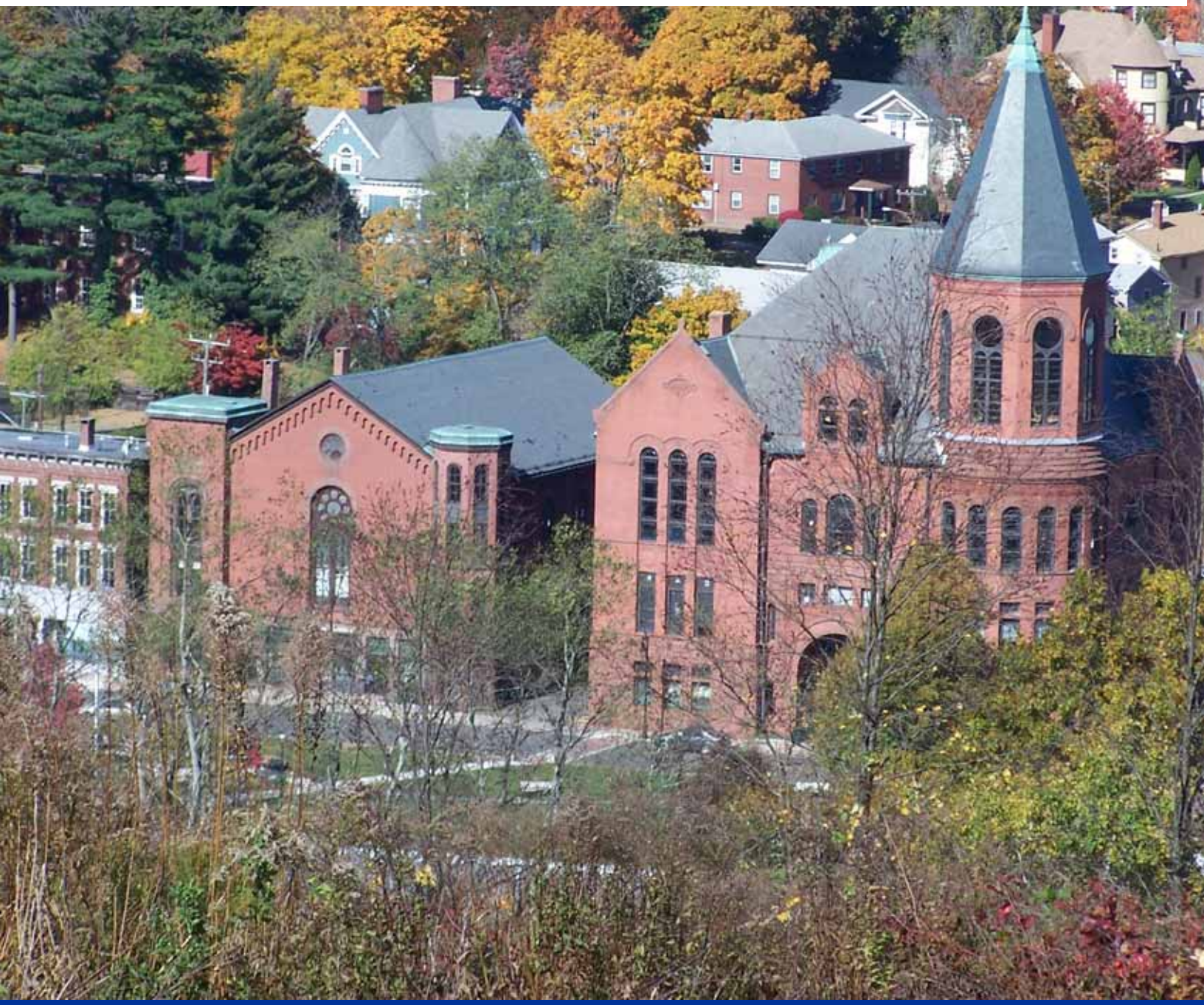
Vernon PROPOSED

Plan of Conservation and Development



July 2011

Vernon Planning and Zoning Commission

Proposed for Adoption

ADVISORY DOCUMENT

As provided in CGS Section 8-23, a Plan of Conservation and Development is an **advisory document**. Recommended polices, strategies and tasks are intended to help guide land use decisions, assist in determining priorities, and suggest actions which will provide long-term benefit to the Town of Vernon. Recommendations of the POCD are not binding on the Planning and Zoning Commission or Town.

IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENT

The **Implementation Element** is separate document that is intended to be regularly updated The Implementation Element is a detailed compilation of strategies contained in this Plan. That element suggests an initial lead entity for each strategy, the anticipated timeframe for completion, and priority level. As tasks and programs are implemented and results are evaluated, it is envisioned that the Implementation Element will be updated by the Planning and Zoning Commission to acknowledge completed tasks, to add new tasks, and to update priorities.

TOWN OF VERNON

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSIONN (PZC) 14 PARK PLACE,
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DRAFT

August 2011

To the Residents of Vernon and Rockville,

We are pleased to present to you the 2011 Vernon Plan of Conservation and Development (POCO). It establishes a common vision for our community's evolution over the next 10 years or so. The test of the Plan is in the reading and whether you see some of your values, hopes and expectations in it. The value is in the implementation and our willingness to implement balanced land-use solutions which are:

- Environmentally sustainable with emphasis on the protection of water quality;
- Financially responsible for individuals and the community as a whole; yet,
- Maintain Vernon/Rockville's character, i.e., how the Town looks and how we feel about it.

The plan of Conservation and Development will serve the needs of the residents of Vernon/Rockville well during the next decade and would not have been possible without the assistance of volunteers who contributed much time and talent to the creation of the plan. On behalf of Planning and Zoning Commission, we extend thanks to all who helped make this plan viable, including members of the PZC POCO sub-committee, elected officials, town staff, residents who attended the workshops and Town Boards and Commissions who provided input.

Sincerely, Chester W. Morgan, Chair, Vernon Planning &Zoning Commission

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Residents of Vernon and Boards and Commission members for their interest and participation in the development of this Plan and The Pert Group for conducting the telephone survey.

**Also POCD Subcommittee member*

www.ct-vernon.gov

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this Chapter:

- About Vernon
- Why Plan?
- About This Plan

About Vernon

Vernon is home to roughly 30,200 residents and is located 12 miles east of downtown Hartford. Vernon is predominantly an outgrowth of its 19th century settlements: Rockville, with its textile mills, mercantile center and village cluster; Vernon Center – a community crossroads; and Talcottville, a mill, associated "company" housing, church, and school. This blend of urban/suburban/rural patterns along with open space, historic resources, and community spirit, contributes to Vernon's overall character. The variety of its historic and contemporary forms of development together with its easy access to Hartford, other regional centers, New York and Boston attract residents and businesses to Vernon.

Why Plan?

Baseball legend Yogi Berra stated, "If you don't know where you are going, you'll wind up somewhere else." Communities often find themselves in reactive positions – responding to plans put forth by others and issues and problems that crop up. A long term plan allows a community to take a proactive approach to its future development patterns.

A Plan of Conservation and Development is a tool for guiding the future of a community – it establishes a vision for a community's future and outlines policies and strategies to attain that vision. The Plan of Conservation and Development is primarily an advisory document which can be used to:

- coordinate community activities,
- guide land use decisions and regulations, and
- program public projects.

A Plan of Conservation and Development becomes an official document after a public hearing and adoption by the Planning and Zoning Commission. Connecticut General Statutes (8-23) outline what a Plan shall and may include (see box on next page).

Rockville (when formerly incorporated as a city) adopted its first plan in 1961. Subsequent plans were prepared by the Town in 1981, 1991, and 2001 (with updates in 1995 and 2003). This Plan of Conservation and Development is a continuation Vernon's tradition of planning.

Summary of Sec. 8-23. Preparation, amendment or adoption of plan of conservation and development.

In preparing such plan, the commission … **shall** consider the following:

- The community development action plan of the municipality, if any,
- the need for affordable housing,
- the need for protection of existing and potential public surface and ground drinking water supplies,
- the use of cluster development and other development patterns to the extent consistent with soil types, terrain and infrastructure capacity within the municipality,
- the state and regional plans of conservation and development,
- physical, social, economic and governmental conditions and trends,
- the needs of the municipality including, but not limited to, human resources, education, health, housing, recreation, social services, public utilities, public protection, transportation and circulation and cultural and interpersonal communications,
- the objectives of energy-efficient patterns of development, the use of solar and other renewable forms of energy and energy conservation, and
- protection and preservation of agriculture.

Such plan of conservation and development **shall**:

- be a statement of policies, goals and standards for physical and economic development
- provide for a system of principal thoroughfares, parkways, bridges, streets, sidewalks, multipurpose trails and other public ways as appropriate,
- be designed to promote, with the greatest efficiency and economy, the coordinated development of the municipality and the general welfare and prosperity of its people and identify areas where it is feasible and prudent (i) to have compact, transit accessible, pedestrian-oriented mixed use development patterns and land reuse, and (ii) to promote such development patterns and land reuse,
- recommend the most desirable use of land for residential, recreational, commercial, industrial, conservation and other purposes and include a map showing such proposed land uses,
- recommend the most desirable density of population,
- note inconsistencies with the following growth management principles: (i) Redevelopment and revitalization; (ii) expansion of housing opportunities and design choices; (iii) concentration of development around transportation nodes and along major transportation corridors; (iv) conservation and restoration of the natural environment, cultural and historical resources and existing farmlands; (v) protection of environmental assets; and (vi) integration of planning across all levels of government,
- provide for housing opportunities for all residents of the municipality and the planning region
- promote housing choice and economic diversity in housing

The plan **may** show recommendations for (1) conservation and preservation of ridgelines, (2) airports, parks, playgrounds and other public grounds, (3) the general location, relocation and improvement of schools and other public buildings, (4) the general location and extent of public utilities and terminals (5) the extent and location of public housing projects, (6) programs for the implementation of the plan, including (A) a schedule, (B) a budget for public capital projects, (C) a program for enactment and enforcement of zoning and subdivision controls, building and housing codes and safety regulations, (D) plans for implementation of affordable housing, (E) plans for open space acquisition and greenways protection and development, and (F) plans for corridor management areas along limited access highways or rail lines, designated under section 16a-27, (7) proposed priority funding areas, and (8) any other recommendations .

About This Plan

The Planning and Zoning Commission appointed a subcommittee (plus one town resident) to work with a consultant to create a draft Plan. The full Planning and Zoning Commission participated in public workshops, reviewed and discussed interim work products and reviewed and edited drafts of the Plan. This process occurred over roughly 18 months.

Residents, other boards and commissions, and local officials provided input at various stages of the process. See Chapter 4 for details.

This 2011 Vernon Plan of Conservation and Development:

- identifies key land use and planning issues and opportunities in Vernon, and
- outlines a vision for each issue area and strategies to achieve the vision.

The Plan is intended to be a strategic / action-oriented document that is easy to use. To achieve this, clarity and conciseness were important. Detailed data and inventories, educational information, and ancillary information is not included in this Plan.

Instead, Plan supplements are available on the Town's website (www.vernon-ct.gov). Supplements include data collected during preparation of the Plan; a listing of other plans, studies, and documents that contain more detailed information on various subjects; full results of the community survey; and other useful documents. In addition, during the preparation of this plan, seven "discussion booklets" were prepared. Those booklets provided additional data, analysis and discussion. The booklets were used to frame initial discussions with the subcommittee and Commission, so the recommendations in those booklets are "out-of-date". However, the booklets contain background information and analyses that could be useful to the community.

Where possible, the POCD includes web hyperlinks for supplemental documents.

Chapter 2: Plan Summary

In this Chapter:

Summary of Goals

Preserving Our Roots

Natural Resources

- protect our natural resources
- continue to restore and improve our lakes and rivers
- protect drinking water
- minimize threats to water quality
- reduce storm water runoff
- protect habitat and minimize the clearing of vegetation

Open Space and Greenways

- promote and manage existing open space
- preserve open space and greenways

Historic Resources

- preserve and promote our historic resources

Community Character

- preserve scenic features
- maintain an undeveloped ambiance in rural parts of Vernon
- preserve heritage farms
- promote community spirit throughout Vernon
- maintain our overall community structure
- enhance gateways

Pathway to Prosperity

Rockville

- maintain and enhance the village nature of Rockville
- encourage the revitalization of Rockville

Vernon Center and Talcottville

- maintain and enhance Vernon Center
- maintain and enhance Talcottville

Residential Patterns and Housing Needs

- protect residential neighborhoods
- maintain overall residential density patterns(with some updates)
- ensure multi-family development occurs in appropriate areas and contributes to community structure
- increase homeownership opportunities

Business Development

- update commercial zones
- maintain Vernon Circle as a regional destination
- encourage appropriate business development at Exits 66 and 67
- redevelop and retenant vacant buildings
- retain businesses and promote business development
- continue to improve business-friendly protocols

Community Facilities

- maintain community structure when planning for new facilities
- address community facility / service needs
- anticipate and plan for future needs

Transportation

- maintain overall circulation and minimize congestion
- continue to require and encourage access management
- calm traffic
- continue road maintenance
- improve public transit service
- enhance pedestrian and bicycle travel
- address parking

Utilities

- coordinate land use goals with sewer service
- ensure utilities meet current and future needs
- meet energy needs

Chapter 3: Conditions & Trends

In this Chapter:

History's Influence on Land Use

Regional Context

People

Housing

Economy

Fiscal Overview

Existing Land Use

Existing Zoning

History's Influence on Land Use

Vernon's physical layout – its streets, neighborhoods, business locations and other elements – were shaped by historic trends and events. Some of these historic factors were common to many Connecticut communities, while others were unique to Vernon.

Early Water Supply Protection

As early as 1847, the newly formed Aqueduct Company had the foresight to buy land around the Town's water supply – Lake Shenipsit.

However, the lake was a popular summertime resort. By the early 1900s, the Aqueduct Company realized that resort activities threatened the water supply. The resort owners shut down and sold their land to the Aqueduct Company, further protecting what today serves as a regional water supply.

Vernon Becomes a Town

Vernon's early inhabitation by Native Americans is memorialized in the names of rivers and lakes in the Town. Three territories converged at Lake Shenipsit – Nipmucks, Mohegans, and Podunks. These tribes eventually moved westward as new settlers arrived from East Windsor.

The area that is Vernon today was part of Bolton and referred to as North Bolton. By 1808, the farmers of North Bolton found it too difficult to travel to Bolton for town functions. They petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly and in 1808, Vernon became a town. Vernon Center was the new town's center with the church, meeting house, school, grange and houses. Vernon was predominantly an agricultural town at this time. The Hartford Turnpike, built in 1801, ran through Vernon Center, connecting Vernon Center to Hartford and the court in Tolland. In 1810, 827 people lived in Vernon. Connections improved in 1847, when a railway connected Vernon to Hartford and Providence. Vernon Center remained the Town's civic center.

Early Development Patterns

Vernon's rivers – the Tankerhoosen and Hockanum – drove industry and created patterns that we still see today. The rivers provided water power for mills, mainly during the 1800s and early 1900s. The development of Talcottville and Rockville exemplified the concept of "mill towns."

The Talcott Brothers (owner of the Talcottville Mill) owned land in what today is Talcottville. As many mill owners did at the time, they built a village for its workers. The village included houses (many still there today), a store, an assembly hall, library and a church. Because the area was under single ownership, Talcottville emerged as a cohesive village.

Multiple mill owners in Rockville also developed housing, stores, and other amenities, but each mill owner developed its own mini-village. Most businesses existed solely to support the mills. It was not until much later, when roads were built to connect these villages, that Rockville became a "place" and eventually a city.

Rockville Thrives

As Rockville thrived, history repeated itself. Similar to the desire of North Bolton residents to avoid traveling to Bolton, Rockville residents found it inconvenient to travel to Vernon Center. So they built their own church and a school in 1836. As a result, Rockville residents had less interaction with the rural residents of Vernon. By 1856, Town Meetings began alternating between Vernon Center and Rockville.

From 1860 to 1880, Rockville was booming, with the continued construction of single family houses and businesses. By this time, businesses that were not dependent on the mills opened, including lawyers and physicians. Roads were improved and parks were created. The pressing demand for more housing resulted in houses being built up the steep hills around Rockville and spurred the conversion of boarding houses and some larger single-family houses to multi-family housing. New two- to four-family houses also were built. Talcott Park was created in the 1860/70s and Central Park was created in 1877. Transportation improved too; by 1863, a railroad spur served Rockville and trolley service began in 1898.

Meanwhile, residents in "rural" Vernon were concerned that their taxes were supporting public improvements in Rockville and they did not feel they were benefitting from such investments. By 1889, the Town successfully petitioned the State legislature to incorporate Rockville as a city. Rockville was still a part of Vernon, but now had the ability to govern and tax itself.

Public improvements continued, cementing Rockville's civic, business and cultural identity. Memorial Hall opened in 1880; the Library was built in 1904; and Rockville City Hospital opened in 1921. But industry changed and many mills began closing. Some changed in ownership and shifted to new products. Many burned down. A number remain today; some have been renovated and reused while some sit vacant.

Suburbanization and Redevelopment

Like most communities, Vernon sought to capitalize on two trends occurring in the 1950s and 1960s – land use patterns that supported automobile use and urban redevelopment. The Town adopted its first zoning ordinance in 1951.

Vernon's suburbanization was marked by the loss of rail and trolley service, better access to Hartford via the newly-built Wilbur Cross Parkway, and the opening of the Tri-City Plaza. Suburbanization is credited with alleviating some of the economic impact of the declining mill industry. Redevelopment of Rockville entailed tearing down buildings and building suburban style retail. At that time the Hockanum River was viewed as a constraint that limited Rockville's redevelopment potential, so it was covered. It was also at this time (1961) that the first zoning ordinance was adopted for Rockville. Shortly afterward, Rockville's and Vernon's government and police were consolidated. Consolidation of the fire department followed.

Today Vernon's villages are integral parts of the community. Although some have been lost (e.g., Dobsonville), the historic importance of Rockville and Talcottville have been cemented by their listing as historic districts on the National Register of Historic Places.

"Vernon" and "Rockville"

Some degree of the "Vernon versus Rockville" sentiment is still evident today.

Residents expressed concern that others do not see Rockville as their village center and that residents perceive "Rockville" and "Vernon" as two different communities.

It can be a delicate balance to celebrate the uniqueness of Vernon's neighborhoods, while still promoting that all residents are "Vernon" residents.

This Plan envisions that those who live in Rockville will view themselves as Vernon residents and those who live elsewhere in Vernon view Rockville as Vernon's Town Center.

Civic events play an important role in bringing residents together and drawing them to Rockville. These efforts should continue and be supplemented with other events throughout Vernon.

Regional Context

Vernon is a member of the 29-community Capital Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) and a member of the Tolland County Chamber of Commerce. The CRCOG region includes a mix of urban, suburban and rural communities. Vernon is one of nine communities categorized as "Fully Suburban", meaning that there are 1,251 to 3,000 persons per square mile.

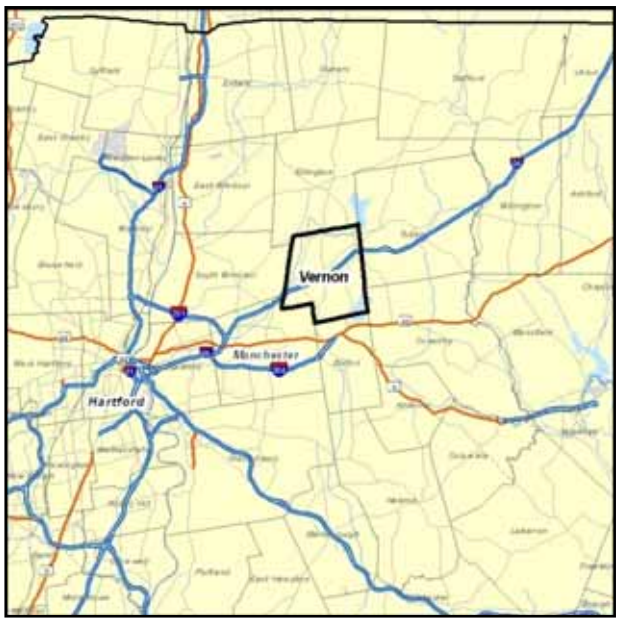
CRCOG has adopted a number of regional plans that have implications for Vernon. These include:

- Regional Plan of Conservation and Development (2009)
- Capital Region Transportation Plan (2007)
- Transportation Improvement Program (FFY 2010-2013)
- Regional Pedestrian Plan and Bicycle Plan (2008)

A number of regional assets are found in Vernon. These include transportation infrastructure (I-84, major State routes), recreational opportunities (trails, parks, open space, lakes), cultural assets (museums), and State and regional facilities (Connecticut National Guard, Rockville Hospital, etc.). And Shenipsit Lake provides water to the region. Vernon's retail businesses provide goods and services to neighboring communities in addition to its own residents.

Conversely, Vernon's residents and businesses depend upon the greater region for a number of things, including jobs. Also, conditions and trends in the greater region can impact Vernon. Examples include better access to Hartford which spurred residential growth in Vernon and retail development in neighboring communities that competed with retail businesses in Vernon, but also opened up new opportunities.

Regional Context



People

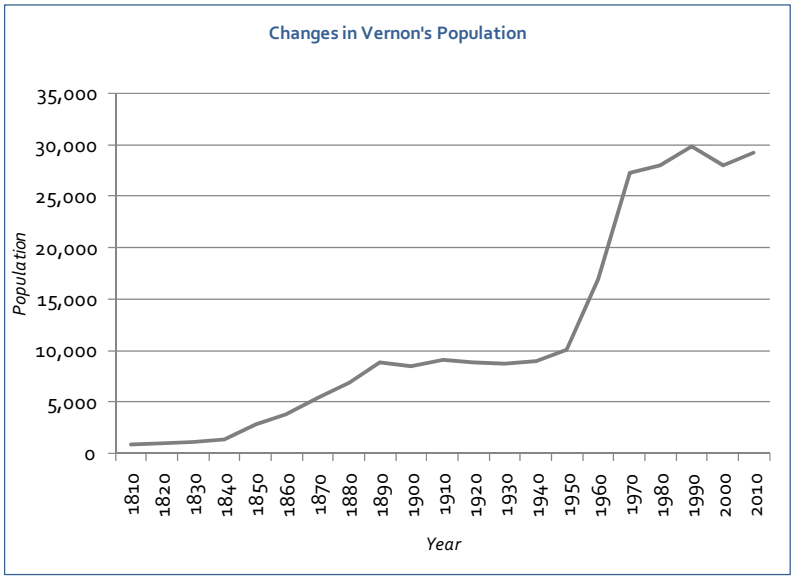
Additional Data

See the POCD web page for additional demographic data (http://www.vernon-ct.gov/plan-of-conservation).

Vernon experienced dramatic population growth during two periods – in the mid 1800s due to the booming mill industry and one hundred years later when access to Hartford improved. The Town experienced a decline in population from 1990 to 2000. Census data from 2010 indicates that the decline has reversed and 29,179 people live in Vernon.

Vernon's population has surpassed projections prepared by state entities (29 to 30,000 residents were projected by 2030). Simply extending the current 4% growth over the previous decade would place Vernon's population at approximately 31,560 by 2030.

Each age group has different needs, particularly in terms of housing and town services and facilities. The following chart depicts the actual and projected proportion of Vernon's population in each age group. The projections indicate that if current demographic trends continue, the proportion of the over 55 population will continue to grow while the proportion of most other age groups will decrease.



Changes in Vernon's Age Composition

Description	Age Range	Needs / Wants	1980 Share	2000 Share	Projected 2020 Share	Future Trend
Infants	0 to 4	• Child care • Pre-school programs	7%	6%	6%	↓
School Age	5 to 19	• School facilities • Recreation programs and facilities	25%	18%	15%	↓
Young Adults	20 to 34	• Rental housing, starter homes • Social destinations	28%	22%	16%	↓
Middle Adults	35 to 54	• Starter homes, trade-up homes • Family programs, school programs	23%	31%	17%	↓
Mature Adults	55 to 64	• Smaller homes, second homes • Leisure programs and facilities	9%	10%	15%	↑
Retirement Age	65 +	• Lower upkeep, higher service housing • Elderly programs, tax relief	9%	13%	32%	↑

Sources: Census and CT State Data Center.

Housing

Housing Units

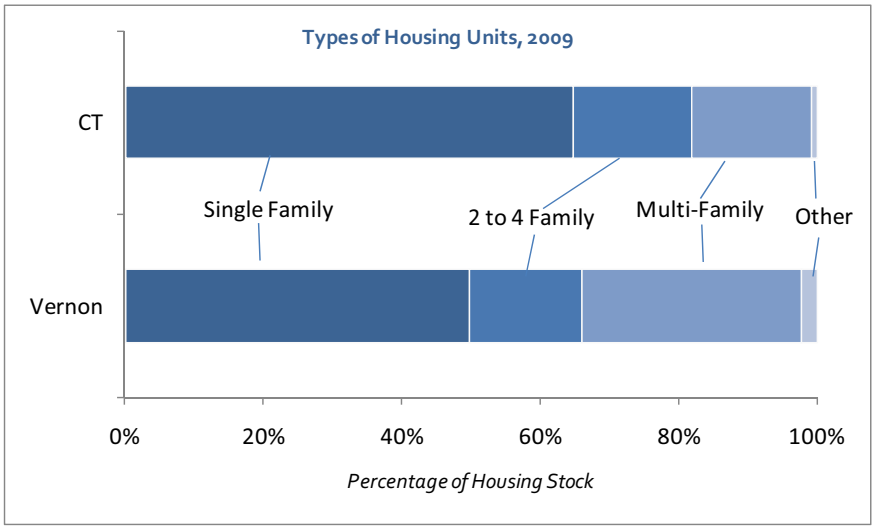
By the end of 2009, there were just under 14,000 housing units in Vernon (a 9% increase since 2000). Growth since 2000 is attributed mainly to additional multi-family units (950 new multi-family housing units were constructed).

Vernon's housing stock is diverse – much more so than the State as a whole (see chart). According to the 2006/08 American Community Survey (ACS), 57% of Vernon's housing units are owner-occupied and 43% are renter-occupied.

Changes in Vernon's Housing Stock

Year	# of Units	Change
1960	5,408	--
1970	8,608	59%
1980	10,611	23%
1990	12,748	20%
2000	12,867	1%
2010	13,986	9%

Sources: US Census and previous Town Plans.



Having a variety of housing types and ample rental units helps to meet the needs of many segments of the region's population. At the same time, having a high proportion of rentals and multi-family might draw residents who only stay in Vernon for a few years – i.e., they "trade-up" elsewhere. In addition, while Vernon's housing stock has provided opportunities for seniors to remain in Town and likely draws area seniors to locate in Vernon, a population that lacks age-diversity could have implications in the future.

A 2009 study by HomeConnecticut analyzed housing affordability for all Connecticut municipalities and determined that housing in Vernon was "affordable" (affordable meant that in 2009, a family earning the Town or State median household income could qualify for a mortgage to purchase the median sales price home in Vernon).

Vernon is one of the more affordable communities in the region. Vernon's single family sales prices in 2010 were substantially lower than the median sales price for the State and many nearby communities.

Affordable Units in Vernon

Discussion on the previous page focused on whether units sell at affordable prices; sales prices fluctuate based on a number of market conditions. This section focuses on how many of Vernon's housing units are designated as affordable.

The State, pursuant to CGS 8-30g, considers a unit to be affordable if the dwelling unit is assisted, CHFA-financed or deed restricted. Just over 15% of Vernon's housing stock is affordable as of 2008 (see sidebar). All of Vernon's affordable units are either "assisted" or CHFA-financed. Out of the 1,626 affordable units in 2008, two-thirds are family units and one-third are elderly units. Roughly 34% of all affordable units are managed by the Vernon Housing Authority.

Vernon's percentage of affordable units has been declining (in 2002, it was 20.07%). The decline has occurred due to:

- Loss of deed-restricted units. Since 2004, Vernon has lost all 25 of its deed-restricted units. These were units that were affordable for a set period of time and once that time expired, the owners had fulfilled their obligation and could rent or sell the units at market rates.
- Certain developments were accidently double-counted by the State. Corrections made it appear that the Town lost those units.
- Vouchers and subsidized mortgages are counted as affordable units. These are attached to the householder – not the housing unit. If the householder moves out of Vernon or loses the voucher or mortgage, Vernon loses the affordable "unit".

Vernon's affordable housing percentage may drop further when the State updates the affordable housing percentages using 2010 Census because the 2008 percentage is based on the number of housing units counted in the 2000 Census. Vernon has seen additional housing units built since 2000. Using the 2009 housing unit total, Vernon's percentage would drop to 11.4%. Any time new market rate units are built, Vernon's percentage will continue to decrease unless additional affordable units are also created / built. If Vernon loses another 560 affordable units then the Town would drop below the 10% requirement. While this seems like a large number, Vernon has "lost" almost 600 affordable units since 2002.

Vernon is one of only 31 municipalities in the State to surpass the 10% threshold – it will be important to stay above the 10% threshold in order to continue to provide housing for a range of income levels and to avoid becoming subject to the affordable appeals process.

Affordable Housing Definition

An affordable unit under CGS 8-30g must be:

- assisted (funded under a state or federal program);
- CHFA-financed (financed under a program for income-qualifying persons or families); or,
- deed restricted to be affordable to low- or moderate-income persons or families for at least 40 years.

When 10% of a community's housing stock is affordable, it is exempt from an affordable housing appeals procedure that shifts the burden of proof to the community to show that threats to public health or safety outweigh the need for affordable housing.

Percentage of Units that are Affordable, 2008

E. Windsor	16.25%
E. Hartford	15.63%
Vernon	**15.44%**
Manchester	15.13%
S. Windsor	7.07%
Ellington	6.39%
Coventry	5.68%
Tolland	3.54%
Bolton	0.71%

Source: DECD, 2008.

Additional Resources

For additional information on Vernon's economy, see:

Economic Conditions & Trends, Economic Development Commission, 2008

Town of Vernon Market Study, by Economic & Policy Resources, Inc., 2004

Economy

Vernon's economy provides employment, offers goods and services to local and regional businesses and residents, and adds to the local tax base. It is important to distinguish between Vernon's "Labor Force" and "Jobs":

- **Labor Force** – The labor force is comprised of Vernon residents who work or are seeking employment. They may work in Vernon or elsewhere.
- **Jobs** ("Employment") – These are jobs that are located in Vernon. The jobs may be filled by Vernon's labor force or by people who live elsewhere.

In 2008, 17,540 Vernon residents were part of the labor force. Vernon's labor force depends upon jobs located outside of Vernon. For every one Vernon resident in the labor force, there were 0.5 jobs in 2008. Vernon saw tremendous job growth in the 1980's, but that trend has since reversed itself resulting in modest decreases since 1990. In 2008, there were approximately 9,180 jobs located in Vernon.

In terms of types of jobs in Vernon, the highest percentage of jobs are in health care and social assistance (24%), followed by retail (17%), accommodation and food service (13%), and local government (12%). These top sectors do not, however, offer the top wages in Vernon. Top wage jobs in Vernon were in construction, state government, professional / technical / scientific services, and manufacturing.

The Connecticut Economic Resources Center, Inc., (CERC) prepared the *Economic Conditions and Trends Report* for the Town in 2008. The report identifies which industry sectors might be economic engines in Hartford and Tolland Counties.

Change in Jobs, Vernon

Year	# of Jobs	Change
1980	7,650	--
1985	9,170	20%
1990	10,130	10%
1995	9,830	-3%
2000	9,530	-3%
2005	9,213	-3%
2009	8,998	-2%

Source: CT Department of Labor.

Current Strengths	
• Non-Internet Broadcasting • Social Assistance • Museum and Historical Sites	• Management of Companies and Enterprises • Waste Management, Remediation Services
High Priority Retention Targets	
• Warehousing and Storage	• Nursing and Residential Care Facilities
Emerging Strengths	
• Construction of Buildings • Food Manufacturing • Plastics and Rubber Products Manufacturing • Wholesale Electronic Markets, Agents, Brokers • Clothing and Accessories Stores • Truck Transportation • Motion Picture and Sound Recording	• Securities, Commodity Contracts, Other Investments • Rental and Leasing Services • Educational Services • Performing Arts, Spectator Sports • Amusement, Gambling, Recreation • Accommodation • Food Services, Drinking Places

Fiscal Overview

Revenues

In the fiscal year ending (FYE) 2009, Vernon had just over $2,600 in revenue per person. This was lower than nearby communities and the State overall.

The majority (68% in FY 2010) of the Town's revenues come from property taxes. From 2003 to 2010, property tax income increased from just over $40 million to $54 million. Vernon is much less dependent upon residential uses for the tax base compared to the State and many nearby communities (see sidebar). Vernon's top ten taxpayers are listed in the following table.

Top 10 Taxpayers in Vernon, 2008

Taxpayer	% of Grand List
Chapman and Mansions, LLC (apartments)	2.50%
Tri City Improvements (shopping center)	1.59%
Evandro Santini & Woodbridge LLC (apartments)	1.13%
Connecticut Water Company (utility)	1.05%
Connecticut Light & Power/Yankee Gas Co. (utility)	1.00%
CE Vernon II LLC (shopping center)	0.81%
Chapman Acres (apartments)	0.47%
Boston Rockville / Boston Vernon (shopping center & land)	0.45%
Parkwest Residents Association (apartments)	0.40%
Kerensky, Schneider (Risley Trust) (commercial & residential)	0.36%

Based on the October 1, 2010 Net Taxable Grand List.

Expenditures

When compared to other nearby communities Vernon had the lowest per capita expenses (see sidebar). Of the total governmental activities, education accounted for 67% of the expenses.

