

Applications should be **no longer than 6 pages** – this does not include any maps or letters of support for the project(s). Please provide documentation from your governing body/board to confirm that you have the local funding and staff availability to work on the proposed projects.

A Project Application Form must be submitted for each project. If you are submitting more than one application, please show the priority order of each project. There are separate forms to request transportation counts and infrastructure inventories. The deadline for submissions is Friday, January 23, 2026. Please email completed forms in Word format to mdistel@ccrpcvt.org. All forms can be found on the CCRPC website: <https://www.ccrpcvt.org/about-us/commission/annual-work-plan-budget-finances/>.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Submitted by (Name, Title): Harmony Cism, Administrative Officer & Planning Coordinator
Municipality/Agency/Organization: Town of Westford
Telephone: (802) 878-4587
Email: zoning_admin@westfordvt.us

2. PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title: Brookside Road Pathway

Project Location: This project would involve a segment of Brookside Road, beginning at its intersection with VT Route 128 at the Town Common, proceeding to the south approximately 0.7 miles where Brookside Road provides access to the Westford Elementary School.

Project Description and Expected Outcomes (250 words max):

What issue or problem is proposed to be addressed? Please state whether this is a multi-year effort and identify each phase, and for which phase this application is requesting funding.

The Town of Westford seeks assistance to re-scope a previously studied pathway project along a segment of Brookside Road. A scoping study completed in 2003 evaluated alternatives for providing pedestrian accommodations in the Town Center, including the initial segment of Brookside Road leading to the Westford School. Since that time, conditions, standards, and cost considerations have changed, and the earlier study no longer provides a reliable basis for future decision-making or implementation.

This project would update and refine the earlier work by focusing on the Brookside Road segment and developing a revised, concept-level understanding of feasible pedestrian pathway alternatives. The scope is expected to include collection and review of existing conditions data; evaluation of potential pathway alignments; development of updated, planning-level cost estimates; and consideration of potential implementation phasing. Assistance with this project would be provided by a transportation consultant. Project management would be provided by CCRPC in coordination with the Town.

The expected outcome is a clear, updated conceptual framework that reflects current conditions

and realistic implementation considerations. This re-scoping effort will help the Town better understand available options, support informed discussions among municipal boards and the community, and position the project for future funding or implementation decisions, without committing the Town to a specific design or construction timeline.

3. REGIONAL AND LOCAL BENEFITS (please keep your responses brief)

- Identify at least one of the CCRPC's top 10 actions or 8 ECOS strategies that this project will address (you can find them at http://www.ecosproject.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2018-ECOS-Plan-Summary_20180807_FINAL.pdf).

This project supports ECOS actions focused on improving pedestrian safety, access, and connectivity, and advancing implementation of active transportation priorities. Updating the School-to-Common pathway concept will help ensure that future investments are based on current conditions and realistic implementation considerations.

- Explain how the need for this project is documented or identified. Is it a part of a local plan, or is it a newly identified need? Please provide details.

The need for this project is documented by a 2003 scoping study that evaluated pedestrian alternatives along Brookside Road, including the segment connecting the village/common area to the school. While the earlier study provided valuable initial analysis, it is now more than twenty years old and reflects conditions, standards, and cost assumptions that are no longer current. The Town lacks an updated, reliable conceptual framework for this corridor that reflects existing roadway conditions, contemporary design approaches, and realistic cost considerations.

The need for re-scoping is also documented in the Town of Westford's adopted Town Plan, which identifies improving safety, walkability, and bicycle access on public roads as a community priority. In addition, this need was reaffirmed through a community meeting held on October 22, 2019, and the action plan that followed. That meeting involved partners including the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD), the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, and the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC), and identified improved pedestrian connectivity between key community destinations as an important community objective. The Town Plan includes goals and policies supporting the development and use of public trails, creation of safe non-vehicular travel options within village and Town Center areas, and provision of a transportation system that safely serves pedestrians and bicyclists alongside vehicles. Together, the prior study, the Town Plan, and the 2019 community action plan establish a clear basis for reassessing pedestrian connectivity between the village/common area and the school along Brookside Road

- Please describe the demographics of the project area, including historically excluded or underserved populations (e.g. age, race, income, ethnicity, language, etc.). Please be as specific to your community as possible. You can reference [CCRPC's Demographic Map Viewer](#) for census data on your community.

