

Report on Proposed Amendments to the Hinesburg Town Plan

For 4/28 Planning Commission (PC) meeting & 5/26 PC Public Hearing

prepared 4/22/2010

This report was prepared to explain updates to the Hinesburg Town Plan (adopted in 1971, last revised June 2005) proposed by the Planning Commission. The report is also intended to satisfy the requirement of VSA Title 24, Chapter 117, Section 4384c with regard to proposals to amend a town plan. This section requires that a report be prepared to “address the extent to which the plan, as amended, is consistent with the goals established in section 4302.” There are 4 general goals and 13 specific goals outlined in section 4302 that are discussed below. This section also requires that the report address changes that would alter the designation of any land area. In this case, the Commission is proposing changes to certain stream/riparian areas to recognize Fluvial Erosion Hazard areas, as well as minor refinements to designations of areas in the village growth area to reflect the new zoning for this area that was adopted in 2009. See below for further details.

Hilights of changes to each section of the Plan:

1. Introduction to the Plan

- a. Update on significant activities during the last 5-year planning period (2005-2010).
- b. Reassessment and updates regarding compatibility with the regional plan and the plans of surrounding municipalities.

2. Population & Housing

- a. Updated population statistics.
- b. Significant revision to population growth projections – i.e., much more conservative growth estimate based on regional projections and demographic trends.
- c. Updated housing statistics and figures on home purchase price and rental rates.
- d. Information on regional housing targets and Hinesburg’s contribution.
- e. Recognition of the Town’s Affordable Housing Committee – role & objectives.

3. Land Use

- a. Recognition of the Town’s Village Steering Committee – role & objectives.
- b. Significant revisions to the village area section to reflect how the previous Plan’s vision was implemented via the village growth area zoning changes and Official Map adopted in 2009.
- c. Economic development update – e.g., NRG expansion, Saputo Cheese closure. Recognition of the Town’s Saputo Redevelopment Steering Committee, interim zoning and ongoing work to develop new permanent zoning for this portion of the village area.
- d. Refinement of goals for ongoing efforts to improve land use regulations for the rural areas.

4. Natural Resources

- a. Update current use acreages and farming summary to reflect changes since 2005 – dairy farm decline, farming diversification, CSA popularity.
- b. Recognition of low-level MTBE contamination of 2 municipal wells.
- c. Complete re-write of flood hazard section to better explain hazards – both from inundation and from stream erosion and relocation (fluvial erosion hazards). New goals to include fluvial erosion hazard areas in land use regulations, and to keep these

- regulations up to date in order to stay enrolled in the National Flood Insurance Program.
- d. Recognition of work to date on greenspace (i.e., open space) planning by the Conservation Commission.

5. Community Facilities & Services

- a. Updates on various general government functions and facilities – e.g., wastewater treatment facility upgrade.
- b. Greater emphasis on the need for additional recreational field space.
- c. Recognition of the new LaPlatte Headwaters Town Forest.
- d. Vision for town-wide trail network connections and recognition of the Town's Trails Committee and their work on this priority goal from the 2005 Town Plan.

6. Transportation

- a. Updates to reflect improvement projects completed since 2005.
- b. Recognition of the work done by the Ancient Roads Committee.
- c. Description and recognition of the Hinesburg Rides community transportation program of the Hinesburg Community Resource Center, and the likelihood of CCTA public transportation in the near term.

7. Energy

- a. Complete re-write of the Energy section from the 2005 Plan.
- b. Data, goals, and recommendations on greenhouse gas emissions added.
- c. Greater specificity regarding encouraging the use of alternative sources of energy.
- d. Additional language on minimizing energy use, including transportation.

8. Other Resources/Issues

- a. Elimination of recommendations related to the regulation of noise and telecommunication facilities – in recognition of telecom regulations passed in 2009 and discussions since 2005 that discouraged additional noise regulations at this time.

9. Implementation

- a. Updates to the top 10 implementation priorities (and the overall implementation schedule) – pending public feedback at Planning Commission public hearing.

