



# WAITSFIELD PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA

January 21, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

## Planning Commission

Beth Cook  
Robert Cook  
Emma Hanson  
AnnMarie Harmon, Vice-  
Chair  
Becca Newhall  
Alice Peal  
Jonathan Ursprung, Chair

**THE PLANNING COMMISSION WILL BE HOLDING A HYBRID MEETING. THE PUBLIC MAY ATTEND IN PERSON AT WAITSFIELD TOWN HALL OR REMOTE VIA ZOOM WITH TELEPHONE AND/OR VIDEO ACCESS. THOSE PARTICIPATING MAY SPEAK DURING THE DESIGNATED PERIODS.**

To join the meeting remotely, use this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9190265312>

**Meeting ID:** 919 026 5312

**Or call:** 1 929 205 6099

## Planning & Zoning Administrator

J. B. Weir

**Town Administrator**  
Vacant

**Town Clerk**  
Jennifer Peterson

**Town Treasurer**  
Steve Lewis

**Waitsfield Town Office**  
4144 Main Street  
Waitsfield, VT 05673  
(802) 496-2218  
[www.waitsfieldvt.us](http://www.waitsfieldvt.us)

1. **CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL**
2. **REVISIONS TO AGENDA, IF ANY (5 +/- min)**
3. **PUBLIC FORUM (10 +/- min)**
4. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JANUARY 7 (10 +/- min)**
5. **GROUNDWATER PROTECTION OVERLAY (5 +/- min) JB**
6. **VILLAGE MASTER PLANNING (60 +/- min) AnnMarie/Jonathan**
7. **ALICE UPDATE (10 +/- min)**
8. **WASTEWATER PLANNING PROJECT UPDATE (10 +/- min) JB/Bob**
9. **OTHER BUSINESS (10+/-min)**
10. **ADJOURNMENT**

**Waitsfield Planning and Zoning Administrators Report  
Planning Commission January 21, 2025 meeting**

**5. Groundwater Protection Overlay District (GPOD)**

Between January 14-15, the PZA satisfied the requirements of 24 V.S.A. § 4384 (c). This included submitting the final draft of the GPOD standards, definitions, map, reporting form, and public hearing notice to abutting municipalities, CVRPC and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD).

The PZA has included the public hearing notice in the packet. The date of the Commission's public hearing on the proposed amendments is February 18, 2025. An updated adoption timeline is also included in the packet.

**6. Village Master Planning**

The next meeting of the VMPS is scheduled for January 21<sup>st</sup> at 10:00am. The PZA has warned the meeting to include the potential for a quorum of Planning Commissioners. That warning is included in the packet along with the SE Group agenda. The focuses of this meeting will be to review the initial conceptual design sketch prepared by SE Group and the project core team, as well as to discuss plans for the next phase of public engagement.

The project website has been updated to include an overview of the community event along with the dot board photos, as well as a comment/survey form. The website can be found [here](#). And is linked off the Town webpage [here](#).

Commissioners are encouraged to either attend the steering committee meeting on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, or otherwise watch the meeting recording ahead of the PC meeting that night. The PZA will send out the recording link as soon as it is available after the meeting.

**8. Wastewater Planning Project Update**

The Engineering Technical Team (ETT) met on 1/8/25 with Jon Ashley to review updated pump station locations and other final design work. Geotechnical drilling/boring at the school and Fiddlers Green has been completed. The Munn field testing has been completed and those results have been submitted to the State for review. The hope is that resultant levels of phosphorous in treated waste will be low enough to *not* lead to excess costs in the selected advanced treatment system.

The United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA RD) Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Waitsfield Community Wastewater Project's (WCWP) Environmental Assessment (EA), which was published in the Valley Reporter's 12/12 and 12/19 editions, received no public comment. This deemed it complete and the project received a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Notice of the project's FONSI ran in the 1/2 edition of the Valley Reporter. Staff is awaiting final USDA RD confirmation that the town's application for funding is deemed final and complete.

As mentioned at last meeting, the Town should receive notice of our grant award and loan eligibility from USDA RD very soon. The Town will also be applying for a grant from the Northern Borders Regional Commission in March/April. The Town ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> on the CVRPC/CVEDC list of priority projects in Washington County (see [here](#)). This high ranking – considering the project ahead of us is seeking recognition not funding – should result in our project getting a sizeable award, ideally \$3 million.

As discussed at last meeting, Village Water & Wastewater ARPA Resource Day was held on January 3<sup>rd</sup> in Berlin. The PZA, Josh Schwartz and Chach Curtis represented Waitsfield at this VT DEC-organized day-long event focused on supporting ARPA-funded village water & ww projects to address major challenges, barriers, and opportunities, as well as identify steps & tasks in the path to success for these projects and begin planning a timeline, resources, and action steps. Eight communities were represented, with approximately 50 people in attendance (1/3 from communities, 2/3 resources). The event increased clarity on the various project, which include capacity, equity, technical, managerial, financial, and regulatory. It also built meaningful connections across communities and with resource providers.