Per Capita Revenue, FYE 2009

S. Windsor	$3,985
Tolland	$3,594
CT	$3,563
Bolton	$3,494
E. Hartford	$3,408
Coventry	$3,091
Ellington	$3,062
Manchester	$2,888
E. Windsor	$2,874
Vernon	**$2,637**

Source: Office of Policy Management, 2010.

Residential Grand List Percentages, 2008

Coventry	83.7%
Tolland	81.0%
Bolton	82.3%
Ellington	76.4%
CT	71.4%
South Windsor	66.1%
Vernon	**65.4%**
East Hartford	56.3%
Manchester	56.1%
East Windsor	54.8%

Source: Office of Policy Management, 2010.

Per Capita Expenditures, FYE 2009

S. Windsor	$4,050
CT	$3,580
Tolland	$3,576
Bolton	$3,549
E. Hartford	$3,440
Ellington	$3,104
Coventry	$3,077
E. Windsor	$3,074
Manchester	$2,930
Vernon	**$2,624**

Source: Office of Policy Management, 2010.

Definitions

Developed Land – land that has buildings, structures, or improvements used for a particular economic or social purpose (such as residential, commercial, or institutional).

Committed Land – land that is used for a particular economic or social purpose (including open space).

Vacant Land – land that is not developed or committed.

Dedicated Open Space – land or development rights owned by the Federal government, the State, the Town, land trusts, or conservation organizations permanently protected as open space.

Managed Open Space – land that is currently used as open space but is not protected from future development.

Community Facilities w/open space – the grounds of many community facilities are used for open space purposes, such as school grounds. This plan assumes that those open space uses will continue. Those facilities are tallied in this separate category.

Existing Land Use

Most of Vernon's land (86%) is developed or committed to a use (see sidebar for definitions). Half of committed land is for residential use. Open space is the second largest category, with just over 1,900 acres that are either permanently protected or used for open space purposes. That leaves just over 1,600 acres of vacant / uncommitted land.

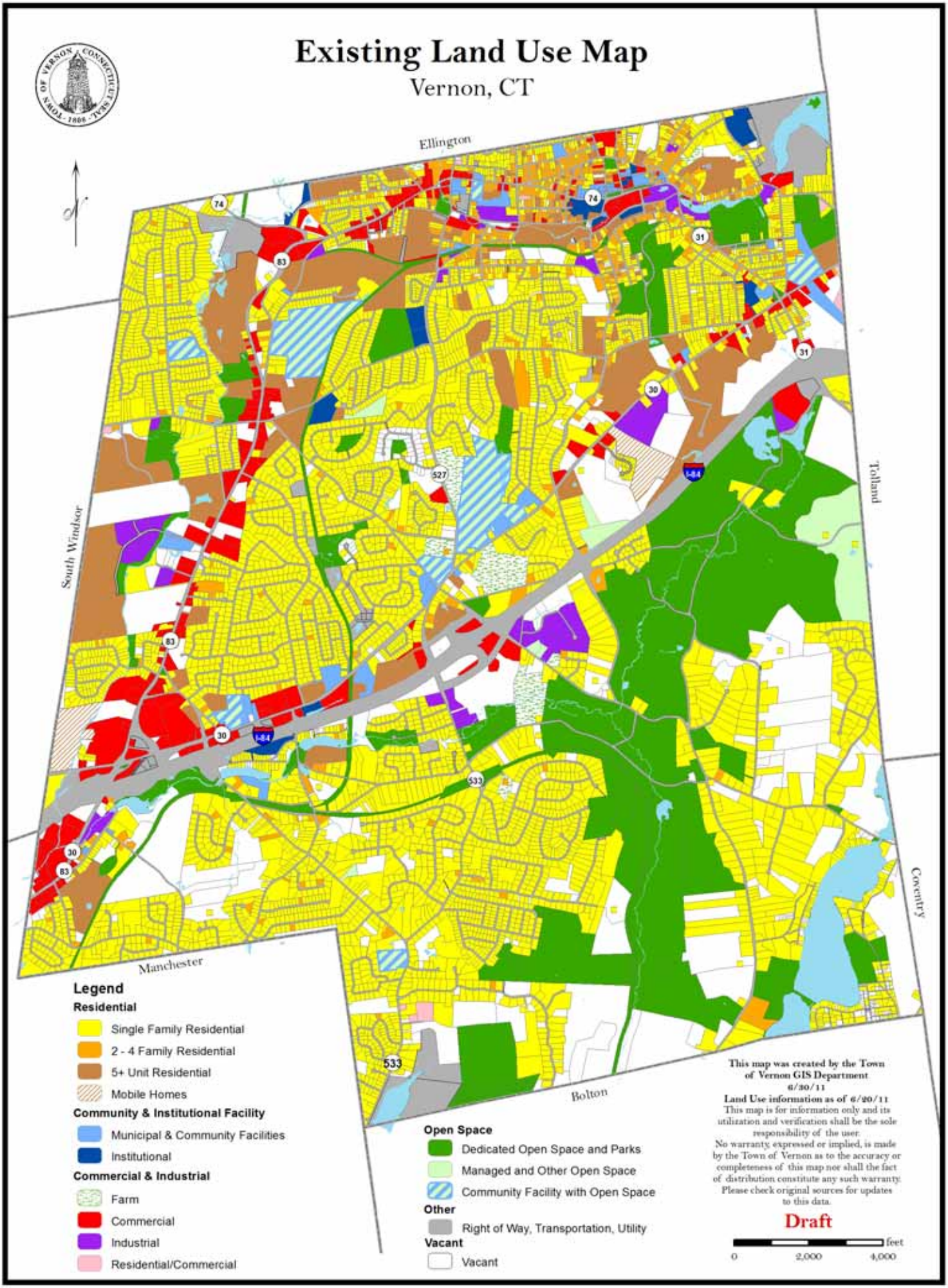
Existing Land Use in Vernon

Land Use	Acres	% of Committed Land	% of Total Land
Residential	**5,304**	**54%**	**46%**
Single Family	4,150		
2-4 Family	277		
5+ Family	811		
Mobile Home	66		
Commercial or Industrial	**712**	**7%**	**6%**
Commercial	445		
Industrial	156		
Agriculture	95		
Residential / Commercial	16		
Community Facilities or Institutional	**352**	**4%**	**3%**
Community Facilities	94		
Community Facilities w/open space	193		
Institutional	65		
Open Space	**1,904**	**19%**	**17%**
Dedicated Open Space and Parks	1,766		
Managed / Other Open Space	118		
Other	**1,610**	**16%**	**14%**
Right-of-Way, Transportation, Utility	1,238		
Water	256		
Total Developed & Committed Land	**9,882**	**100%**	**86%**
Vacant Land	**1,636**	**--**	**14%**
TOTAL	**11,518**		

Numbers may not add due to rounding; as of June 2011.

Existing Land Use Map

Vernon, CT



Additional Resources

For a full description of zoning districts, see:

Town of Vernon Zoning Regulations

Existing Zoning

Most of the Town's land area is zoned for residential use (over 72%), while over 8% is zoned for business use (these figures exclude the zones in Rockville which allow for both business and residential uses). According to an analysis by CRCOG, of the 29 communities the region, Vernon has the 4th highest percentage of land zoned for commercial uses, but the 6th lowest in the percentage of land zoned for industry (see 2009 Regional Plan, CRCOG).

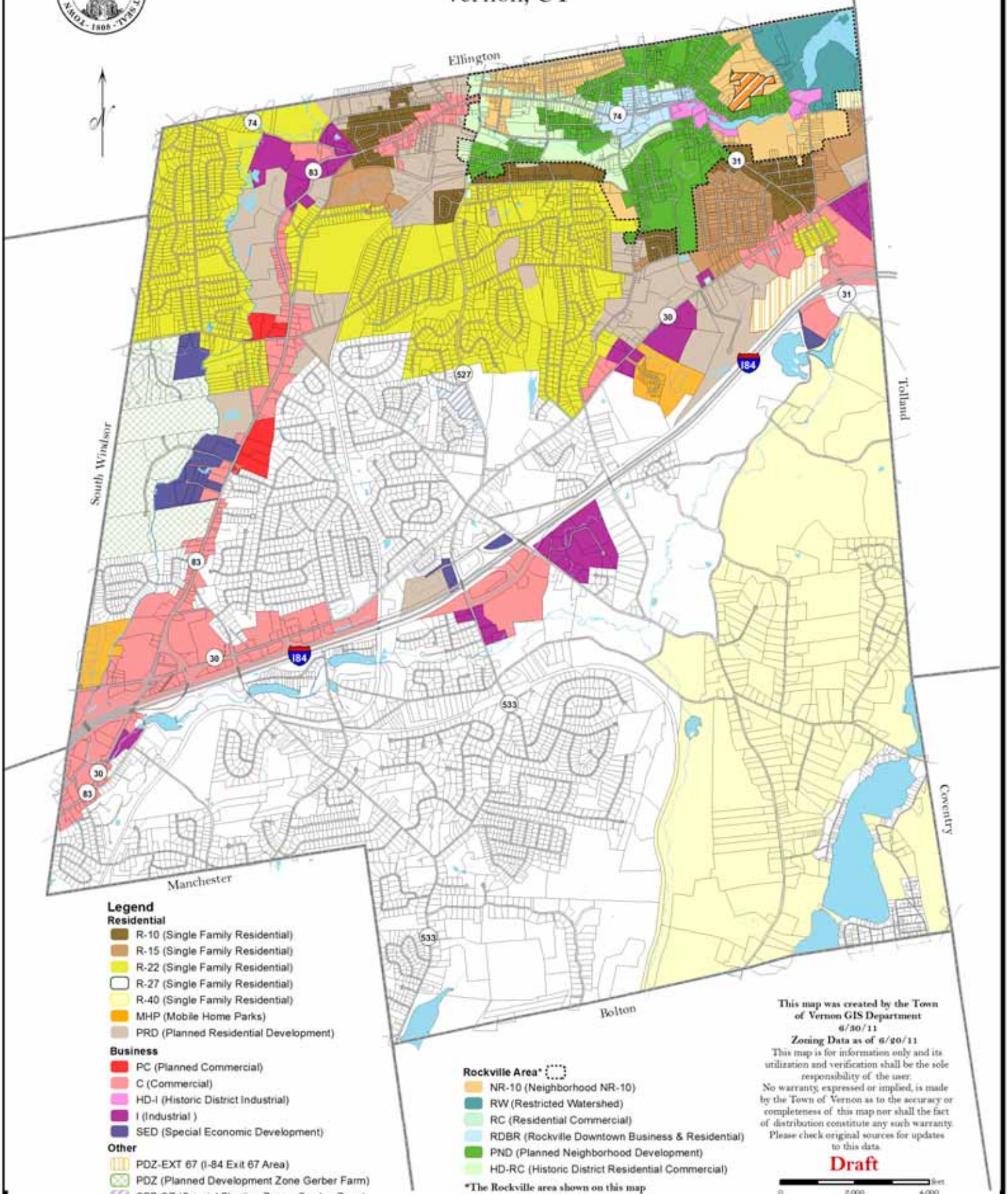
Existing Zoning in Vernon

Zone	Acres	% of Land Area
Residential	**8,289**	**72%**
R-10 (Single Family)	143	
R-15 (Single Family)	178	
R-22 (Single Family)	1,136	
R-27 (Single Family)	4,330	
R-40 (Single Family)	1,861	
MHP (Mobile Home Parks)	82	
PRD (Planned Residential Development)	543	
CMFD (Comprehensive Multi-Family)	16	
Business	**877**	**8%**
C (Commercial)	523	
PC (Planned Commercial)	38	
I (Industrial)	209	
HD-I (Historic District Industrial)	24	
SED (Special Economic Development)	83	
Rockville Historic District	**698**	**6%**
NR-10 (Neighborhood)	176	
PND (Planned Neighborhood Development)	273	
RDBR (Business & Residential)	45	
HD-RC (Historic District Residential Commercial)	115	
RC (Residential Commercial)	1	
RW (Restricted Watershed)	88	
Other	**326**	**3%**
PDZ–EXT 67 (Exit 67 area)	42	
PDZ (Gerber Farm)	272	
SFZ-GZ (Garden Zone)	12	
No Zone (right-of-way, water, other)	**1,328**	**12%**
TOTAL	**11,518**	

Numbers may not add due to rounding. As of July 2011

Zoning Map

Vernon, CT



Legend

Residential

- R-10 (Single Family Residential)
- R-15 (Single Family Residential)
- R-22 (Single Family Residential)
- R-27 (Single Family Residential)
- R-40 (Single Family Residential)
- MHP (Mobile Home Parks)
- PRD (Planned Residential Development)

Business

- PC (Planned Commercial)
- C (Commercial)
- HD-I (Historic District Industrial)
- I (Industrial)
- SED (Special Economic Development)

Other

- PDZ-EXT 67 (I-84 Exit 67 Area)
- PDZ (Planned Development Zone Gerber Farm)
- SFZ-GZ (Special Floating Zone - Garden Zone)
- CMFD (Comprehensive Multi-Family Dwelling)

Rockville Area*

- NR-10 (Neighborhood NR-10)
- RW (Restricted Watershed)
- RC (Residential Commercial)
- RDBR (Rockville Downtown Business & Residential)
- PND (Planned Neighborhood Development)
- HD-RC (Historic District Residential Commercial)

***The Rockville area shown on this map does not reflext the historic boundaries of the City of Rockville**

This map was created by the Town of Vernon GIS Department
6/30/11
Zoning Data as of 6/20/11

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Chapter 4: Community Input

In this Chapter:

Public Input Process

Prominent Themes

Resident Survey

References in this plan to "the survey" [also marked with a C] refer to a statistically valid random sample telephone survey of Vernon residents.

In November 2010, the Pert Group conducted the survey of 400Vernon residents. The survey asked 40 questions on various topics related to conservation, development, community facilities, transportation, etc., along with demographic questions. The full survey results are available as a supplement to this Plan on the Town's website [will add hyperlink]

Public Input Process

A Plan should focus on those issues and goals that are important to the community. To solicit input and keep residents informed of the planning process, the Planning and Zoning Commission (and in some cases the POCD subcommittee):

- Held two public workshops at the beginning of the planning process to identify issues and solicit goals and strategies
- Established a web page using social media to disseminate project information
- Posted project documents on the Town's web site
- Collected input from individual board / commission members and staff via a written questionnaire
- Invited boards / commissions and other local officials to provide input at a special Planning and Zoning Commission meeting
- Met with local reporters to enhance newspaper coverage of the project's progress
- Conducted a statistically valid, random sample telephone survey
- [Held a public information meeting on the draft Plan – forthcoming]
- [Held a public hearing on adoption]

In addition, the planning consultant interviewed a number of departments about issues and their future needs.

Prominent Themes

A number of themes became evident through the public outreach process. Here is a summary of those themes:

Overarching Themes

- **Fiscal resources**. The plan was updated during an economic downturn. Municipalities, including Vernon, were facing great uncertainty about revenues, whether stalled economic projects would impact the tax base, and with many residents struggling financially, would residents be willing to pay for needed projects, let alone quality-of-life amenities.
- **Optimism**. At the same time, many felt optimistic that many goals can be achieved with little if any "cost" and / or would provide a return on investment.
- **Goals are not at odds with one another**. Some goals may appear to be at odds (e.g., open space protection and business development), but many felt strongly that this is not the case. Vernon can have both, with thoughtful planning.
- **Community engagement**. Vernon has a large pool of volunteers who are committed to maintaining and improving the Town's quality of life. However it is difficult to broaden the volunteer pool, possibly in part due to a large renter population, who may not feel committed to Vernon over the long-term.

Conservation Themes

- Development should be "responsible" – i.e., does not impact natural resources
- Protecting water quality is particularly important
- Good job preserving open space and strong support to continue
- Reuse historic buildings to preserve our heritage
- Our natural features, unique places (e.g., Rockville), and community spirit help define Vernon's character
- While "Rockville" and "Vernon" were historically seen as two separate communities, today we are one community

Development Themes

- Rockville is a "gem" and it is important to focus on revitalization…
- …but we as a community are not patronizing Rockville's businesses
- Continue to promote homeownership and work to attract families to Vernon
- Maintain residential neighborhoods and rethink how and where new multi-family housing is built
- Continue to build tax base
- Vacant and underutilized buildings are assets for business development
- Business development in certain areas will require careful planning

Infrastructure Themes

- Maintenance of existing infrastructure is a priority (roads, sewers, facilities, etc.)
- Quality schools can attract families / homeowners
- Vernon offers stellar parks and recreational facilities
- Neighborhoods and commercial areas could be better connected with paths and sidewalks
- Better bus service is desired…but few indicate that they would use it

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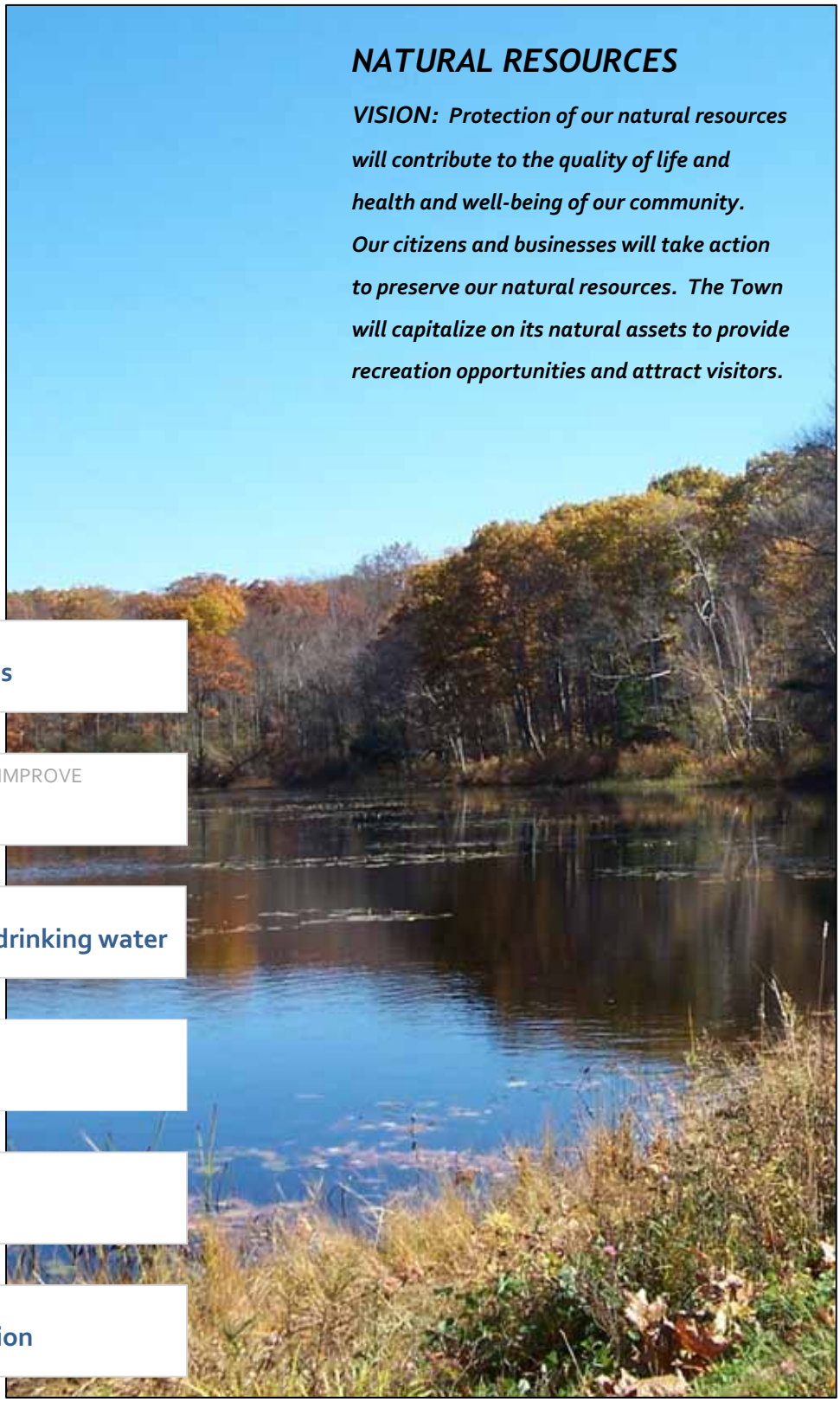
Chapter 5: Preserving Our Roots

In this Chapter:

- Natural Resources
- Open Space and Greenways
- Historic Resources
- Community Character



NATURAL RESOURCES

***VISION:** Protection of our natural resources will contribute to the quality of life and health and well-being of our community. Our citizens and businesses will take action to preserve our natural resources. The Town will capitalize on its natural assets to provide recreation opportunities and attract visitors.*

STRATEGIES

PROTECT
Our natural resources

CONTINUE TO RESTORE & IMPROVE
Our lakes and rivers

PROTECT
Ground and surface drinking water

MINIMIZE THREATS TO
Water quality

REDUCE
Storm water runoff

PROTECT
Habitat and vegetation

Natural Resources

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the…community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

- Aldo Leopold

Our natural resources:

- Protect our health and provides us with basic needs (clean water, fresh air, energy)
- Contribute to the ecological well-being of the larger region and state
- Boast our quality of life, with its beauty and recreational opportunities
- Contribute to Vernon's unique character
- Protect our safety (e.g., floodplains)

Vernon is fortunate to have miles of flowing rivers, potable ground water, scenic lakes and ponds, and important wildlife habitat. Preserving and conserving our resources is beneficial to residents today and for future generations.

Resources to Preserve

Alterations should be avoided to the maximum extent feasible:

- 100 year floodplain
- Steep slopes (>20%)
- Watercourses
- Wetlands

Resources to Conserve

The functions of the resources might be able to be maintained if development occurs in an environmentally sensitive manner:

- 500 year floodplain
- Aquifers
- Unique or special habitat areas (DEP Natural Diversity Database)

Inventory of Natural and Cultural Resources

For an inventory of Vernon's natural and cultural resources, see the POCD website at: www.vernon-ct.gov/plan-of-conservation

Protect Vernon's Natural Resources

Some natural resources are so important that they must be "preserved". Permanent preservation as open space or, if not feasible, ensuring that development is carefully regulated can be the best approach for protecting such resources.

For other natural resources, "conservation" is a key approach. Conservation means that some level of development is often acceptable, provided that the integrity of the natural resource is "conserved." Best practices to conserve such resources are contained throughout this Chapter.

An overall approach to protecting natural resources in Vernon might be:

- where feasible, preserve sensitive natural resource areas as open space (see page 44)
- where preservation is not possible, reduce densities / development intensity
- when development does occur, design sites to avoid sensitive areas (e.g., allow flexibility)

Updates to the zoning regulations can improve natural resource protection. The Zoning Regulations require a "developable acreage" (area without wetlands, floodplains or slopes over 15%) calculation for rear lots. The concept of developable acreage could be expanded to new lots in R-40 (and possibly R-27).

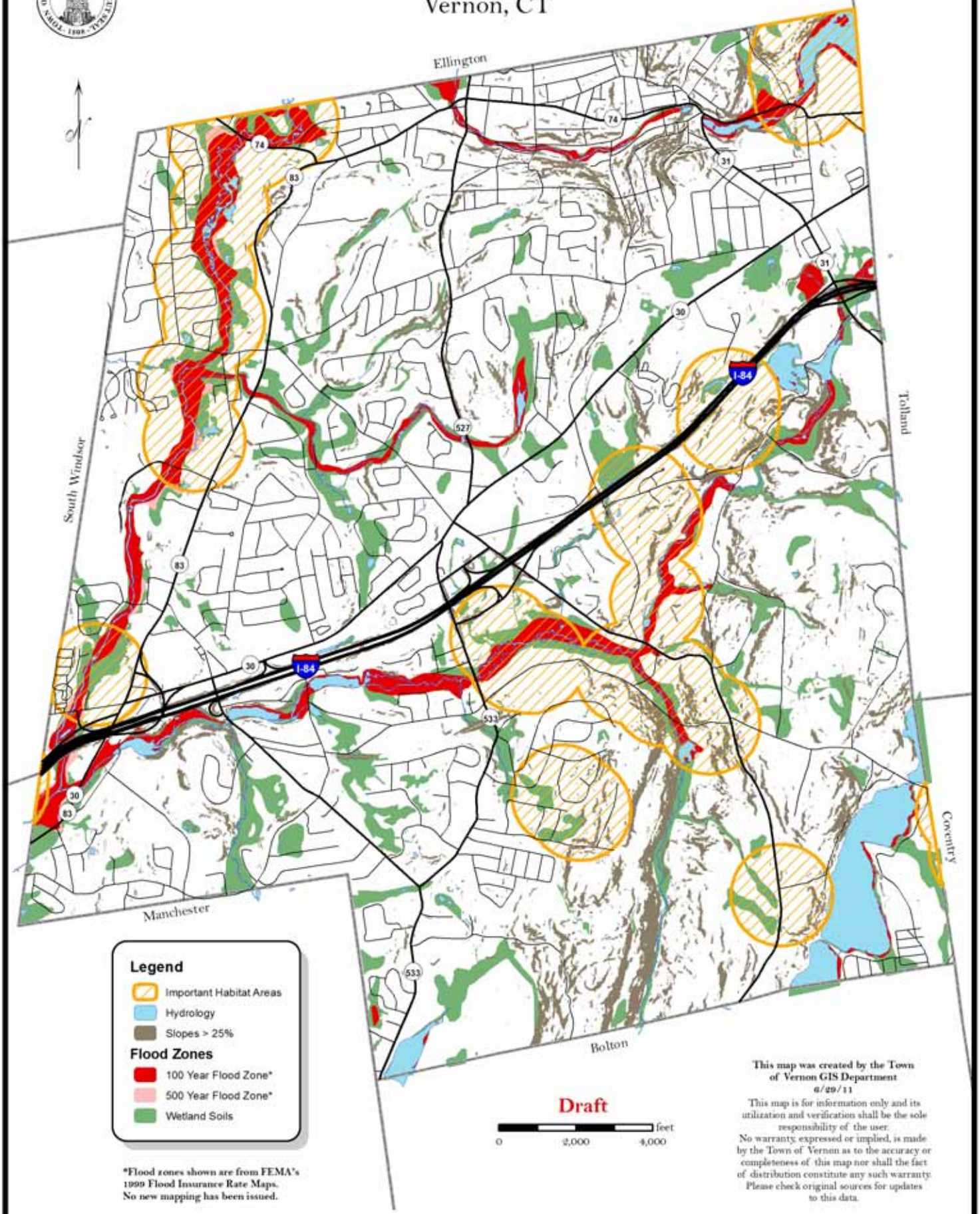
Allowing flexibility in lot dimensional requirements for new building lots better enables the avoidance of sensitive areas and better follows natural topography. The Town's cluster regulations, which allow a generous bonus in number of permitted units provide such flexibility. However, it requires a minimum parcel size of 10 acres and must be in areas with sewers. The Town might consider reducing or eliminating the minimum parcel size for land that is adjacent to existing open space or in areas for conservation; however, the bonus provision should be scaled back in those areas.

Protect Vernon's Natural Resources:

1. Make every effort possible to preserve sensitive natural resource areas.
2. Where preservation is not possible, update zoning to reduce densities / development intensity in areas with a concentration of natural resources.
    a. Consider updating zoning regulations to expand "developable acreage" to low density zones (R-40 and possibly R-27).
3. Design sites to avoid sensitive areas.
    a. Update zoning regulations to allow Cluster Developments on smaller parcels, as appropriate.

Natural Resources Plan

Vernon, CT



*Flood zones shown are from FEMA's 1999 Flood Insurance Rate Maps. No new mapping has been issued.

This map was created by the Town of Vernon GIS Department
6/29/11

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Continue to Restore and Improve Vernon's Lakes and Rivers

Vernon is divided into three main watersheds: Hockanum River, Tankerhoosen River, and the Hop River. Both the Hockanum and Tankerhoosen rivers originate in Vernon. These rivers, along with Vernon's lakes, provide ecological and recreational benefits, and are important components of the community's identity.

Hockanum River – The DEP has rated its water quality as "impaired" with a goal to improve it. The recent upgrade at the Town's water treatment plant, which discharges into the river, was an important step in improving water quality. Additional efforts to upgrade the water quality of the river and Paper Mill Pond should continue.

A stretch of the river in Rockville is buried under a parking area and buildings. Some have expressed a desire to uncover the river for ecological and aesthetic benefits. Daylighting the full stretch might not be feasible (financially and because it could greatly reduce Rockville's built ambiance).

Focus should continue on enhancing the uncovered parts, with additional pocket parks and vantage points, referencing the River's presence in walking guides, and providing plaques or kiosks with information. Continued implementation of the Hockanum River Linear Park Plan can help achieve these goals (see page 42).

For the remainder of the river, key strategies should focus on restoring and improving water quality and continuing to implement the Linear Park plan.

Vernon's Watersheds

Surface Water Quality

Legend

Good / Maintain

Impaired / Improve

Tankerhoosen River – The Tankerhoosen River has its headwaters at Gages Brook. The Tankerhoosen River watershed has been recognized as unique in the State, particularly for the robust native wild trout populations. Although it was once one of the cleanest rivers in the State, the westernmost stretch is considered "threatened", with impaired water quality. East of Tankerhoosen Lake, the river maintains a higher water quality rating. Because 70% of this river's watershed is within Vernon, protective measures within the Town can have great impact on this river. Water quality measurements have established a baseline from which progress can be tracked. Such water quality assessments should continue.

Detailed strategies for restoring and protecting the River were identified in the 2009 Tankerhoosen Watershed Management Plan (see box). The document's recommendations are incorporated by reference into the POCD.

Tankerhoosen Watershed Management Plan, 2009

A collaboration of organizations concerned about the future of the River contracted an engineering consultant to create the Tankerhoosen Watershed Management Plan in 2009. The multi-town Plan assesses issues facing the river and watershed, reviews existing regulations, and recommends actions to restore and protect the river and watershed.

The overall watershed management goals are to: develop an affordable and effective watershed management plan; maintain and enhance water quality and ecological health; protect the upper region of the watershed from pollution; and restore and enhance water quality and ecological health.

Objectives to accomplish these goals include:

- Establish a coalition and coordinate regionally
- Enhance habitat
- Protect and restore buffers
- Address illicit discharges and encourage stream cleanups
- Advance local government, business and residential awareness
- Monitor water quality
- Manage and acquire open space
- Mitigate impacts of stormwater runoff
- Conduct additional assessments in other parts of the watershed

The Plan recommends that Vernon develop consistent stormwater management standards which would become the regulatory standards for all boards and commissions. Details on administration, applicability, enforcement, etc., would need to be worked out. Such standards should incorporate Low Impact Development / Design (LID, see page 37).

Bolton Lakes (and Hop River Watershed) – The Bolton Lakes provide scenic value, wildlife habitat, and extensive recreational opportunities. Sewers are being extended to neighborhoods around the lakes to reduce potential pollution from failing septic systems. Sewers can spur development at densities that might not be desired in a given area. As discussed on page 111, the Town should ensure that sewer availability supports desired land use patterns rather than drive undesirable development.

Long-term, the water budget in this area should be monitored. Prior to sewers, water was cycled up from the wells and discharged back into the ground through on-site septic systems (i.e., remains in the same watershed). With sewers, the water is transferred out of the watershed and ultimately discharged into the Hockanum River in Manchester. The Environment Impact Report prepared for the sewer project estimated a loss of 2.4% of annual flow in the watershed and considered the loss to have a negligible impact. This situation should be carefully monitored to ensure that well water levels are not affected. Efforts to increase stormwater infiltration on site can also help mitigate this water loss (see LID discussion later) along with improving water quality.

The Town should continue to work with the other communities in the watershed to reduce pollution potential, to determine optimal water levels for the lakes, and to maintain groundwater levels.

Other Water Bodies –

- The Tankerhoosen Ponds (Tankerhoosen Lake, Talcottville Pond, and Dobson Pond) have impaired water quality. Efforts to improve water quality in the river can also help improve these water bodies. Overtime, these ponds have filled with sediment, making the ponds shallower. Shallower waters tend to have warmer waters, which thereby impact temperatures downstream. Dredging can help restore these ponds.
- Walker Reservoir's health should be maintained in order to continue to provide recreational opportunities and to ensure that the eastern stretch of the Tankerhoosen maintains its high water quality rating.
- There are many additional brooks, streams and ponds in Vernon. Many of these smaller water bodies feed into larger water resources and therefore their water quality is important.

In addition to preventing water pollution, Vernon's water bodies have been affected by the spread of invasive species which outcompete native species, often leading to their elimination. Creating a long term plan to prevent, monitor, and eradicate invasive species would help maintain the ecological health and public enjoyment of Vernon's water bodies.

Wetlands, Flood Plains and Vernal Pools – Wetlands and floodplains provide critical public health and safety functions and habitat. They also provide natural flood control and filter pollutants from storm water.

Flood plains are intended to convey water during times of heavy rain, so depletion of their flood conveyance capacity can impact adjacent and downstream properties. Preservation of the 100-year flood plain is of particular importance. As required by the State, activities that might impact wetlands and flood plains are regulated. The Town has further strengthened wetlands protection by extending the upland review area along certain rivers.

Protection of vernal pools is essential for species which depend upon them for survival. The Town has started to identify their locations (29 have been identified as of 2010). Additional identification should continue. The land surrounding vernal pools is critical to their proper functioning. Landowners should be encouraged to protect these areas.

Continue to Restore and Improve Vernon's Lakes and Rivers:

1. Continue to preserve open space along lakes and rivers (see Open Space discussion).
2. Better integrate the Hockanum River into Rockville's identity.
3. Implement the Tankerhoosen River Watershed Management Plan.
4. Incorporate LID into land use regulations and Town projects.
5. Continue to work with the other Bolton Lakes communities to reduce pollution potential and determine adequate water levels.
6. Monitor groundwater levels near Bolton Lakes to ensure that the diversion of water out of the watershed does not impact groundwater levels.
7. Investigate the merits and feasibility of dredging ponds to remove accumulated sediment.
8. Develop a plan to address invasive species.
9. Protect wetlands, floodplains and vernal pools through the regulatory process.

