

PRESENT CONDITIONS

The early settlement patterns noted above still guide our structure and settlement goals today. Planning for villages surrounded by rural countryside constitutes the first of the State of Vermont's planning goals outlined in statute. 24 V.S.A. §4302(1). A modern political map of the Region resembles the 1840s era map noted above.

The Addison Region remains a predominately rural place. The Land Use/Land Cover map (**Map 1**) depicted on page 3 shows that only a very small portion, 4.53% of the Region currently falls into one of three “developed” categories. ACRPC’s proposed Future Land Use map includes approximately 3.3% of the Areas land within its proposed growth areas, in line with its current development patterns. Forests predominate in the mountains of the east of the Region, having returned after many of the small sheep farms closed and bolstered especially by the federal government’s purchase of the first 32,000 acres to form the Green Mountain National Forest in 1932.¹ That early conservation project in the State aimed to reforest the land to prevent erosion caused by logging and farming steep slopes. To the west, farm fields still predominate. Farms and acreage farmed have fluctuated, but stayed relatively steady for the past 20 years. Agriculture still constitutes the primary use of the land, especially on the flat fertile clay plains in the Region’s western area.

See the Chapter 1, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Forestry subsections



FUTURE LAND USE AREAS

Downtown Center

Village Center

Planned Growth Area

Village Area

Transition or Infill Areas

Resources-based Recreation

Enterprise

Rural Agriculture & Forestry

Rural Conservation

Rural General

Special Land Use Area

The small villages first established by the European settlers also remain. A significant portion of the municipal buildings that mark their core stem from the mid-nineteenth century. Most are surrounded by other civic buildings, small businesses, and clusters of housing.

Lastly, the Region’s three commercial centers—Middlebury, Bristol, and Vergennes—continue to evolve. While the manufacturing that created them still constitutes an important economic sector, they also host numerous service and retail businesses along their main streets, surrounded by established housing development. This Plan seeks to build on and reinforce those portions of our current settlement patterns ACRPC described above and provide goals and actions to transition away from less desirable development patterns.



From left to right: Middlebury, Bristol, Vergennes

The Future Land Use Plan

The Addison County Regional Planning Commission (ACRPC) created a **Future Land Use map** depicting the types of land use areas described in the Addison County Regional Plan and recently adopted by all Vermont’s regional planning commissions under Act 181 of 2024 to provide consistency in definitions of types of planning areas. All regions mapped **ten eleven** types of future land use areas and are listed on **Map 2**. ACRPC’s Future Land Use Chapter and Map are presented to be compatible with the Region’s municipal plans and to work in concert with the municipal plans to guide growth and development in accordance with smart growth principles and into appropriate places within the Region.

For a full list of smart growth principles, please see the Chapter 8 Appendix.

TIERS OF JURISDICTION FOR ACT 250

Act 181 also created tiers of jurisdiction for Act 250. In fact, the greatest benefit to developing housing stems from exemption from Act 250 for housing in Tier 1 areas. **All of the ten different types of future land use areas fall into one of two Act 250 jurisdictional areas:** Tier 1 (A and B) and the remainder in which jurisdictional triggers remain largely the same.

- ✦ **Tier 1** constitutes existing and potential growth areas including 60% of Housing Targets

In the Addison Region, nearly all towns will have the option to accept the regional map and opt-in for Tier 1B status, exempting residential projects (under 50 units/

Table 1: Village Center Designations and Changes

	Previous Designations	Centers with Act 181 Changes
Addison	Village Center	Village Center
Bridport		Village Center
Bristol	Downtown	Downtown, Planned Growth Area
Cornwall	Village Center	Village Center
Ferrisburgh	Village Center	Village Center, Planned Growth Area
Goshen		Village Center
Lincoln		Village Center
Leicester		Village Center
New Haven	Village Center	Village Center
Middlebury	Downtown, Neighborhood Development Area	Downtown, ~~Planned Growth Area,~~ Village Center
Monkton	Village Center	Village Center
Orwell	Village Center	Village Center
Ripton		Village Center
Panton		Village Center
Salisbury	Village Center	Village Center
Shoreham	Village Center	Village Center
Starksboro	2 Village Centers	2 Village Centers
Vergennes	Downtown; Neighborhood Development Area	Downtown, Planned Growth Area
Waltham		Planned Growth Area
Weybridge		Village Center, ~~Planned Growth Area~~
Whiting	Village Center	Village Center

