

Report on Proposed Amendments to the Hinesburg Town Plan

For 9/12/2012 Planning Commission Public Hearing

prepared 8/10/2012

This report was prepared to explain updates to the Hinesburg Town Plan (adopted in 1971, last revised May 2011) 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. No land area designations are proposed to be changed with this update. See below for further details.

The Hinesburg Planning Commission will hold a public hearing at Town Hall on Wednesday, September 12, 2012, at 7:30 pm to receive public comment on proposed changes to:

1. Town Plan - last revised May 16, 2011
2. Zoning Regulations – last revised October 17, 2011
3. Subdivision Regulations – last revised May 16, 2011

The purpose of these changes is to better ensure that Hinesburg retains its rural character consistent with the goals of the Town Plan. The changes have three primary objectives. First, to provide rural area landowners with more land use options by expanding the types of uses allowed in the Agricultural and Rural Residential 2 zoning districts. Second, to clarify and improve rural area development design standards to make sure important natural resources are better defined by the Town, and considered early in the design process. Third, to define how much residential development is allowed via an objective formula, and to allow for smaller lot sizes to increase flexibility when creating new subdivisions. Most of the changes relate to new and revised language in the Zoning Regulations and Subdivision Regulations. Revisions are also being made to the wildlife resources and scenic resources sections of the Town Plan, including the addition of new maps to better define the location of these resources. Please see the revision proposal for a complete list of changes. The geographic area affected is primarily the Agricultural zoning district (generally west of Route 116) and the Rural Residential 2 zoning district (generally east of Richmond Road, North Road, and Route 116); however, some general changes may affect all of Hinesburg.

Copies of the proposed changes, as well as a report on how the proposed changes comply with State Statute and the Town Plan, are available on the Town web site (www.hinesburg.org) and at the Planning & Zoning Office at Town Hall, located at 10632 Route 116. The P&Z Office is open 8am to 4pm Monday-Friday. For information please contact Alex Weinhagen (Town Planner) at hinesburgplanning@gmavt.net or 482-2281 ext 225.

Consistency Section 4302 Goals:

The proposed Plan amendments are consistent with the goals outlined in the State statute. The changes to the wildlife resources and scenic resources sections are merely updates to better clarify the language and reference new maps that help identify the location of these resources. These changes constitute a minor revision to the 2011 Town Plan, which is necessary to support facets of the more comprehensive changes to the Zoning and Subdivision Regulations that are also proposed, and being reviewed concurrent with this plan change.

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 first 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 over a decade of work by the Planning Commission. In addition to innumerable regular Planning Commission meetings, this project was discussed at earlier community forums on October 29, 2011, November 11, 2009, and February 28, 2008. The overall 2011 plan, that these revisions will update, was 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. 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 proposed update improves and clarifies the way in which wildlife and scenic resources are considered, especially with regard to the consequences of growth and development. The overall 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 needed housing and related commercial services while recognizing that most of Hinesburg is, and will remain, rural with green 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.

The proposed update utilizes wildlife habitat data provided by the VT Fish and Wildlife Department, which several other municipalities are also evaluating as a way to implement plan provisions. 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.

Proposed revisions not related to this goal. Overall, 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.

Proposed revisions not related to this goal. Overall, 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.

Proposed revisions not related to this goal. Overall, 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 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.

Proposed revisions not related to this goal. Overall, 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 – which came to fruition with new CCTA/ACTR bus service in 2012.

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

The proposed revisions seek to better identify and protect important wildlife and scenic resources. 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.

The proposed revisions seek to better identify and protect important wildlife and scenic 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.

Proposed revisions not related to this goal. These concepts are well established, and are reflected in section 7 of the Plan.

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

Proposed revisions not related to this goal. 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 trail vision map embodies this continuing effort.

9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

Proposed revisions not related to this goal. 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.

Proposed revisions not related to this goal. 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.

Proposed revisions not related to this goal. 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 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.

Proposed revisions not related to this goal. 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...

Proposed revisions not related to this goal. 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.