Vernon's Aquifers

In addition to surface reservoirs, there are two types of aquifers in Vernon: stratified drift aquifers and bedrock aquifers.

The 1988 Aquifer Management Study delineated the Town's stratified drift aquifers and their recharge areas, along with subareas which are particularly favorable for providing drinking water because the saturated thickness of sand and gravel exceeds 30 feet.

Protect Drinking Water Supplies

Protecting surface and ground water supplies in Vernon is an important local and regional public health consideration. While some surface and ground water sources are currently used for public water supply, other areas could serve as a future drinking water source. In addition to public supplies, some properties in Vernon rely upon private wells (i.e., ground water). Strategies to protect water quality can help ensure that residents have a safe supply of drinking water. The following table and accompanying map outline a leveled protection approach.

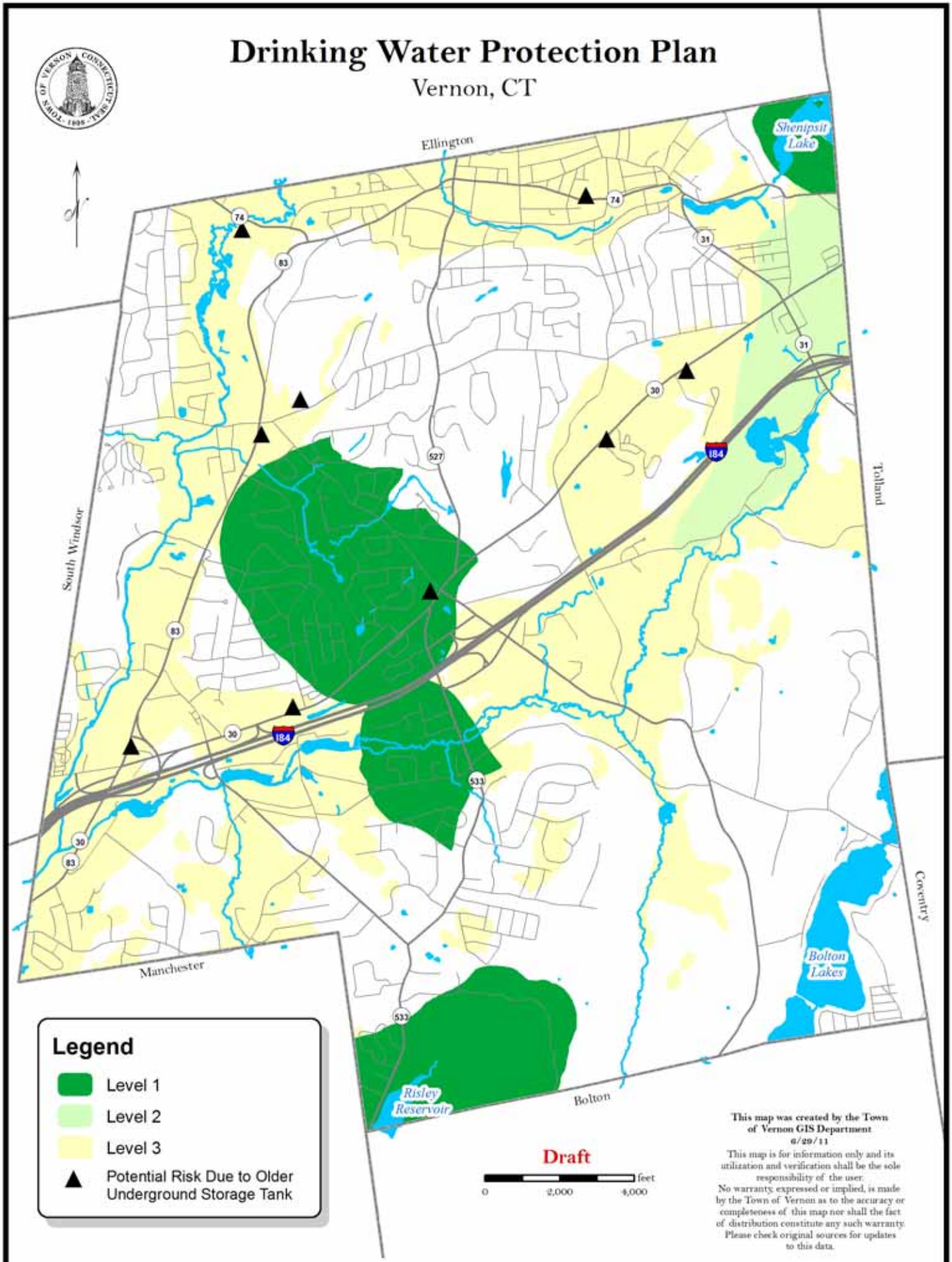
Drinking Water Protection Plan *
Level 1: Current Water Supply: Part of a public water system and warrants the highest level of protection. This includes the Connecticut Water Company's public water supply wells which are located in a stratified drift aquifer west of Vernon Center. The State requires additional mapping and the adoption of regulations for this aquifer since it provides a public water supply for more than 1,000 people.
Level 2: Possible Future Water Supply: Area identified in the 1988 Aquifer Management Study as one of many Favorable Aquifer Areas. DEP data does not indicate ground water pollution threats or impairments. The goal for this area should be to maintain its integrity so that the aquifer can be preserved for future use. The Town's Aquifer Protection Overlay Zone applies to this area.
Level 3: Groundwater Improvement Area: Remainder of stratified drift aquifers that may have a higher risk of contamination based on DEP data and existing land uses. In fact, the Connecticut Water Company has abandoned one well (in the Vernon Circle area) here due to water quality issues. The goal in this area should be to reduce additional risks by maintaining the existing Aquifer Protection Overlay Zone and incorporating other water quality practices which are discussed throughout this POCD.
*The areas on the map are general; as more specific geologic and/or water quality data is available, some areas should be reclassified. The criteria above should be the guiding factor in classifying areas.

Protect Drinking Water Supplies:

1. Preserve the water quality of existing drinking water supplies (Level 1 on map).
2. Maintain the integrity of potential future water supply aquifers in Level 2 on map.
3. Reduce pollution risks in Level 3 on map and restore water quality.

Drinking Water Protection Plan

Vernon, CT



Minimize Threats to Water Quality

Many common practices by households and businesses contribute to water pollution (e.g., overuse of fertilizer, use of pesticides, dumping or washing cleaners into storm drains, etc.) Such pollutants may seep into groundwater or wash away into water bodies. Public education should focus on explaining the impacts of these practices and suggesting alternative approaches.

Potential contamination from underground storage tanks (USTs) is also a concern. Particularly, old residential or commercial USTs might pose a risk because they were not constructed with today's pollution prevention standards. The Drinking Water Plan map indicates areas that might be of concern because older USTs are located in areas which also support our water supplies.

Some communities prohibit installing new USTs for heating oil for 1- and 2-family houses, while others have adopted ordinances to require that USTs over a certain age be replaced. Vernon might consider regulating USTs in the areas that warrant a higher level of protection (e.g., Drinking Water Protection Areas 1 and 2).

Some stormwater pollution issues are outside of the Town's control. For example, impacts to Walkers Reservoir area (both reservoirs and Gages Brook) from DOT facilities and land use activities in upstream communities have been documented in the Tankerhoosen studies. It will be important to work with the State, the region and neighbors to address these issues.

Minimize Threats to Water Quality

1. Educate residents and businesses on practices they can undertake to reduce water pollution.
2. Investigate the need for underground storage tank (UST) removal programs and / or regulations.
3. Work with the State to determine options for reducing pollution from state-owned facilities.

Reduce Stormwater Runoff

The traditional approach to stormwater management practiced by most communities was to carry stormwater off site as quickly as possible, often emptying directing into water bodies with little if any treatment. LID (Low Impact Development / Design) approaches can more effectively manage and reduce stormwater runoff (see sidebar). LID in communities might include a mixture of the following approaches:

- **Education** – Educate property owners, developers and others about simple LID practices they can undertake (e.g., rain gardens, directing roof runoff to vegetated areas, reducing the amount of pavement)
- **Guidance** – Provide guidance to property owners during the development review process; provide advice to those who wish to retrofit their properties.
- **Regulatory** – Update zoning and subdivision regulations to require LID approaches; adopt a town drainage ordinance; provide incentives for reducing peak and total stormwater runoff; reduce parking requirements; require swales and non-piped drainage structure as appropriate; etc. The Tankerhoosen Watershed Plan provides specific LID-related regulatory recommendations, such as eliminating some curb requirements, reducing paving widths for new roads, reducing front setbacks to allow shorter driveways, etc.
- **Municipal Practices** – Encourage the use of LID techniques into the design of municipal projects, such as road reconstruction, repaving, facility updates, etc.

The Town has begun to introduce some LID concepts, such as allowing gravel drive-ways subject to review by the Town Engineer. Additional LID strategies should be explored. Also, the Inland Wetlands regulations were recently amended to increase the upland review area from 75 feet to 100 feet and to 200 feet for certain rivers and streams. Retaining a buffer along rivers and streams can promote infiltration and remove pollutants before stormwater reaches the water body.

Finally, drainage systems must be maintained in order to be effective. While some drainage systems are municipally managed, some are private. There are protocols the Town can adopt to help ensure proper maintenance of privately-managed stormwater systems, whether conventional or LID (see sidebar)

LID

LID (Low Impact Development / Design) aims to better manage both water runoff volume and water quality. LID's goal is to use multiple on-site techniques to reduce runoff and increase the landscape's ability to detain (or reuse) rainwater and capture pollutants.

Sample Protocols for Ensuring Maintenance of Private Drainage Facilities

The following best practices can help towns track maintenance of private drainage facilities and respond if issues occur:

- Create a database to track sites with approved Stormwater Management Plans (ultimately link to GIS)
- Require long term maintenance agreements
- Require long term bond/escrows for LID (in addition to traditional facilities) to insure proper installation and maintenance

Reduce Stormwater Flows:

1. Educate residents and businesses about simple LID approaches they can take to reduce stormwater flow from their properties.
2. Integrate LID into land use regulations (provide guidance or require).
3. Encourage LID techniques in the design of municipal projects.
4. Ensure protocols are in place for maintenance of privately-owned drainage facilities.

Protect Habitat and Minimize the Clearing of Vegetation

Open space protection and greenway preservation conserve habitat. This strategy is particularly important within the Tankerhoosen River watershed, as the river is home to robust native wild trout populations and the watershed contains a concentration of DEP-identified important habitat areas ("endangered, threatened and special concern species and significant natural communities"). The continued preservation of land in this watershed can help protect and link important wildlife habitats, along with other benefits that open space provides.

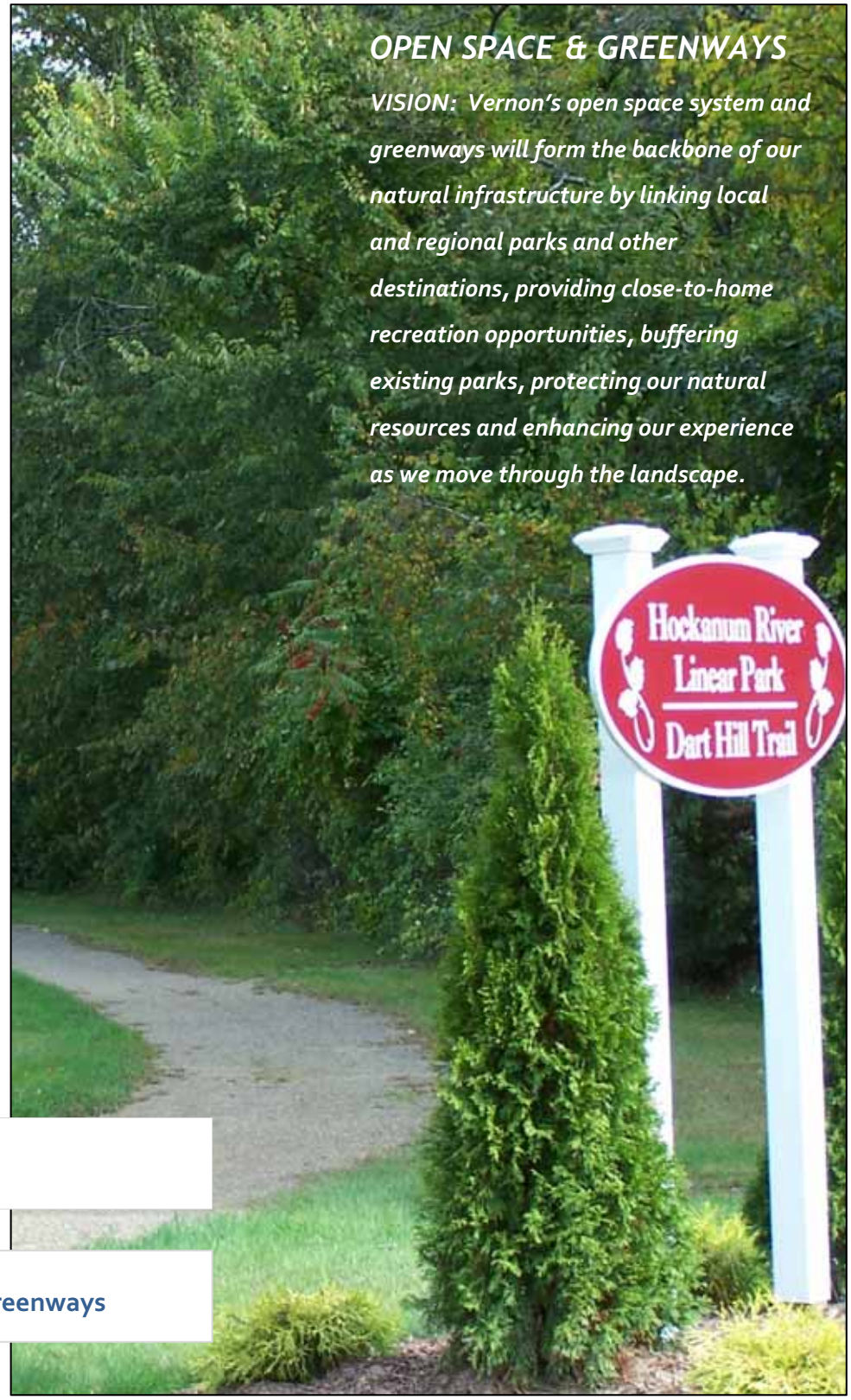
The Town and its conservation partners should maintain and enhance wildlife habitat by inventorying, analyzing, and developing habitat management plans for its open space. This could be conducted in conjunction with the open space management plans discussed on page 43.

Trees and vegetation provide habitat, decrease stormwater runoff, reduce erosion, remove carbon from the atmosphere, filter air pollution and add to the character of an area. Strategies to preserve vegetation include minimizing the amount of clearing during construction, employing practices during construction to prevent accidental damage to trees, ensur-ing that newly planted trees (as part of development approvals) are properly planted and maintained, and encouraging property owners to retain vegetation. The Commission recently updated the zoning regulations to require that site plans account for existing trees and aim to preserve them.

Similar to aquatic invasive species, terrestrial invasive species can impact native vegetation. The Town should encourage property owners to avoid planting invasive species and should maintain a program for the removal of invasive terrestrial species.

Protect Habitat and Minimize the Clearing of Vegetation

1. Continue preserving open space in areas with critical habitat (see Open Space discussion).
2. On existing open space, develop habitat-based management plans.
3. Continue to work with applicants to minimize the amount of vegetation cleared during construction.
4. Work with applicants to prevent accidental tree damage and to ensure that new trees are planted correctly and maintained.
5. Encourage property owners to retain vegetation, particularly mature, heritage and specimen trees.
6. Maintain a program for the removal of invasive species and educate property owners on invasive species.



OPEN SPACE & GREENWAYS

***VISION:** Vernon's open space system and greenways will form the backbone of our natural infrastructure by linking local and regional parks and other destinations, providing close-to-home recreation opportunities, buffering existing parks, protecting our natural resources and enhancing our experience as we move through the landscape.*

STRATEGIES

PROMOTE & MANAGE
Our open space

PRESERVE
Open space and greenways

Open Space and Greenways

Open Space Definitions

Dedicated Open Space - land or development rights intended to remain for open space purposes. For this analysis, Dedicated Open Space includes: land owned by land trusts, water bodies, cemeteries, and town-owned and state-owned lands that are intended to provide open space.

Vacant land that is under the PA 490 program (CGS 12-107a) is not included in this calculation because the program defers development; it does not permanently preserve the land. The benefits of PA 490 are discussed in the Character section.

Managed Open Space - land that provides open space benefits but is not protected from future development. For this analysis, Managed Open Space includes schools (fields), private open space (Fish & Game club), and town-owned or state-owned land that is vacant, but not specifically intended as open space.

The quality of life in a community is greatly enhanced by the quality, quantity and distribution of its cultural and natural resources. Protection of these resources through the preservation of their supporting landscape is a key function of open space preservation. Open space preservation also provides for the community's recreation needs and the basic human needs for fresh air, sunlight, physical exercise and psychological release.

The need to preserve open space in Vernon remains strong, particularly to provide recreation opportunities and to protect natural resources. The Vernon Open Space Task Force developed an Open Space Plan as part of the 2001 POCD and has regularly updated it. The Open Space Plan establishes policies and recommendations to:

- ensure the protection of resources,
- preserve of the unique character of Vernon,
- provide adequate open space to meet recreational needs, and
- enhance the Town's quality of life.

Just over 1,900 acres (17%) of land in Vernon is currently considered Open Space. Of this amount, 1,786 acres are "dedicated open space" – i.e., land that is expected to remain as open space over the long term (see sidebar). The remaining acres are "managed open space" (land that currently provides the benefits of open space, but is not protected from future development).

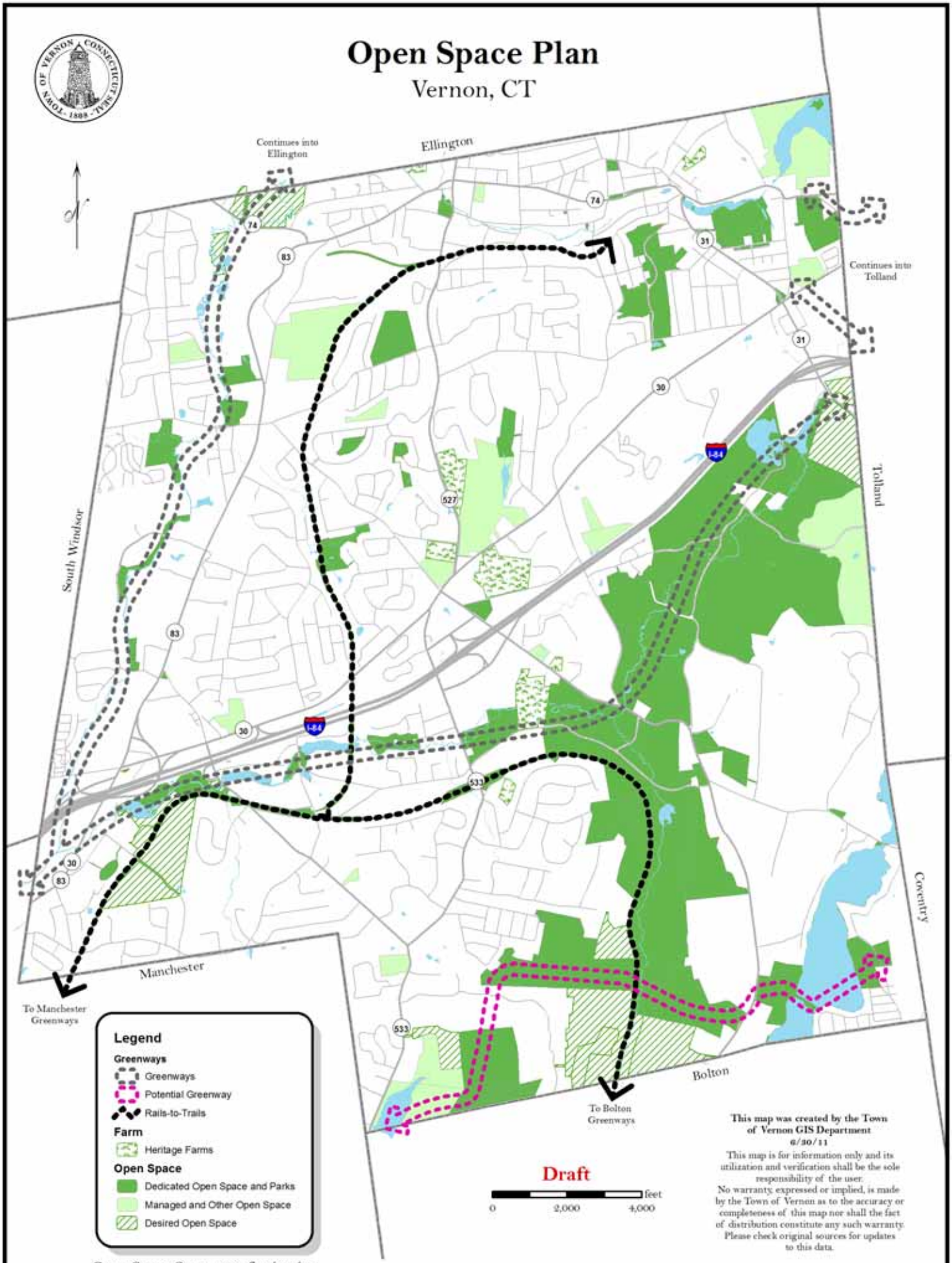
Greenways are an important component of Vernon's open space system. Greenways are corridors of open space that generally follow natural land or water features and link destinations such as cultural and historical features, open space, parks and other areas. Because of efforts to create linear parks and bike trails, Vernon has a distinct greenway network already in place. Key greenways are:

- The Hockanum River Linear Park (see box on p. 42)
- The Tankerhoosen Greenway
- The Hop River Linear Rails-to-Trails
- The Rockville Linear Rails-to-Trails
- The Shenipsit Trail

Both the Hockanum River Linear Park and the Tankerhoosen Greenway are "Officially Designated Connecticut Greenways" and included on the Connecticut Greenways map.

Open Space Plan

Vernon, CT



This map was created by the Town of Vernon GIS Department
6/30/11

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Open Space Status as of 6/29/11

State Open Space Goal

In the late 1990's a Blue Ribbon Task Force recommended that the State establish a goal of having 21% of the State's land held as open space. The goal entailed that 10% of the State's land area would be held by the State as open space, while the remaining 11% would be held by municipalities, water companies or non-profit land conservation organizations. This goal is codified in CGS Sec. 23-8.

It is important to note that this is a state-wide goal; some communities might have greater than 21% of its land preserved as open space while other may have less. But cumulatively, the State aims to preserve 21% of land as open space.

Municipalities can set their own open space policies. This POCD recommends open space acquisition policies for Vernon.

Vernon has developed its organizational capacity to manage and pursue open space preservation by forming the Open Space Task Force and having an Open Space Plan that is updated and maintained. The Town is supported by engaged citizen groups, such as "friends of" groups. Further, the Town and these groups have prepared plans for specific components of the open space network, such as the Hockanum River Linear Park Master Plan.

Hockanum River Linear Park – A Regional Greenway

The Hockanum River Linear Park is a planned regional riverscape and recreational park incorporating the lands along the 25 mile length of the Hockanum River, from its origin at Shenipsit lake to its confluence with the Connecticut River. This regional plan includes the four towns through which the river flows: Vernon, Ellington, Manchester and East Hartford. Each town is responsible for developing and managing that section of the river within its borders.

The goal of Park Plan is to bring people back to their river, increase public awareness and appreciation for the River and its surrounding environment, and to protect water quality by preserving riparian areas along the River.

Given the important role that the Hockanum River has played in the history of the community and the considerable watershed lands that lie along its five-mile length in Vernon, the objectives and strategies detailed in the following documents are incorporated by reference into the POCD:

- *A Plan for the Hockanum River Linear Park*, prepared for the CT DEP by Roy Mann Associates, Inc., 1981.
- *The Hockanum River Linear Park Proposal: Connecting Our Community*, prepared for the Vernon Town Council by the Hockanum River Linear Park Committee, 1989 [accepted and approved by the Town Council]
- *The Master Plan of Development*, prepared by Johnson and Richter, 1990.

Promote and Manage Existing Open Space

Vernon's open space and trails are highly appreciated by residents; 90% of those polled said that they were satisfied with the trails in the town (including hiking and bike trails). Continued maintenance of existing open space is important to residents.

Some parcels which are presumed to be dedicated open space but actually do not have clear deed restrictions that would prevent development or conversion to other uses. Creating management plans can help reach agreement on future intentions for the land. For town-owned open space, the Town should prepare management plans that outline the intended long term use. The development of the management plans should involve the various boards, commissions and departments involved with open space preservation and municipal facilities operations and management. In cases where other entities own open space, the Town should work with them to ensure that the long term intention is to keep the land as open space.

Other issues related to existing open space include continuing to promote the enjoyment of open space. The Town should also continue to expand access to water bodies within its parks (e.g., additional river access points) in order to enhance recreation opportunities and continue to make accessibility upgrades where feasible (e.g., paths that are wheelchair accessible, expansion of the Braille trail, etc.)

Promote and Manage Existing Open Space:

1. Maintain and update the inventory of open space and greenways.
2. Provide annual status updates to land use boards / commission.
3. Make information on open space access and amenities easily available.
4. Program events to promote use of open space and parks.
5. Encourage / provide river access for canoes, kayaks, and fishing.
6. Where feasible, improve accessibility for people with disabilities.
7. Consult with the Conservation Commission and other land use boards when municipal open space is to be sold, transferred, or exchanged.
8. Provide regular funding in the Capital Improvement Program for maintenance.
9. Continue to encourage volunteers and non-profits to aid in maintenance.
10. Prepare management plans for town-owned open space that outline intended long-term uses. Seek input from Dept. of Parks and Recreation, Conservation Commission, Inland Wetlands Commission and other boards, commissions, agencies and departments.

Criteria for Open Space Preservation

In addition to specific parcels identified as desirable open space, the following criteria can be used to prioritize future open space acquisition.

Land that:

- contains important natural resources, as outlined in the Natural Resources section,
- links or expands existing open space, or
- enhances close-to-home recreation opportunities for the public including small neighborhood parks in Rockville.

In addition, acquiring parcels zoned for business development for open space should be discouraged. Preserving portions (such as with a conservation easement) is supported if at least one of the above criteria are met and such preservation does not eliminate business development potential of the remainder of the parcel.

Continue to Preserve Open Space

The telephone survey indicated that there is strong support for preserving additional open space in Vernon (80% support the concept). Even when asked if they would be willing to pay more in taxes to preserve open space, a majority (62%) still supported additional open space preservation.

The Open Space Task Force has identified key parcels for open space acquisition, should the owners wish to preserve the land. This Plan incorporates most of those parcels, except those located in business zones as it is the intention of this Plan to support additional business development, rather than land preservation in business zones. However, this Plan does support preserving portions of business-zoned land where such preservation meets open space acquisition criteria (see sidebar) and does not eliminate the ability to use the remainder of the parcel for economic development.

This Plan also supports the acquisition of other parcels not identified on the map, provided they also meet the criteria. Often the development process results in some portion of land being "unusable" and that portion is offered as open space. The Town should be strongly discouraged from acquiring such unusable pieces if those pieces do not meet any of the open space acquisition criteria. Collecting a fee-in-lieu of open space instead will help fund strategic and meaningful acquisitions.

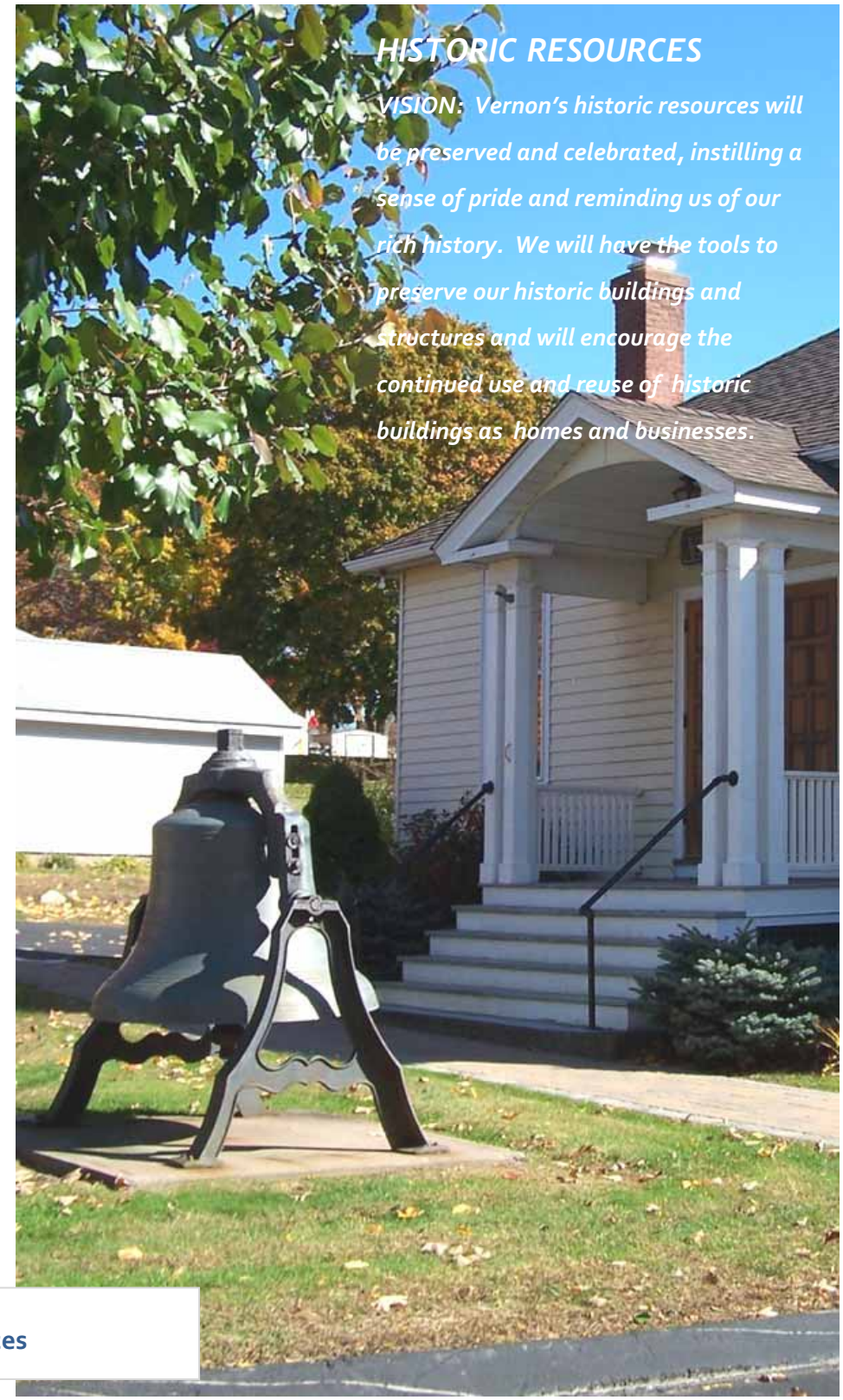
Funding open space acquisition can be challenging, especially with competing priorities in a difficult economy. The Town has established some financial tools to enable a proactive approach should acquisition opportunities arise. However, often these funds are not be sufficient to cover costs and instead are better suited to augment other funding sources. The phone survey indicated that Vernon residents might be willing to bond for open space (which requires a referendum).

In addition to Town purchases, open space acquisition by the State and non-profits will likely continue to play an important role in Vernon. The Town should continue to collaborate with these entities.

As discussed, greenways can help to tie the open space system together. The Town and its open space partners should continue to preserve greenways.

Continue to Preserve Open Space:

1. Work with the owners of managed open space (including state agencies) to permanently preserve their land.
2. Focus on preserving Desired Open Space parcels identified on Open Space Plan.
3. Encourage open space preservation in other areas that meet the criteria listed on page 44.
4. Ensure that deeds for open space state that the property is to remain open space in perpetuity.
5. Pursue additional means of funding to purchase desirable parcels including:
    a. State and federal grants
    b. Bonding
    c. Continued contributions to the Open Space Fund
    d. Donations and other gift contributions
6. Encourage the creation of additional greenways.



HISTORIC RESOURCES

***VISION:** Vernon's historic resources will be preserved and celebrated, instilling a sense of pride and reminding us of our rich history. We will have the tools to preserve our historic buildings and structures and will encourage the continued use and reuse of historic buildings as homes and businesses.*

STRATEGIES

PRESERVE & PROMOTE

Our historic resources

Historic Resources

Historic buildings, structures and landscapes remind us of Vernon's rural and urban heritage and contribute to the community's overall quality of life.

Preserve and Promote Vernon's Historic Resources

To be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a structure must be at least 50 years old (and meet other criteria). Many may not consider buildings built in 1960 as "historic". In Vernon, "historic" could be defined as those structures and sites that are over 50 years old and contribute to at least one of the following:

- **Identity**: Is important to Vernon's history because of what occurred there or who lived there. Such places can instill local (and state) pride, give residents a sense of heritage and provide education. The primary goals for these types of historic resources should be preservation of the place and promotion.
- **Architecture**: Unique to a period in history, educational about architecture, visually interesting. The primary goal should be preservation of the architectural features.
- **Patterns**: How buildings, streets, and outdoor spaces work together to create a neighborhood reflective of historic Vernon and / or Rockville. The primary goal should be to preserve the patterns and ensure that redevelopment and infill contribute to those patterns.

The following chart illustrates a range of approaches for protecting historic resources.