The project area involves the entire Town of Westford, with particular relevance to residents who travel between the Village/Common area and the school along Brookside Road. Westford is a small, rural community with a mix of households, including families with school-aged children,

older adults, and residents across a range of income levels. As in many rural towns, some residents may face barriers related to mobility, access to transportation options, or safety when traveling along public roads without dedicated pedestrian infrastructure.

- Please describe how this project will benefit your community and different populations.

Providing a safe walking connection between a major center of activity (the school) and the town center has the potential to benefit a wide range of Westford residents. In addition to linking the school and Town Common, the proposed pathway would improve pedestrian access between the Common and Westford's Town Forests and their associated trail networks, including Maple Shade Town Forest and the Misty Meadows Trails and Forest, as well as the Town's recreational fields located at the school. Improved pedestrian access would support healthy physical activity, expand access to cultural, recreational, and community resources, and strengthen connections between key parts of the community. Enhanced walkability may also support economic activity within the town center by improving access for residents and visitors.

Improved pedestrian connectivity along Brookside Road would help ensure that residents of all ages and abilities - including children, older adults, and those without access to a vehicle - can safely travel between the school, Village area, recreational facilities, and nearby trail system. Over time, improved access to scenic, recreational, and civic spaces may contribute to greater community cohesion and increased opportunities for social interaction.

- What potential unintended negative impacts could arise, which populations or neighborhoods might be most affected, and how will you minimize harm and ensure fair access to project benefits?

No unintended negative impacts are anticipated as a result of this planning-level re-scoping effort. The project will focus on evaluating existing conditions and conceptual pedestrian pathway alternatives and will not involve design or construction. Any future implementation would be subject to additional planning, public engagement, and review to identify and address potential impacts before decisions are made.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Please check CCRPC's 2014 (amended 2017) Public Participation Plan for resources:

https://www.ccrpcvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CCRPC_2014_PPP_Amended_2017.pdf

Does this project require any public engagement?

YES: X

NO:

For transportation technical assistance requests and projects that do not involve public engagement, please skip the questions below. Examples of these projects include but are not limited to technical assistance requests (speed studies, road safety audits, signal timings, etc.); water quality projects with transportation nexus; and stormwater and other data gathering for municipal capital planning purposes.

For projects that involve public outreach and engagement, please ensure that your budget and timeline include sufficient funds and staff/consultant time to support a meaningful and inclusive

process. Please consider the following questions as you develop your budget and timeline. These questions will be revisited when the scope of work is developed.

- Who are the key partners and populations that should be involved in this project?
- What outreach and engagement tools and methods should be considered to ensure that all affected groups, including historically excluded or underserved populations, are informed and have meaningful opportunities to participate?
- Does public outreach for your project need to include translation/interpretation, facilitation, outreach materials, stipends, childcare, etc.? Did you budget for these services?
- How will your public engagement process build upon or be informed by past community engagement?

This project should include a level of public engagement appropriate to a planning-level re-scoping effort. Key partners and stakeholders include the Planning Commission, Selectboard, school representatives, residents who live along or regularly use Brookside Road, and community members who travel between the village/common area and the school. Particular attention should be given to engaging families with school-aged children, older adults, and residents who rely on walking as part of their daily travel.

Public outreach would likely occur primarily through existing municipal channels, including discussion at publicly warned Planning Commission and/or Selectboard meetings, presentation of conceptual pathway alternatives, and opportunities for public comment. Project materials may also be shared via the Town’s website. Translation or interpretation services are not anticipated at this time, but outreach methods will remain adaptable as needed. This engagement will build upon earlier planning work by reintroducing the project to the community and incorporating current perspectives into the updated conceptual framework.