10. Maps – 13 proposed (revisions plus 2 new maps)

- a. Updates to several maps to account for zoning changes since 2005 and more recent data (buildings, flood hazard areas, etc.).
- b. Two new maps – 1) Official Map of future community facilities and infrastructure (adopted in 2009 and currently focused on village growth area); 2) Trail Network Vision showing existing routes and gaps – to be presented by Trails Committee.

Consistency Section 4302 Goals:

The proposed Plan amendments are consistent with the goals outlined in the State statute. By and large this plan retains the vision and direction of the 2005 Plan, which represented a substantially new and reorganized Plan based on comprehensive community input and dialogue via surveys, forums, public meetings, as well as extensive Planning Commission discussions. The most significant changes were made to the village area land use section (3.2), the flood hazard section (4.6), and the energy section (8) to reflect Hinesburg's interest and progressive steps forward in these areas in recent years. The Plan outlines the community's vision for the

future of our Town, and proposes reasonable initiatives and regulatory changes to accomplish that vision. It does not attempt to provide solutions for every issue or challenge facing the community.

General Goals of VSA 24, 117, Section 4302

1) To establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework to guide decisions by municipalities, regional planning commissions, and state agencies.

Hinesburg has a well established planning process and policy framework that began in the early 1970's with the 1st Plan, Zoning Regulations, and Subdivision Regulations. Today, Hinesburg's planning toolbox also includes a formally adopted Capital Budget & Plan, public safety impact fees, an Official Map of future community facilities and infrastructure, and a municipal planning & zoning department with dedicated full-time staffing. Our planning process continues with the help of the Planning Commission, Development Review Board, Selectboard, other municipal boards/commissions, Town staff, and a host of committed community members.

2) To encourage citizen participation at all levels of the planning process, and to assure that decisions shall be made at the most local level possible commensurate with their impact.

This Plan update is the result of consultation with many/most Town boards, committees, and staff, as well as community members via regular Planning Commission meetings, formal public hearings, and community outreach (newspaper articles, Front Porch Forum postings, booth at 12/2009 indoor Farmers Market, etc.). Many of the Plan's elements mention community participation and Hinesburg's unique sense of place. The Plan continues to envision and advocate for decision making at the local level through informed landowners, community volunteer efforts, and the Town's existing governance structure.

3) To consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development for the region and the state, as well as the community in which it takes place.

The Plan addresses both the regional plan for Chittenden County as well as the plans of the surrounding towns. The Plan seeks to balance Hinesburg's role in providing desperately needed housing and related commercial services while recognizing that most of Hinesburg is, and will remain, rural with open spaces and important natural resources that are critical to the local and regional rural character.

4) To encourage and assist municipalities to work creatively together to develop and implement plans.

We recognize that towns rely on each other for the provision of certain services and the protection of certain values. This Plan puts Hinesburg in context of the surrounding communities, and seeks to coordinate planning with them either directly (e.g., greenway/trail creation, Lewis Creek Association, public transportation) or via the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (e.g., regional plan, open space inventory).

Specific Goals of VSA 24, 117, Section 4302

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

The Plan seeks to achieve this goal through orderly growth of Hinesburg's existing village area where higher residential density and a wide variety of commercial, retail, and municipal uses can co-exist. Outside of the village growth area, the Plan prioritizes lower density growth and natural resource conservation as well as innovative development techniques to preserve rural character. See section 3, land use, for details and specific recommendations on this front.

2) To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita income.

The Plan recognizes this as an important goal, and seeks to address it by allowing and encouraging continued economic development in the village growth area (redevelopment, in-fill, and new development) as well as appropriate industrial land use areas. The Plan seeks to concentrate much economic development in the village growth area so as to provide services and employment close to higher density residential areas and public infrastructure like municipal water and sewer. With that said, this Plan also advocates for the continuation of Hinesburg's tradition of small scale home occupations and businesses that fit within the community. Home-based businesses often allow greater entrepreneurial opportunities with less upfront capital costs. Furthermore, these businesses enrich community life by increasing local activities, providing local services, saving energy on commuting, and reducing impact on local and regional transportation infrastructure. Hinesburg, and the greater Chittenden County area have low unemployment and generally high per capita income, and this Plan recommends actions to maintain this strong and diverse local and regional economy. See section 3.3 for details on economic development.