town offices; restaurant; places of worship; community hall; traffic calming; wastewater capacity; public businesses; bank; housing for all income groups; visitor lodging; fire department; monuments; town green; arts and cultural activities or museum; places for kids; and recreational opportunities.² Accordingly, this Future Land Use Plan calls for expanding small-scale, mixed use, and commercial and civic activity within the Village Centers as depicted on its Future Land Use Map to include the uses listed above and other similar uses.

PLANNED GROWTH AREAS

In the Addison Region, its planned growth areas extend from **or will extend from** and surround its historic Designated Downtowns in Middlebury, Vergennes, and Bristol. In both Middlebury and Vergennes, they include **or will include** areas already designated as Neighborhood Development Areas, places where each municipality noted they wanted to achieve extra housing growth. They also include **or will include** extensively developed areas outside the Downtown Centers, which could include residential neighborhoods and mixed-use areas. Interestingly, in both Vergennes and to a lesser extent Middlebury, they ignore **or will ignore** municipal boundaries and extend into neighboring communities. Vergennes' growth area stems largely from the way in which the city was developed. The City of Vergennes was carved from landholdings of Ferrisburgh, Pantton, and New Haven to create a manufacturing City at the site of the Vergennes Falls on Otter Creek. As a more urban place surrounded by agricultural neighbors, Vergennes has always served as a sub-regional center for its neighbors and continues to house many of the cultural and service venues for each of its neighboring communities. Historically, some of its growth has spilled into its neighbors as a natural extension of the city. Other neighbors, like Waltham, have recognized Vergennes as their de facto town center and structured their planning and zoning to match densities in the area near Vergennes to resemble Vergennes.

Vergennes possesses both water and wastewater that has also sometimes spilled beyond its boundaries, or in the case of the Vergennes Pantton Water system, was created to serve a sub-regional area. In the North of Vergennes and in adjacent Ferrisburgh, the City and Town have been working together planning for transit-oriented development around the train station that lies

in Ferrisburgh, receives utilities from Vergennes, and serves them both. The Transit-Oriented Development Plan recognizes and assumes that to achieve the densities both municipalities desire for the area, water and sewer will need to serve Vergennes and Ferrisburgh. It calls for more housing in Ferrisburgh, in part to support its school, and more mixed-use and commercial development in Vergennes to complement and reinforce its existing vibrant downtown and retail establishments. Similarly, in Middlebury, the residential development, supported by existing water and wastewater, **will extend**s into the southeastern section of Weybridge.

VILLAGE AREAS

The Village Areas surround the region's historic Village Centers, whether previously designated or not. Village Areas include a significant portion of the Region's existing mix of residential, civic, religious, commercial, and mixed-use buildings. The core area generally contains the existing denser settlements of the Region's villages plus some additional area selected to support additional housing units. These additional areas have been added **or identified for future addition** through careful and inclusive outreach to the municipalities involved and their citizens through a number of public meetings. They are informed by municipal plans and zoning ordinances supplemented by local knowledge of terrain, land use, and ownership patterns of the local planning commissions, citizens, and selectboards/city councils.

The Village Areas expand **or will expand** around the historic center to create additional opportunities for all types of housing development. In the housing targets recently released by ACRPC, the median housing target for 2030 for the Region includes new housing units to be built over a five-year period (2025-29). Sixty percent of those housing units are targeted to be built within the growth areas of the municipalities comprising the Addison Region. Accordingly, for the Region to reach this target it will need its municipalities to support and authorize construction producing approximately 1,000 new housing units within the Village Centers and Village Areas (approximately 600 fall within Downtown Centers and Planned Growth Areas) **and Planned Growth Areas** depicted on ACRPC's Land Use Map within the next five years, an average of 200 housing units per year.