5. PROJECT COSTS & MATCH REQUIREMENT

Please see the **FY27 UPWP PROGRAM SUMMARY** and the **Technical Assistance and GIS Pricing Policy** for a description of match requirements and check below to get an idea of which applies to your proposal. If matching funds are required, **municipalities** should attach a letter of support from their governing body to show that they have the required local match and staff availability.

Non-municipal transportation partners should include a letter from their Board or other governing body that shows their support and commitment to providing the matching funds.

- **Transportation-Related Projects (Federal Transportation Planning Funds)**
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 - The CCRPC may waive the local match requirement for municipal projects deemed to be regionally significant.
 - Transportation Technical Assistance – no local match required.
 - Non-Municipal Transportation Partner – 20% non-federal cash match required.

For PL funded transportation projects requiring consultants or for non-municipal partners:

Total Project Cost Estimate (100%)	\$ 35,000
Local Match Required (20% of Total Cost)	\$ 7,000

Examples:

	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Total Project (100%)	\$25,000	\$50,000	\$75,000
Local Match (20%)	\$5,000	\$10,000	\$15,000

- **Land Use and Energy Implementation Assistance (ineligible for federal transportation funding)**
 - Non-transportation projects (including municipal plans and bylaws) – This is a fee-for-service program. There is no fee for projects requiring less than 12 hours of CCRPC staff time. Projects over 12 hours will be charged a rate of \$70 per hour. We encourage municipalities to also seek [Municipal Planning Grants](#).
 - Energy Implementation Assistance – this program provides CCRPC staff assistance to the municipality. Depending upon state grant requirements, this may have no local match requirement.

Is the project request for CCRPC staff assistance only? (Yes/No)	NO
CCRPC staff hours requested:	

For Non-Transportation Land Use Project Requests, please contact Taylor Newton (TNewton@ccrpcvt.org, (802) 846-4490 ext. 115 to discuss project and budget needs.

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WESTFORD TOWN PLANNER JOB DESCRIPTION

Official Title

Part-Time Town Planner
Estimated 20 hours a week

Nature of Position

The Town Planner is a highly responsible administrative position that requires considerable judgment. The primary responsibility of the Town Planner is to assist the Planning Commission in carrying out their statutory functions, including but not limited to preparation and implementation of plans and regulations, undertaking planning initiatives and studies, and making recommendations to the legislative body. A great deal of time is spent working closely with the public, often on controversial or sensitive matters. This work requires a high degree of independence, initiative, sound judgment, professionalism, and organizational skills.

Appointment, Supervision and Evaluation

The Town Planner is nominated by the Planning Commission and appointed by the Selectboard. The Town Planner is under the general supervision of the Planning Commission and is ultimately accountable to the Selectboard. The Town Planner is subject to the Town's personnel policy and may be removed for cause at any time by the Selectboard after consultation with the Planning Commission.

Town Planner – Primary Responsibilities and Duties

Fully staffing the Planning Commission pursuant to state statute, assisting the DRB Coordinator, serving as Acting Administrative Officer during extended AO leaves of absence, and other related tasks including but not limited to the following:

1. Assist the Planning Commission in carrying out their statutory functions, including development of land use and development regulations, development of the town plan, and implementation of town plan projects.
2. Research, analyze, develop, and propose land use planning and development policies, plans and ordinances for consideration by the Planning Commission and Selectboard.
3. Stay up to date on local regulations, state statute, court precedent and modern planning practice.
4. Maintain communication and coordinate with the Selectboard, Planning Commission, Development Review Board, Conservation Commission, Town employees, other committees, Regional Planning Commission, State agencies and hired consultants regarding Town projects.
5. Effectively communicate and be available to the public and board members for the purpose of explaining proposals and projects and to discuss any issues or concerns.
6. Keep the board and commissions apprised of issues, concerns, and opportunities associated with zoning and planning.
7. Serve as custodian of public records related to planning and zoning.

8. Prepare and administer grants.
9. Manage planning projects under the oversight of the Planning Commission.
10. Maintain the planning portions of the Town website.
11. Staff town committees, as requested.
12. Participate in the regional planning process and serve on committee as necessary.
13. Any other duties as assigned and agreed to.