3) To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

The Plan recognizes the importance of educational opportunities, including our local elementary school and union high school and regional vocational/technical centers. Hinesburg's commitment to education is demonstrated by the community's strong support of the Champlain Valley Union High School, which the Town hosts. This commitment is further evidenced by the Plan's language to address child care issues outside of the formal educational setting (see section 5.7 on Child Care issues). At the same time, the Plan reports on current census data that shows the number of young children is declining here, just as it is across the rest of the state. These trends make efficiency considerations critical for any attempt to "broaden" access to educational opportunities.

4) To provide for safe, convenient, economic and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.

Hinesburg takes its transportation system very seriously, especially since it is the 2nd largest budget item (after schools) for property tax revenues. The Plan includes a comprehensive transportation section (section 6) that addresses the needs of conventional vehicular traffic as well as pedestrian, bicycle, and public transportation options. It tackles the difficulties related to the State highway (Route 116), which runs through the center of town, and constitutes Hinesburg's "Main Street" within the village core. It prioritizes the creation and maintenance of a truly "walkable community", especially within the greater village area. It recognizes that the management of rural roads, especially dirt roads, requires special consideration in order to preserve the rural character and related recreational uses. The Plan addresses this goal by

detailing specific studies and road improvements, by recommending additional pedestrian and bicycle project areas, and by advocating follow through to initiate public transportation based on the community's recent Town Meeting vote (3/1/2010) to join CCTA and fund commuter bus service.

5) To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape.

Hinesburg residents care deeply about the natural and historic features that define both the rural character and the industrial history of the community. The Plan includes 2 sections detailing the town's historic resources (section 8.1 and Appendix 1). A conservation ethic for significant natural areas, open space, and water resources permeates the entire Plan.

6) To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

As stated above, Hinesburg residents continually rate natural resources as important elements that need good stewardship, conservation, and preservation where appropriate. The planning process recognizes this shared community value, and the Plan specifically incorporates it via a comprehensive natural resource section (section 4).

7) To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

These concepts are well established, and are reflected in a completely re-written and improved section 7 of the Plan.

8) To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

Recreational activities abound in Hinesburg thanks to the varied landscape, rural land use, and multi-use back roads and trails. The Plan recognizes the importance of rural recreation (hiking, hunting, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, bicycling, etc.), and the role that public and private lands play in providing these opportunities. The Town is also committed to providing a wide variety of organized recreational programs, primarily through the Recreation Department and school programs. The Plan recognizes the importance of recreation and advocates for continued and enhanced opportunities (see section 5.4). The Plan advocates a proactive stance on providing recreational opportunities within the Town's growth center. It also advocates for greater planning in the rural areas to develop networks of trails with connections to important residential areas and services. The new trail vision map embodies this continuing effort.

9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

The Plan includes a number of strategies to retain and bolster agricultural and forest uses. First and foremost, it identifies the bulk of town as a lower overall development density area where agricultural and forest uses receive priority (see sections 3.4). Secondly, it provides mechanisms for home-based businesses, which allows producers greater flexibility in the manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products. Lastly, it addresses the importance of agricultural and forest lands, along with strategies to ensure continued access to viable agricultural and forest parcels (see section 4.1 and 4.2).

10) To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of aesthetic qualities of the area.

Section 4 of the Plan provides the background information and specific recommendations for Hinesburg's abundant natural resources. Earth or Geological resources, and their importance to the community are clearly identified in section 4.10. The planning process (i.e., conditional use review) makes adequate provisions for proper restoration, once extraction of these resources begins or ends.

11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

Hinesburg's Plan specifically addresses and encourages the creation of affordable housing, especially within the village growth area, where more municipal infrastructure is available. The plan includes definitions of both affordable and "reasonably-priced" housing. Both the Plan and the Town's existing regulations provide for density bonuses as an enticement to build safe and affordable housing for a variety of income levels. In fact, the Plan goes on to recommend that the Town expand its municipal services (e.g., wastewater treatment capacity, sidewalks, etc.) so as to further the provision of desperately needed housing. See sections 2 and 3 for details.