Range of Strategic Historic Preservation Approaches			
	Less aggressive		More aggressive
Promotion	• Plaque on building • Provide public information	• National & State Registers • Street plaques / kiosks	• Events • Regular publicity
Preservation	• Offer design review advice to interested owners • Collaborate with Local Historic Properties Commission	• Require design review • Demolition delay ordinance • Zoning incentives for owners	• Local Historic Place • Zone as Village District • Public ownership
Redevelopment / Infill		• Ensuring zoning regulations do not prevent or create a strong disincentive for historic patterns (e.g., setbacks, locations of parking areas, etc.)	• Zone as Village District

What do Historic Designations Mean?

Listing on the National and State registers generally provides recognition and some limited protection.

The National and State Register designations affect activities involving Federal and / or State funding and may prevent unreasonable destruction of important resources.

Pursuant to the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act, citizens can intervene in the proposed demolition of structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Local historic district designations afford the highest level of protection. The local historic district commission is given the authority to regulate the construction and demolition of structures and the alteration of architectural features. In cases where studies were submitted to the state to create a local historic district, but ultimately a local district was not created, the district is still listed as a State District This was the case with the Valley Falls State Historic District.

The following lists historic resources in Vernon that have a local, state or national historic designation.

Districts	National	State	Local
Talcottville Historic District	✓	✓	✓
Rockville Historic District	✓	✓	
Valley Falls Historic District		✓	

Places	National	State	Local
1. Florence Mill	✓	✓	
2. Minterburn Mill	✓	✓	
3. Old East School	✓	✓	
4. Old Rockville High School	✓	✓	
5. Saxony Mill	✓	✓	
6. Sharpe's Trout Hatchery*	✓	✓	
7. Valley Falls Cotton Mill site*	✓	✓	
8. Thrall Farm		✓	✓
9. Dr. Charles C. Beach House		✓	✓
10. Skinner – Hammond House		✓	✓
11. Vernon Grange No. 52		✓	✓
12. Jonas Sparks House		✓	✓
13. Leonard Rogers House		✓	✓
14. Valley Falls Farm A		✓	✓
15. Valley Falls Farm B		✓	✓
16. County Home School Property		✓	✓

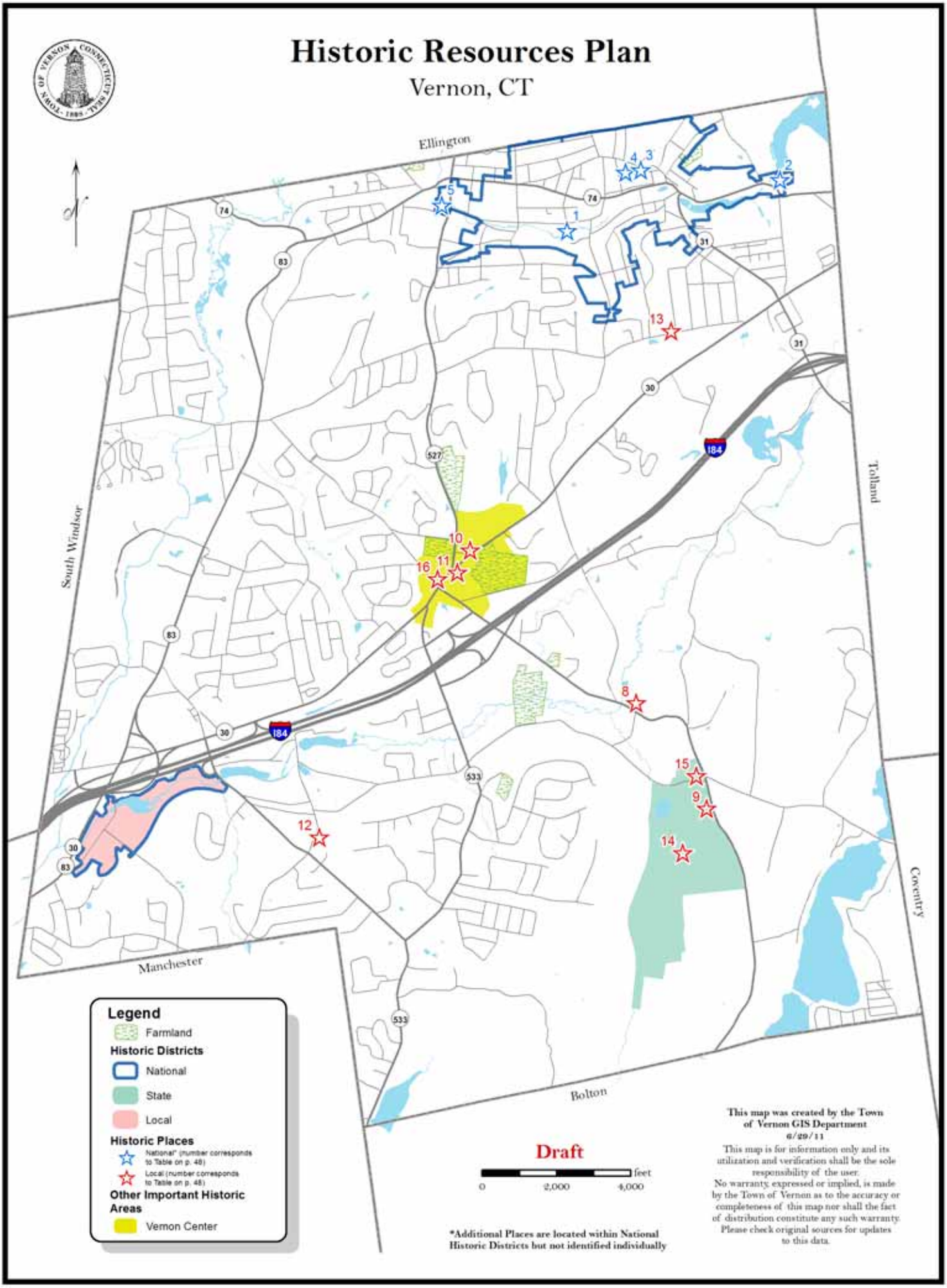
* Not mapped – address restricted.

The Town and its historic preservation partners have inventoried historic assets and designated resources as local, state and national historic resources. They also promote historic assets with events and publications and encourage (and facilitate) the reuse of historic buildings. The Local Historic Properties Commission recently adopted guidelines for alterations to historic buildings.

Vernon has also adopted a demolition delay ordinance, allowing a delay of up to 90 days before the owner can tear down a historic building. The delay provides a window for the Town and historic preservation entities to explore alternatives.

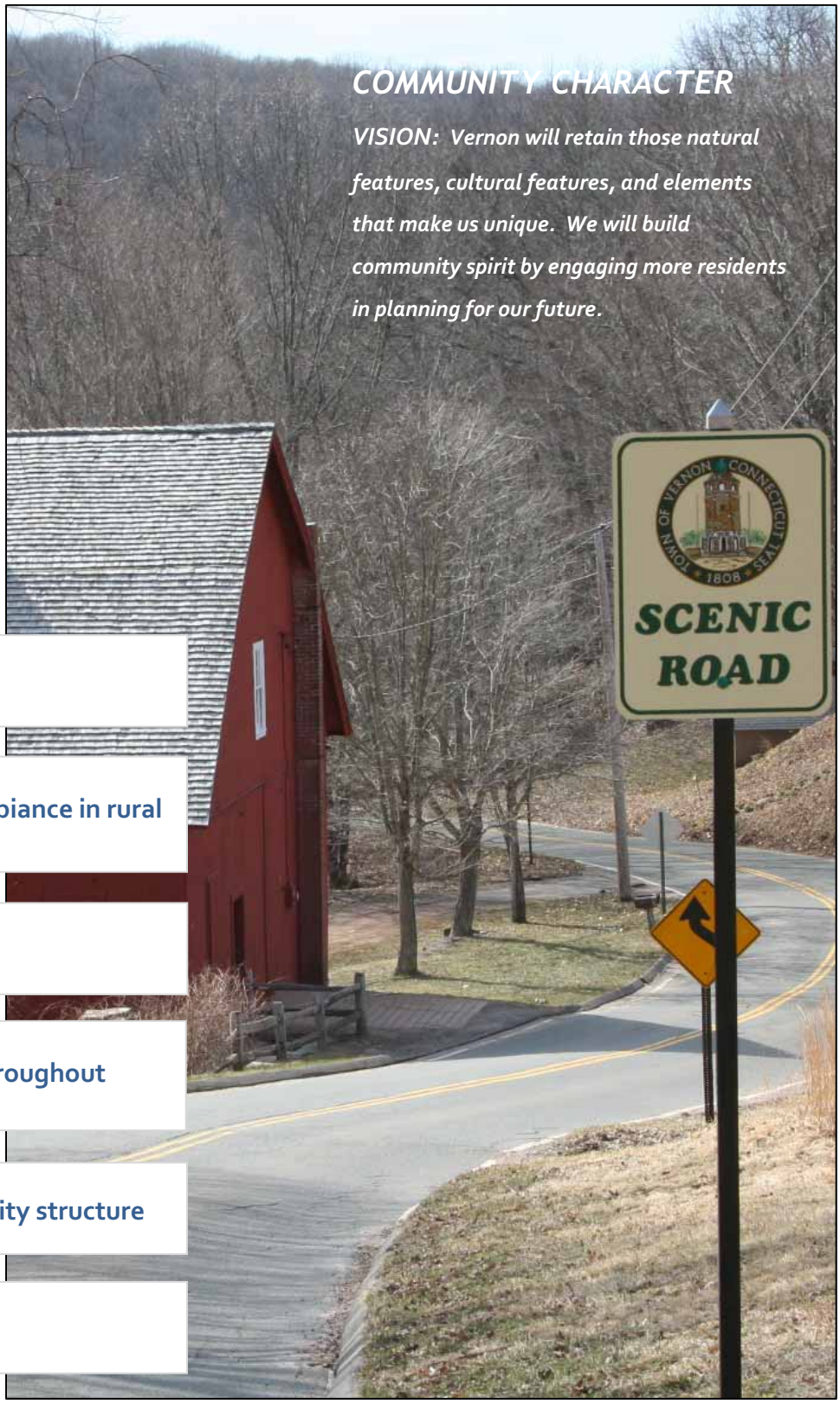
Historic Resources Plan

Vernon, CT



Preserve and Promote Vernon's Historic Resources:

1. Continue collaboration between the PZC and the Local Historic Properties Commission for applications involving historic buildings and neighborhoods.
2. Maintain a demolition delay ordinance.
3. Increase efforts to promote and celebrate Vernon's history and historic assets.
4. Support the designation of additional Local Historic Places and Districts, if property owners seek such a designation.
5. Rockville:
    a. Update zoning to maintain village elements of Rockville (see specific recommendations on pages 62-64)
    b. Determine approach to improve the facades and overall design of buildings in the RDBR (Rockville Downtown Business and Residential) zone (see "Preservation" and "Redevelopment / Infill" categories in table).
6. Talcottville: maintain this historic character of Talcottville (via the existing Local and National Historic District designations).
7. Enhance efforts to promote and celebrate Vernon's history and historic assets.



COMMUNITY CHARACTER

VISION: *Vernon will retain those natural features, cultural features, and elements that make us unique. We will build community spirit by engaging more residents in planning for our future.*

STRATEGIES

PRESERVE
Scenic features

MAINTAIN
An undeveloped ambiance in rural parts of Vernon

PRESERVE
Heritage farms

PROMOTE
Community spirit throughout Vernon

MAINTAIN
Our overall community structure

ENHANCE
Gateways

Vernon's Character

No single element, scene, or site defines Vernon's character. Rather it is the combination of all of these things (and many others) that distinguish Vernon from other communities.

Preserve Scenic Features

In 2004, Vernon adopted a Scenic Road Ordinance, which ensures that road improvements will have minimal impact on those features the make the road scenic. The Town may need to update its ordinance so that the criteria for designation and procedures are consistent with state statute (see side-bar).

While scenic road designations can effectively protect the roadway, it does not protect scenic features and views located outside of the right-of-way. Communities have limited ability to protect scenic areas, hilltops and ridgelines, but there are some strategies that can help reduce negative scenic impacts. These include:

- **Limiting the type of development and building coverage allowed in areas with hills and hilltops.** Much of the area south and east of I-84 is characterized by steep slopes (and thus scenic views) and is zoned R-27 and R-40. Zoning does allow some uses that might require large-scale clearing (e.g., hospitals, schools) and the zones can allow a lot coverage of greater than 25%. But a special permit is required, thereby giving the PZC broad discretion.
- **Limiting the clearing of trees during the development review process.** The extent of tree clearing should be minimized and measures should be in place to protect trees during construction (see earlier discussion of vegetation).

Regional scenic views are afforded from a number of vantage points in Vernon. Preserving those views is outside of Vernon's ability to control. The Town could encourage a regional approach to identifying and preserving scenic features.

Preserve Scenic Features:

1. Update the local Scenic Road Ordinance, if necessary.
2. Continue to designate local Scenic Roads.
3. Preserve the scenic value of hilltops and ridges by ensuring that large-scale development is avoided or carefully managed / sited.
4. Work regionally to identify and protect scenic views.

Elements of Vernon's Character

Elements of Vernon's character include:

- Scenic views
- Community icons (e.g., statues, towers)
- Special places (e.g., Rockville, Vernon Center)
- Water resources and features (ponds, waterfalls)
- Community spirit (events, volunteers)
- Agricultural heritage (working farms, fields)
- Open space
- Natural resources

Some elements are discussed here, while others (e.g., open space) are discussed elsewhere in this Plan.

Designation of Scenic Roads

CGS 7-149a lists specific criterion for scenic road designation. A road must meet at least one to qualify for designation:

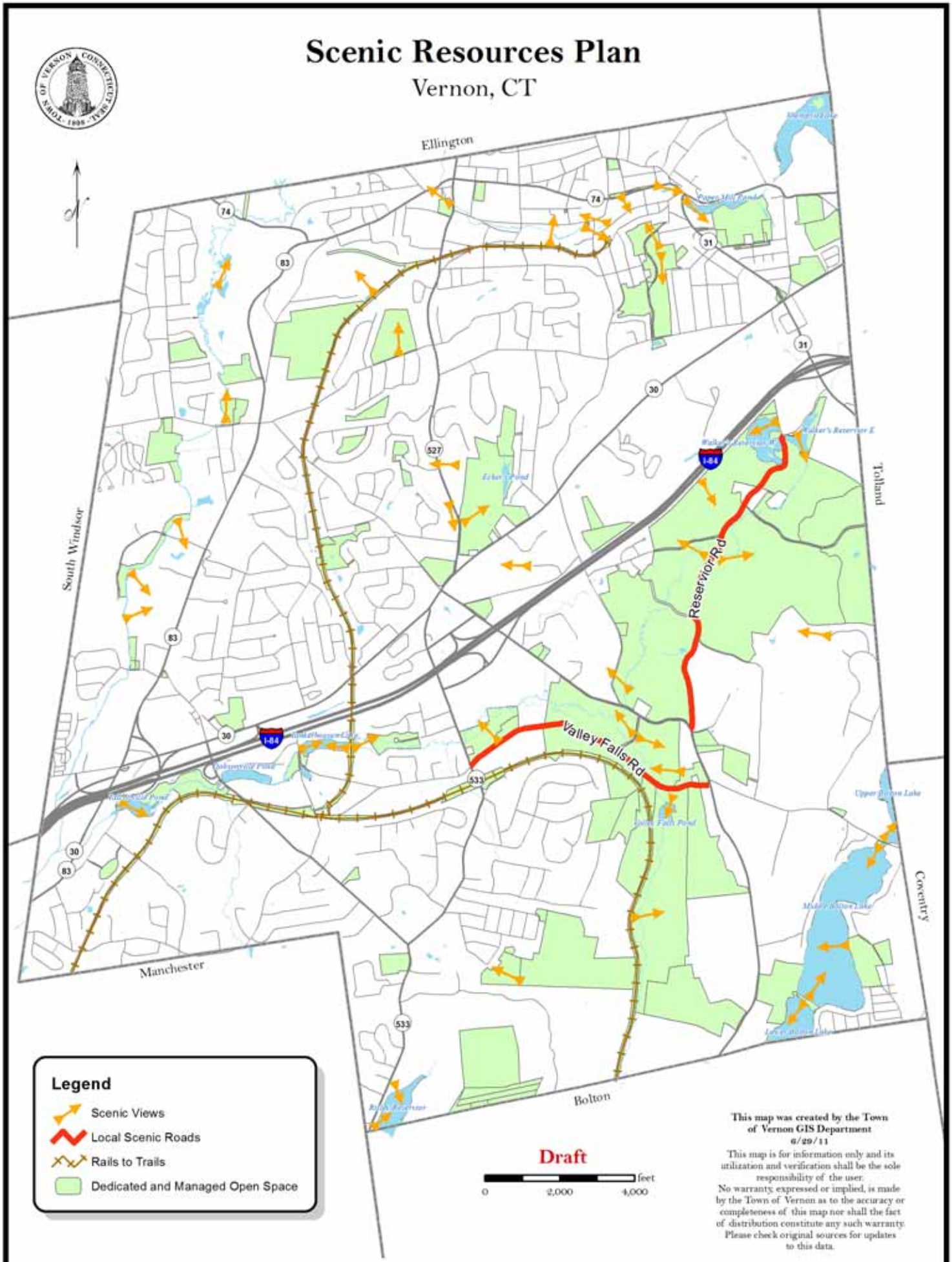
- Unpaved,
- Bordered by mature trees or stone walls,
- No more than 20 feet wide,
- Offers scenic views,
- Blends naturally with surrounding terrain, or
- Parallels or crosses water bodies.

The Vernon ordinance included an additional criterion related to agricultural land and historic resources. The Town should eliminate this extra criterion and update "scenic views" to include historic and agricultural landscapes.

The Town should also confirm if the process for owner consent is consistent with state statutes.

Scenic Resources Plan

Vernon, CT



Vernon's PA 490 Open Space Policy

Pursuant to CGS 12-107, or PA 63-490, Vernon's PA 490 Open Space Policy is:

- priority open space areas and vacant land of at least four acres located in R-10, R-15, R-22, R-27 and R-40 are eligible; and,
- lots created through subdivision or resubdivision are not eligible.

Maintain an Undeveloped Ambiance in Rural Parts of Vernon

Travelling throughout Vernon, particularly in the southeast part of Town, "openness" plays a prominent role. This land is often perceived as being open space, but much is simply vacant land that has not yet been developed. Some of this land remains vacant due to reduced tax assessments under what is commonly called the "PA 490" Open Space Program (see CGS 12-107). PA 490 does not protect land from development; but it can delay development and thus protect the character of these areas for some period.

State statute requires that eligible parcels or criteria for eligibility are contained in the POCD and adopted by the Town Council. This POCD recommends the continuation of the current PA 490 open space policy and eligibility criteria (see sidebar).

Maintain an Undeveloped Ambiance in Rural Parts of Vernon:

1. Continue the current PA 490 Open Space policy and eligibility requirements.

Preserve Heritage Farms

Like many Connecticut communities, Vernon has a strong agricultural heritage. Most farms have been developed for housing or business or have reverted to forest. Vernon is fortunate to have retained a prominent farm, centrally located in the historic Vernon Center. The 58-acre Strong Farm keeps the connection to this past, strongly contributes to the character of Vernon Center, and contributes to the local economy. It is also easily accessible to visitors due to its proximity to I-84. Because of its central location, development pressures could be strong. The Town should continue to work with the owners to ensure that the farm remains economically viable and continues its important role to both Vernon Center and the Town.

Preserve Heritage Farms:

1. Ensure that existing farms remain viable and that farmland is preserved.

Promote Community Spirit Throughout Town

Vernon has a number of volunteers who serve on municipal boards and commissions and various community groups,. Such resident and business involvement contributes to community spirit. Residents recognize that it can be difficult to encourage younger residents and those who are new to Vernon to become involved. Some perceptions of Rockville versus Vernon still exist in the community.

Protecting those things that are important to Vernon (as discussed throughout this Plan) can help residents identify more with Vernon as a whole and build community pride and spirit. In addition, the Town could explore ways to engage residents with the implementation of this Plan.

Events and celebrations instill civic pride and build spirit. Many events are held in Rockville at Central Park, including concerts, ceremonies, and other events. Other events include fireworks, fishing derbies, trail days, races and tournaments, and many other activities. Such events should continue to be held to bring together residents from all of Vernon's neighborhoods.

Promote Community Spirit Throughout Town:

1. Continue to hold a variety of events throughout the Town for residents.
2. Work with Vernon's community groups and seek ways to engage a wider array of residents when implementing this POCD.
3. Develop a brand / positive and recognizable image to help convey Vernon's unique identity in a way that meets the goals in this POCD.

Example of "Brand" or Image for Vernon

At a public meeting during the planning process, a resident proposed one idea for "branding" Vernon.

The resident suggested promoting the Tankerhoosen Valley as a unit. Residents of Vernon and the region are aware of the individual elements in the Valley, such as Talcottville, the Rails-to-Trails, Valley Falls and other natural and cultural resources. The resident suggests that collectively promoting these elements as a "unique, connected, cohesive resource" could convey a "positive, recognizable image."

The Town could look into this and other ideas that residents have for Vernon's brand or image.

Photos: Kelly Pramberger.

"Node"

A node is an area or focal point the contributes to a sense of place. Nodes have notable character. Examples of nodes include traditional New England downtowns and villages.

Maintain Vernon's Overall "Community Structure"

"Community structure" is the physical organization / layout of Vernon; it influences how residents and visitors perceive and understand the community. Physical organization enhances community character and quality of life and can help guide land use regulations and decisions. People identify most strongly with areas in a community that have a "sense of place," such as "nodes." Nodes are distinct areas with notable character; often these are traditional New England downtowns and villages.

Historic and modern influences created Vernon's community structure. Two prominent nodes, Rockville (Downtown) and Vernon Center (a municipal node), evolved over the past 200 plus years. Meanwhile, Vernon's linear commercial corridors formed more recently (and continue to form). And some neighborhoods hold the framework to become more distinct, identifiable nodes or "places" (see "Neighborhood Nodes" on map).

Vernon's structure is depicted on the Community Structure Plan. Land use regulations should reinforce community structure. Overall, Vernon should encourage development to occur in locations and in manners that contribute to positive elements of structure and discourage those elements that detract from structure. Specific strategies to accomplish this are contained in the next sections on residential and business development and community facilities.

Maintain Vernon's Overall Community Structure:

1. Encourage land use patterns that contribute to Vernon's community structure (see next sections for specific strategies).
2. Discourage land use patterns that detract from Vernon's community structure (see next sections for specific strategies).

Enhance Gateways

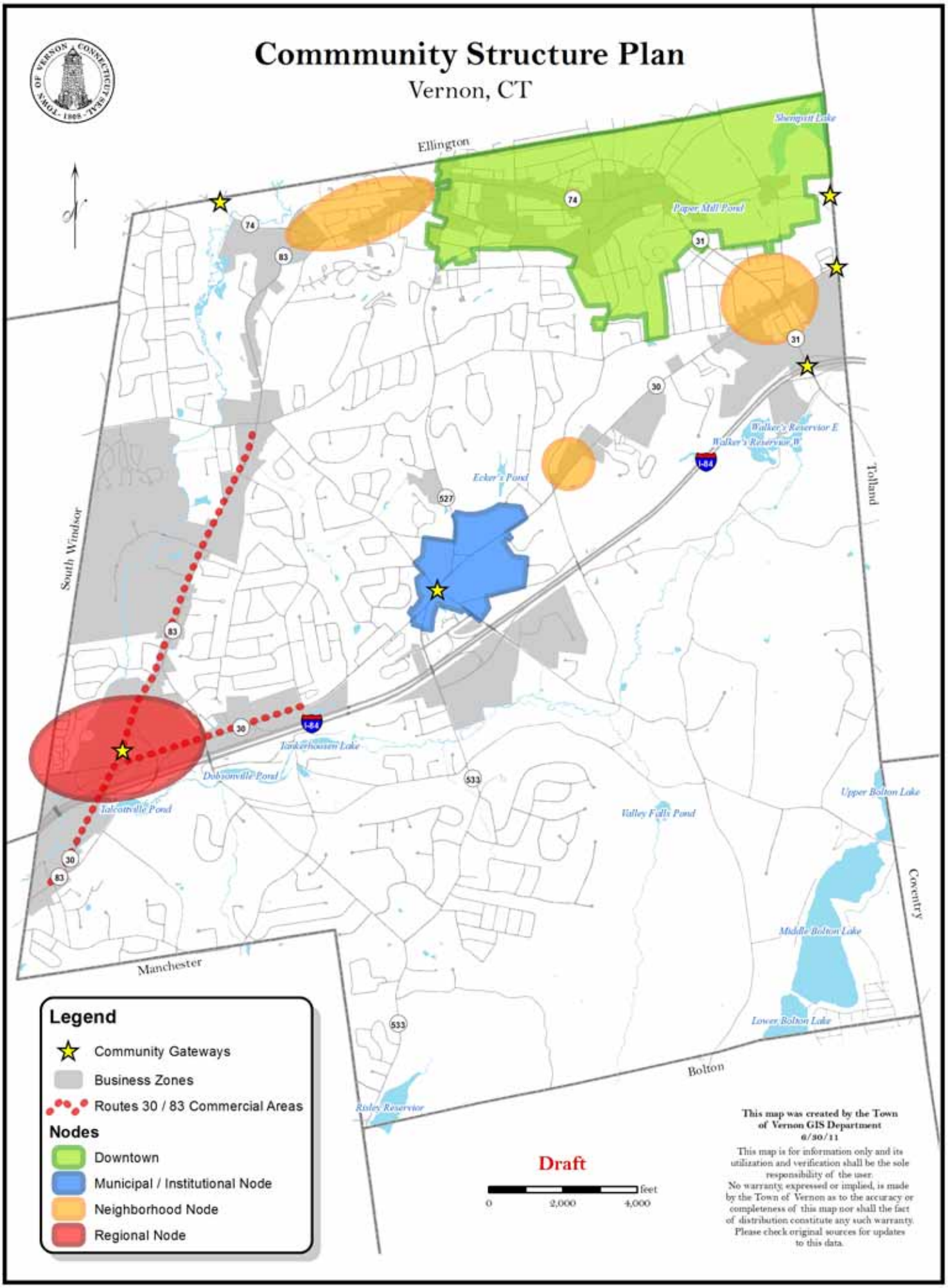
Attractive and distinctive gateways to the community enhance community structure and identity. Gateways convey a sense of arrival and give a glimpse of the character of the community. Vernon has placed welcome signs at some gateways, alerting commuters from the interstate that they are in Vernon. Elements that can demarcate and enhance gateways include signs, landscaping, public art, attractive building design and other features. Closer to Rockville, the overall appearance of sidewalks, roads and building maintenance contribute to initial impressions formed by those arriving in the area. Physical improvements can improve visitors' impressions.

Enhance Gateways:

1. Enhance the gateways to our community.

Commmunity Structure Plan

Vernon, CT



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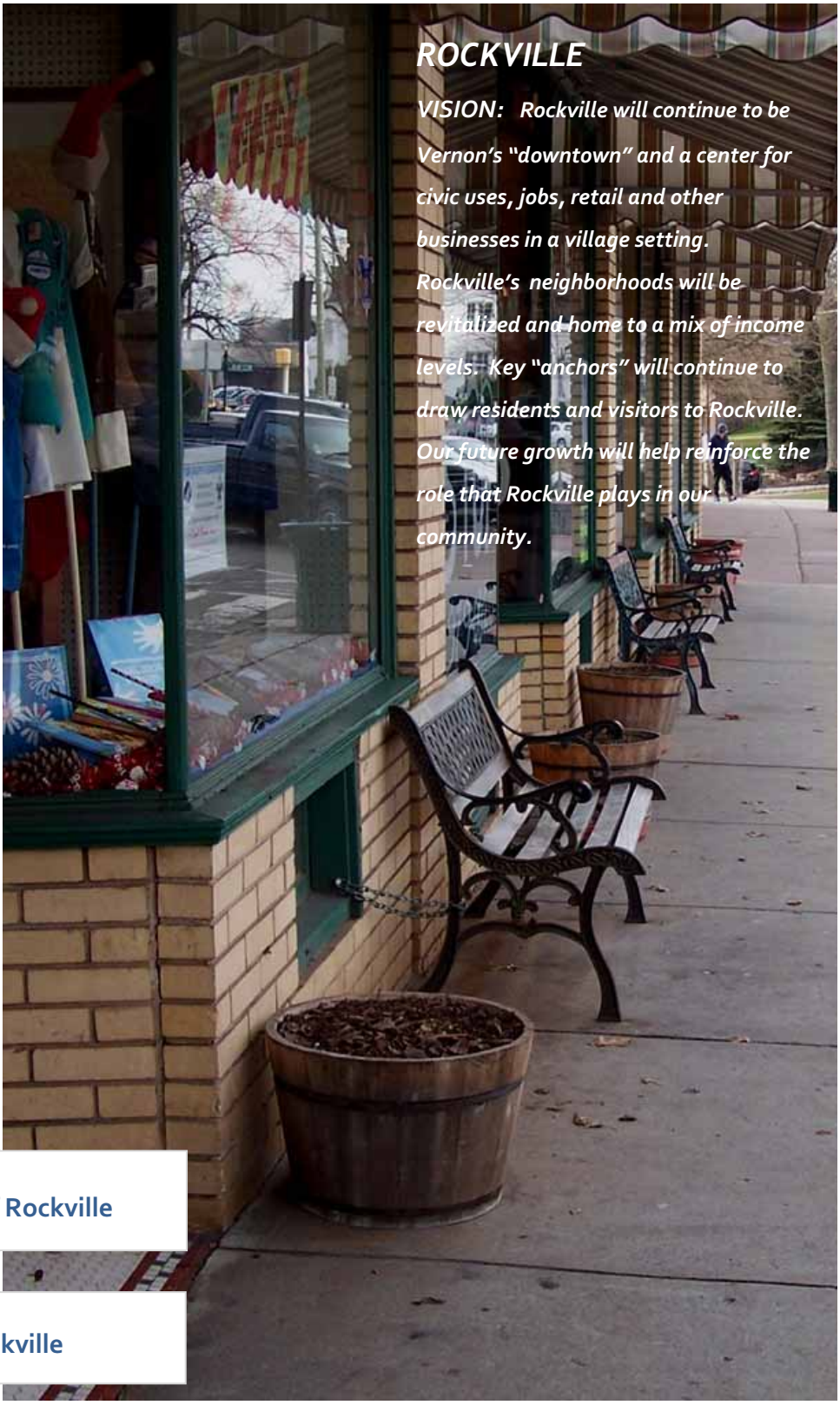
Chapter 6: Pathway to Prosperity

In this Chapter:

- Rockville
- Vernon Center and Talcottville
- Residential Patterns & Housing Needs
- Business Development
- Community Facilities
- Transportation
- Utilities



ROCKVILLE

VISION: *Rockville will continue to be Vernon's "downtown" and a center for civic uses, jobs, retail and other businesses in a village setting. Rockville's neighborhoods will be revitalized and home to a mix of income levels. Key "anchors" will continue to draw residents and visitors to Rockville. Our future growth will help reinforce the role that Rockville plays in our community.*

STRATEGIES

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE
The village nature of Rockville

ENCOURAGE
Revitalization of Rockville

Rockville

Residents see great potential in their downtown, Rockville (see sidebar). Rockville is an identifiable place with a distinctive feel. It has retained much of its New England village patterns, its mixture of residential, business and civic uses and its historic architecture. A majority of residents support the redevelopment of historical buildings in Rockville for office (71%) or residential use (77%).

Rockville – Resident's Ideas

Rockville is a "**gem**".
- public workshop attendee

"...I was compelled to purchase [a home in Rockville] because of the **stunning architecture** and the desire for a **walkable town center**. .....I see great potential in Rockville marketing itself as a walkable downtown, close to jobs ...."
- public workshop attendee

"...with its **distinctive** historical architecture, Rockville could house eateries with real atmosphere that could perhaps **draw people** to spend more time here. I see old postcards of the old Hof Brau Haus that was in Rockville and would love to have a place like that here now"
- from a Facebook entry

"To help with the litter ... perhaps some kind of **volunteer organization** can be started? This would be a great opportunity for members of the community (especially high school students) to become involved in a positive movement.
- from a Facebook entry

Maintain and Enhance the Village Nature of Rockville

A successful downtown or village has a combination of physical elements that attract people to work, visit and live there. This framework is already in place in Rockville; it should be maintained and enhanced.

Positive Elements to Encourage

Overall Village Principles

- A mixture of uses
- Higher densities than elsewhere in town
- Park once and walk to multiple destinations

Site Design

- Buildings oriented to street – face streets, entrance on street, building close to sidewalk / street
- Wide sidewalks
- Parking is on-street or located behind buildings

Building Details

- First floor mostly retail uses with façade mainly windows (no blank walls facing street)
- Residential, office uses upstairs
- Window displays oriented to pedestrians – visually interesting

Details / Amenities

- Benches, places to sit
- Awnings – decorative and protect pedestrians from weather
- Banners denote that this is a "place"
- Landscaping, plantings

These are just a few of many elements that contribute to a successful, attractive and inviting village. These elements could form the basis of a thorough set of design guidelines that would outline good design practices, identify what is most appropriate in Rockville, and identify what to encourage and avoid. Such guidelines could be used to:

- provide advice to business owners and landlords on simple improvements they can make; and /or,
- guide the Design Review Board (and PZC) when reviewing land use applications.

Zoning plays an important role in maintaining and enhancing a village. Generally, retail uses at the street level create a more positive pedestrian experience. Vernon recognizes this and requires a special permit for first floor office use in the DBR zone. This provision should continue. In cases where a special permit is granted for first floor office use, such uses can be encouraged to create interesting store fronts and window displays (design guidelines can provide techniques for accomplishing this).