Desired Qualifications, Abilities and Skills

1. Demonstrated experience in the land-use-related field with relevant education preferable.
2. Bachelor's degree in planning, landscape architecture, natural resource management and planning, or a related field desirable.
3. Experience with Flood Hazard Regulations and familiarity with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).
4. Excellent oral and written communication skills.
5. A desire to work as part of a team to initiate and perform detailed work with appropriate supervision.
6. Ability to organize, prioritize, maintain multiple tasks and deadlines, and to manage time effectively.
7. Proficiency with computers, including word processing, database management, WordPress, the Internet, and other technologies, as well as an aptitude for learning new applications required to accomplish various tasks.
8. Ability to read plans and drawings, and additional experience with ArcGIS mapping software preferable.
9. Ability to interact courteously, clearly, and in a timely manner with the public.
10. Attendance at evening Planning Commission meetings and other meetings as required.
11. General familiarity with State statute and land use & development regulations.
12. General familiarity with land use & development principles and practices.
13. A valid driver's license and reliable vehicle.

Disclaimers

- The above information is intended to describe the general nature of this position and is not to be considered a comprehensive statement of duties, activities, responsibilities, and requirements. Additional duties, activities, responsibilities, and requirements may be assigned, with or without notice, at any time.
- This job description is not an employment contract nor is it a promise of work for any specific length of time.

Equal Employment Opportunity

The Town of Westford is an Equal Employment Opportunity employer.

Interested applicants please send:

Resume

Cover Letter

3 References

Items can be sent to

Town Planner Search

1713 Vermont Route 128

Westford, VT 05494

OR

Dropped in the dropbox at the above address

OR

Via email to townadmin@westfordvt.us



8

1713 Vermont Route 128 • Westford, Vermont 05494
Town Office: (802)878-4587 • Fax: (802)879-6503
www.westfordvt.us

Planning Commissioner Stipend Waiver

Fiscal Year _____ – _____

I, _____, serving as a member of the Town of Westford Planning Commission, hereby voluntarily decline receipt of any stipend, per diem, or other compensation otherwise available to me for Planning Commission service during the above-referenced fiscal year.

I understand that this decision is voluntary and applies only to the fiscal year identified above. A new waiver may be submitted for any subsequent fiscal year.

Signed: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Received by: _____

Date Received: _____

From: Joshua Smith <sgtjoshuasmith@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, May 17, 2026 10:13 AM
To: selectboard <selectboard@westfordvt.us>; PlanningCommission <planningcommission@westfordvt.us>
Cc: Elisabeth Smith (prev. Airoidi) <elisabethairoidsmith@gmail.com>
Subject: Kickback Brewery Sign Zoning Issue

Members of the Selectboard, Planning Commission, and Development Review Board,

I am writing to request formal closure of an issue I have with the Town Zoning Administrator, Harmony Chism, regarding the signage for my business, Kickback Brewery. I have been advised to reach out to all 3 boards to provide continuity and ensure maximum dissemination, and to bring this matter to a close. Attached, you will find my formal letter to the board, as well as a reference for decision-making. As a long-standing member of this community since 2013 and a longtime nearby resident of Essex with many ties to Westford, I look forward to resuming my business in Westford in 2027 as a future tax-generating member of the community, providing a value-added service. I will await your response, and unfortunately, in-person meeting requests will be difficult as I am currently in Germany with the Vermont Army National Guard. I would like to see this resolved prior to my return in November of 2026. Thank you all for your time and consideration in this matter.

Josh Smith

Town Resident since 2013
Volunteer Firefighter for 5 years
Town Emergency Planner for 2 years

617 Osgood Hill Rd.
Westford, VT 05494

Mr. Joshua Smith
Kickback Brewery, LLC
617 Osgood Hill Rd
Westford, VT 05494

May 15, 2026

Westford Selectboard
Town of Westford
Westford, VT 05494

Dear Members of the Westford Selectboard,

I am writing to you as a resident, property owner, and small business owner in Westford. My name is Joshua Smith, and I operate Kickback Brewery, LLC at 617 Osgood Hill Rd, Westford, VT 05494 and I have been doing so since 2016 in Westford. I am reaching out regarding a matter involving the Town Zoning Administrator, Ms. Harmony Chism, concerning a sign on my property. I am respectfully requesting that the Selectboard make a formal determination on this matter so that it can be resolved conclusively and without further legal action.