In addition, the team will be putting in a grant with Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP). VCDP administers U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding. Vermont's CDBG funding assists communities on a competitive basis by providing financial and technical assistance to identify and address local needs in areas of: housing, economic development, public facilities, public services, and handicapped accessibility modifications. 70% of CDBG funds must primarily benefit persons of low and moderate income.

On January 22, 2025, Joshua Schwartz, Chach Curtis and the PZA will be hosting staff from USDA RD for a tour of the proposed wastewater service area and a lunch.

Here is an interesting [article](#) titled “Inside Elizabethtown’s 60-year journey to a public sewer system.” Let’s hope the Town can get the system constructed and online a little but sooner 😊.

Once updated and complete, the PZA will include the revised funding stack for the project.

As of 1/16//25, the Town website page for the project has been updated and can be found [here](#).

## **10. Other Business**

The PZA has included Joshua Schwartz’s staff report for the MRVPD meeting on 1/16/2025. Going forward, the PZA intends to the same to keep commissioners abreast of various planning efforts in the greater valley community.

Also included in the report is the “Report to the General Assembly on Affordable Housing Initiatives.” The PZA encourages all members to read this document.

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Upcoming trainings/webinars:

### **Grants & Funding Chat:**

This chat is a bi-monthly series to help members learn about specific funding opportunities as well as ways to make their funding applications competitive – and the advance work that is required when using someone else’s money.

Each meeting focuses on a different topic. After an eye-opening 15-minute presentation on the day’s topic, the format transitions to a participant Q&A, where attendees can ask questions of the presenter and each other. Bring your questions, share your challenges, and learn from other communities.

This series is presented by Bonnie Waninger, the Project & Funding Specialist on VLCT’s Municipal Operations Support Team.

#### Registration Information

Register once and attend all sessions! Once you register, your link to join will be the same for every 2025 Grants & Funding Chat. Zoom will send you an email with the link to join ahead of each chat.

#### Future Dates and Topics

Tuesday, March 11, 2025 – Climate Resilience

Tuesday, May 13, 2025 – Housing\*

Tuesday, July 8, 2025 – Transportation\*

Wednesday, November 12, 2025 – Community Economic Development

\* These two might switch dates due to timing of the legislative session.

Presenter

Bonnie Waninger, Project & Funding Specialist, VLCT

Website [here](#). Registration for February topic not available as of yet

### **Mad River Valley Wastewater Workshop:**

Date: Spring 2025

Location: TBD

The Friends of the Mad River, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission and Department of Environmental Conservation are partnering to offer a Wastewater Workshop in the Mad River Valley in the Spring 2025. Discover how onsite wastewater treatment (septic) systems work and the various kinds of systems installed in Vermont. Learn why newer systems are no longer the septic systems of the past. Understand the regulatory framework for on-site wastewater systems and potable water supplies. Develop an understanding of how to maintain your onsite wastewater system to keep it functional in the years to come.

### **The Future of VT Land Use Regulation**

In this webinar, we will provide the audience with an understanding of H. 687 (Act 181) and how it affects the state, municipal and regional planning commission processes. From the Act 250 perspective, this workshop will provide an overview of the changes to the law, and then focus on the “nuts and bolts” of the interim exemptions that provide an on ramp to the “tiered” system of land use review. The Agency of Commerce and Community Development will discuss the incentive programs of the new Community Investment Board, and the RPC representative will discuss their roles in plan and map development for the new tiered system and designated areas.

Presenters:

Peter Gill

Jacob Hemmerick

Charlie Baker or Catherine Dimitruk

Repeat sessions of this webinar will be offered on the following two dates:

Wednesday 2/5/25 10:00am - 11:00am [Register](#)

Thursday 3/27/25 2:00pm - 3:00pm [Register](#)

## **Vermont's Land Conservation: Where do we go from here?**

Vermont has an incredible track record of protecting land for people and nature. Using the Conserved Lands Inventory developed by Vermont Housing & Conservation Board as part of Vermont's 30x30 effort, we reflect on the distribution of permanently conserved lands around the state, and how those lands intersect our most ecologically important places seen in Vermont Conservation Design. By looking at these past patterns, we can celebrate the work by federal, state, town, and NGOs. We can also reflect on the types of lands and parts of the state that have been historically under-represented in our land conservation investments, and prioritize future places to work for both people and nature. Join us for this exciting webinar to learn how your town's efforts can contribute to making our conserved lands more diverse, equitable, and ecologically impactful.

