

# THE PLANNING PROCESS

## Chapter 1

**W**hy Plan? Whether preparing for retirement, developing new business strategies, or buying seeds for the summer garden, planning is an essential part of our lives. Though not always a conscious act, the practice of looking ahead, identifying needs, setting goals, budgeting time and resources, and attempting to achieve desired outcomes are key elements of a planning process.

Why should communities plan for their future? Vermont municipalities are not required to plan, although they must have a Town Plan in order to be eligible for grant funds from the state or federal government. Towns have found that,

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through planning, they can protect community interests, maintain a measure of local control, better manage public investment and the allocation of scarce tax dollars, protect important natural and cultural resources, promote development in appropriate locations, and nurture the local institutions that define community life. Looking ahead and anticipating change makes sense.

Warren has been planning since the town's earliest days. The 1789 Town charter subdivided the new community and established land use requirements for the first settlers. Modern planning and growth management followed the economic, technological and



cultural changes that have occurred since the early 1960's. As these changes continue at an ever faster rate, planning will be an increasingly important means with which Warren can take full advantage of the future without forfeiting the town's heritage and unique character.

### ***Authority to adopt the Town Plan***

Warren's Town Plan was prepared in accordance with Title 24 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated, Chapter 117, The Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning Act. Consistent with §4385 of the Act, this Town Plan was adopted by the Town's Selectboard on April 26, 2011.

In 1988 the Vermont legislature amended the Act with the adoption of Act 200. The purpose of this amendment was to develop a "bottom-up" statewide planning program. The basis of this program was a series of goals contained within Act 200 intended to guide planning activities at all levels of government. In 2003 the state legislature further amended Act 200 to include a thirteenth planning priority relating to daycare facilities. Since 1989, Warren's town plans have been deemed consistent with those goals by the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission.

## ***Purpose of the Town Plan***

The purpose of the Warren Town Plan is to define a long term vision for the Town and a means of achieving that vision. The Plan is designed to serve as the primary reference when making community decisions and provide guidance to local officials when setting public policy. At a minimum, the Plan shall:

- guide the Planning Commission, Development Review Board, other town boards, and landowners during regulatory processes, including conditional use and subdivision review;
- serve as the “blueprint” for anticipated revisions to the town’s development regulations, most importantly zoning and subdivision regulations, by providing for proposed future land uses, densities and intensities of development;
- provide the town boards, citizens and landowners with clear guidance during Act 250 proceedings;
- define the existing and desired “levels of service” for public facilities and services and assist with the allocation of resources to maintain those levels of service;
- carry out, as applicable, any specific proposals for community facilities or proposed actions;
- guide town, state and federal officials in other regulatory, administrative or legislative processes involving state or federal agencies or neighboring towns;
- serve as the foundation for policies, programs and regulations designed to ensure the conservation, preservation

and use of natural and cultural resources; and

- inform and educate anyone interested in the Town.

## ***Organization & Format***

The Warren Planning Commission undertook an extensive revision of the Town Plan in 2003 and 2004, which has been updated in 2010. As adopted, the plan contains ten chapters.



Chapter 1 describes the purpose of the Plan, explains the town’s ongoing planning process and describes the regional context and Warren’s relationship with surrounding towns. Chapter 2 provides a history of the town.

Chapters 3 through 10 address specific categories of topics and or issues. Included is an overview of the topic, such as transportation or housing; background information relative to recent trends and current conditions; an analysis of those trends or conditions; and, where appropriate, projections of future conditions. By providing greater understanding of the changes facing the Town and the forces behind those changes, these eight chapters serve as the basis upon which goals, objectives and strategies are made. At the end of each chapter, the Goals,

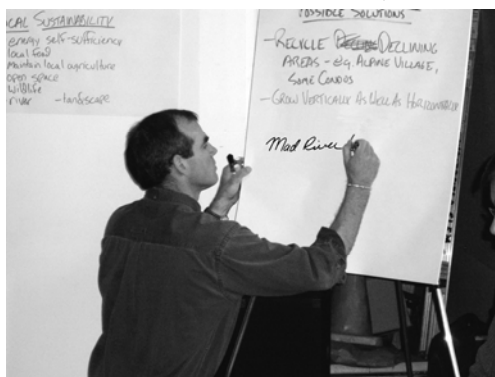
Objectives, and Strategies that are relevant to the subject matter of that chapter are listed.

In the Goals and Implementation section of each chapter, the Goals represent a part of the town's vision for the future. The Objectives bring the general goals into focus and provide a framework for the Implementation Strategies, which are the specific actions that will be taken to achieve the town's goals.

## Public Participation

The Town of Warren has long benefited from the active involvement of town residents during every step of the planning and decision making process. Spirited debate, and often conflict, is a predictable part of resolving important community issues. This Plan builds upon the history of debate and past planning efforts in an attempt to better focus future discussions concerning major decisions, thereby avoiding unnecessary conflict whenever possible.