At a recent meeting, I was informed without any prior notice, written warning, or opportunity to respond that Ms. Chism was pursuing Judicial Superior Court action against me and my business for alleged non-compliance with the Town's zoning regulations regarding sign placement. Specifically, the claim is that my sign was located within a 25-foot setback from the centerline of the road right-of-way. Upon learning of this concern in the spring of 2025, I removed the sign panel. The post currently remains in place, and as I will explain below, both the removal of the sign and the retention of the post are entirely consistent with Westford's own written regulations.

I must also bring to the Board's attention the impact this situation has had on my wife, who is the co-owner and homeowner at this address and has been managing the property during my deployment to Germany with the Vermont Army National Guard. She has been deeply troubled to learn that personal information about her as a homeowner has been circulated among community members. To her knowledge, she has received no direct communication from the Town Zoning Administrator since a letter we received in the fall of 2025. She was therefore understandably surprised and dismayed to hear that we have been characterized as "unresponsive." This characterization is both inaccurate and unfair, particularly given that she is managing a household alone while her spouse is deployed overseas in service to this state and country.

I have reviewed the 2024 Westford Land Use and Development Regulations in detail and identified the following specific provisions that are directly relevant to this matter. I respectfully submit that the regulatory basis for the Zoning Administrator's position is not supported by the Town's own written rules.

First, Section 326.F(3) of the Westford Land Use and Development Regulations — the section that governs free-standing signs specifically — states that a sign “may be located within required yards, but must be set back at least 3 feet from the property line.” There is no road centerline setback requirement anywhere in Section 326. The applicable standard for a business sign is a 3-foot setback from the property line, not a 25-foot setback from the road centerline. The 25-foot centerline language that appears elsewhere in the regulations (Sections 232.D, 242.D, and 252.D) applies to building setbacks for structures — not to signs — and even then, it is expressly described as a presumption used only when the edge of the right-of-way is “unknown.” It is not a fixed rule, and it does not govern signs.

Second, Section 326.H of the same regulations directly addresses sign removal and states: “For lawful, conforming signs, only the message components of the sign associated with the changed or terminated use must be removed or covered and the support components may remain.” I have already removed the sign panel in a good-faith effort to resolve this dispute. Under the Town's own written regulations, my post is lawfully permitted to remain in place. Any demand for removal of the post has no basis in the Westford Land Use and Development Regulations. (See attached image of the sign and post location)

Third, and critically, my property is located on Osgood Hill Road, which is a town-owned road — not a state highway. The 25-foot centerline rule cited against my sign originates from Vermont Agency of Transportation guidance applicable exclusively to state highways. It has no legal authority over signage on town roads. Under Vermont Title 19 §702, the default width of a town road right-of-way is three rods (49.5 feet total, or approximately 24.75 feet per side of the centerline). Neighboring towns such as Fairfax explicitly acknowledge in their own 2024 development regulations that the 25-foot centerline figure is a fallback assumption only, and that a known right-of-way width supersedes it.

In light of the foregoing, I am formally requesting that the Selectboard make a binding determination on this matter. Specifically, I ask the Board to find that: (1) the applicable setback standard for free-standing signs under Section 326.F(3) of the Westford Land Use and Development Regulations is 3 feet from the property line, not 25 feet from the road centerline; (2) the retention of the sign post is expressly permitted under Section 326.H of the same regulations; and (3) the 25-foot state highway centerline rule does not apply to signage on town roads, including Osgood Hill Road (4) Recommending that the Development Review board consider adopting new language in the Land Use Regulation describing that the placement of signs advertising places of business can be placed in a location where its reasonably and safely viewed from the road for patrons driving by to notice the establishment and it does not hinder road crews or extend past the placement of a mailbox. Upon such determination of these requests above, I

respectfully request that the Zoning Administrator be directed to cease all further enforcement actions and close this matter.

