

Report on Hinesburg Town Plan Revision

For 11/9/2016 Planning Commission Public Hearing

prepared 10/10/2016 by Alex Weinhagen, Director of Planning & Zoning

The Hinesburg Planning Commission will hold a public hearing at the Town Office on Wednesday, November 9, at 7pm to receive public comment on the proposed changes. Hinesburg adopted its first Town Plan in 1971. It was last revised on September 9, 2013. This report was prepared to explain the revision and 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 four general goals and 14 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 specific land area designations are outlined in the plan; however, Chapter 3 does anticipate refinements in the Rural Residential 1 (RR1) zoning district. Changes are likely given the variable land use, development densities, and natural resources across this district. The Planning Commission has discussed changing the more rural northern portion of the district around Mt. Pritchard to a more rural district (e.g., Rural Residential 2). The southern portion of the RR1 district may be changed similarly. Changes in and around the Shoreline district to improve Lake Iroquois and Sunset Lake water quality are also contemplated, but still in discussion.

This revision represents a complete update. As such, the revisions affect all of Hinesburg. All sections were reviewed with most Town committees contributing revisions and/or feedback. Substantial community outreach was done. In addition to regular meetings and required hearings, other outreach included two community surveys, tabling and conversation at community events, and several topic-specific public forums that included presentations and discussion with knowledgeable speakers. The revised Town Plan includes some significant changes in the community’s vision for the future.

- Village Growth & Design – address phasing based on infrastructure limits, ensure measured growth over time, better regulations/review to ensure good design.
- Rural Residential 1 & Shoreline Areas – need to overhaul allowed development densities and uses.
- Stormwater – greater emphasis on this issue and the Town’s responsibility for solutions (e.g., Town roads).
- Economic Development – be proactive to encourage job creation, new and expanded business, etc.

Copies of the proposed Town Plan, appendices, supporting maps, and this report are available on the Town web site (www.hinesburg.org), and at the Planning & Zoning Office at the Town Office, located at 10632 Route 116. The website also has community survey results and forum summaries. The P&Z Office is open 9am to 4pm Monday-Friday. For information please contact Alex Weinhagen (Director of Planning & Zoning) at aweinhagen@hinesburg.org or 482-2281 ext 225.

Consistency Section 4302 Goals:

The proposed plan revision is consistent with the goals outlined in the State statute. This plan builds on and refines past community efforts and vision. Beyond the significant revisions noted above, this plan's focus is squarely on action items for the next 5-10 years. We recognize the importance of articulating a vision; however, after 45+ years of planning, we also believe in the importance of implementing this vision through concrete actions. Success breeds more of the same, and we aim to keep Hinesburg a vibrant, engaged, and successful 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 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 two years of work by the Planning Commission. In addition to innumerable regular Planning Commission meetings, community outreach included surveys in 2014 (438 responses) and 2015 (225 responses) as well as a series of four forums (2014-2015) featuring speakers and public dialogue. This plan was the result of consultation with many/most Town boards, committees, and staff, as well as community members. Many of the plan's elements mention community participation and Hinesburg's unique sense of place. Hinesburg's planning process 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 plan gives ample attention to the considered use and conservation of important resources – ecological and cultural. It specifically recognizes 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. This is not an easy balancing act, but Hinesburg's planning process is robust and deliberative.

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

The proposed plan utilizes data from a wide variety of partner groups – watershed protection groups, State agencies, regional planning entities, etc. 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., 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 proposed revisions retain Hinesburg’s long-time commitment 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 Chapter 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 proposed revisions address this more directly than any of Hinesburg’s previous plans thanks to the inclusion of a new Economic Development chapter. 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 Chapter 4 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.

Similar to previous plans, the new plan addresses this goal to the extent possible. 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 child care section in Chapter 6). 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.

Hinesburg takes its transportation systems very seriously, especially since it is the 2nd largest budget item (after schools) for property taxes. The plan includes a comprehensive transportation section (Chapter 7) 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 continuing to support 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 plan very clearly identifies and requires protection of important ecological and cultural resources. Hinesburg residents care deeply about the natural and historic features that define both the rural character and the industrial history of the community. A conservation ethic for significant natural areas, open space, and water resources permeates the entire plan – particularly in Chapter 5. The plan also includes two sections detailing the town's historic resources (Chapter 9 and Appendix A).