Zoning updates could help ensure that new development and building upgrades contribute to Rockville's village nature. Such updates for Rockville zones might include:

- require that parking be located to the rear of buildings in the Downtown district
- reduce the amount of parking needed (see page 109)
- require a certain percentage of window coverage for street-level facades
- reduce the minimum front yard setback and setting a maximum (see box below)
- adopt additional restrictions against auto-oriented uses (e.g., drive throughs)
- provide greater flexibility to older buildings in meeting dimensional requirements (see sidebar)

Finally, Town capital projects and operations play an important role in maintaining the village nature of Rockville. Operations such as street sweeping and overall maintenance and capital projects such as sidewalk and road repair and upgrades, parks, etc., contribute to the Rockville's ambiance.

Zoning Flexibility to Promote Building Re-Use

Zoning regulations do provide flexibility for the reuse of historic buildings and mills. General updates to older buildings and houses, however, require a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals if additions / updates cannot meet today's zoning standards.

Some communities allow older buildings flexibility via special permit.

For example, in the Town of Wilton, CT, buildings that were built before 1920 (and other buildings deemed to have historic architectural merit) can obtain the following relief through a special permit:

- Front, side and/or rear building setback requirement can be 75% of the applicable regulation requirement.
- Site coverage can be up to 125% of the applicable regulation requirement.

Vernon should consider allowing similar flexibility through the special permit process.

This would provide the Commission with broad discretion and allow a review of the design of the proposed addition / expansion while providing greater flexibility to building owners. Input from the Historic Properties Commission can help ensure appropriate additions.

Sample First Floor Window Requirements

For communities that require or encourage a minimum percentage of window coverage for street level facades in certain districts, the percentages vary. Here are some examples:

- Hamden – The first story of all facades shall be glazed with clear glass no less than 30% and shall be glazed at least 70% if a shopfront.
- Milford and Bridgeport – 50% of the ground floor façade shall be windows.
- Suffield – Between 50% to 75% of first floor facade shall be windows.

Rethinking Setbacks in Rockville

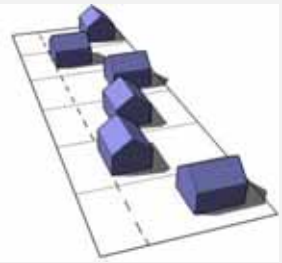
Current zoning regulations allow flexibility for front yard requirements in the DBR, PND, NR-10, and HDRC in that new buildings can have a lesser front setback if existing neighboring buildings also have lesser front setbacks.

Otherwise, the minimum front yard setback is 30 feet (and a landowner could choose to place the house even further back). A large part of Rockville's village character is derived from how houses and other buildings are oriented to the street.

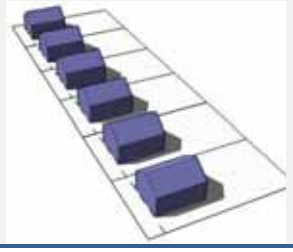
Analyses indicate that the majority of existing buildings in the NR-10, PND, and HD-RC zones are less than 30 feet from the street right-of-way.

The front yard setbacks requirements could be amended to require a minimum <u>and</u> maximum setback (e.g., no closer than X feet but no further than Y feet). Appropriate minimum and maximum setbacks would need to be determined for each of these zones.

Potential Building Alignment under Minimum Setback Standards



Required Building Alignment under Build-to Standards



Keys to Success

Facilitating and encouraging revitalization requires:

- Vision – a common goal
- Capacity – leadership and support by the Town, the business sector, community groups and residents in achieving the vision
- Tools – appropriate programs, incentives, regulations to work toward the vision

Maintain and Enhance the Village Nature of Rockville:

1. Encourage business and property owners to make improvements that will contribute to Rockville's village atmosphere.
2. Create design guidelines for Rockville.
3. Continue to discourage first floor office uses in pedestrian areas.
4. Consider updating zoning in Rockville so that the following applies to redevelopment:
    a. require that off-street parking be located to the rear of buildings in the Downtown District
    b. reduce the amount of required parking
    c. require a certain percentage of window coverage for street-level facades (see sidebar)
    d. adjust minimum front yard setbacks and provide for maximums
    e. further minimize the potential for auto-oriented uses and sites
    f. provide greater flexibility to older buildings in meeting dimensional requirements

Encourage the Revitalization of Rockville

Revitalization efforts must continue to encompass both economic development and housing investment. It is important for the private sector to be assured that long-term, the Town is committed to Rockville. The fact that the Town maintains a civic presence here and has improved streets, sidewalks, Central Park, and other areas, conveys this commitment. Implementing the Hockanum River Linear Park Plan, which includes parks in Rockville, can further enhance this area.

Economic Revitalization

While Rockville is no longer the sole job center in Vernon, three major employers remain in here – the Town, the State (court system), and Rockville General Hospital. They provide jobs for residents of the Town and the region and they bring potential customers to Rockville daily. In fact, most Vernon residents (75%) visit Rockville at least once a month, according to the survey. Retaining these "anchor" land uses in Rockville is an important component of any revitalization strategy.

But most (64%) admit that they rarely or never visit retail establishments when in Rockville. This statistic corresponds with resident's low ratings regarding the availability of retail establishments in Rockville. Residents are optimistic that Rockville can be revitalized and attract people to live, work and shop here. The strategies in this Plan can help move Rockville in this direction.

Several downtown associations are key partners in accomplishing many of the strategies for economic revitalization. These include the Rockville Downtown Association (RDA), the Rockville Community Alliance and greater Rockville neighborhoods groups.

The Town should continue to collaborate with these partners on economic development, addressing issues and challenges faced by Rockville businesses, and helping property owners find funding sources for upgrades and redevelopment.

There is great potential to capitalize on the 75% of residents who visit Rockville at least once a month and the many employees who work in Rockville. Some employers provide on-site services for the convenience of their employees and visitors which reduces the need to patronize Rockville businesses. To entice potential customers, Rockville businesses must provide the goods and services desired by workers and visitors and encourage them to visit. Surveying employees and visitors can help identify desired goods and services. Results could be shared with businesses and building owners.

Rockville Downtown Association (RDA)

The RDA is a non-profit organization whose mission is to:

"Preserve, Promote and Enhance Rockville's Historic Downtown and to create partnerships that stimulate economic activity and action for a renewed sense of pride and community."

RDA Vision

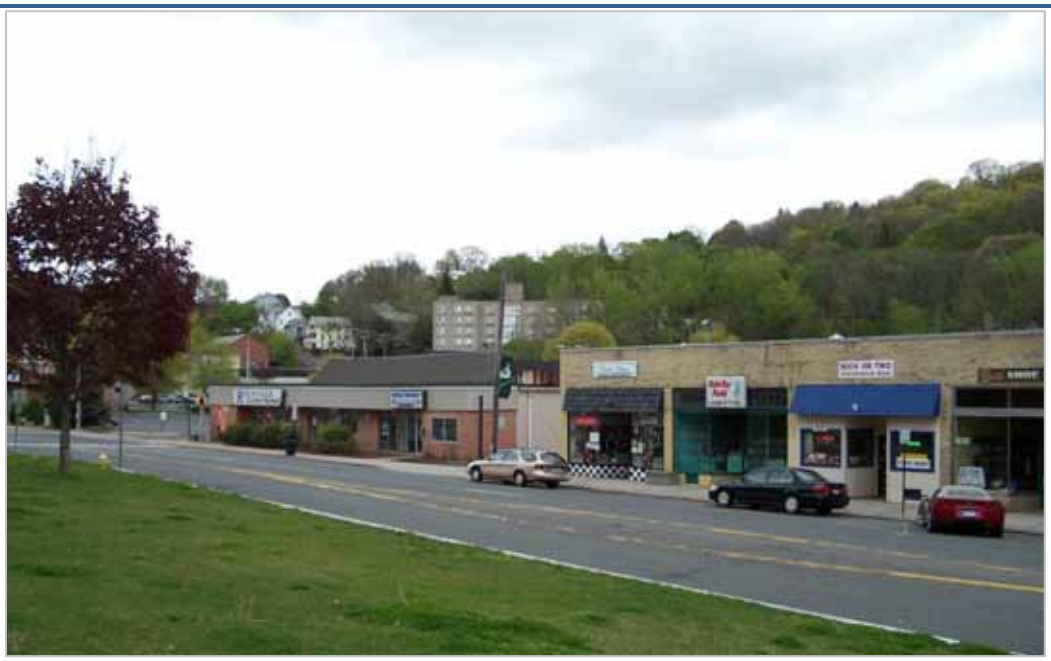
Visualizing Rockville's Potential

Before:

After:

Visualizing Rockville's Potential

Before:



After:

Specific economic development projects in Rockville might include:

- **West Main Street Retail Block**. As identified in past plans and in studies conducted by the RDA, this block provides the biggest opportunity for whole-scale redevelopment over the long term. In the short term, the focus can be on providing goods and services to employees and visitors and to Rockville residents. Infill development along the frontage could extend the streetscape further east.

  The longer term goal could be whole-scale redevelopment. Any new development or redevelopment should contribute to the downtown / village atmosphere, with pedestrian amenities and design (as discussed earlier). The RDA has taken a proactive approach by putting forth a vision of how redevelopment in Rockville could look. Based on these renderings, Planimetrics has created photo simulations of this stretch of West Main Street (see pages 66-67). The intent of the renderings is not to dictate future design or architecture, but to help residents and property owners visualize the potential this area holds.
- **The Citizens Block.** The Town, which owns the building, has conducted studies on its condition and potential for reuse and has attempted to find a buyer for the building. These efforts should continue. As noted in Town reports, the building is eligible for historic preservation tax credits, which can help facilitate its redevelopment. The primary short term goal should be to keep the building in use and update / redevelop it for additional businesses uses. Over the long term, the Town should encourage non-office uses on the first floor to better contribute to Rockville's pedestrian orientation.

In addition, Vernon is fortunate to still have some mills that continue to be used for business purposes (e.g., Amerbelle and Anacoil). The Town should continue to ensure that mills are capable of supporting business uses and help to retain those businesses currently located in mills.

The Town should also review the zoning regulations for Rockville to determine if updates are needed to facilitate redevelopment and revitalization for these and other properties.

Housing Revitalization

Housing is also an important component of successful revitalization. Rockville provides a range of housing opportunities for low and moderate income residents and families. Rockville should continue to provide these opportunities, but attention should focus on promoting a mixture of income levels by attracting middle and upper income households and, particularly, homeowners. This will help to rehabilitate and preserve the many historic houses and provide a larger customer base for existing and potential businesses in Rockville.

The Town and non-profits have developed the capacity and tools to increase home-ownership and upgrade residential properties. The recent Village Street housing project is a good example with visible results. The program improved the appearance of the neighborhood and increased homeownership in a targeted area.

The Town has also used its powers to acquire and demolish houses that were in ex-treme disrepair. Residents expressed a desire to see the Town take additional action on blighted properties. However, impediments include the length of time it can take to acquire a problem building (due to slow court processes) and finding the funding to demolish the structure.

One tool to address the financial challenge is to establish a revolving fund to cover the cost of demolishing a building. The fund would need an initial appropriation (e.g., possibly using funds from the Small City Community Development Block Grant). After the demolition, the Town would sell the lot and the money from the sale would go back into the fund. After the initial appropriation, the fund would be self-sustaining. When selling the lots, the Town could place restrictions on the future use (e.g., require owner-occupancy and only allow single family units). Income restrictions for this type of program should be avoided since the intent is to draw additional middle and upper income households to Rockville. This approach should target specific areas in order to most efficiently use limited resources.

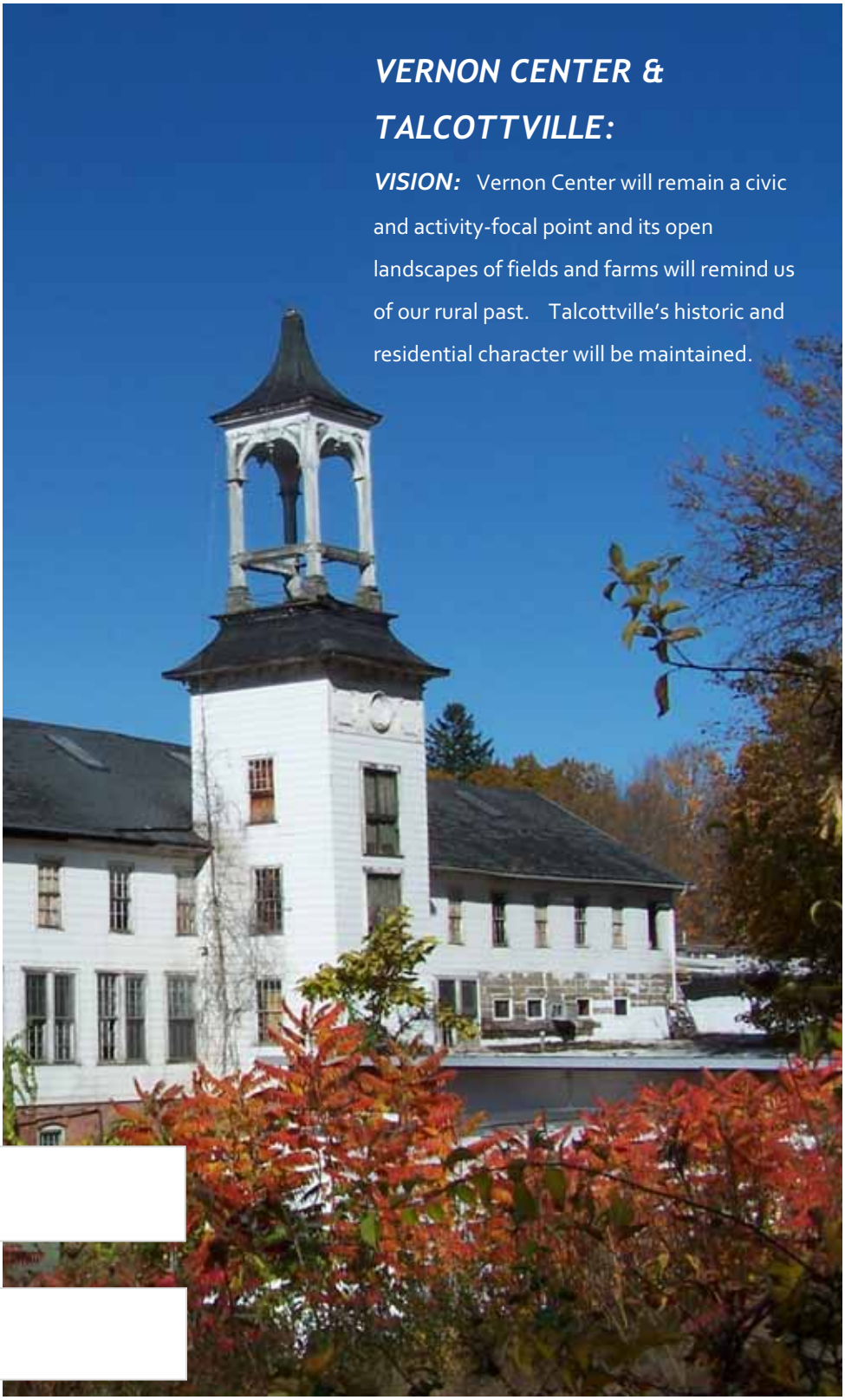
Another goal for Rockville's housing stock is to convert multi-family structures back into single- or two-family houses. Other communities around the country have devel-oped incentives for this exact purpose including:

- providing a grant for each eliminated unit (Pottstown, PA; Bellevue, KY)
- offering low-interest or forgivable loans (Collinswood, NJ)
- providing tax credits for any increase in property value resulting from im-provements (Hagerstown, MD)

Strategies found in other sections of this POCD also will play an important role in increasing homeownership in Rockville. These include promoting Rockville's amenities, maintaining a police substation in Rockville, and overall revitalization of business areas in Rockville. The Town should also track sales data for residences in Rockville to monitor trends and to help determine appropriate strategies. The Town might be able to integrate sales data into its Geographic Information System.

Encourage the Revitalization of Rockville:

1. Maintain a public commitment to Rockville, including capital improvements and keeping a civic presence here.
2. Continue to support and collaborate with the RDA.
3. Increase patronage of Rockville businesses by employees in the area and Vernon residents.
4. Encourage the redevelopment of the West Main Street Retail Block.
5. Continue efforts to redevelop / re-tenant the Citizens Block.
6. Work to ensure that existing buildings (e.g., mills) can continue to support business uses.
7. Increase homeownership in Rockville.
8. Encourage upgrades of Rockville's housing stock and attract additional middle and upper income households.
9. Continue to redevelop blighted housing lots, replacing structures with owner-occupied single family houses.
10. Consider establishing financial incentives for converting multi-family properties to owner-occupied single family houses.
11. Consider tracking sales data for houses in Rockville.
12. Maintain the police substation in Rockville.



VERNON CENTER & TALCOTTVILLE:

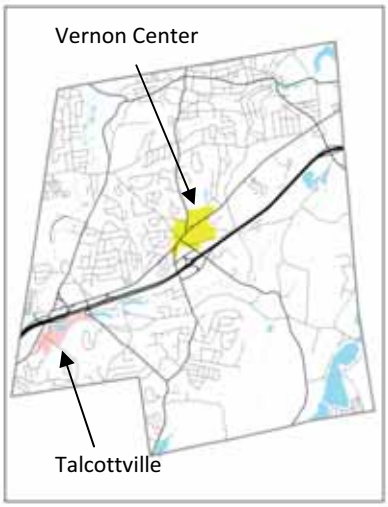
VISION: Vernon Center will remain a civic and activity-focal point and its open landscapes of fields and farms will remind us of our rural past. Talcottville's historic and residential character will be maintained.

STRATEGIES

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE
Vernon Center

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE
Talcottville

Vernon Center and Talcottville



These two areas of Vernon have retained their historic patterns and remain "places" in Vernon that are identifiable. Because the Town has "lost" the framework of some historic areas as the community grew (e.g., Dobsonville), it is especially important to support those neighborhoods that retain their heritage, even after 200+ years.

Maintain and Enhance Vernon Center

Vernon Center can be considered a Municipal or Institutional node, with a feeling of a rural town center. It is an identifiable "place" (though exact boundaries may not be commonly agreed upon), with historical significance due to its civic role. While most town administrative functions moved to Rockville over 100 years ago, some civic uses are located here (schools, public safety, and recreation facilities). Institutional uses in Vernon Center include churches, the cemetery and the historical society. The addition of the planned Arts Center will contribute to Vernon Center being a town-wide destination for activities.

These uses, combined with farmland, a general "open" landscape, and recreational activities create a unique character not found elsewhere in Town. The area is zoned residential (R-27). A number of non-residential uses are allowed by special permit and it appears that most of those uses are consistent with the nature of this area.

Strategies for Vernon Center should include maintaining the area as a predominantly residential and institutional node, encouraging additional recreation / outdoor activities, continuing pedestrian improvements, and maintaining the open landscape.

Maintain and Enhance Vernon Center:

1. Maintain a mixture of civic, institutional, recreational and residential areas in Vernon Center.
2. Maintain the open, rural landscape.

Maintain and Enhance Talcottville

Talcottville has retained its historic mill town patterns and continues to have a strong neighborhood identity and sense of place.

Today it is predominantly a residential neighborhood with some institutional uses. Its designation as local historic district will help ensure that updates and new construction maintain the historic feel. Recent streetscape improvements have added to the historic ambiance.

The Talcottville Mill has a strong presence in this neighborhood although it is currently empty. Re-use of the historic mill should be encouraged, particularly for uses that are compatible with the Talcottville neighborhood.

Maintain and Enhance Talcottville:

1. Continue to ensure that building alterations and new construction complement the historic character of Talcottville.
2. Maintain Talcottville as a predominantly residential neighborhood with some compatible non-residential uses.
3. Encourage the rehabilitation of the Talcottville Mill.

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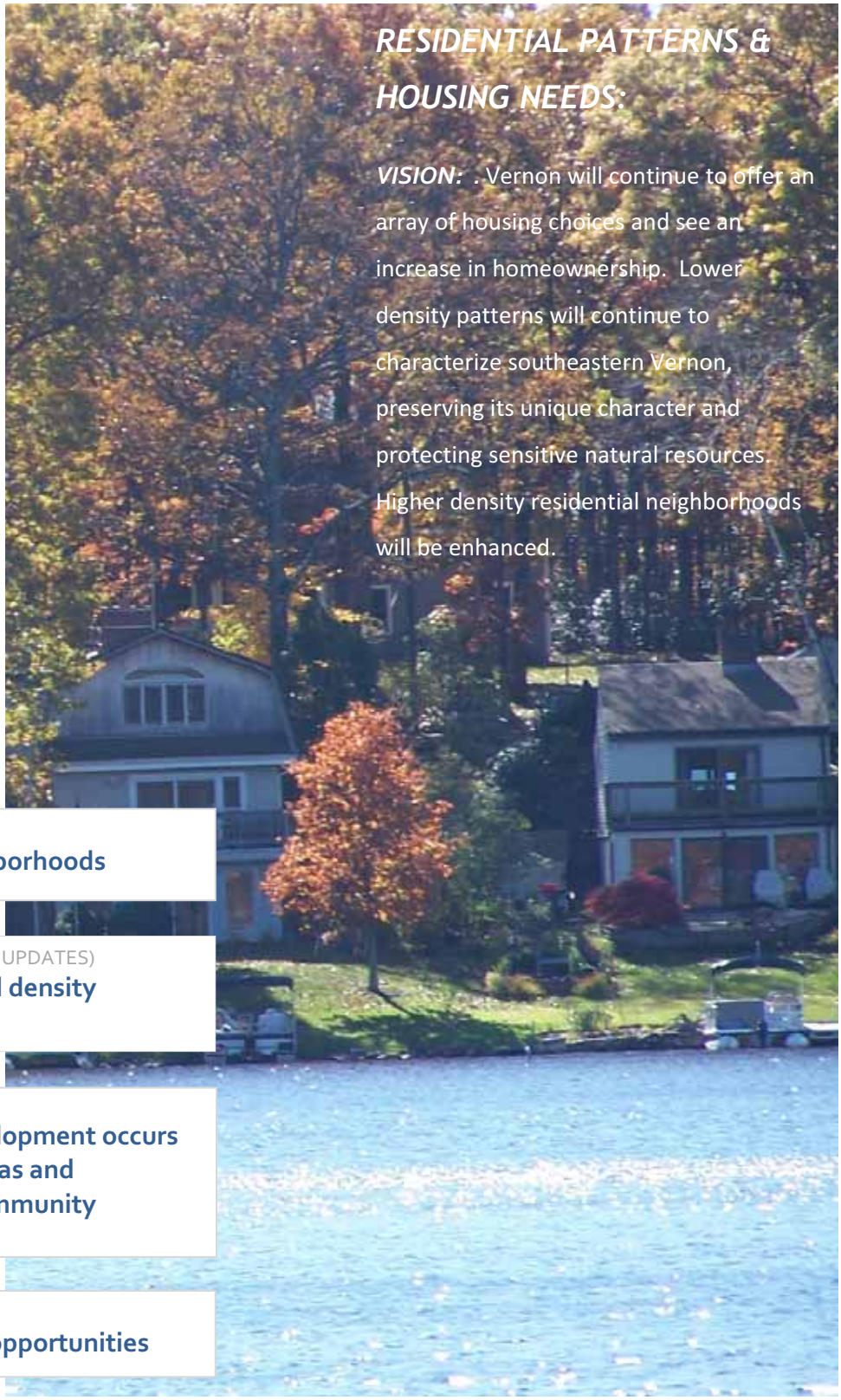


RESIDENTIAL PATTERNS & HOUSING NEEDS:

VISION: . Vernon will continue to offer an array of housing choices and see an increase in homeownership. Lower density patterns will continue to characterize southeastern Vernon, preserving its unique character and protecting sensitive natural resources. Higher density residential neighborhoods will be enhanced.

STRATEGIES

PROTECT
Residential neighborhoods

MAINTAIN (WITH SOME UPDATES)
Overall residential density patterns

ENSURE
Multi-family development occurs in appropriate areas and contributes to community structure

INCREASE
Homeownership opportunities

Residential Patterns and Housing Needs

This section outlines residential strategies that generally apply town-wide. For strategies specific to Rockville, see page 69.

Vernon has a wide array of housing types and housing prices which help meet regional housing needs. As discussed in Chapter 3, Conditions and Trends:

- Just over 15% of Vernon's housing stock meets the State's definition of "affordable"
- Median sales prices in Vernon have been lower than the that of the State
- According to the Vernon Housing Authority, they have a surplus of available elderly units and there are many others that provide elderly housing in Vernon

Since Vernon's housing stock helps to meet housing needs (and likely will continue to do so), this Plan focuses on other key housing issues which emerged during the planning process:

- Protecting existing neighborhoods from adjacent commercial development.
- Rebalancing Vernon's "housing portfolio". The housing stock, which has a high percentage of multi-family housing, could be balanced with more ownership and single-family housing opportunities.
- Managing the location of and characteristics of new multi-family or planned residential developments.

Protect Residential Neighborhoods

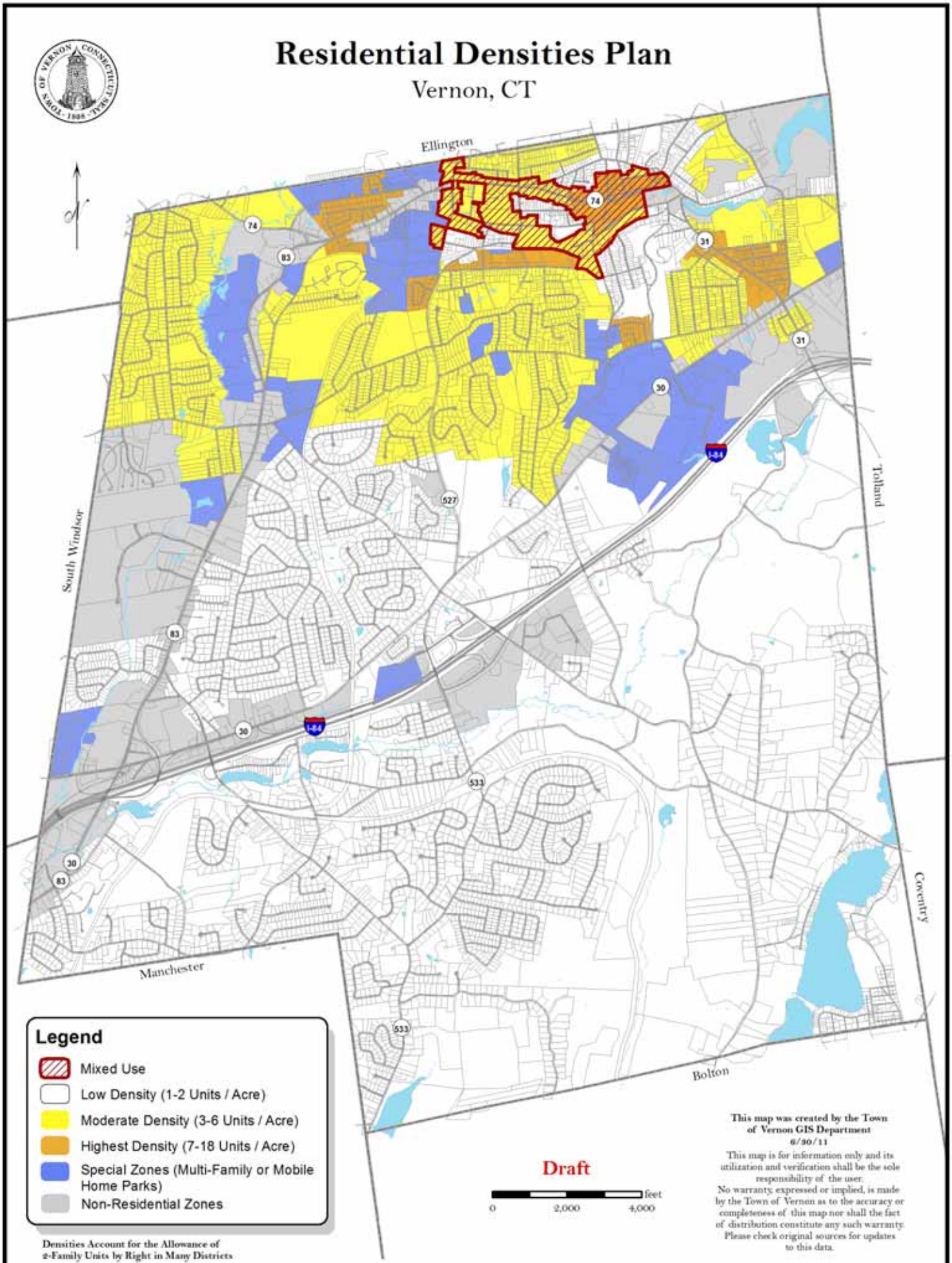
Residents value the convenience of having retail and services nearby, but also wish to protect neighborhoods from real or potential impacts of nearby commercial development. Vernon's Zoning Regulations include stipulations to minimize possible impacts (e.g., restricting delivery hours, hours of operation, etc.). Also, many types of businesses require a special permit if located within 200 feet of a residential structure and the Commission can require landscaped buffer strips be provided. These provisions allow the Planning and Zoning Commission to minimize potential impacts and should continue.

Protect Residential Neighborhoods:

1. Continue to manage potential impacts of business uses that are adjacent to residential neighborhoods through zoning.
2. Continue to ensure that development provides adequate buffers when adjacent to residential buffers.

Residential Densities Plan

Vernon, CT



Densities Account for the Allowance of 2-Family Units by Right in Many Districts

This map was created by the Town of Vernon GIS Department
6/30/11

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No warranty, expressed or implied, is made by the Town of Vernon as to the accuracy or completeness of this map nor shall the fact of distribution constitute any such warranty.
Please check original sources for updates to this data.

Maintain Overall Residential Density Patterns with Some Updates

With over 70% of land in Vernon zoned for residential uses, the form and pattern of housing will continue to strongly influence Vernon's character. Historic settlement patterns set the residential framework. Today, the availability of water and sewer service and the presence of natural resource constraints reinforce the patterns.

Rockville should remain a generally higher density area. However, there may be cases where a slight decrease in density can improve the quality of life on a given street or neighborhood (see earlier discussion of Rockville). In addition, mixed use (buildings that contain commercial and residential uses) should be encouraged since a variety of uses contributes to a village atmosphere.

The R-40 areas are generally more rural in nature and are home to sensitive natural resources. The Town should examine extending the "developable acreage" zoning concept to all new housing developments in this area of Town to better match future densities with the ability of the land to support the development.

Maintain Overall Residential Patterns with Some Updates:

1. Decrease densities in parts of Rockville where the quality of life will benefit from such a decrease (see earlier strategies).
2. Consider extending the "developable acreage" concept to the R-40 areas to better match the density of future development with the ability of the land to support development.

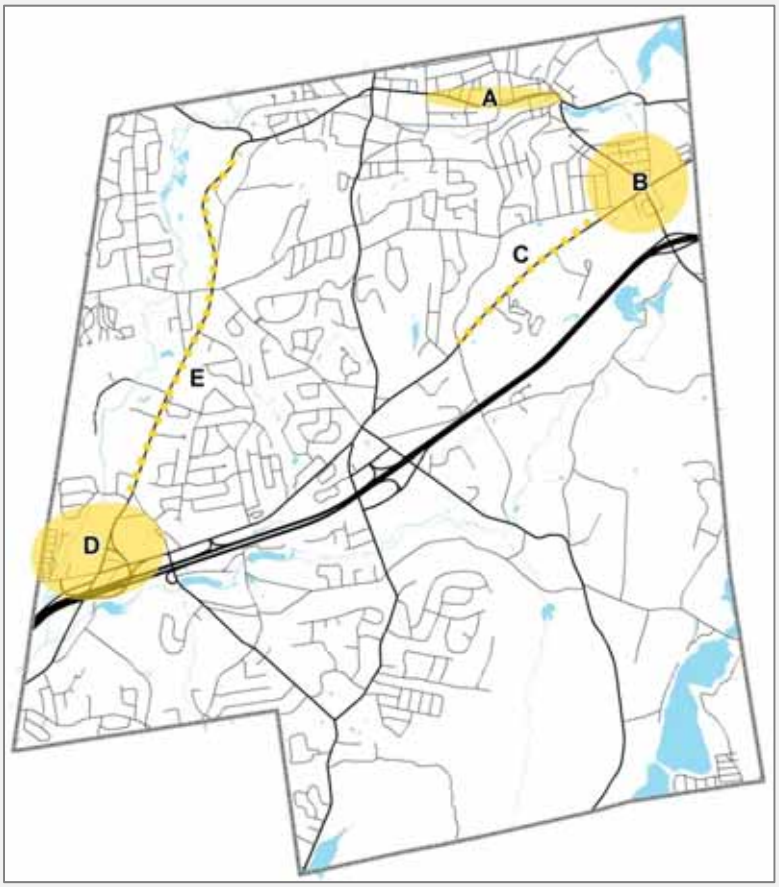
Ensure that New Multi-Family Development is Appropriately Located and Contributes to Community Structure

Vernon's multi-family and planned residential developments provide a range of housing choices for residents of the Town and Region. Some residents have a concern that Vernon has too much of this type of development. But often, these types of development tend to attract smaller households and contribute positively to the tax base. There are areas in Vernon where well-planned multi-family development can contribute positively to Vernon's Community Structure, provided certain criteria are met. Rather than recommending a restriction on further multifamily and planned residential developments, this Plan suggests adopting policies regarding appropriate areas and standards.

Ensure that New Multi-Family Development is Appropriated Located and Contributes to Community Structure:

1. Update zoning to require that future multi-family development meet specific criteria depending upon which parts of Vernon they are to be located in.

Policies for New Multi-Family or Other Planned Residential Developments*



Legend

Policy Areas for Future Multi-Family Housing

* Does not apply to subdivisions pursuant to zoning and subdivision regulations.

