

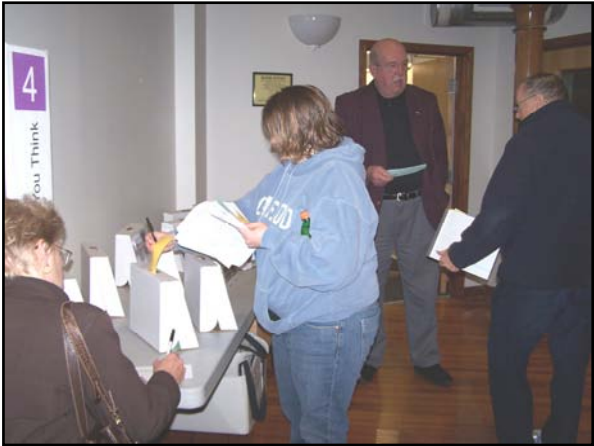
# PLANNING ISSUES

## Overview

To begin updating the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD or Plan), the Vernon Planning and Zoning Commission sought to identify issues that should be considered during the planning process by:

- At its October 22, 2009 meeting, the Planning and Zoning Commission provided input on issues that it felt should be addressed in the POCD.
- In late October and early November, surveys were distributed to members of many local boards and commissions and department heads. These confidential surveys were sent directly to the consultant. The surveys asked board members, commission members, and department heads to describe what they see as the greatest challenges over the next 10 years and what they like most and least about how Vernon has developed. Over 40 surveys were filled out.
- The Planning and Zoning Commission held a public workshop on November 12, 2009 at the Senior Center. Approximately 50 residents provided their input into what they are "proud" of, "sorry" about, and what issues they felt should be addressed in the POCD.

This stage of the project is called "Issues Scoping". This booklet summarizes input and identifies some of the key issue areas that emerged and may warrant careful attention as the POCD is updated.



## Key Findings

- Residents are proud of Vernon’s natural, cultural and recreational assets including open space, trails and historic buildings. They’ve identified opportunities to further capitalize on these assets.
- Continued efforts to preserve open space are important.
- Rockville is a gem and a challenge. Revitalizing Rockville emerged as an important issue.
- There is a wide-spread desire to increase the tax base through business development. There seems to be strong support to focus on re-using existing vacant buildings. In terms of new business development, it is less clear what might be acceptable to residents because input greatly varied and was sometimes contradictory.
- Residents feel that Vernon provides an abundance of multi-family and rental opportunities. The Town should attract families and promote single family homeownership opportunities. However, residents cautioned that the Plan should not make assumptions about residents based upon the type of housing unit in which they live.
- Maintaining and upgrading the Town’s infrastructure will be challenging.

Residents are proud of Vernon’s open space and parks...



## Summary of Findings

The following summarizes those issues that arose multiple times during the issues scoping phase. A more extensive list of input is contained in the last section of this Booklet.

Conservation Issues	
Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water resource protection – surface and ground water, riparian areas</li> <li>• Ensuring development does not impact resources, “responsible” development</li> <li>• Opportunities presented by natural resources:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ alternative energy sources</li> <li>○ promote to residents</li> <li>○ tourism</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important to quality of life</li> <li>• Good job preserving southeast Vernon</li> <li>• Need a funding mechanism</li> <li>• Desire to be proactive in preserving open space</li> <li>• Look for open space opportunities in Rockville also</li> <li>• Great trail network – promote, look for more opportunities</li> </ul>
Historic Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rich history can be used to promote town / celebrate what we have</li> <li>• Threats to historic homes due to blight, decline, additions</li> <li>• How to determine what is truly historic and should be preserved?</li> <li>• Find tools that can be used for historic preservation</li> <li>• Importance of reusing historic buildings</li> </ul>
Community Character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Components of character include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ natural features</li> <li>○ historic resources</li> <li>○ mixture of business areas and neighborhoods</li> <li>○ diversity</li> <li>○ having a Downtown</li> <li>○ town image</li> <li>○ community spirit</li> <li>○ volunteers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Valley Falls Park is the “**jewel** of Vernon.”

- Workshop attendee

“Vernon has a very **strong, proud history** and this should be built upon.”

- Board/Commission survey

"...I was compelled to purchase [a home in Rockville] because of the **stunning architecture** and the desire for a walkable town center. I'm a bit afraid, however, that I will have nothing to walk to...I see **great potential** in Rockville marketing itself as a **walkable downtown**, close to jobs in Manchester, Hartford, UCONN, etc."