I want to be direct with the Board about a broader concern. The Town of Westford faces real challenges — among them the need to grow its tax base and address housing availability. The energy and resources of the Zoning Administrator's office are most productively directed toward facilitating the permitting of additional housing and supporting the kind of responsible business development that will strengthen this community for years to come. Pursuing Superior Court action against a deployed servicemember and enthusiastic business owner and his family over a wooden sign and post — in apparent conflict with the Town's own written regulations — does not serve that mission. It drives a divisive wedge between the Town and the very landowners and small business owners who have invested in Westford and want to see it thrive.

I have invested in this community, and I intend for Kickback Brewery to be a positive presence in Westford for years to come. I am fully committed to operating within the Town's regulations — the actual written regulations, as I have outlined above. I appreciate the Board's time and attention, and I trust that a fair review of the regulatory record will confirm that this matter should be resolved in my favor and closed without further action.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Josh" being more prominent than the last name "Smith".

Mr. Joshua "Josh" Smith

Owner, Kickback Brewery, LLC

617 Osgood Hill Rd

Westford, VT 05494

Kickback Brewery Sign Facing North on Osgood Hill Rd (does not extend past mailbox)



Kickback Brewery Sign Facing South (sign is in view of traffic at a distance for awareness)



Kickback Brewery Sign Facing South aligned with current powerline pole also in right of way



Kickback Brewery Sign with Brewery as Backdrop



As you can see the sign placement, design and aesthetics are in keeping with the rural characteristics of a small business operating in a rural environment. It should be noted that great effort and detail went into establishing something that would work with the rural charm and ambiance of this kind of space. I believe it does not hinder any natural traffic patterns and it accomplished the jobs of a sign as follows: alert people ahead of time of the upcoming destination, advertise for unknowing passerby's, do not cause unwarranted distractions, do not pose a safety hazard to pedestrians or vehicles, asthetically pleasing, and informational.

Harmony Cism

From: Town Planner
Sent: Monday, May 18, 2026 2:32 PM
To: Joshua Smith; selectboard; PlanningCommission
Cc: Elisabeth Smith (prev. Airoidi)
Subject: RE: Kickback Brewery Sign Zoning Issue

To the Westford Selectboard and Planning Commission, and Joshua and Elisabeth Smith,

There have been several correspondences regarding this matter over the past few days, and I would like to address the issues raised in a single response.

First, I agree with Elisabeth Smith's statement that it is unfortunate she learned about the discussion at the May 14 Selectboard meeting through community members rather than through official correspondence. The Selectboard directed me at that meeting to send follow-up correspondence to the landowners, and I find it concerning and inappropriate that individuals in the community contacted the Smiths before that correspondence could be received.

It is additionally concerning that inaccurate information appears to have been shared. Specifically, it has been alleged that personal information about the landowners was discussed publicly at the meeting. The recording and minutes of the May 14 Selectboard meeting will show that I did not mention the landowners' names, the business name, the property address, or even the road name. I stated only that there was an unresolved zoning violation involving a signpost that had not been removed following three warning notices and a formal Notice of Violation issued over approximately 2½ years.

During the meeting, a Selectboard member asked whether the landowner had contacted me regarding removal of the sign. I responded that no response had been received to the Notice of Violation and that I only became aware the sign itself had been removed when I happened to pass the property for an unrelated reason. No correspondence was received from the landowners indicating that the sign had been removed or requesting additional time to remove the remaining post structure.

The matter was discussed before the Selectboard because I had been asked to provide a Planning & Zoning Report. Enforcement activities are necessarily part of that report, as the Zoning Administrator is statutorily required to enforce the Westford Land Use & Development Regulations (WLUDR). To date, an unresolved violation remains open because the sign associated with Permit #20-46 was not installed in the approved location shown on the associated site plan, and no amended permit application has been submitted for approval of the relocated sign.