New multi-family or planned residential developments should meet the following goals :

Area A:

- Be part of a mixed use development or entail the redevelopment of a large historic industrial building (e.g., mill).
- Provide sidewalks

Area B:

- Provide sidewalks or pathways to connect to commercial areas
- Does not reduce the amount of business-zoned land
- Mixed use (apartments above business uses) might be appropriate near the Route 30/31 intersection.

Area C:

- Provide buffers along the frontage to screen the development from Route 30
- When located next to a non-residential land use, provide a buffer
- Sidewalks connect units to Route 30 and provided along frontage of property on Route 30

Area D:

- Mixed use (apartments above business uses) in business zones or stand-alone multi-family developments are appropriate here.
- Sidewalks should connect to commercial areas.
- Coordinate with neighboring uses to consolidate / reduce the number of driveway curb cuts.

Area E:

- Consolidation of smaller properties is encouraged.
- Coordinate with neighboring uses to consolidate /reduce the number of driveway curb cuts.
- Sidewalks connect units to Route 83 and provided along frontage of property on Route 83.

Increase Homeownership Opportunities

As discussed in the Rockville section, increased homeownership is very important for Rockville's revitalization. Increasing homeownership should be encouraged town-wide also. Homeownership represents a commitment by the homeowners to Vernon and thus they may be more likely to volunteer for boards, commission, and other groups.

Increase Homeownership Opportunities:

1. Retain zoning patterns which reserve appropriate areas of the Town for single-family homeownership.
2. Encourage programs that provide incentives for owner-occupancy of two- and three-family structures (see Rockville section).

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

***VISION:** Business development will help to enhance our tax base, provide goods and services to our residents and the region, and provide jobs. Our zoning regulations will facilitate the types of development desired in appropriate locations. Potential impacts will be carefully managed in order to protect our neighborhoods, our community character and our natural resources.*

STRATEGIES

UPDATE
Commercial zones

MAINTAIN
Vernon Circle as a regional destination

ENCOURAGE
Appropriate business development at Exits 66 & 67

REDEVELOP & RETENANT
Vacant buildings

RETAIN
Businesses

PROMOTE
Business development

CONTINUE TO IMPROVE
Business-friendly protocols

Business Development

Historically, Rockville was the Town's business center. The advent of the automobile and construction of I-84 opened up Route 83 and parts of Route 30 for business development. Gradually, businesses located along key intersections and business / industrial parks were created, mainly along those routes that lead commuters through Vernon to the interstate. Today's business development pattern consists of business zones located throughout Town.

Business development provides:

- goods and services for residents and other businesses,
- job opportunities, and
- a tax base.

The tax base benefit is particularly important to Vernon and communities throughout Connecticut. Connecticut communities rely upon the local tax base for the majority of funding. The most recent Town data indicates 68% of Vernon's total revenues are from the local property tax. While the State has explored alternative options for communities to raise revenues to support local services, the current system is not expected to change during this Plan's 10-year planning period. As such, Vernon will need to continue to strive to increase its tax base in order to maintain the quality of life enjoyed by residents and to provide essential local services.

At the same time, land is a finite resource. As shown on page 18, only 8% of land in Vernon is zoned for business purposes. Due to this limitation, this Plan emphasizes:

- the importance of retaining business-zoned land for development (e.g., by discouraging the acquisition of business-zoned land for open space);
- promoting redevelopment of vacant buildings and underutilized sites (see Rockville section and the discussion in this section); and,
- promoting new business development in business zones (see this section).

Residents support additional business development. Overall, a majority of residents support additional light industry (72%) while half (49%) support additional large retail businesses.

Update the Commercial "C" Zone to Better Match Goals for Specific Business Areas

The majority of Vernon's business areas are zoned Commercial - C. As a result, very different areas are zoned the same, such as Vernon Circle, areas just west of Rockville, the Exit 66 area, and elsewhere. The C zone currently allows 11 uses by right and 27 uses require either a special exception or special permit. The special permit process provides the Commission broad discretion in determining whether a use is appropriate

for a particular area. However, the process creates uncertainty and greater risk for landowners because they do not know what types of uses might be acceptable until after an application and site plan have been prepared and submitted.

As a result, many uses that seem appropriate for Vernon Circle must go through the Special Exception process. Conversely, there are many uses by Special Permit that might not make sense in all Commercial Areas. For example, a hotel might be very appropriate in the Vernon Circle area, but not appropriate just west of Rockville or near the Vernon Avenue / Route 30 intersection. The Commission could tailor the C zones to make it easier to obtain approvals for appropriate businesses while still requiring a special exception for certain uses.

To accomplish this, the Commission could consider the following zoning adjustments (see Business Plan map):

- **Vernon Circle Zone**. This area is more appropriate for larger / regional scale businesses. Many uses currently allowed by special permit, could be allowed with site plan approval.
- **Neighborhood Commercial**. Rezone the commercial area west of Rockville and the Vernon Avenue area as neighborhood commercial zones, offering goods and services to residents and commuters that pass by. Smaller retail, restaurants and services would be allowed as permitted uses, with site plan review. Larger scale and more automobile oriented uses could be prohibited or require a special permit. This approach helps create more definable "nodes" (see Community Structure Plan).
- **Route 83 Updates**. Consider rezoning some of the C zone along Route 83 to Planned Commercial, so as to encourage the consolidation of small lots and to manage curb cuts.

Virtually all C zones are located within the Aquifer Protection Zone. Uses that pose a high risk to contamination should still be prohibited and aquifer protection measures should still be required and evaluated during the site plan review process.

As noted in Chapter 3, Conditions and Trends, Vernon has little land zoned for Industry when compared to the region. Some land near Exit 66 is zoned for industry, while adjacent land is zoned C. The Commission should continue to allow for research and development uses in this area. While residents showed stronger support for small retail shows here (62%), there is support for light industry (57%).

Update the Commercial "C" Zone to Better Match Goals for Specific Business Areas:

1. Create a separate Vernon Circle Zone and neighborhood commercial zones.
2. Rezone some Commercial C zones along Route 83 to Planned Commercial.
3. Continue to allow research and development uses in the C zone near Exit 66.

Maintain Vernon Circle as a Regional Commercial Destination

Vernon Circle remains a regional retail center attracting Vernon residents and residents from the larger region.

The highway, its interchanges and the major arterials are important regional transportation features and will continue to be a dominant feature in this area. Vernon Circle would not be a successful regional destination without this transportation infrastructure, yet residents express frustration with the level of traffic, the prevalence of pavement, and the need to drive a car to get from business to business.

The appearance of buildings, signs and landscaping contribute to the character of Vernon Circle. The continued design review of buildings and signs can help to improve the overall appearance of the area. For existing buildings, property owners could be encouraged to improve the appearance of buildings and landscaping and provide additional pedestrian amenities. The Town might also provide zoning incentives that encourage consolidation and redevelopment of properties. For example, regulations can provide incentives to consolidate by allowing greater development potential for larger properties.

There are a number of residential neighborhoods within walking distance of the stores here. The addition / extension of sidewalks can help to better connect these neighborhoods to the businesses and property owners can be encouraged to work together to provide pedestrian connections between adjacent properties (see sidewalk discussion on page 105).

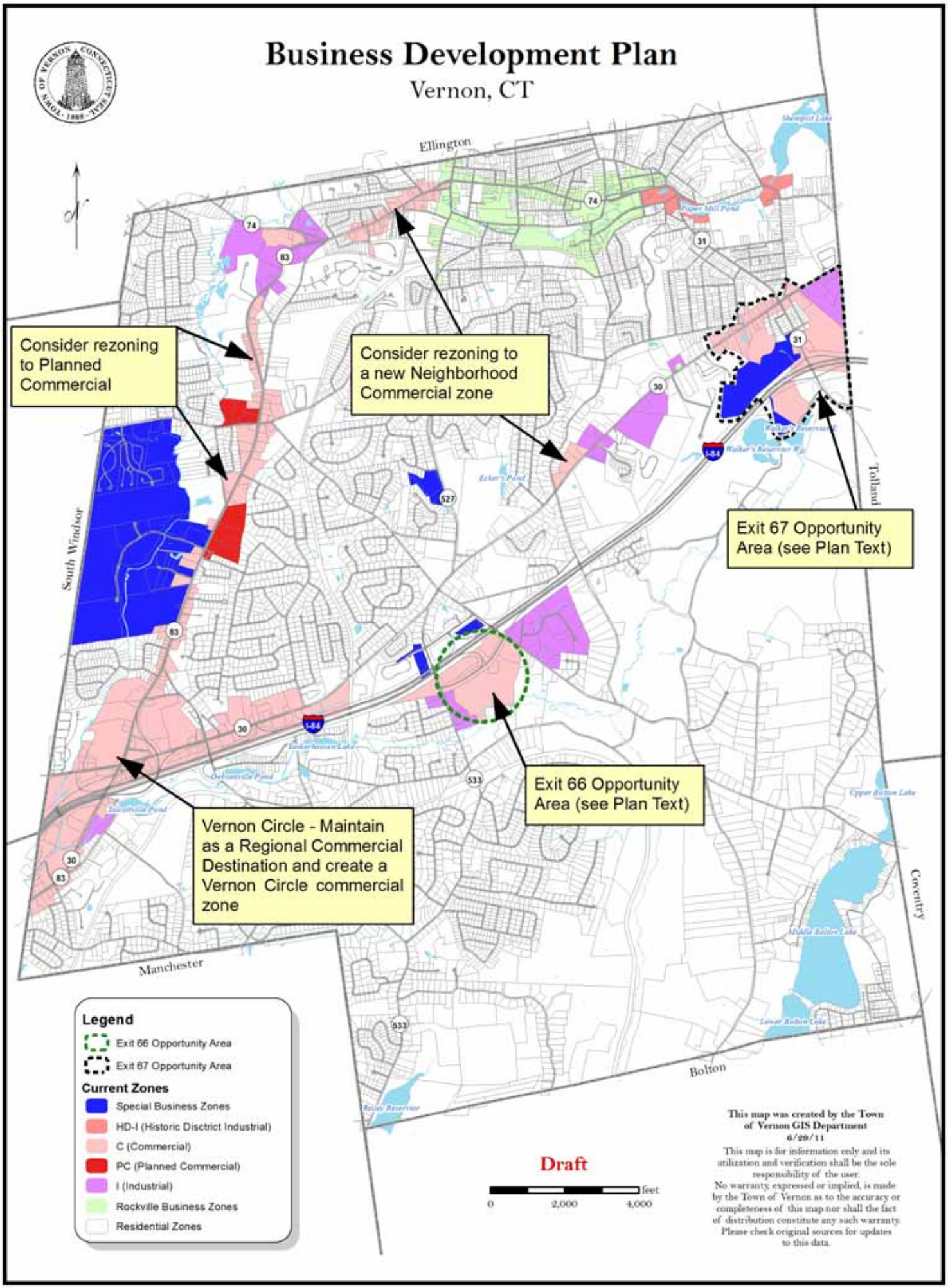
Access management is important for safety and aesthetic purposes in this area. The Town should continue to encourage the closing and / or consolidating of curb cuts and encourage consolidation of smaller properties for better access and coordinated development. As discussed later, the Town should encourage the State and property owners to undertake additional measures to better manage traffic.

Maintain Vernon Circle as Regional Commercial Destination:

1. Maintain Vernon Circle as a regional node.
2. Continue to require design review for development in this area.
3. Encourage existing businesses to improve the appearance of buildings and signs and to provide pedestrian amenities.
4. Add / extend sidewalks, especially to provide connections from nearby residential neighborhoods.
5. Improve pedestrian connections between properties.
6. Continue access management.
7. Encourage the consolidation of smaller properties when developed / redeveloped.

Business Development Plan

Vernon, CT



"Exit 67 Area"

For the purposes of the POCD, discussion about the Exit 67 area extends beyond the few parcels that have received the most attention. The Business Development Plan identifies this larger area generally.

Form Based Zoning

Zoning regulations tend to focus on uses and provisions to ensure that buildings are not too large, too tall, too close to property lines, and so forth. They tend to focus on what is not wanted rather than what is desired. Communities often find that buildings may not look appealing, even though the zoning requirements were met.

With form based zoning, the community determines the physical form it would like to see and then establishes regulations to create the desired form. Form based zoning is a tool to implement a vision for a specific area.

While the uses of the building are still a consideration, often these play a lesser role.

Encourage Appropriate Business Development at Exits 66 and 67

Land near highway interchanges often presents a tremendous business development opportunity. The exit 66 and 67 areas are no exception.

Over the past decade, the Exit 67 area has generated much community discussion due to uses which have been proposed or planned. Residents appear more likely to support the development of small retail shops (70%) or light industry (62%) in this area compared to larger retail (51% supported).

Three key principles for the Exit 67 area emerged during the planning process:

- **Opportunity**. This area provides opportunities for economic development.
- **Gateway**. As an eastern gateway to the Town, its appearance will help convey Vernon's image and let visitors know that they are in Vernon.
- **Environmental Sensitivity**. Development should be planned and designed to protect important water resources here (surface and ground water).

A range of zoning approaches were analyzed during the planning process. The option that seemed to best balance the various interests in this area the "Market-Based with Focus on Form / Design" approach (see sidebar for a description of one possible tool – "Form Based Zoning.")

Possible Zoning Approaches for Exit 67 Area*

Less prescriptive → Most prescriptive

Market-Based Approach	Market-Based Approach with Focus on Form / Design	Managed Approach
Maximum flexibility in form / design and use.	Form / design is a priority and regulated; use is less important.	Form / design and use are both priorities and regulated.
Allow a wide variety of uses.	Allow a wide variety of uses.	Limit the allowed uses to those desired.
Do not regulate form beyond setbacks, building height, and other standards typically contained in zoning regulations. Detailed vision not needed.	Regulate (or incentivize) development to meet a certain form such as campus-style, neotraditional, etc. Requires a detailed vision to determine desirable forms / physical aspects.	Regulate (or incentivize) development to meet a certain form such as campus-style, neotraditional, etc. Requires a detailed vision to determine desirable uses and form / physical aspects.

*There are many variations between these approaches.

A similar approach might also be warranted for the Exit 66 area. To implement this approach, the community would first need to determine the desired form / style of development in this area (create a vision). As shown in the table on page 15, many of the Town's largest taxpayers are planned residential developments. Planning for these two areas should explore if residential uses in a mixed use or village setting are appropriate in these areas.

Planning for the Exit 67 area should encompass a larger area – possibly all of the business zones in this area and the desired form may vary area to area. Based upon the outcome, zoning should be updated to either require or provide incentives for landowners to meet the desired form or style. In addition, zoning regulations should explicitly prohibit those uses that would clearly detract from the gateway.

Encourage Appropriate Business Development at Exits 66 and 67 While Protecting Natural Resources and Providing an Attractive Gateway to Our Community:

1. Encourage business development.
2. Work with residents, landowners, and local economic development officials to determine desired form / style of development for both areas.
3. Update zoning regulations to:
    a. allow a wide variety of uses
    b. regulate or create incentives for the desired form / style

Redevelop and Re-Tenant Vacant Buildings

Vacant buildings / space in Vernon is found in larger, historic buildings in Rockville (e.g., Citizens Block), mills (e.g., Talcottville Mill) and newer retail space (e.g., along Route 83). At public workshops, residents stressed the importance of reusing vacant business space.

Often businesses find it more cost effective to build on a vacant site than to update or rehabilitate an existing building. Challenges include financial (e.g., handling contaminants, structural issues) and meeting regulatory requirements such as zoning and building codes. In addition, the layout of older buildings might not be suitable for modern needs.

The Town recognizes these challenges and has successfully helped owners of vacant buildings identify and obtain financing. It is important for the Town to maintain staff that is knowledgeable about funding sources and can work with owners. In instances where the reuse of a building for business purposes will have a clear community benefit, the Town should explore options to provide direct financial assistance / financial tools. The Town should also continue to reduce assessments for the redevelopment of blighted buildings.

In terms of regulatory challenges, the zoning regulations allow for adaptive reuse of buildings for business purposes. This provision provides the flexibility often needed when redeveloping unique and challenging mill sites or other older vacant buildings. Recommendations discussed under Rockville, may also reduce regulatory barriers to redevelopment and facilitate upgrades that help meet modern needs.

Lastly, the Town had maintained a list of vacant business properties (land and buildings) to aid in attracting business to Vernon. The Town should continue to take an active role in marketing and regularly update the vacant property listings.

Redevelop and Re-Tenant Vacant Buildings:

1. Maintain the organizational capacity (e.g., staff) to identify funding sources for redeveloping vacant buildings.
2. Continue to facilitate the reuse / redevelopment of vacant buildings through zoning and update regulations as needed.
3. Maintain listings of vacant buildings and actively market their availability.

Retain Businesses and Promote Additional Business Development Opportunities

Overall, the Town should continue to promote business development in its commercial and industrial zones and work to retain existing businesses. Vernon's proximity to the University of Connecticut and Hartford might present opportunities for businesses that focus on research and development or provide incubator space. These and other opportunities should be explored.

This section highlights three strategies to increase the amount of potential development within existing business zones – the first relates to sewers and the others relate to parking.

As discussed on page 111, the Town may wish to extend sewers to commercial and industrial zones that currently lack sewers to promote additional business development. This would open up additional development opportunities for land already zoned for business uses.

Next, Vernon is home to four commuter lots (three are owned by the State and one is leased from a religious institution). 2009 data from the CT Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) indicates low usage of some lots (although the count was taken during an economic downturn). But the count might indicate that Vernon has more land dedicated to commuter parking than necessary. To serve their purpose, commuter lots must be located near the highway and the land also tends to be prime land for economic development. Long term, it is important to maintain adequate commuter lot capacity to encourage increased car-pooling and bus use. However, opportunities for meeting commuter needs and additional business development could

be explored. The Town could discuss options with ConnDOT for allowing the development of underused lots so long as current and future commuter needs could be met by expanding other lots or through other creative approaches (e.g., lease private lots).

Another way to "find" additional land for business development is to rethink the parking requirements set in zoning. Providing more parking than is necessary can have environmental and economic impacts. The environmental impacts are straightforward – increases in impervious surfaces impact water quality.

However, the economic impacts of parking requirements are rarely discussed or considered by communities. Parking lots can be expensive to install and maintain and may not result in the highest economic return (or value) for the property owner, or the Town. Each parcel has a limited buildable area – the more that is used for parking means that less can be used for buildings. For property owners, having more leasable square footage can increase profits and the value of the property. For the Town, increased property values will strengthen the Grand List and produce more property tax revenue. In denser areas like Rockville, high parking requirements can freeze redevelopment; often the older, vacant buildings that a community desires to see redeveloped cannot meet parking requirements. Specific approaches to reduce parking burdens while still addressing safety and congestion concerns are outlined in the transportation discussion (see page 108).

The Town is exploring innovative approaches to economic development, particularly related to energy (the recently adopted Energy Improvement District ordinance). Providing lower-cost energy options can help to retain existing businesses and attract new ones. Other innovative possibilities include capitalizing on the rail-to-trail users (see sidebar), marketing Vernon's cultural and natural amenities to attract visitors, and providing free WiFi coverage throughout Vernon. These options should be explored.

In addition to attracting new business development, the Town should continue to work to retain existing businesses.

Retain Businesses and Promote Business Development:

1. Actively promote business development in commercial and industrial districts.
2. Capitalize on the Town's proximity to both UConn and Hartford.
3. Consider extending sewers to business zones not currently served by sewers.
4. Identify additional innovative approaches to economic development.
5. Discuss options with ConnDOT for allowing the development of underused commuter parking lots.
6. Reduce parking requirements to increase business development potential of parcels in business zones.

Rail Trail Business Opportunities

There are many studies that outline the positive economic impacts that bike paths have had on communities. Dollars spent by trail users often focus on food, beverages and lodging. And bike paths tend to draw users with higher income levels, and therefore more disposable income.

Bike-related retail and services could capitalize on those who ride through Vernon. The presence of the bike path could help draw tourists to Vernon, benefitting the local economy.

For more information see: http://www.americantrails.org/resources/economics/businessoftrails.html.

Continue to Improve Regulations and Protocols to be More "Business-Friendly"

A clear, predictable application process can help create a "business-friendly" atmosphere. There are a number of simple steps that can help achieve this goal. The first step is to ensure that land use regulations are user-friendly; i.e., easy to determine what is allowed and what the process is to obtain permits and approvals.

Applicants often must work with many staff and commissions during the permitting process. As discussed in the Community Facilities section (see page 94), currently building / land use staff are located in different buildings. Having staff in one area can facilitate coordination among staff and make it easier for applicants.

Regular training for land use related commissions can help ensure that members are up-to-date on their mission, best practices for procedures, and law. This can result in a smoother and timelier approval process.

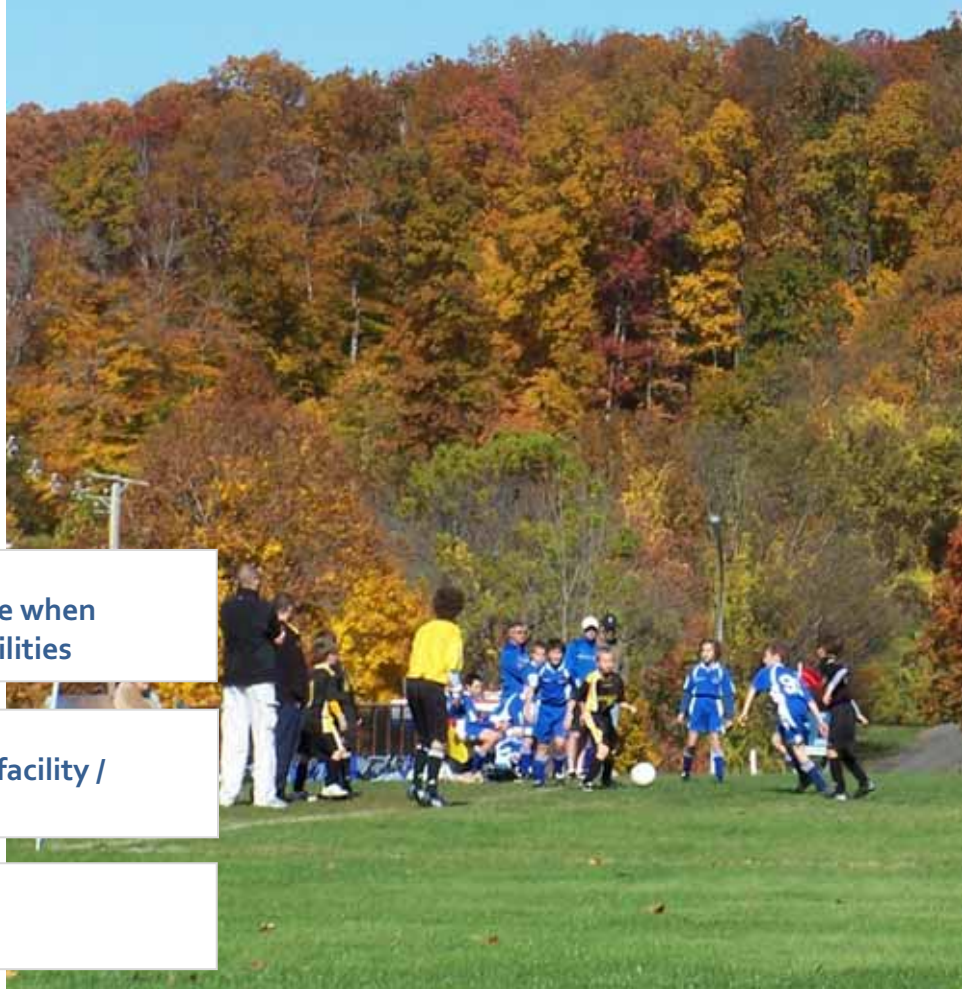
Communities are making more forms and services available on-line. One such initiative in the CRCOG region is the recent introduction of a regional on-line permitting system. The system, being piloted in a handful of communities, allows applicants to apply for permits on-line. Vernon should consider joining or creating its own online permitting system.

Continue to Improve Regulations and Protocols to be More "Business-Friendly":

1. Update land use regulations to improve user-friendliness.
2. Continue coordination among staff and boards / commissions that conduct permit / application reviews and approvals.
3. Consider housing all building / land-use related staff in one space or in the same building.
4. Provide the opportunity for regular training for land-use related commissions.
5. Provide more permit-related services on-line.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

VISION: Vernon's community facilities will meet our needs and protect our health, safety, and welfare. The Town will continue to provide an array of recreational opportunities and other amenities which contribute to the Town's quality of life. The Town will continue to find cost-effective solutions to meeting community needs.



STRATEGIES

MAINTAIN
Community structure when planning for new facilities

ADDRESS
Current community facility / service needs

ANITICPATE & PLAN FOR
Future needs

Community Facilities

Community facilities include those that provide: services to residents (town governance, social services, education, DPW), public safety (fire, police, EMS) and amenities (recreation, library). The quality of facilities and services contributes to a community's quality of life – for residents and businesses.

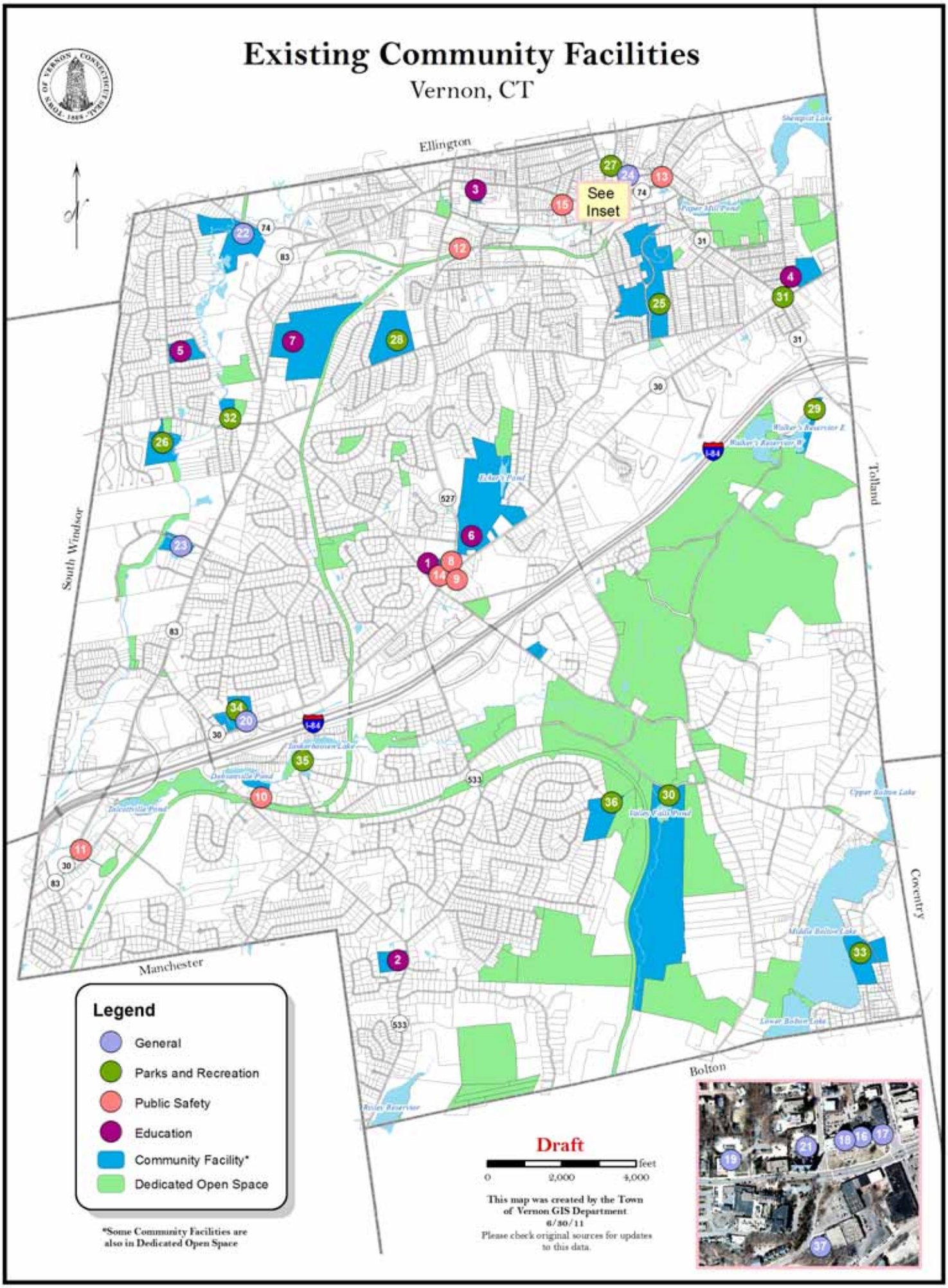
Vernon's community facilities are listed below and shown on the Community Facilities Plan map.

# on Map	Name
1	Center Road School
2	Lake Street School
3	Maple Street School
4	Northeast School
5	Skinner Road School
6	Vernon Center Middle School
7	Rockville High School
8	Emergency Services Station #641
9	Fire Station #1
10	Dobsonville Fire Station #2
11	Fire Station #3
12	John Ashe Fire Station #4
13	Fitton Fire House #5
14	Vernon Police
15	Police Sub-Station
16	Town Hall
17	Town Hall Annex
18	Senior Center
19	Public Library

# on Map	Name
20	Public Works Dept; Social Services
21	Youth Services
22	Sewer Treatment Plant
23	Recycling Center
24	Board of Education
25	Henry Park
26	Dart Hill Park
27	Talcott Park
28	Legion Field
29	Walker's Reservoir
30	Valley Falls Park
31	Lafayette Park
32	Dart Hill North Trails
33	Newhoca Park & Camp Newhoca
34	Center 375
35	Tankerhoosen & Phoenix Mill Park
36	Boulder Ridge
37	Building Department

Existing Community Facilities

Vernon, CT



Impacts on Community Facilities and Services

Factors that will influence future community facility needs include:

- Change in demographics, particularly age (e.g., an older population might increase emergency calls, drive a need for more senior center space, etc.)
- Population growth (more residents creates need / demand for more services)
- State mandates (e.g., juvenile detention)
- Regionalizing services (could increase need for space if Vernon hosts services, or decrease if hosted elsewhere).
- Technology (e.g., deliver more services online; more digital storage)

These and other factors are important considerations when studying and planning for community facilities.

The following highlights findings from this planning process. It does not take into consideration the costs or fiscal resources to undertake these projects. While the summary uses the word "need" it does not distinguish between those items which are necessary for a department to fulfill its function versus those items which are desirable for quality of life or other purposes.

Administration / Services	
Town Hall	Internal updates completed and additional updates are planned. Electronic storage could reduce future space needs. Longer term it is desirable to have all land use departments in one facility (this can also make it easier for applicants, more "business friendly"). There is also a lack of municipal meeting space in Rockville. Options for space in the Citizens Block or the Senior Center building (if Senior Center were to move) Importance of keeping Town Hall and most administrative services in Rockville to draw people to Rockville and demonstrate Town's commitment to Rockville.
Schools	Overall, the quality of schools is key to attracting families / homeowners. Space in schools meets current needs but is at capacity. Loss of existing space in schools should be avoided. There is also a current need for storage space, but it is not a pressing need. School enrollment has been declining. However, school enrollments tend to be cyclical. If a school is closed due to declining enrollments, the Town should consider retaining the building and possibly leasing out space. If enrollment increases again, it is very difficult to find land for a new school. The school bus company that provides bus service in Vernon leases land for bus storage near I-84.
Public Works	Space is generally adequate, though there is a need for more covered storage . DPW has developed a plan for storage and prefers to have on-site.
Waste Disposal	There is enough space at transfer station to meet needs (only 3 out of 7 acres currently used).
Social Services	There is a desire for better office and program space (privacy issues with current configuration). Overall, the central location works well. It is assumed that these needs could be met by configuring existing municipal space.
Youth Services	Their rented space is adequate for current needs (20 children in a program). If programs increase in size, additional space would be needed. Longer term, a community center is desirable.

Public Safety	
Police	Police headquarters is 30 years old and does not meet current needs. State mandates might drive future need for more space. Money had been previously allocated for conducting a needs analysis for space. The analysis should move forward and address space needs and location options. The current location is central and contributes a civic presence to Vernon Center. Creative options should be explored to retain the police headquarters in Vernon Center.
Fire	Station 541 on Prospect not adequate and the site is too small to accommodate an expansion. A number of factors could influence the number and location of stations needed in Vernon. One factor is the whether a switch to a paid force might be needed in the future. A study that analyses trends and determines space needs can address these issues. This Plan recognizes that Vernon aspires to maintain its tradition of having a volunteer fire department. The Fire Department also expressed a desire to have a large meeting space.
Ambulance	Two ambulances are kept at Public Safety Building. No additional space needs have been identified.
Emergency Shelters	There are 6 emergency shelters in Vernon (see sidebar) and agreements with Tolland and Ellington to share, when necessary. According to local emergency management officials, it is not anticipated that additional shelters will be need over the next 10 years.

Other Services and Amenities	
Parks and Recreation	While there is a desire for some facility upgrades and need for indoor storage space at Henry Park, maintenance of existing facilities is a priority. Long term there is a desire for a gym / community center in Rockville. Volunteer groups maintain some amenities, while the Town maintains the remainder. One issue to consider is whether additional volunteer groups should be encouraged. Understanding the cost savings would be useful. The Parks & Recreation Dept. carefully manages its athletic fields to meet demand as best as possible. A continued focus on managing existing fields will reduce the need to find land for new fields. Management approaches can include expanding the use of existing fields (e.g., installing artificial turf allows greater use; installing lights allows longer use) and restricting the use of fields (e.g., restricting use by out-of-season sports). There may be future needs for additional football and lacrosse fields. Other options that should be explored include sharing facilities with neighboring communities and encouraging the private sector to provide for-profit recreational amenities. If new fields are needed, the Town should first analyze if existing fields or other town-owned land can meet needs.
Senior Center	While there are no pressing needs, over the long term more office space and space for computer training is needed. If in the future, the Town considers moving the senior center (or using the facility to meet other needs), a central location (e.g., along Route 30) may better meet seniors' needs.
Library	The library is not technically a "municipal" facility (it is privately operated); but it is an important community facility. An on-site expansion is planned. The library leases some of its parking to hospital, but it may need this parking for library use in the future . Library plays important role in attracting residents to Rockville. Its continued presence here is critical.