- Public workshop attendee

"Vernon has **good residential areas**, access to **employment**, closeness to shopping....and good **quality of life**."

- Board/Commission survey

Development Issues	
<b>Community Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Nodes" include Vernon Center, Rockville and Talcottville</li> <li>• Balance distinct needs of different areas, but unify all areas as "Vernon"</li> <li>• Route 83 is key gateway, but does it convey a positive image?</li> <li>• Do not let Route 30 become another Route 83</li> <li>• Rockville is a "gem" – important to focus on revitalization</li> </ul>
<b>Housing &amp; Residential Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vernon has provided an adequate supply of multi-family housing, rental housing, over 55 housing, and elderly housing</li> <li>• Important to maintain existing neighborhoods, particularly from encroaching development</li> <li>• Increase homeownership, attract families</li> <li>• Minimize additional conversions of historic single family houses into multi-family and encourage conversion back to single-family houses</li> </ul>
<b>Business Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire for additional business development to increase tax base</li> <li>• Focus on using existing buildings, redeveloping vacant buildings, especially in Rockville</li> <li>• Wide range of opinions (sometimes conflicting) about additional economic development beyond the reuse of vacant buildings, including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ increase industry in industrial park</li> <li>○ do not focus on retail</li> <li>○ encourage green business, light industry, high tech</li> <li>○ encourage small-town type businesses</li> <li>○ encourage big box retail in existing commercial areas</li> <li>○ do not allow big box or large retail in town</li> <li>○ encourage large industry along I-84 corridor</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Convenient access to retail, services was highlighted by many as something they like about Vernon</li> <li>• Concerns that there is not enough land for additional business development</li> <li>• Design of new business development is important</li> <li>• How does business development in one area of town impact another area (i.e., competition, vacancies)?</li> <li>• What should happen at exit 67?</li> </ul>

## Infrastructure Issues

### Community Facilities

- Town Hall updates desired – inter-departmental communication abilities, grouping certain departments together, and other upgrades /updates
- Quality of schools is critical
- Energy efficiency of municipal facilities is important
- Concerns with concentration of social services in Rockville, potential impacts
- Public safety and enforcement of quality of life issues
- Providing amenities to attract families, for youth, for aging population

### Transportation

- Maintenance of roads was a concern of many
- Need to reduce curb cuts
- Would like more comprehensive and user-friendly bus service
- Need a sidewalk plan – how to maintain and where to build / require sidewalks
- Better connect neighborhoods and commercial areas with sidewalks, paths
- Parking in Rockville is a concern

### Utilities

- Need for maintaining all town infrastructure
- Need to update sewer service map, coordination between Planning and Zoning Commission and WPCA
- Promote alternative energy options

“Schools, police, fire and medical facilities are **excellent**.”

- Board/Commission survey

The Town’s major focus during the next 10 years should be on “improving our **transportation** network and **utility** infrastructure.”

- Board/Commission survey

“The first memory that a prospective homeowner experiences when entering Vernon are **the roads**...”

- Board/Commission survey

Create a more “**walkable** and **bikable** community.”