The Mad River Valley towns have a history of working together on valley wide planning projects. The three towns of Waitsfield, Fayston and Warren started combining funds toward valley studies back in 1979. In 1983, prompted by the Sugarbush mountain master plan designed to increase the comfortable carrying capacity (CCC) of the mountain from 6,800 skiers / day to over 10,000, the valley towns, Sugarbush, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission and the State entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Memorandum of Understanding addressed community concern over the potential impact of this expansion on the Valley's public infrastructure and quality of life. The



Memorandum of Understanding was designed to phase expansion of CCC in a manner that does not over-burden the Valley's capacity to accommodate it. Despite changes to the expansion plan in response to changes in ownership, market conditions and ski area technology, the MOU has remained in effect since 1983 (the MOU was updated and reaffirmed by the parties in 1998). In 1985 the Mad River Valley Planning District was formed by the valley towns, Sugarbush Resort and the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission.

Between the completion of the Valley Growth Study in 1981, Valley Forum Series in early 1990's and the last update of the Town Plan in 2005, Warren residents, together with

residents of the neighboring Mad River Valley towns of Fayston and Waitsfield, have supported one of Vermont's most innovative planning programs. These efforts, detailed below, have involved a comprehensive data collection and monitoring

program, included a multi-town approach to addressing issues related to growth, landscape preservation and capital facilities improvement, and have provided Valley residents with frequent opportunities to participate in discussions on a wide range of topics concerning the future of the larger community.

Warren has addressed matters of local concern with the same openness and outreach that Valley-wide issues have been addressed. Since the 2005 Town Plan update, the town has addressed several issues with long term implications. These include the following:

- Updating and revising to zoning regulations to bring them into compliance with changes in the Vermont

Planning & Development Act (24 V.S.A Chapter 117);

- Engaged in a multi-year process of reviewing the existing zoning districts, including dimensional requirements, boundaries and densities; development review criteria under subdivision, conditional use, planned unit and planned residential development, flood hazard review and affordable housing;
- Held a Planning Charrette in November 2006 upon which was developed a comprehensive Master Plan for the Municipal Facilities. This plan was presented to the Select Board for amendment to Chapter 8 of the Town Plan and was adopted into the Town Plan in October 2007;
- Completed study of the Town Garage and recommended its relocation in order that its current site could be redeveloped for affordable housing;
- Updated the zoning regulations to meet FEMA requirements in order to retain eligibility for federal flood insurance coverage;
- Extensively reviewed the Warren Village Historic Residential and Warren Village Commercial District in order to explore ways to encourage additional commercial activity in the Village while maintaining the residential quality of Warren Village;
- In 2008 received a Municipal Planning Grant to assist in analyzing the Warren Land Use and Development Regulations for ways to promote the development of affordable housing. Working with SmartGrowth VT, the commission issued a town-wide survey and held a Public Forum to gather input from residents regarding both the proposed zoning district changes to the Village as well as their thoughts regarding how affordable

housing should be incorporated into Warren.

- With the assistance of SmartGrowth VT, applied for and received from the State of Vermont Village Center Designation for a portion of the Historic Warren Village.
- With the upcoming issuance of new flood hazard maps in 2010 and changes to FEMA regulations, has further updated the Town's flood regulations to meet the updated FEMA regulations. These changes were approved by the Selectboard in August 2010. In addition, the Planning Commission has begun overall review of Fluvial Erosion requirements for possible incorporation into the Town's zoning regulations.
- Recommended changes to the zoning regulations regarding wireless telecommunications standards and definitions, including a district boundary line modification between the Forest Reserve and Sugarbush Village Residential district, in order to permit installation of a wireless cellular tower adjacent to Sugarbush Ski Area as well as installation of small scale cellular transmission equipment in the Warren United Church in the Village. These changes were approved by the Select Board in April 2010.

During the 2004 Town Plan revision process, the Planning Commission mailed out a survey, the 2004 Questionnaire, to Warren registered voters, the questionnaire and results of which can be found in Appendix A.1. In 2006, the Planning Commission conducted a Town Meeting Day survey as a follow up to the 2004 survey, the questionnaire and results of which can be found in Appendix A.2. In Fall 2008, the Planning Commission mailed out a survey "Warren Village 2020" regarding possible zoning changes related to the Warren Village

Commercial and Warren Village Historic Residential zones. This survey was mailed to all Warren registered voters and property owners and was further followed up with a public forum in November 2008. The survey and results of which can be found in Appendix A.3.

As is often the case, there is room for additional public involvement at all levels of the planning process. The use of surveys and questionnaires, public forums and greater coordination between interest groups and the Town will serve to increase the level of citizen participation in local decision making. Further, the ongoing coordination with local citizen groups, businesses and regional agencies will ensure that Warren's planning program benefits from all of the other opportunities for community involvement that exist in the Town and Valley.

### **Cooperation with Neighboring Towns**

The Town of Warren has been meeting regularly with the neighboring towns of Fayston and Waitsfield to discuss issues of mutual concern for the past twenty-eight years. This relationship was formalized by the creation of the Mad River Valley Planning District (MRVPD) in 1985.