12) To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

The Plan and the community recognize the importance of maintaining and fully utilizing our existing public facilities. As noted above, it recommends the expansion of certain critical pieces of infrastructure (e.g., public safety facilities, recreation fields & facilities, road improvements, etc.), and advocates for continued use of the capital budget to adequately plan for their creation and financing. Furthermore, the Plan recommends the Town continue to utilize impact fees, or other comparable mechanisms, to help fund improvements that will undoubtedly be needed as the community grows. Fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal are all addressed. Our regulatory process is designed to consider impacts to these services, and try to minimize these impacts wherever possible. See section 5 (Community Facilities and Services) for details.

13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process...

This Plan provides baseline information on available child care and demand. It goes on to make recommendations (see sections 5.7) to improve child care by addressing financing difficulties, ensuring adequate infrastructure, and assisting with business assistance and work force development. The Plan strives to meet both the spirit and letter of this State standard/goal.

Land Area Designation Considerations:

1) The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.

Solidifying and refining the village growth land use areas are minor adjustments to the vision laid out in the current Plan. The overall village growth area vision remains an affirmation of the smartgrowth principles that focus development in traditional village centers rather than evenly across the entire Town. As such, it should have a positive impact on the surrounding rural regions by absorbing some of the local and regional housing and economic development needs. It supports the community's shared vision for Hinesburg's overall pattern of land use with clear boundaries between high density and low density areas. It helps to ensure a vibrant town center from which all residents will benefit. The Plan is honest about the current and future traffic issues through the growth area, and proposes recommendations to address these concerns. It

seeks to address continual traffic increases through the improvement of existing infrastructure and the orderly creation of additional street networks in the village area. It also seeks to address traffic and circulation on the demand side through strong “walkable community” language and specific recommendations with implementation time tables.

This Plan amendment refines the flood hazard land use areas to incorporate fluvial erosion hazard areas in addition to the traditional inundation areas identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This change should better address true hazard areas. It is largely a preventative measure because Hinesburg is lucky to have few public or private structures in the flood hazard area. Recognizing and protecting the fluvial erosion hazard areas will have little impact on the surrounding area, because these riparian areas are largely unsuitable for development due to soils, wetlands, and existing stream setback provisions.

2) The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality...

Solidifying and fully embracing the village growth area land use plan will involve a variety of costs and benefits, some of which are discussed in the Plan (both the 2005 Plan and this updated version). Clearly much work still needs to be done on the planning and design of these new areas. The adoption of a formal capital budget and plan was a step in the right direction; however, the current capital budget does not reflect all of the likely costs related to creating and maintaining a vibrant village growth center. It will need to be updated and enhanced as public infrastructure needs are identified and cost estimates are developed. The Official Map was another major step forward along these lines, and should be refined and utilized to inform the capital budget. This work will flesh out the costs and benefits, and seek to offset fiscal costs to the extent reasonable through capital budgeting and impact fees.

Regarding the flood hazard area changes, the long-term benefit to the community (both municipality and private landowners) will be substantial since hazard area identification and avoidance represents the least costly way to deal with future flood events and the damage they can create.

3) The amount of vacant land which is already subject to the proposed new designation, and actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.

Not applicable – the land use area changes in this plan revision represent minor refinements and hazard area recognition rather than wholly new designations.

4) The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose.

The Planning Commission recognizes the inherent limitations within the village growth area. These include substantial prime agricultural soils, wetland designations, a large depth to bedrock in certain areas (i.e., will not support heavy commercial/industrial buildings). Even with all these limitations, land ownership patterns, existing land use, topography, and proximity to the existing village core all support the suitability of the village growth area.

The flood hazard land use area changes are directly tied to the importance of maintaining these areas for flood discharge and river/stream realignment. The suitability of these areas for this has been scientifically established through fluvial geomorphic studies and flood hazard area modeling by state and federal agencies.