- Public workshop attendee

## Results from Public Workshop Exercises

### Overview

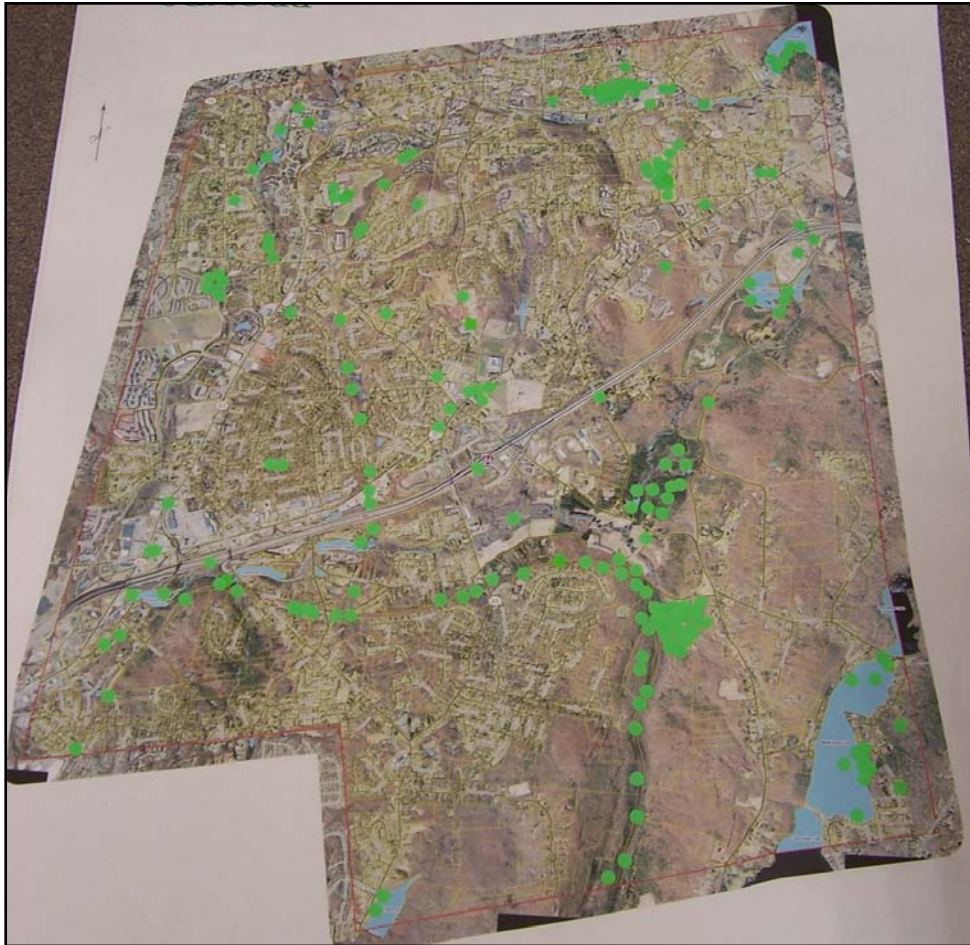
Residents participated in four exercises prior to having a room-wide discussion:

1. Attendees placed a blue dot on the map to indicate where they live (see below).
2. Attendees placed green dots on things they are "proud" of (see next page).
3. Attendees placed orange dots on things they are "sorry" about (see page 8).
4. Attendees were given 50 "planning points" in different denominations (1 @ 20, 2 @ 10, 2 @ 5) and asked to place their planning points in different ballot boxes based on how important they felt that issue was for Vernon to address as part of the planning process (see page 9).

### Where Do You Live?



## What Are You Proud Of?



## Prouds

Prouds tend to be those things that should be encouraged. Often they:

- Contribute to character
- Contribute to quality of life
- Support traditions

### Top "Prouds":

- Valley Falls Park (28 prouds)
- Rails to Trails and other walking trails (26)
- Other open spaces and parks (e.g., Belden Preserve, Fox Hill, etc.) (34)
- Rockville / Places in Rockville (e.g., Town Hall, Library Hospital, historic homes, Village Street redevelopment, "hidden surprises", etc.) (23)
- Bolton Lakes / Camp Newhoca (17)

### Sampling of Additional "Prouds":

- Rockville High School
- Waterfalls
- Braille Trail
- Diversity
- Talcottville
- Train Depot at Church and Maple
- Waste Water Treatment Plant

## Sorrys

Sorrys tend to be those things that should be discouraged. Often they:

- Are irritants that affect quality of life
- Threaten community character
- Represent something that is lacking or deficient

## What Are You Sorry About?



### Top "Sorrys":

- Vacant mills and other vacant buildings (25 sorrys)
- Exit 67 area (16)
- Rockville (e.g., blight, specific areas, feels unsafe) (14)
- Route 83 – all or parts of it (12)

### Sampling of Additional "Sorrys":

- River riparian areas
- Level of development around Bolton Lakes
- Route 30
- Lack of places for younger people to gather
- Lack of bus service in parts of town
- Condition of roads



## Planning Points

Based on the results of the planning points exercise, residents indicated that Natural Resources, Open Space and Parks, and Business Development are the issues of greatest concern in the Plan update process.