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 (Chapter 5). Water quality in particular is an issue highlighted again and again in the plan, with goals and actions items that anticipate an "all-in" approach to cleaning up Lake Champlain – e.g., municipal demonstration projects, municipal road stormwater control improvements, development regulations, public outreach, etc.

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

These concepts are well established, and are reflected in Chapter 8 of the plan, which borrows heavily from the State comprehensive energy plan. Hinesburg has been very supportive of

renewable energy development. The Town itself has a sizable ground-mounted solar installation on its property adjacent to the wastewater treatment facility. With that said, this plan also provides clear guidance on factors to be considered in the siting of such facilities.

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 Chapter 6). 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.

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 Chapter 3). Secondly, it provides mechanisms for home-based businesses and rural-based enterprises (e.g., farm café, integrated agricultural uses, etc.), 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 Chapter 5).

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.

Chapter 5 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 identified. 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 needed housing. See Chapter 2.

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 Chapter 6 (Community Facilities and Services) for details. Hinesburg is currently in need of infrastructure improvements to meet the vision outlined in the plan – e.g., water supply, wastewater treatment, new highway garage. The plan addresses these needs and recommends more work on development phasing to ensure growth and development doesn't outstrip the community's resources.

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 Chapter 6) 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, while recognizing that there is only so much the community can do on this front.

14) To encourage flood resilient communities.

This is addressed in Chapter 5, with flood hazard areas (including fluvial erosion areas) indicated on Map 7. New development in flood hazard areas and riparian areas is discouraged. The Zoning Regulations allow development in such areas only in keeping with flood proofing standards, and only after a demonstration of no undue adverse impacts on surrounding properties, upstream/downstream properties and infrastructure, as well as water quality. The Town has actively worked to conserve important floodplain areas (e.g., LaPlatte Headwaters Town Forest). Building setbacks from streams have been required for decades in Hinesburg, but the plan further recommends the creation of vegetated riparian buffers to improve water quality and help minimize flood impacts.

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.

Likely changes to the RR1 zoning district will refine development potential to better align with municipal infrastructure (e.g., Town water and sewer), existing development areas where more development will have less impact, and natural resource areas where less development is appropriate. The changes 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 and surrounding area which benefits all residents. Traffic safety and congestion continue to be a challenge during peak times in the village area. Changes

to the RR1 district are unlikely to impact this situation meaningfully. With that said, we do seek to address continual traffic increases through the improvement of existing infrastructure (including pedestrian and bicycle facilities), and the orderly creation of additional street networks in the village area.

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

Refinements of the RR1 district are unlikely to result in new long-term costs to the Town. With that said, the plan language only enables the consideration of these changes. Clearly much work still needs to be done on the planning and design of these new areas. This work will flesh out the costs and benefits, and seek to offset fiscal costs to the extent reasonable through capital budgeting, impact fees, water and sewer connection fees, etc. The Town is very conscious of the property tax burden on residents, and will seek to have new development help fund the lion's share of new infrastructure needed for such development.

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.

Planned refinements to the RR1 district are not intended to create new designations per se. The core of the district along Richmond Road has a higher existing development density and has access to municipal water and sewer. Further buildout here versus more remote portions of the district makes sense, but is quite limited by the existing pattern of development. As such, it's unlikely that large changes will result from refining development densities and uses in the district. With that said, some of the more remote portions of the district effectively function like the rural zoning districts that surround the RR1 district. These areas could be rezoned with development densities and design standards similar to or the same as Hinesburg's rural regions.

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

It is exactly the varying suitability within the RR1 district that will be considered – i.e., development potential, ecological function, water quality impacts, etc. Site constraints will be factored into that process, so that the resulting land use plan and regulatory framework is realistic. Land ownership patterns, existing land use, topography, proximity to the existing village core, and natural resource protection all support the need to re-evaluate this district.