Vernon's Emergency Shelters

There are 6 emergency shelters in Vernon, as identified in the Emergency Operation Plans:

- Center 375
- Vernon Center Middle School
- Tolland Agricultural Center Building
- Vernon Congregational Church
- Church of the Nazarine of Rockville
- Church of the Risen Savior

When Planning for New or Expanded Community Facilities, Maintain Vernon's Community Structure

The character (and overall community structure) of Rockville and Vernon Center are positively affected by the presence of civic uses. When planning for new civic uses or expanding civic uses, the Town should strive to keep these two areas as civic hubs.

Municipal facilities should strive to be "good neighbors" with little impact on neighboring uses. When new facilities are built, they should be in locations where the types of activities and impacts (e.g. traffic, noise, lighting) have a minimal effect on nearby residences.

Conversely, when new development is proposed adjacent to existing municipal facilities, these developments should be carefully planned to minimize impacts to buildings when the facilities are being used. This can help ensure that existing facilities remain viable over the long term. One example is when new housing is built next to recreation fields. The new residents might find that the noise, lighting, or other impacts are not compatible with their neighborhood and could press for limited use of the fields. These situations should be minimized so that community facilities can be used to their fullest potential.

When Planning for New or Expanded Community Facilities, Maintain Vernon's Community Structure:

1. Maintain Rockville as the focal point for town governance and the library.
2. Maintain a "campus" style setting for public safety, other municipal services, and amenities (e.g., recreation fields, the new arts center) in Vernon Center.
3. For other parts of town, continue to locate community facilities in areas that are appropriate for the type of use and best meet the needs of residents / users.
4. When new community facilities are built, minimize impacts on adjacent neighborhoods.
5. When new neighborhoods are built adjacent to existing community facilities, ensure that the site layout minimizes possible impacts that the community facility could have.

Address Current Community Facility and Service Needs

Maintenance of existing facilities emerged as a key priority. Some departments noted that they would benefit from additional space and the Town has reconfigured space to better meet the needs of various departments. This approach of addressing needs by optimizing existing space should continue.

The majority of residents are satisfied with recreational facilities in Vernon (88% are satisfied with parks; 71% with playgrounds and 70% with athletic fields). Keeping these facilities well-maintained will ensure continued enjoyment.

Address Current Community Facility and Service Needs:

1. Continue to update and maintain public buildings and schools, including the provision of energy conservation measures.
2. Continue to update and maintain parks and recreation facilities.
3. Continue to re-use and reconfigure existing space, share facilities, and employ technology innovations to meet needs and minimize the need for new land or buildings.

Anticipate and Plan for Future Needs

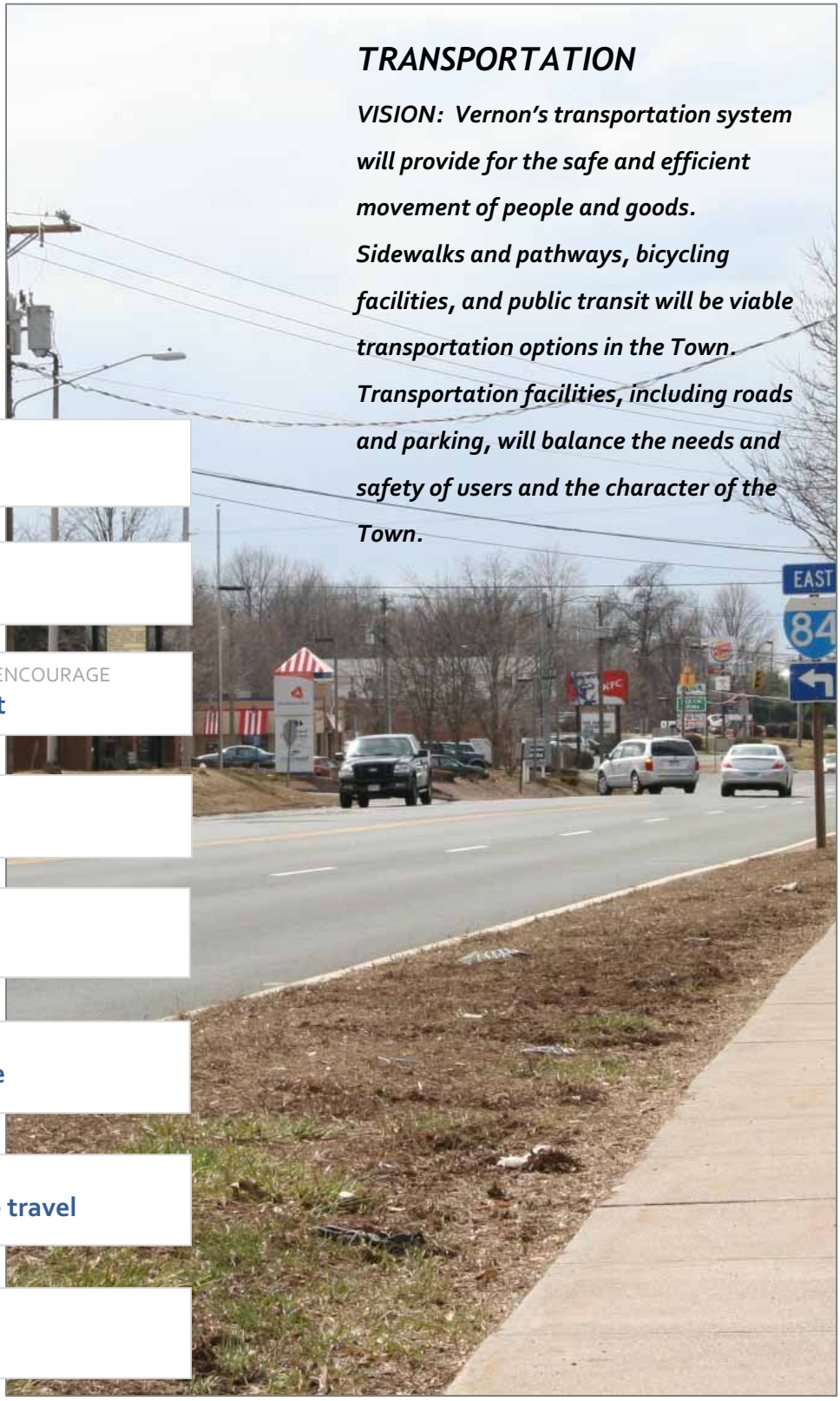
It is important to understand changes and trends that will influence the need and demand for community facilities in Vernon. For example, as our population ages, will it be more difficult to retain a volunteer fire department? If so, would our current facilities accommodate a change to a paid force? These are just two of many questions related to future facilities in Vernon. A comprehensive assessment of facility needs can identify opportunities for sharing a facility or space, determine timing for new facilities or expansions, and identify possible state or federal funding sources.

Multiple departments raised the idea of creating a community center either in Rockville or another location. Roughly half (51%) of residents polled would support a community center even if it meant a increase in taxes. If such a community center could efficiently meet the needs of multiple departments and there is adequate public support, the Town might explore this idea further over the long term.

Lastly, when new buildings are planned or substantial upgrades are undertaken, design plans should facilitate the incorporation of the latest communications technologies.

Anticipate and Plan for Future Needs:

1. Monitor how demographic changes might affect the needs and demands on Town services and facilities.
2. Retain school buildings / sites to meet long-term education needs.
3. Conduct a space needs assessment for the police station and investigate options for expansion.
4. Examine space needs and locational considerations for fire stations.
5. Determine approaches for meeting recreation demands.
6. Determine if a community center would help meet demands for recreation and other community activities.
7. Continue to seek innovative ways to provide quality-of-life amenities, such as through grants, public-private partnerships, etc.
8. Look for state and federal funding opportunities when facilities are built or expanded.



TRANSPORTATION

VISION: Vernon's transportation system will provide for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods. Sidewalks and pathways, bicycling facilities, and public transit will be viable transportation options in the Town. Transportation facilities, including roads and parking, will balance the needs and safety of users and the character of the Town.

STRATEGIES

MAINTAIN
Overall circulation

MINIMIZE
Congestion

CONTINUE TO REQURE & ENCOURAGE
Access Management

CALM
Traffic

CONTINUE
Road maintenance

IMPROVE
Public transit service

ENHANCE
Pedestrian & bicycle travel

ADDRESS
Parking

Transportation

Vernon's transportation system consists of roads, public transportation, and pedestrian and bicycling facilities. Transportation, especially the road network, continues to be one of Vernon's strengths. Overall, a community's transportation system should support existing and desired land use patterns and provide for the mobility of its residents, workers, and visitors. Viable alternative transportation options (including public transit and walking) expand mobility options for residents or workers who do not have a car or are unable to drive. This is particularly important in communities that have a large or growing senior populations.

Many components of Vernon's transportation infrastructure are under the jurisdiction of state and regional entities. While Vernon does not have direct control over these other entities, continued collaboration can ensure that Vernon's transportation system meets local needs.

Road Classification

The following classification is partially based on guidelines by the Federal Highway Administration and the town's subdivision regulations.

Interstate – Road with controlled access intended to move larger volumes of traffic.

Major Arterial – Intended to carry regional traffic and serve major activity centers. In theory, serving abutting land is subordinate to moving traffic.

Minor Arterial – Interconnects and augments major arterials, provides for trips of moderate length, might serve minor traffic generators.

Collector – Collects traffic from local roads and neighborhoods and connects with minor and major arterials.

Local Road – All other streets, primarily providing direct access to abutting land. Generally not appropriate for high traffic generators.

Legend

Average Daily Traffic*

20,000+

10,000 - 19,999

<10,000

Source - CT DOT, 2006.
*Only for select areas with available counts.

Maintain Overall Circulation Patterns and Minimize Congestion

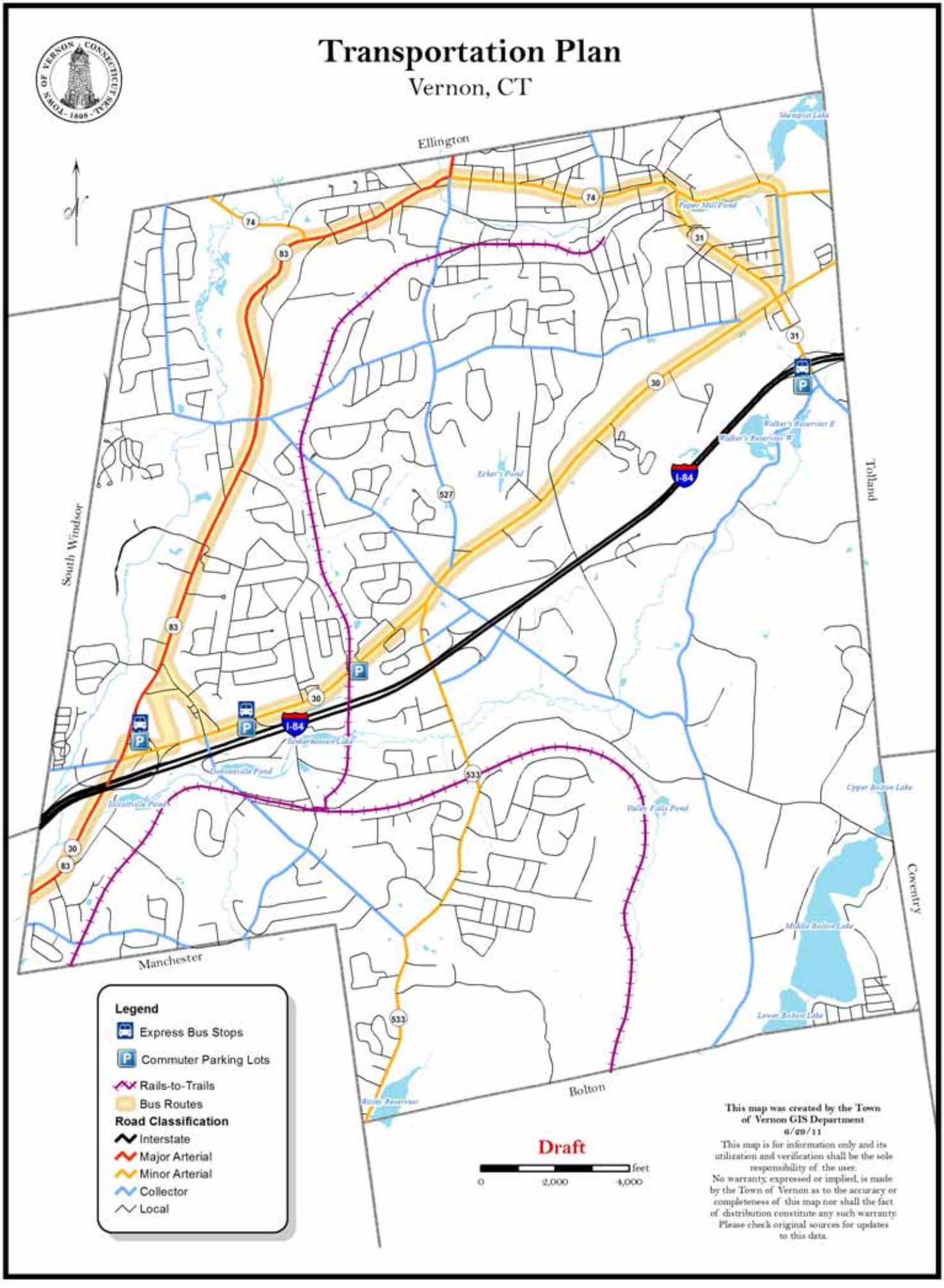
Vernon's well-developed road network provides convenient access to jobs and other destinations in the Town and the region. Input at public workshops and through the telephone survey highlight this convenience as a contributor to a high quality of life in Vernon. Regional commuters, who depend upon Vernon's roads to reach I-84, add traffic but present business development opportunities for providing services to these commuters.

Traffic Volumes

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) has classified roads in Vernon (see sidebar and Transportation Plan). The classification generally seems reasonable, although Route 83 between Windsorville Road and West Road might be better classified as a Minor Arterial rather than Major based upon lower traffic volumes and the character of the area.

Transportation Plan

Vernon, CT



To evaluate and manage potential traffic impacts, the Planning and Zoning Commission can require Traffic Impact Statements when development is proposed. Another approach used by communities is to tie allowable land uses to road classification. High traffic generators are generally not considered appropriate on local roads and, often, collector roads. Therefore certain uses are only allowed on arterials. This can be particularly helpful when siting non-residential uses (schools, nursing homes, religious facilities) in residential zones.

Recent improvements to Route 83 in Vernon Circle are expected to address traffic flow in this area. The Town should work with the State and property owners to undertake additional measures to better manage traffic in Vernon Circle and along other parts of Routes 30 and 83. Measures might include improvements to signal coordination and traffic calming.

Other areas of town tend to experience some congestion during morning and evening rush hours (generally roads that provide access to I-84, such as the Route 30/31 intersection). As additional development occurs, opportunities to improve circulation patterns should be explored.

Maintain Overall Circulation Patterns and Minimize Congestion:

1. Consider incorporating road classification into zoning regulations to manage potential traffic impacts.
2. Continue to require Traffic Impact Statements for developments which might generate high levels of traffic.
3. Work with the State and property owners to undertake additional measures to manage traffic on Routes 30 and 83.
4. To manage congestion near I-84 access points:
    a. continue to work with the state on options / improvements
    b. as development occurs, look for opportunities to make improvements

Continue to Require and Encourage Access Management

"Access Management" is an overarching strategy to optimize access to land while ensuring for the safe and efficient flow of traffic. Curb cut (driveway) management is a key component of access management. Multiple curb cuts in close proximity to one another impact traffic flow, increase the potential for accidents, and increase the number of conflict points between pedestrians and vehicles.

The Planning and Zoning Commission has worked to reduce / combine curb cuts when development occurs. Additional steps could include:

- adding access management provisions to its zoning regulations (i.e., requiring driveways connections between adjoining properties or reserving areas for future connections)
- encouraging the creation of access roads that run behind multiple properties
- preparing an access management plan which would provide specific recommendations for access to properties along a corridor
- update zoning regulations to require compliance with the plan when properties are developed or redeveloped.

The State has ultimate control over the location and number of curb cuts for properties along state roads. The recent improvements to Route 83 in Vernon Circle have helped address issues there; the island limits the ability to make left-hand turns. The Town should continue to work with the State to ensure its decisions are consistent with town policies for access management. This is especially important for Routes 83 and 30 and will be important as development occurs along Route 31 near exit 67.

Continue to Require and Encourage Access Management:

1. Continue to work with land use applicants and the State Traffic Commission to reduce / minimize curb cuts.
2. Consider incorporating access management provisions into the Zoning Regulations.
3. Create an access management plan for Route 83.

Continue to Implement Traffic Calming Measures

Traffic calming helps to slow traffic down, thereby making streets safer for pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers. Certain physical conditions tend to cause drivers to slow down, such as roads that are narrow, or appear narrow due to activity along the roads (e.g., on-street parking). Other traffic calming techniques include installing curb extensions, medians, and speed humps. The appropriate treatment varies based upon the type of road and its use.

The Town has successfully employed traffic calming techniques and should continue to do so as appropriate. The Town should also review the roadway widths required for new roads to see if they can be reduced.

Continue to Implement Traffic Calming Measures:

1. Implement traffic calming measures on a case-by-case basis as needed.
2. Examine road width requirements and determine if they can be reduced.

Continue Road Maintenance

The Town should continue to program funds for maintaining and improving its roads. Maintaining existing road infrastructure is an important priority for safety, convenience, and from a cost efficiency perspective; regular maintenance can extend the useful life of a road and thereby delay the need for reconstruction. The Town has also undertaken aesthetic improvements when upgrading roads since roads can greatly influence the character of a neighborhood.

Bridge improvements and reconstruction are a community priority. A number of bridge projects are underway or planned.

Continue Road Maintenance:

1. Continue to program funding for regular maintenance.
2. Continue bridge improvements and reconstruction.

Improve Public Transit Service

Vernon is one of 16 communities that belongs to the Greater Hartford Transit District. The District plans, develops, operates, maintains, and provides transportation and related services such as transportation centers and parking facilities. CT Transit operates local and commuter bus service. Buses connect Rockville and the Route 83 corridor to Manchester and downtown Hartford. The Vernon Express provides direct service between commuter parking lots and Hartford.

Workshop attendees would like to see more user-friendly bus service. The Town could encourage CT Transit to better identify and maintain bus stops, make route maps more accessible, and provide more bus shelters. However, the survey revealed that very few residents (19%) would use the bus if service were improved / expanded. As future residential and business development occurs along bus routes, there could be increased demand. If demand increases, the Town could work with residents and employers along bus routes and CT Transit to determine if route expansions are warranted. In addition, the Express service should continue to be offered in Vernon.

Paratransit (door to door service) is provided by the Hockanum Valley Community Council. The Senior Center also provides some bus transportation, mainly to bring seniors to the center and for special trips and events. The private sector and the Housing Authority also meet demand for door-to-door transportation – many senior and elderly housing developments provide transportation to their residents.

The Town may receive funding for the creation of a multi-modal transportation center. While the location and details are still in the planning stages, such a facility could help make it easier for residents and others in the region to use public transit in Vernon. One site under consideration is the commuter parking lot on the western stretch of Route

30. This location is near the highway, close to Vernon Center, and near the Rail Trail, making it a good candidate.

Improve Public Transit Service:

1. Continue to work with the region and public transit providers to make existing bus service more user-friendly.
2. Monitor future demand for bus service and, if warranted, work with public transit providers to extend routes / increase service.
3. Ensure that the express commuter bus continues to connect Vernon to Hartford.
4. Support the continued provision of para-transit service.
5. Support the creation of a multi-modal center in Vernon.

Enhance Pedestrian and Bicycle Travel

Trips made by foot or on bicycle can reduce traffic and have environmental and health benefits. While a community cannot change people's behavior, it can increase opportunities and reduce barriers to walking and biking. This can occur through public investment or through improvements made by the private sector.

In terms of public investment, the Town has a track record of providing and promoting pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. The Town has maintained the historic walkable environment in areas such as Rockville and has invested in sidewalks in other areas where walking is a suitable means of transportation. The Skinner Road School participates in the Safe Routes To School movement which encourages children to walk to school. Finally, Vernon's Rail Trail provides a central bicycle corridor, allowing pedestrian and bicyclists to easily get around town and to Bolton and Manchester. These public-lead efforts should continue.

Sidewalk maintenance and construction requires funding and difficult choices have to be made annually about where limited dollars can best be used to enhance the sidewalk network. Residents support building sidewalks in areas such as Route 30, Route 83 and Vernon Circle – 75% support building them here and just over half (57%) support them even if it would increase their property taxes. The Town should explore options for funding sidewalks, such as a sidewalk fund.

The Town has taken cost-efficient approaches by obtaining grants and incorporating sidewalk improvements as road work is done. This approach of including sidewalk upgrades when roads are repaired is akin to a "Complete Streets" approach. Complete streets take all users – pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers – into account when improving roads.

Sidewalk Plan

The Sidewalk Plan suggests which areas of Vernon could be highest priority for sidewalk construction and maintenance. It can also help the Planning and Zoning Commission determine when a private development should include sidewalks.

Highest priority areas are those areas where there is more likely to be a demand for sidewalks or there is a desire to increase pedestrian activity.

Areas received "points' if located within:

- ¼ mile of most commercial zones (SED, PC, C, RC, RDBR or HD-RC zones)
- ¼ mile of existing high density residential areas
- ¼ mile of a bus route or commuter parking lot
- ¼ mile of an existing sidewalk
- A "node"
- ¼ mile of any public school

Areas rated highest met multiple criteria.

New development or redevelopment on arterials, collectors, and most local through streets should be required to install sidewalks in high priority areas and encouraged to in medium priority areas.

Streets listed in the Town's current Sidewalk Policy are either High or Medium on this Sidewalk Plan.

In terms of the private sector, the zoning regulations require that "sidewalks shall be installed for all new development in all areas" and further calls for granite curbs in "sidewalk policy areas." Subdivision regulations require sidewalks on at least one side of the street, unless waived by the Commission.

But determining when to waive sidewalks proves challenging. The private-sector approach to expanding the sidewalk network is piecemeal since it is based upon when and where development occurs. As a result, landowners may feel frustrated that they are required to provide sidewalks when there are no sidewalks on adjacent properties. Having a clear plan that identifies priority areas for future sidewalks could help clarify how individual sidewalk additions fit into the larger, long-term picture. Conversely, there are areas of Vernon where sidewalks might not be necessary. The Sidewalk Plan Map can aid in the determination of when to require sidewalks.

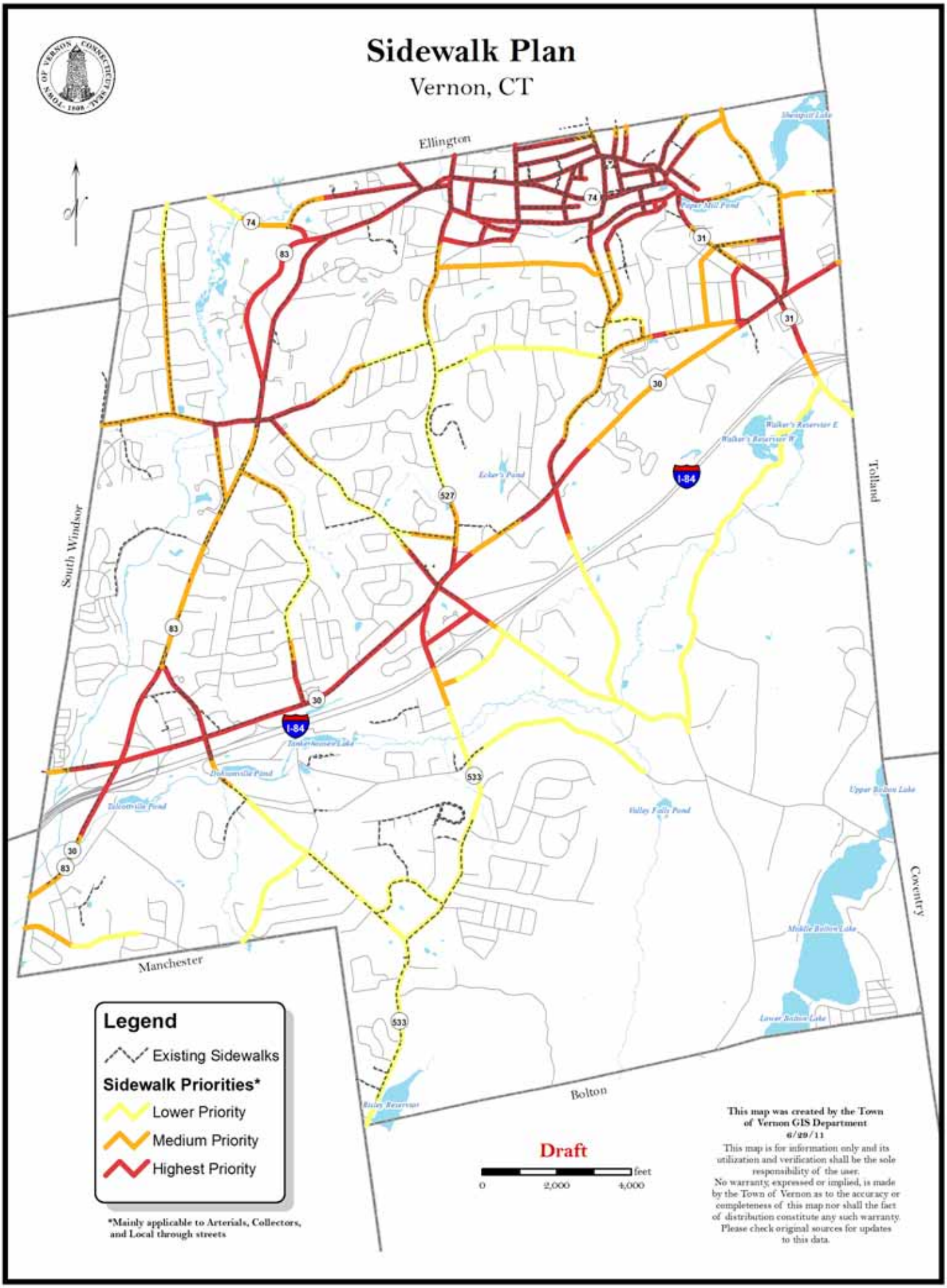
Other pedestrian and bicycle amenities (pathways connecting adjacent properties, bicycle racks, benches, etc.) can be provided as new development or redevelopment occurs. In addition to the off-road Rail Trail, on-road bike accommodations are important components of a bicycle transportation system. A "Complete Streets" approach can identify ways to accommodate bicyclists when improving roads.

Enhance Pedestrian and Bicycle Travel:

1. Use the Sidewalk Plan (or one similar to this one) to:
    a. help prioritize spending for construction of sidewalks.
    b. help prioritize maintenance of sidewalks, and
    c. help determine when to require new development to install sidewalks.
2. Schedule the review and maintenance of sidewalks and repair them as necessary.
3. Continue to incorporate sidewalk improvements into road projects, where feasible.
4. Encourage new development to provide pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.
5. Explore options for funding sidewalks, such as a sidewalk fund.

Sidewalk Plan

Vernon, CT



Address Parking Needs

Ensuring an adequate amount of and convenient location of parking in downtown areas can be a great challenge. Downtowns, including Rockville, are appealing in large part for pedestrian-friendliness. Yet most visitors and workers mainly arrive by car and need a place to park. Parking strategies in a downtown should balance convenience for drivers, providing a walkable and attractive streetscape, and not inadvertently freezing redevelopment through unachievable parking requirements.

There are a number of parking spaces throughout Rockville; however, many of the parking lots are privately owned. At certain times, visitors to the Town Hall or Senior Center have trouble finding on-street parking or a space in the municipal lot while private lots sit near-empty. The Town should continue to investigate options for structured parking to increase capacity at its municipal lot and work with private landowners to allow public parking on their sites.

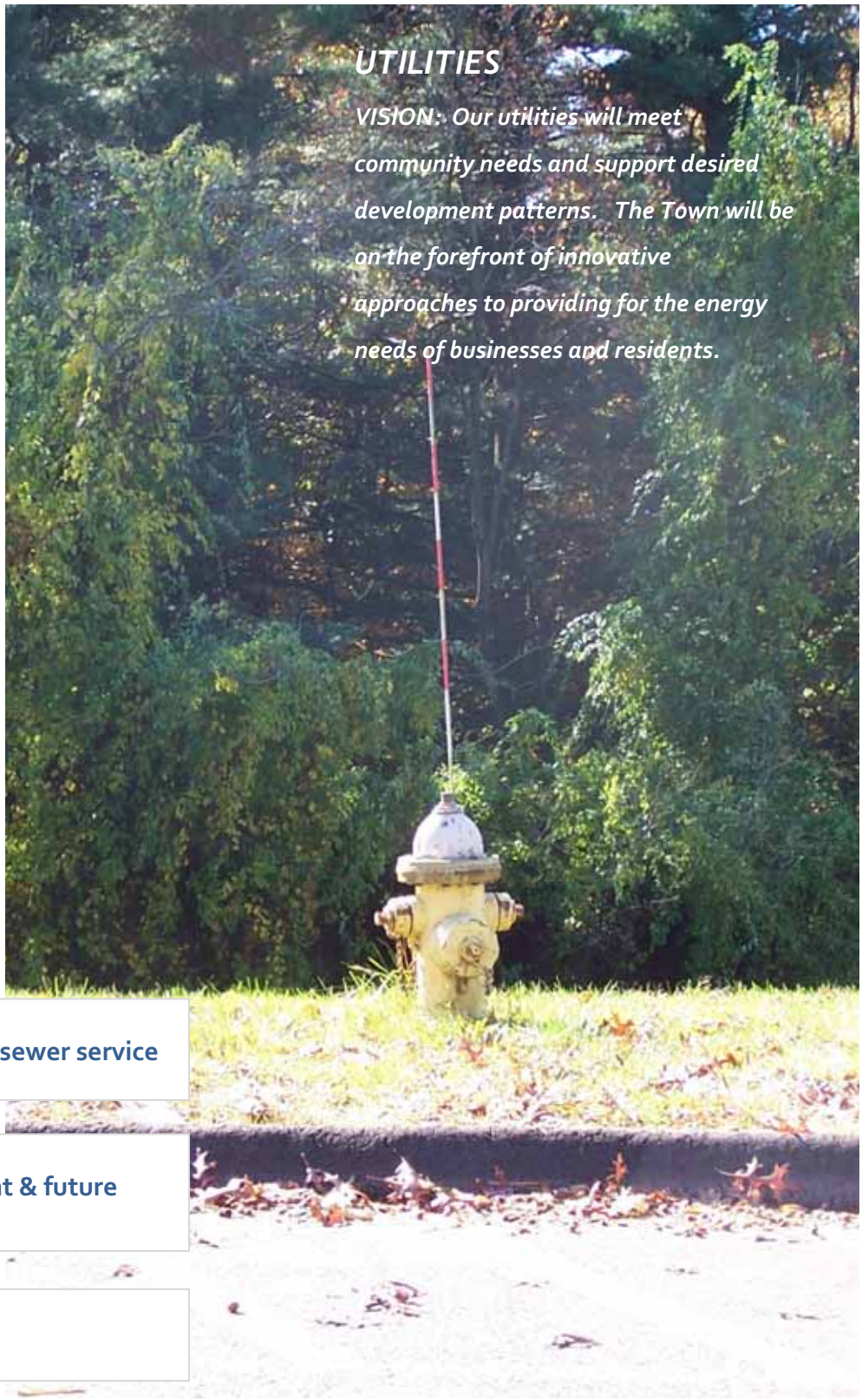
Town-wide, providing more parking than is necessary can have environmental and economic impacts (see discussion of economic impacts on page 89). The Town provides some flexibility in meeting parking requirements. Additional measures might be beneficial. The table on the following page outlines alternative approaches to parking requirements and indicates which approaches might be appropriate in Rockville or the remainder of the Town.

Address Parking Needs:

1. Consider building structured parking in the municipal lot in Rockville.
2. Encourage landowners to share parking in Rockville.
3. Rethink parking requirements to reduce the environmental and economic impacts of providing too much parking.

Possible Regulatory Approaches to Parking

Parking Approaches	Appropriate for: Rockville	Appropriate for: Remainder of Town
RECALIBRATE		
Continue to require a minimum number of spaces, but recalibrate space requirements to better match demand.	✓	✓
"5/8ths" Rule – reduce parking requirements by 5/8ths in areas where public parking or on-street parking is available.	✓	
Set a minimum and maximum number of spaces.	✓	✓
REDUCE*		
Allow reduction in spaces if applicant can demonstrate the spaces are not needed (no fee-in-lieu required).	✓	✓
Allow reduction if other private parking spaces are available nearby and owner has a legal agreement with owner of other spaces to share (no fee-in-lieu required).	✓	✓
Allow reduction if other public parking spaces are available nearby (on-street or public lot) – in this case, the fee-in-lieu of parking payment should be required because a cost is borne by the Town.	✓	
*Vernon's zoning regulations allow payment in lieu of parking for up to 20% of the required spaces.		
DEFER		
Can build lesser number of spaces but must reserve an area for future parking spaces in case demand warrants a need for them.		✓
ELIMINATE		
Eliminate minimum parking requirements for some or all uses.	✓	✓



UTILITIES

VISION: Our utilities will meet community needs and support desired development patterns. The Town will be on the forefront of innovative approaches to providing for the energy needs of businesses and residents.