Rank	Topic	Total Points	% of Total Points	Attendees That Chose as #1 Issue
<b>Conservation Topics</b>		<b>1,330</b>	<b>48%</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>Natural Resources</b>	470	17%	14
<b>2</b>	<b>Open Space and Parks</b>	445	16%	9
5 (tie)	Historic Resources	200	7%	3
4	Community Character	215	8%	1
<b>Development Topics</b>		<b>665</b>	<b>24%</b>	
10	Community Structure	140	5%	2
12	Residential Development	40	1%	0
11	Housing Needs	55	2%	1
<b>3</b>	<b>Business Development</b>	430	16%	12
<b>Infrastructure Topics</b>		<b>755</b>	<b>27%</b>	
5 (tie)	Community Facilities	200	7%	3
8	Vehicular Transportation	190	7%	3
9	Other Transportation	165	6%	3
5 (tie)	Utilities	200	7%	4
<b>Total Points</b>		<b>2,750</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Equivalent to 55 people with 50 planning points each.  
Percentage totals may not add due to rounding.

## Detailed Input

The following provides additional detail on input received via the written surveys, the meeting with the Planning and Zoning Commission and at the public workshop. It is not intended to include every comment, but to show the range of issues raised.

### Conservation Issues

- Expose the Hockanum River in Rockville
- Natural resources and open space contribute to quality of life
- We can do better protecting resources
- Restore riparian areas
- Capitalize on natural resources like the rivers
- Need to protect aquifers
- Look into Low Impact Development
- How to minimize impacts from development
- Responsible storm water management
- Discourage development along water courses
- Restoring wildlife habitat
- Encourage environmental education outside of classrooms
- Preserving trees and vegetation
- Pollution issues – lawn chemicals, impervious surfaces
- Rural charm with urban areas, old mill charm
- Proud of open space and greenway preservation, continue efforts
- Acquire open space near lakes
- Need proactive approach to open space
- Need to expand open space and find funding
- Stewardship on existing open space
- Educate public on open space benefits, promote open space
- Preserve Strong Farm
- Volunteers have been important in maintaining open space and trails
- Need to maintain existing open space and parks
- Issues with invasive species
- Concerned with light pollution
- Look into alternative energy sources
- Historic resources are at risk, concerns with blight and converting single family to multi-family
- Use historic resources to draw people to Vernon
- Character varies from rural, urban, historic, suburban

## Development Issues

- Too many apartments, condos, elderly, over 55 housing
- Protect established neighborhoods
- Continue with housing rehabilitation similar to Village Street
- Fear that Route 30 will become like Route 83
- Are gateways attractive and reflective of image of Vernon?
- Like convenience of shopping, coexistence of downtown and stand-alone retail, proximity of stores to residential areas
- Rockville – Concerned with concentration of social services, blight, negative images, waiving of zoning regulations; would like to see a downtown with business and entertainment, more homeownership, convert back to single-family houses, make Rockville a destination, encourage small businesses, encourage lower density in Rockville, encourage higher densities in Rockville, discourage additional institutional uses in Rockville
- Route 83 concerns – strip development, no overall plan, too many curb cuts, lack of sidewalks, hodge-podge development
- Need better design for commercial buildings
- Need better attitude toward commercial development
- Build the tax base, diversify economic base, attract manufacturing, high tech, increase industrial development, attract good jobs, green business
- Some would like to see large retail / big box while others do not
- Fill empty commercial space, mills
- Restore mills
- Tear down mills
- Pay attention to impacts that business development in one part of town might have on another part of town

## Infrastructure Issues

- Pleased with work done around Town Hall
- Space needs, and upgrades needed at Town Hall, how to restructure / reorganize space at existing municipal government buildings for efficiency
- Mixed opinions on quality of schools, but many stress improving schools is important
- How does aging population affect town services?
- Provide more recreation opportunities, a dog park, a new pool, areas for teens and families
- Embrace volunteer fire department
- Look at public / private partnerships to use vacant properties for education – daycare, nursery schools, etc.
- Promote high school as a town asset
- Need for a school bus lot
- Road maintenance is of concern
- Coordinate traffic planning with neighboring communities
- Look at traffic calming on Route 83 and additional improvements
- Public transportation should be improved – routes and user-friendliness
- Lack of sidewalks, especially along Routes 30 and 83, develop a sidewalk plan, require sidewalks, provide pedestrian and bicycle pathways to connect neighborhoods with commercial areas
- Look at light rail
- Overall infrastructure deterioration is of concern – old, how to pay, don't wait until in disrepair, avoid "cheap" fixes
- Need a sustainable capital improvement plan to address infrastructure needs
- Energy efficient town facilities
- Responsible storm water management
- Where to extend sewers?