Mr. Smith's correspondence asserts that district setbacks apply only to "structures" and not to signs. However, this interpretation is inconsistent with the applicable regulations for a few reasons:

1. The WLUDR defines "structure" as an *"assembly of materials for occupancy or use that is a minimum of 100 square feet **or is on a permanent foundation**, including, but not limited to, a building, **sign**, road, wall, or fence."* The concrete footing used to erect the sign constitutes a permanent foundation.
2. Section 326.C(4) of the WLUDR expressly prohibits *"signs placed on any public property or public right-of-way, except for political signs in accordance with Paragraph 326.D(3) or a seasonal sign in accordance with Paragraph 326.D(6)."*

3. Section IV of the Town of Westford Traffic Ordinance states: *“It shall be unlawful for any person to build, plant, or place any obstacle within the town right-of-way without prior approval of the Town of Westford Selectboard.”*

4.

Mr. Smith also referenced Section 326.H of the WLUDR, which states:

“For lawful, conforming signs, only the message components of the sign associated with the changed or terminated use must be removed or covered and the support components may remain.”

However, this provision does not apply in this case because:

- a) there is no indication that the permitted brewery use has been terminated or changed; and
- b) the sign in question is not considered lawful or conforming under the Regulations or the Town Traffic Ordinance.

Regarding the right-of-way itself, Osgood Hill Road is a Class 3 Town Highway with a three-rod right-of-way. Portions of Osgood Hill Road were laid out in the early 1800s and are recorded in the Westford Land Records at Book 7, Page 6; Book 7, Page 40; and Book 7, Page 149. While the section recorded at Book 7, Page 6 does not specify a width, the other recorded sections establish a three-rod width. In addition, 19 V.S.A. § 702 provides that highway rights-of-way are presumed to be three rods wide unless otherwise properly recorded. Accordingly, Osgood Hill Road is understood to have a three-rod right-of-way, and the applicable front setback is measured from the edge of that right-of-way.

Finally, it appears there may also have been some misinformation shared regarding enforcement procedures. The landowners were apparently told that I am seeking Superior Court action against them. However, the Zoning Administrator cannot independently initiate action in Superior Court without authorization from the Selectboard. During the May 14 meeting, I explained that referral to the Environmental Division of Superior Court would be the next enforcement step available following issuance of a Notice of Violation. The Selectboard instead directed that an additional letter be sent to the landowners. That correspondence was mailed via regular and certified USPS mail on May 15, 2026.

I would also like to emphasize that zoning enforcement is a statutory responsibility of the Zoning Administrator and is never a matter of personal discretion or personal disagreement with any landowner. Enforcement actions are undertaken in fulfillment of the duties required by state law and local regulations. Whenever possible, I attempt to work cooperatively with landowners to achieve compliance and avoid escalation.

In recent weeks, a substantial amount of staff time has been diverted toward responding to allegations, misinformation, and complaints arising from multiple matters seemingly instigated by an individual community member. As the sole staff member responsible for administering the Planning & Zoning Department, it has been difficult and discouraging to spend significant time defending routine administrative actions rather than focusing on the understaffed Department’s actual work and responsibilities. I believe it is important that discussions remain focused on the applicable regulations, established procedures, and factual record.

Respectfully,

Harmony Cism

Administrative Officer & Planning Coordinator

Town of Westford

(802) 878-4587

Harmony Cism

From: Seth Jensen <seth.m.jensen@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 21, 2026 3:20 PM
To: selectboard; PlanningCommission
Cc: Joshua Smith; Harmony Cism
Subject: Re: Westford Sign Regulation Background

Members of the Selectboard and Planning Commission,

I have learned more of the background and believe the following steps could be the starting point for a reasonable solution that maintains the integrity of the Town's zoning process while avoiding the costs and disruptions of formal enforcement:

(1) The Town delays enforcement.

(2) Josh submits a site plan revising the sign and post from the location previously depicted to the current location. The site plan should be legible but not necessarily an engineered plan. The sign that was previously removed may be Reinstalled once/if a permit is granted.