This cooperative effort has resulted in a number of studies and programs designed to address the following issues on a multi-town basis:

- affordable housing;
- economic development;
- growth management associated with ski area development;
- highway improvements;
- public transit;
- recreation;
- river conservation;
- rural resource and historic preservation;

- trails and greenways development; and,
- wastewater treatment and disposal.

In addition to the wealth of information available through these studies and programs, this cooperative relationship allows Warren to coordinate its local planning program with those of neighboring towns through the MRVPD's staff and Steering Committee, thereby ensuring plan compatibility with Fayston and Waitsfield.

While the success of the town's cooperation with adjacent Valley towns is well documented, communication and cooperation with other

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neighboring towns has been less extensive. This is due largely to the geographic barriers separating Warren from the neighboring towns of Northfield and Roxbury (Northfield Range), Granville (Granville Gulf) and Lincoln (Green Mountain Range). Despite these geographic constraints, Warren recognizes that the operation of a major resort in the Mad River Valley does present the potential for impacting adjacent towns in such areas as housing, transportation and land use.

The policies set forth in this Plan have attempted to ensure compatibility with the plans of neighboring towns, as required by the Act, by reinforcing the natural barriers with land use and transportation policies that direct growth and traffic away from neighboring towns, and support Route 100 north as the principal arterial highway in the town. These issues are addressed in detail in the various Plan chapters.

Finally, the town continues to play an active role with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission and the Central Vermont Transportation Advisory Committee. Through

that involvement, potential conflicts with neighboring towns outside of the Mad River Valley can be addressed. More important, the town has considered the policies of the Central Vermont Regional Plan and the Central Vermont Transportation Plan and drafted a Town Plan that is compatible and consistent with these Regional Plans.

### ***Acknowledgments***

The Warren Planning Commission thanks the many people who assisted with the preparation of this Plan. These include Joshua Schwartz, Executive Director of the Mad River Valley Planning District; Noelle MacKay, Executive Director of Smart Growth Vermont; the staff at Sugarbush Resort, especially Margo Wade and Jason Lisai; Jean Proctor, Warren Town Historian; the Friends of Mad River for providing many helpful comments; the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission; and the Warren Selectboard, Development Review Board and Conservation Commission for their ongoing interest and support for the town's planning process.



### Planning Process Goals

- Goal 1.A An active, ongoing local planning process.
- Goal 1.B The widespread involvement of all Warren citizens at all levels of the Town's planning and decision-making process.
- Goal 1.C Ongoing cooperation and coordination with neighboring towns, the Central Vermont region and the State.

**Objective 1.1 To provide opportunities for citizen input during every stage of the planning and decision-making process and to discourage decision making which does not occur in an open, public environment.**

#### Implementation Strategies

- a) Identify potentially affected parties and include them early in the planning and decision-making process.
- b) Recognize statutory hearing requirements as a minimum level of public involvement and exceed that minimum in all instances where public interest is evident.
- c) Continue to require a public hearing and notification of adjacent landowners for all conditional use, subdivision, PRD and PUD applications and make changes to the Land Use and Development Regulations to comply with changes in state law.
- d) Solicit additional public input through the use of surveys and questionnaires.
- e) Inform the public of governmental activities on a regular basis using

hearings, forums, direct mailings, the town's web site, the Valley Reporter, and the Vermont Journal.

- f) Encourage balanced representation of the town's diverse population on town boards and committees.

**Objective 1.2 To continue fostering cooperative partnerships with other Valley towns in order to better address issues of mutual concern, enhance efficiency through cost sharing and minimize conflict through ongoing communication.**

#### Implementation Strategies

- a) Continue to actively support and participate in the Mad River Valley Planning District as a means of addressing issues of Valley-wide concern with the neighboring Towns of Waitsfield and Fayston.
- b) Continue the town's participation in such multi-town organizations as the Mad River Valley Planning District, Mad River Valley Recreation District, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, Mad River Valley-Waterbury Solid Waste Alliance, Washington West Supervisory Union, and explore other opportunities for forming inter-town entities to provide services in a cost-effective manner.
- c) Provide neighboring towns with an opportunity to comment on local matters of concern through notification of pending decisions which may affect them.
- d) Encourage and support private organizations currently providing public services to area towns.

- e) Support a local planning program through annual budget appropriations for planning services.
- f) Review the Town Plan on a regular basis and make changes as appropriate to address changing circumstances.

**Objective 1.3 To ensure that the Warren Town Plan is compatible with state decisions affecting town planning.**

**Implementation Strategies**

- a) Review State decisions, actions and agency plans affecting the town and revise this Town Plan as necessary to be compatible.
- b) Participate in Act 250 decisions and public hearings by other agencies to ensure that the Warren Selectboard and Planning Commission and Development Review Board have substantial input in determining compatibility with this Town Plan.