STRATEGIES

COORDINATE
Land use goals with sewer service

ENSURE
Utilities meet current & future needs

MEET
Energy needs

Utilities

Residents and businesses depend daily upon utilities ranging from sewer and water to communications. The presence of certain utilities can help attract new businesses to a community.

Coordinate Land Use Goals with the Provision of Sewer Service

Two entities oversee the provision of and expansion of sewer service in Vernon: the Vernon Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) and the Bolton Lakes Regional WPCA. There are also some "private" sewage pipes that connect various developments to the public system.

Much of the land north of I-84 and in the southwest of town is served by Vernon WPCA public sewers. The area around Middle and Lower Bolton Lakes is scheduled to be served by sewers in order to minimize potential public health issues and environmental impacts to the lakes. Meanwhile, most of the less developed southeast part of town relies upon on-site septic systems.

The availability of public sewers impacts the amount of and type of development that a parcel of land can accommodate. Ultimately, the Vernon WPCA and Bolton Lakes Regional WPCA decide when and where sewers are to be extended. The Planning and Zoning Commission should work closely with both WPCAs to help meet land use goals. Such coordination will have added importance because the State now requires that sewer expansions are consistent with the State's Plan of Conservation and Development. The State generally will not fund the expansion of sewers into conservation or preservation areas, as identified in the State Plan.

To attract additional business to the industrial park near Exit 66, sewers should be extended. However, this area is labeled as "conservation" and "preservation" on the State Plan map (see page 120), likely due to the presence of the Tankerhoosen River and the aquifer. As the State updates its plan, the Town should work with the State to address this inconsistency and develop options that will protect these water resources while allowing compatible development.

The remaining areas of Vernon would be considered "Sewer Avoidance" areas where the intent is to continue to rely upon on-site septic systems unless public health issues warrant sewer extensions. Vernon should monitor potential use of Alternative Treatment Systems (ATS) and determine if measures should be adopted (see sidebar).

Coordinate Land Use Goals with the Provision of Sewer Service:

1. Work with the State and the WPCA to determine appropriate sewer extensions for business development purposes.

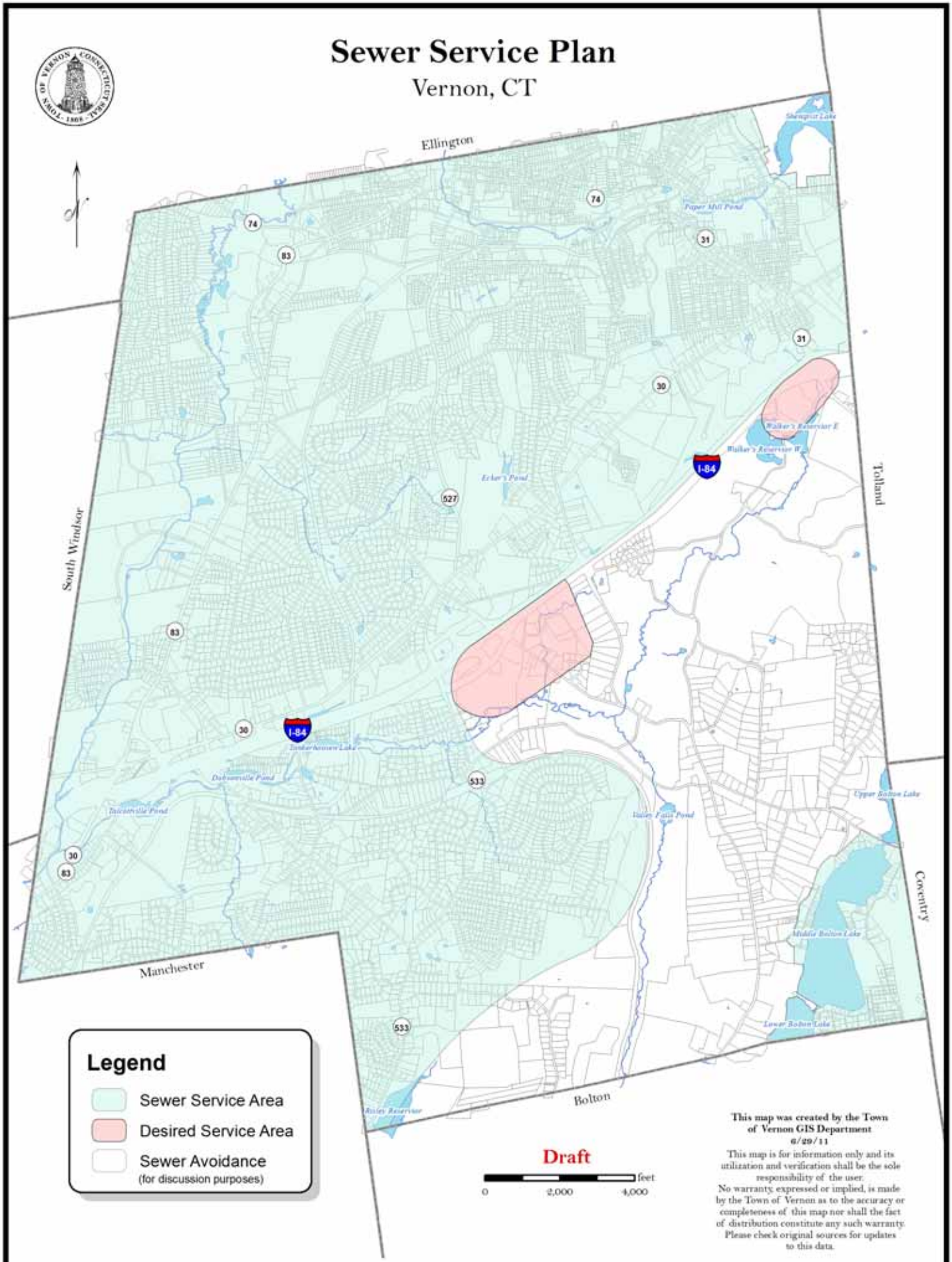
Alternative Treatment Systems (ATS)

An ATS is an on-site sewage treatment system that pretreats effluent before it is discharged. This type of system is used in place of a conventional septic system.

Environmental organizations are compiling guidance for communities to ensure that if an ATS is proposed, the community has the tools in place to conduct an adequate review, ensure proper monitoring and determine accountability should a failure occur.

Sewer Service Plan

Vernon, CT



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6/29/11

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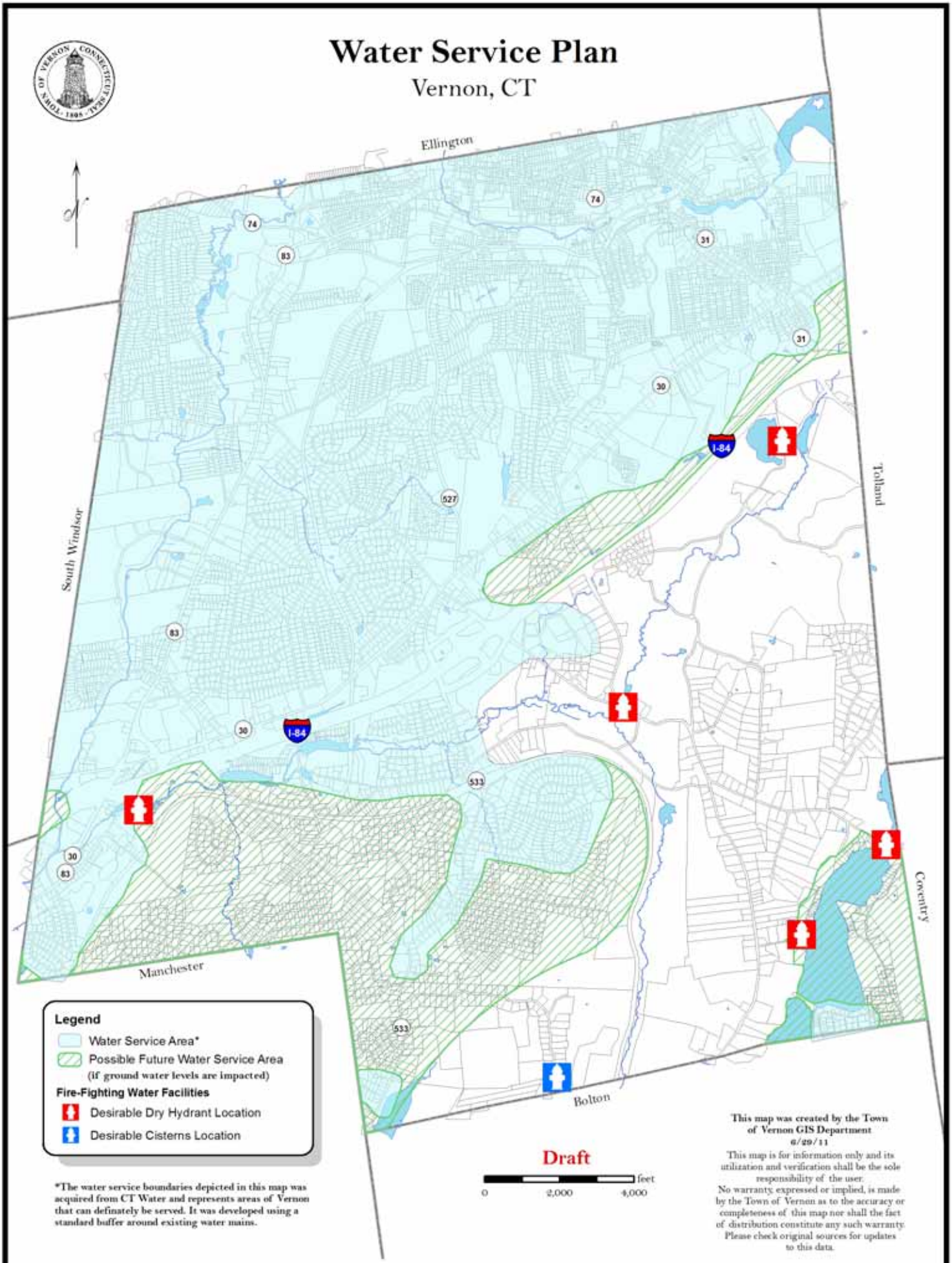
Water Service Plan

Vernon, CT



*The water service boundaries depicted in this map was acquired from CT Water and represents areas of Vernon that can definately be served. It was developed using a standard buffer around existing water mains.

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Vernon Wastewater Treatment Plant Allocations

	% of Allocation
Vernon	77.1%
Tolland	5.63%
Ellington	14.37%
Manchester	1.28%
S. Windsor	1.62%

Ensure that Utilities Meet Current and Future Needs

Sewer

The most recent Sewer Facilities Plan was prepared in 1991 and partial updates were recently made when planning for treatment plant upgrades. While the plant has a capacity of 7.1 million gallons per day (mgd), actual discharge is between 3.5 to 4 mgd. Each community is allocated a portion of the full plant capacity (see sidebar).

In addition to possibly extending sewers, current and future needs related to existing sewer facilities include:

- Updating the Wastewater Facilities Plan. With additional plant upgrades required (see last bullet) the Wastewater Facilities Plan needs to be updated. The Plan would provide current and projected sewage flow from each community and could determine if there might be opportunities to sell extra capacity.
- Continued Maintenance. The Town upgrades pipes on an as-needed basis, but with some sewer pipes that are 120 years old, replacement could be necessary. Fortunately, according to local officials, the older pipes are in good condition.
- Additional upgrades to the Wastewater Treatment Plan. While recent upgrades helped to improve water quality, further upgrades will be needed to meet additional state environmental requirements.

Water

Vernon's residents and businesses obtain their water either from a water system or from on-site wells. A regional water provider, the Connecticut Water Company, is the predominant water provider to those properties on a public system. Overall they anticipate they can meet water needs of the region for at least the next 10 years.

There also are a number of smaller systems that provide water to a specific development or parcel. Issues or long term needs related to these systems were not identified.

As discussed on page 31, a number of properties south of I-84 that use on-site wells are hooked up to sewer systems. This will also be the situation around Bolton Lakes, once the new sewer system is built, and possibly other areas of the Town where sewers are extended to areas that do not have a public water supply. Because ground water will be transferred out of the watershed (well water to sewer system then discharged elsewhere), the situation should be carefully monitored to ensure that well water levels are not affected. Efforts to increase stormwater infiltration on-site (e.g., LID) could help mitigate water losses.

Finally, areas without public water need a source of water for fighting fires. The Fire Marshal and Fire Chief recommend that cisterns are installed at key locations in areas that lack public water service.

Drainage

The Town has begun mapping its drainage infrastructure so that there will be a complete inventory of the location and size of pipes and other structures. According to the Department of Public Works, continued inspections and maintenance of the exist-ing drainage system is the priority. As discussed on page 37, the Town may wish to adopt additional protocols to ensure that privately owned drainage facilities are properly maintained.

The Town should pursue low impact development techniques, which promote on-site infiltration. Reducing the amount of storm water that runs off of properties (and into drainage pipes) relieves burdens on the Town's drainage infrastructure and can reduce the need for constructing and maintaining additional drainage structures (see page 37 for details).

Communications

Outside of upgrades to public safety communication systems, issues related to tele-phone, cable, cellular and other communications have not been identified. The Town has taken a proactive approach to meet its own communications needs by developing a fiber optic network. The Town should encourage providers to make available the most up-to-date communications systems in Vernon to attract businesses that depend upon such technology and to enhance residential quality of life. The Town could also provide free WiFi throughout the Town. This type of amenity can be important when attracting new businesses and can benefit home-based businesses.

Ensure that Utilities Meet Current and Future Needs:

1. Continue to maintain the sewer system and plan for upgrades as needed.
2. Longer term, monitor water levels in areas with on-site wells and public sewer service to determine if ground water levels are impacted.
3. Continue to inventory and maintain current drainage infrastructure.
4. Implement low impact development (LID) measures to reduce stormwater flow into the Town's drainage system.
5. Keep private utility providers appraised of future development potential to ensure adequate availability of utilities.
6. Ensure that Vernon offers up-to-date communication options.

Meet Energy Needs

Connecticut Light and Power (CL&P) provides electrical service in Vernon. Recent upgrades to the Rockville substation and the addition of new substations in surrounding towns have improved electrical service. CL&P anticipates having adequate capacity to serve Vernon over the next 10 years.

Yankee Gas provides natural gas service to parts of Vernon. To accommodate growth in natural gas use, upgrades to Vernon's facilities are planned. The process for the upgrade has begun and eventually will require approval by the Connecticut Department of Public Utility Control. Yankee Gas aims to have the new gate station on-line by 2012.

Workshop attendees expressed a desire to see the promotion of alternative energy options. The Planning and Zoning Commission may wish to review zoning regulations and amend as needed to accommodate appropriate alternative energy. The Town established an Energy Committee and has undertaken efforts to reduce energy consumption at town facilities such as Board of Education buildings and the Wastewater Treatment Plant.

The Town Council recently created an Energy Improvement District to facilitate the "sharing" of excess energy generated by smaller scale energy producers. Such a district can benefit businesses by reducing energy costs and by providing greater reliability. This district can help the Town achieve its business development goals.

Meet Energy Needs:

1. Continue to seek alternative energy approaches to reduce energy consumption and energy prices for businesses and residents.
2. Review zoning regulations and update as needed to allow appropriate alternative energy structures.

Chapter 7: Future Land Use Plan

In this Chapter:

Future Land Use Plan

Consistency with State and Regional Plans and Policies

About the Future Land Use Plan

The recommendations of the preceding chapters are combined into a Future Land Use Plan for Vernon. The Plan reflects the stated goals and recommendations; it should be used in conjunction with the plan maps found in the chapters.

It is important to note that the Plan is focused on the future – it does not imply that existing houses or businesses must "convert" to the future desired land use.

Future Land Use Plan

Natural Resources	
Constraints	Exhibit significant environmental constraints (e.g., wetlands, watercourses, steep slopes, floodplain) and represent the highest priorities for preservation or conservation.

Residential	
Low Density	Single-family residential development is expected to occur at densities of less than 1 unit per acre or less based on current zoning and natural resource constraints.
Moderate Density	Single-family residential development is expected to occur at densities of less than 3 units per acre.*
Highest Density	Single-family residential development is expected to occur at less than 4.4 units per acre.*
Special Zones	Areas that have been developed with multi-family, planned residential, or mobile homes.

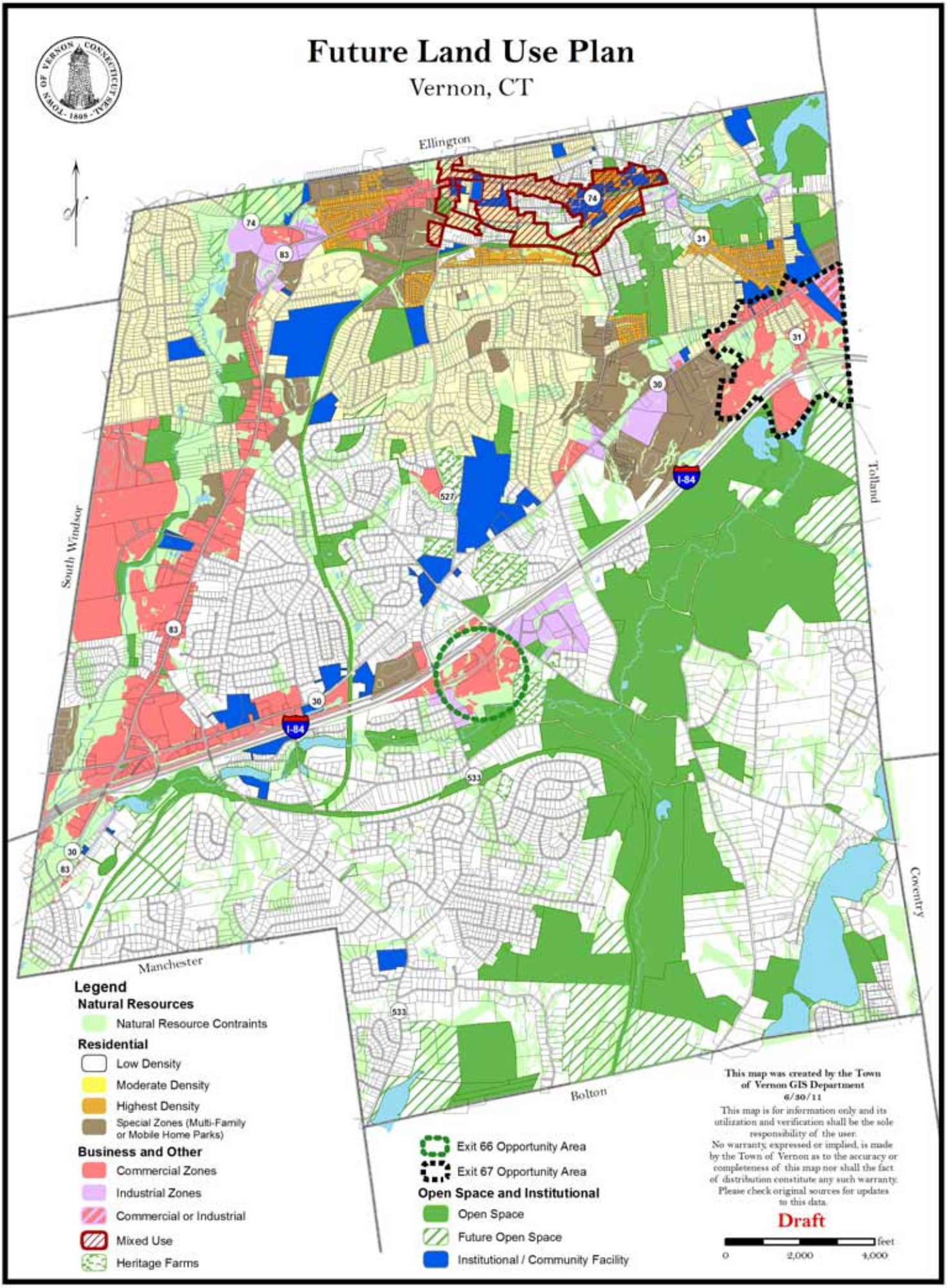
Business and Other	
Commercial Zones	Areas that have developed or are intended to develop for commercial uses.
Industrial Zones	Areas that have development or are intended to develop for industrial use.
Commercial / Industrial	Areas that might be suited for either commercial or industrial uses.
Mixed Use	Areas with a mixture of residential, business and civic uses in a downtown / village setting (Rockville).
Exit 67 Opportunity Zone	Area for business development that is planned and designed to create an attractive gateway to Vernon and to protect sensitive natural resources.
Exit 66 Opportunity Zone	Area for business development that warrants further study to determine appropriate uses and form.
Farm	Heritage farms.

Open Space and Institutional	
Open Space	Land intended to remain for open space purposes (note that some community facilities also contain Open Space).
Future Open Space	Areas that would make a significant contribution to Vernon's Open Space network if preserved. Includes Managed Open Space.
Institutional / Community Facility	Existing public facilities and institutional uses (note that some community facilities contain Open Space).

* Two-family dwellings are permitted by right and could double this density.

Future Land Use Plan

Vernon, CT



Consistency with State and Regional Plans and Policies

In accordance with Connecticut General Statutes Section 8-23, the Vernon POCD was compared to:

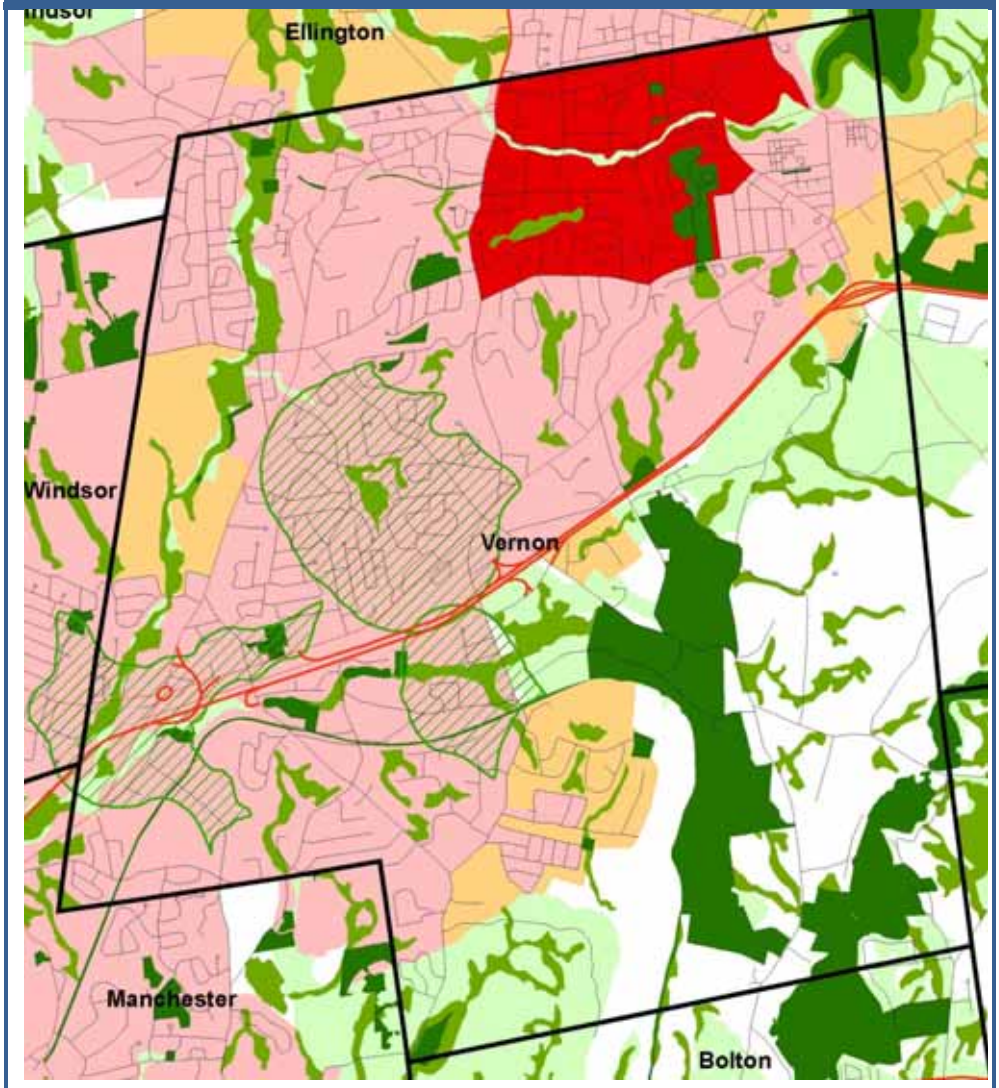
- *2005-2010 Conservation and Development Policies Plan for Connecticut* (the most recent state plan),
- *2009 Regional Plan of Conservation and Development*, and
- State Growth Principles

State Plan Map

The Vernon POCD is generally consistent with the State Plan map with one exception. This POCD supports continued business development adjacent to I-84 in the Exit 66 area and supports extending sewers to this business area.

The State Plan labels this area as Preservation and Conservation, likely due to the water resources located here. The Town should work with the State to determine options that will protect these water resources while allowing compatible development.

State Plan



State Growth Principles

The Vernon Plan of Conservation and Development has been evaluated for consistency with the six State Growth Principles.

State Growth Principle	Vernon POCD
Principle 1 - Redevelopment and revitalization of commercial centers and areas of mixed land uses with existing or planned physical infrastructure.	**FINDING - Consistent** Redevelopment / revitalization of Rockville is a key strategy in the POCD. Continued development in commercial areas is promoted; most such areas are served by sewer and water infrastructure.
Principle 2 - Expansion of housing opportunities and design choices to accommodate a variety of household types and needs.	**FINDING - Consistent** It is expected that Vernon will continue to provide an array of housing types, particularly affordable and rental opportunities. The POCD aims to attract more homeowners to better balance its housing stock.
Principle 3 - Concentration of development around transportation nodes and along major transportation corridors to support the viability of transportation options and land reuse.	**FINDING - Consistent** Future development is expected to occur mainly along major transportation corridors and in Rockville. Most of these areas are served by public transit. Vernon also has an extensive sidewalk network which the POCD aims to enhance and extend.
Principle 4 - Conservation and restoration of the natural environment, cultural and historical resources and existing farmlands.	**FINDING - Consistent** Protecting natural resources, particularly water resources, is a key component of the POCD, along with preserving historic buildings and remaining working farms.
Principle 5 - Protection of environmental assets critical to public health and safety.	**FINDING - Consistent** Protecting natural resources, particularly water resources, is a key component of the POCD.
Principle 6 - Integration of planning across all levels of government to address issues on a local, regional and state-wide basis.	**FINDING - Consistent** Many strategies in the POCD require continued collaboration with regional and state entities, especially regarding transportation issues.

Regional Policies

The Vernon Plan of Conservation and Development has been evaluated for consistency with the goals set forth in the Regional Plan. The Vernon POCD is consistent with the Regional Plan map also.

Regional Plan	Vernon POCD
Conservation Goals Natural Resource Conservation • Protect air, water, and soil quality in the region • Grow and develop in harmony with natural resources • Promote active natural resource stewardship Watersheds and Water Quality • Improve and maintain water quality • Protect water supply and increase water conservation efforts • Reduce nonpoint source pollution • Continue combined sewer overflow and point-source pollution discharge reductions • Use innovative wastewater treatment techniques for new developments Open Space and Farmland Preservation • Support protection of more open space in the region • Encourage preservation of farmland in the region • Encourage preservation of water company land as open space • Coordinate and prioritize open space preservation throughout the region • Expand and protect open space along major rivers Food System • Preserve the Capitol Region's working lands • Improve regional residents' access to food resources • Improve the health and nutrition of the region's population • Reduce environmental impacts of the food system	The Vernon POCD provides for the continued preservation and conservation of natural resources, with a focus on reducing pollution, and improving and maintaining water quality. The POCD recommends many strategies including zoning updates and continued open space protection to protect resources. The POCD sets a goal of continued preservation of open space and identifies desirable future open space parcels. Open space has played and is expected to continue to play an important role in protecting rivers in Vernon. The POCD also supports the preservation of remaining heritage farms.

Regional Plan	Vernon POCD
Development Goals Land Use and Zoning • Guide growth to regional centers and areas of established infrastructure • Increase redevelopment and infill development efforts • Revise zoning and subdivision regulations to address local and regional land use concern	The Vernon POCD generally recommends that future growth occur in areas with existing sewer, water and transportation infrastructure. Redevelopment in Rockville and of vacant buildings is important. The POCD recommends numerous updates to land use regulations to achieve land use goals.
Public Water and Sewer Service • Ensure an adequate and high quality water supply • Reduce environmental impacts of sewage discharge • Use existing water and sewer infrastructure to guide future growth • Balance water supply and ecosystem considerations	The POCD supports updating the Wastewater Facilities Plans and upgrades needed to improve water quality. The POCD includes a strategy to align sewer infrastructure with desired future growth. Possible future issues related to a balanced water supply are identified in the POCD, particularly for the Bolton Lakes area.
Transportation • Provide a range of viable transportation options within the region • Improve interregional and interstate transportation • Coordinate land use, environmental, and transportation efforts • Anticipate and plan for future transportation needs	The POCD accounts for a range of transportation options including public transportation, biking and walking. The POCD address overall circulation and access, and other land use / transportation related issues.
Housing • Increase the range of choice in housing for people of all incomes and all ages, especially for those who have the least choice • Enforce Federal and State fair housing laws • Encourage and support the maintenance of viable residential neighborhoods • Support preservation of region's rental housing stock, and expansion of housing opportunities for renters • Continue to improve the transportation system to better link housing, jobs and services, thus expanding housing choices	Vernon currently provides an array of housing choices, particularly for renters. The POCD aims to better balance the Town's housing stock and promote homeownership. The POCD includes strategies to maintain existing neighborhoods. It is anticipated that new multifamily / residential developments would occur in or near bus corridors and include sidewalks which can help better connect residents of those developments to jobs and services.
Economic Development • Revitalize Hartford as the economic, residential, entertainment, and cultural center of the Capitol Region • Coordinate and promote regional land use, infrastructure, and fiscal policies for economic development • Increase the recognition of a regional identity • Maintain a focus on workforce development • Support and improve regional business development strategies and efforts	The POCD includes a range of economic development strategies to increase the tax base, and provide jobs and services to Vernon residents and residents of the region.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In this Chapter:

Conclusion

Conclusion

This Plan of Conservation and Development aims to maintain a high quality of life in a cost-efficient manner and to help Vernon prepare for and address changes and challenges that the future may hold. The Plan can aid the Town in its land use decisions for the next decade.

Ultimately, the Plan sets forth overarching goals that will likely remain important to residents over the next decade. The Plan is intended to be flexible, however, as the actions and specific strategies to achieve these goals (and the goals themselves) might change over time. In some cases, new trends or challenges may emerge that warrant a re-thinking of strategies. In other cases, new tools, resources, and knowledge might present new ways to address issues highlighted in this Plan.

In all cases, the Vernon Plan of Conservation and Development will be most effective if viewed as a living document that serves as a guide to the Planning and Zoning Commission, other boards and commissions, and other decision-makers. Implementation will be key. We invite our residents to help us with this important task.

Appendix:

In this Appendix:

Glossary

Glossary

Access Management – A strategy to optimize access to land from roads while ensuring that traffic can flow safely and efficiency. The number and locations of driveways (curb cuts) is often an integral component of access management.

ACS / American Community Survey – From the US Census: "The ACS is part of the Decennial Census Program. It is a survey that is sent to a small percentage of our population on a rotating basis. These data previously were collected only in census years in conjunction with the decennial census." The ACS collects data annually.

ATS – Alternative Treatment System. An on-site sewage treatment system that pretreats effluent before discharged. It is used in place of a conventional septic system.

CL&P – Connecticut Light and Power.

Committed Land – Land that is used for a particular economic or social purpose (including open space).

"Complete Streets" – A philosophy that streets should be planned to accommodate all users – not just vehicles.

ConnDOT – The Connecticut Department of Transportation.

CRCOG – Capitol Region Council of Governments. The 29-community regional planning agency of which Vernon is a member.

Dedicated Open Space – Land preserved in perpetuity as open space.

DEP – CT Department of Environmental Protection.

Developed Land – Land that has buildings, structures, or improvements and is used for a particular economic or social purpose (such as residential or institutional).

Future Land Use Plan – A map illustrating the types of future land uses which may result in the community if the goals and strategies contained in the Plan of Conservation and Development are implemented.

Gateway – An entryway to a community or a district or place within a community. A gateway provides a first impression to those entering the community or area.

GIS – Geographic Information System. A computer system used for storing, retrieving, analyzing and mapping geographic information.

Greenway – A corridor of open space and / or trails usually located along a natural corridor such as a river or abandoned right of ways.

LID – Low Impact Development. Strategies to reduce the impact of development, including storm water management.

Managed Open Space – Land that is currently used for open space purposes but is not protected from future development.

Natural Diversity Database – From CT DEP: "Natural Diversity Data Base maps represent approximate locations of endangered, threatened and special concern species and significant natural communities in Connecticut."

Node – A distinct area with notable character and a sense of place.

PA 490 – Public Act 490. The common term used for Public Act 63-490 (CGS 12-107). It is a tax reduction program that allows municipalities to assess qualifying farms, forest lands and vacant land based on their current use rather than potential value if developed.

Paratransit – Transit service that provides door to door rides but without a fixed timetable.

POCD – Plan of Conservation and Development. A long range land use plan prepared and adopted by a municipality pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 8-23.

PZC – The Vernon Planning and Zoning Commission.

RDA – The Rockville Downtown Association.

UST – Underground Storage Tank. A tank used to store fuel that is placed underground.

Vacant Land – Land that is not "developed" or "committed." See definitions for "developed" and "committed" land above.