(3) The Town — through the formal PC preparation and Selectboard adoption processes — considers amendment to Section 326.C4 of the Zoning Bylaws to allow signs in ROW when visibility is inadequate with strict conformance and when authorized by the Selectboard or designee. The PC/SB should also consider if options for administrative site plan amendments should be expanded.

These discussions should occur with the PC and SB, rather than the DRB, to ensure they do not overlap with future site plan amendment or appeal proceedings.

Seth

Sent from my iPhone

On May 20, 2026, at 4:07 PM, Seth Jensen <seth.m.jensen@gmail.com> wrote:

Members of the Westford Selectboard and Planning Commission,

Josh Smith, Westford resident and owner of Kickback Brewery, recently informed me that another member of the community spoke to him about possible zoning enforcement related to a sign post located within or near the setback area on his property.

I am writing to provide background on the genesis of Westford's sign regulations, and how the actions of the Town's governing boards have created a challenging situation for both small home based business owners like Josh and Harmony in the execution of her duties as Zoning Administrator. I am not writing to comment on the merits of possible

enforcement, I do not know the circumstances that led to another community member raising this issue, and I am not writing to pass judgement one way or the other on Harmony in the execution of her duties as Zoning Administrator or Josh as the business owner and potential applicant. My experience with both Josh and Harmony is that they are people of integrity. I hope that the Town can find a solution that is viable on both statutory and neighborly standpoints.

Prior to zoning amendments in the mid 2000s and early 2010's, Westford placed extreme limits on home based businesses with signs. A previous Zoning Administrator even interpreted Westford's zoning at the time to require double district minimum acreage for home based businesses with signs -- effectively treating them as a second "principal use" of the property.

Based on the Town Plan goals of supporting home based businesses and rural enterprises, the Town amended its bylaws to reduce some, but not all of these restrictions. Notably, zoning amendments expanded opportunities for home businesses, allowed multiple principal structures and uses (in layman's terms, a business in a detached garage, stand alone workshop) and increased the previous 2,000sf limit on "rural enterprises."

Around the same time, the US Supreme Court's "Gilbert" decision upended municipal sign regulations nationwide. As a result, the Town elected to defer some major changes to sign regulations until more guidance and direction was available based on the experience of larger communities. The Planning Commission and Selectboard at the time understandably did not feel Westford should become a "test case" for new Constitutional precedent. Note that some revisions were made to clarify dimensional standards for attached vs. free standing signs based on comments from a local business (possibly Mathieu Enterprises, but my memory may be mistaken).

Unfortunately, the net result of this was new provisions that enabled more small home based businesses and rural enterprises, coupled with older sign regulations not fully calibrated to the needs of these businesses. In early 2024, the Planning Commission began what was intended to be a comprehensive process to update the Town's sign regulations. Josh attended the first meeting of this process.

Instead of a comprehensive review of the Town's sign regulations, the Selectboard voted to direct the Planning Commission to focus on one, specific issue -- illuminated signs in the Town Common District. As a result, the comprehensive review did not occur, and Josh and other small, home based-business owners did not have the opportunity to raise their concerns and have these concerns addressed.

Since that time, there has been complete turnover on the Planning Commission, significant turnover on the Selectboard, and chronic underfunding and understaffing of the Planning and Zoning Office. The comprehensive process -- and even institutional memory that this process was going to occur -- appears to have been lost to history. This is the result of actions beyond either the Zoning Administrator or business owner's control, yet they are the ones who must directly engage in the consequences.

As a matter of personal opinion, Westford's current sign regulations suffer from two competing objectives. The regulations place limits on the size of signs in order to reduce the visual impact. However, these size limits also reduce visibility if the sign is located at the distances from the roadway required by other provisions of the bylaws-- especially on Westford winding back roads. There are tools and examples to address these challenges from other rural communities.

The Selectboard cannot direct the Zoning Administrator to implement zoning provisions that do not exist. It can authorize or direct the Planning Commission to re engage in the comprehensive process to address a long standing issue that is now reaching a critical boiling point.

Thank you,

Seth Jensen