See Chapter 5, page 23, for charts of the Region's housing targets.



lands and natural areas. It also allows well-regulated recreational or natural resource dependent businesses, including extraction operations as allowed by local development regulations. As an example, the Town of Middlebury specifically allows natural resource extraction in its rural areas and has a number of small gravel pits and even the very large OMYA quarry as allowed uses.

RURAL AGRICULTURE AND FORESTED AREAS

This area includes significant, active farmland or forest blocks, generally in larger parcels greater than 25 acres and generally lacking access to public water or wastewater infrastructure. It is the majority of land in the Addison Region and encompasses the “working landscape” that a significant portion of the economic activity in the Region derives from. Most of the land in the Region enrolled in the State of Vermont Current Use Program falls within this category of land use. Land conserved by the Vermont Land Trust or other organizations specifically for or allowing farming and forestry activity are also included in this category since the intent of these easements is to preserve agricultural soils and/or promote farming or forestry.

In the agricultural towns in the western plains of the Addison Region, more than 20% of the land is encumbered by conservation easements for farming. The area includes the homesteads of the farmers and foresters that work the land. It also includes some protected natural resources which should be field verified during any development review process. The area provides critical wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation opportunities, flood storage, aquifer recharge, and scenic beauty, and contributes significantly to the Region’s economic well-being and quality of life. Development in this area shall be carefully managed to provide rural housing opportunities, promote the working landscape and rural economy, and protect the agricultural and forest resource value.

RURAL CONSERVATION AREAS

The Rural Conservation Area, ~~the Region’s last future land-use area~~ includes areas of significant natural resources based upon existing Agency of Natural Resources mapping for wetland protection and for the maintenance of forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and habitat connectors and other conservation purposes. Specifically, it includes parcels owned or controlled through



Fishing on the Otter Creek



Demers Park, New Haven



Bristol Pond

easements by the following types of entities for the specific purpose of preservation or conservation:

- ✦ **The Federal government**, like the large swath of Green Mountain National Forest that spans portions of most of the mountain towns on the east side of the Addison Region.
- ✦ **The State of Vermont** and managed for conservation or wildlife, like the Lewis Creek and Fred Johnson Wildlife Management Areas in Starksboro or the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area in Addison, Panton, and Bridport.
- ✦ **Local governments and municipalities**, like town forests that lie outside of a village or growth area.
- ✦ **Non-profit groups**, like the Nature Conservancy or the Middlebury Area Land Trust. Rural agriculture and forest uses and recreational uses are allowed in this area but should be sited to mitigate or avoid impacts on the resources noted above.

In addition to land controlled by the types of entities listed, wetlands greater than 5 acres are mapped into this area to depict the areas protected and to highlight the significant wetlands and floodplains of the Region, especially in the southern communities along the Otter Creek.

The areas noted significantly restrict or regulate both housing and commercial development to preserve

natural resources. However, they do allow some low impact recreational infrastructure and uses. The State of Vermont Wildlife Management Areas encourage trails and hunting. The Moosalamoo National Recreation Area, within the Green Mountain National Forest, encourages a myriad of recreational uses, including the construction of limited infrastructure necessary to support those uses. Additionally, some towns, particularly Lincoln, chose to include significant blocks of private property in this Land Use Area to depict forest blocks on the Land Use Map. On private property within this area, low density housing, forestry and farming, and low impact recreational uses are allowed pursuant to the municipal plan and regulations implementing those plans.

SPECIAL USE AREAS

The Region's last future land use area is the Special Use Area. Special Use Areas include areas planned to be Future Village Areas or Future Planned Growth Areas in municipalities that have expressed a desire to support these areas, have the proximity and infrastructure necessary to support them, but do not currently have an adopted and regionally approved municipal plan.



Canoeing on Bristol Pond