Presenters:

Robert Zaino, Ecologist

Jens Hilke, Conservation Planner

Repeat sessions of this webinar will be offered on the following two dates:

Thursday February 20th 1:00- 2:00p.m [Register](#)

Tuesday, April 8th 2025 10:00a.m. - 11:00a.m. [Register](#)

## **Cold-Blooded Critters: Conserving Vermont's Reptiles and Amphibians**

Despite its cold winters, Vermont is home to surprising herpetological diversity with 19 confirmed species of reptiles, and 21 amphibians. Many of these species, like the gray treefrog, are small and cryptic, and more often seen than heard. And you could go your whole life without seeing a spring salamander if you don't know where to look! But unlike these common species, a growing number of Vermont's reptiles and amphibians are rare, threatened, or endangered within the state and need our care, attention, and protection to survive challenges such as climate change, habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, and poaching. Join VT Fish & Wildlife Herpetologist Luke Groff, and Conservation Planner Jens Hilke, to learn about iconic VT species of special conservation concern such as Timber Rattlesnake, Mudpuppy, North American Racer, Wood Turtle, Spiny Softshell Turtle, and more. We'll discuss their unique ecology and habitat requirements, learn about Fish & Wildlife conservation programs to support these species, and explore municipal land-use planning strategies that can help ensure thriving populations of reptiles and amphibians in Vermont for decades to come.

Presenters:

Luke Groff - Herpetologist

Jens Hilke - Conservation Planner

Repeat sessions of this webinar will be offered on the following two dates:

Tuesday February 11th, 2025 1:00p.m. - 2:00p.m. [Register](#)

Friday, March 14, 2025 10:00a.m. - 11:00a.m. [Register](#)

### **Seeing Success through Conservation Stories.**

How can Conservation Commissions across Vermont effectively collaborate over long distances of space and time? By sharing stories of successes, challenges faced, and lessons learned, conservation minded committees across the state can learn from each other's experiences, and stand on each other's shoulders. Please join us as we celebrate moments of success both large and small by Conservation Commissions from all over Vermont. We will glean lessons, highlight best practices, and together take a step forward towards building a more robust sense of statewide communication, collaboration, and institutional memory so that Vermonters from all corners of the state can contribute their energies to solving local challenges while simultaneously supporting their like-minded peers.

Presenters:

David Moroney

Jens Hilke

Repeat sessions of this webinar will be offered on the following two dates:

Monday March 10th, 2025 3:00p.m. - 4:00p.m. [Register](#)

Wednesday May 7th, 2025 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. [Register](#)

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Respectfully submitted,

J.B. Weir

**TOWN OF WAITSFIELD, VERMONT**  
**Planning Commission Meeting Minutes**  
**Tuesday, December 17, 2024**

Draft

**Members Present:** Beth Cook, Bob Cook, AnnMarie Harmon, Becca Newhall, Alice Peal, Jonathan Ursprung

**Members Absent:** Emma Hanson

**Staff Present:** JB Weir, Planning and Zoning Administrator

**Others Present:**

## **II. Regular Business**

### **1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by Jonathan Ursprung. The meeting was held in person at the Town Offices and remotely via Zoom.

### **2. Review agenda for addition, removal, or adjustment of any items**

AnnMarie noted that she had some information to present in the Other Business portion of the meeting.

### **3. Public Forum**

No members of the public were present.

### **4. Approval of Minutes**

The Minutes of December 3, 2024 were amended and approved.

The Minutes of December 17, 2024 were amended and approved.

### **5. Groundwater Protection Overlay**

JB reported that he had received legal advice indicating that individual notification of property owners of parcels located in/adjacent to the Overlay was not necessary. JB also provided a draft of the accompanying report, which was reviewed at the meeting, with no changes proposed. He noted that the Selectboard had been provided with a copy of the Overlay language, and outlined the adoption process, noting the logistics he will be handling. The PC's public hearing on the matter is scheduled for February 18, 2024.

### **6. Village Master Planning**

No Steering Committee (SC) meeting had been held since the last PC meeting, so there was little to report. Jonathan and AnnMarie will continue to coordinate FPF postings; so far just a few responses have been received following the recent request for comments.

AnnMarie mentioned that SE Group will be undergoing a basic feasibility study regarding development of a pool/community center.

Alex of SE Group had provided an update via email, noting that the team is holding internal meetings regarding the conceptual design, and that the next SC meeting will focus on reviewing the conceptual sketches provided and planning for the next public input meeting.



## **7. Alice Update**

Alice reported on several activities of the committees she is involved with.

The Regional Plan chapters are not yet ready for review by Planning Commissions. Alice did provide a copy of the recently reviewed Washington Town Plan, where the full process of RPC review is outlined. She noted that new requirements for the next iteration of the Waitsfield plan will include addressing flood resilience, disaster recovery, and climate change impacts. The latter will include more emphasis on how to cope with those impacts rather than outlining preventative measures. Mental health services are also being discussed as Plan inclusions, and there are continuing discussions regarding creating cooperative solutions among towns.

The Public Health Task Force work for the Climate Action Plan has been completed. Data has been gathered, and the chapter is now being drafted. One item Alice noted is that the draft will potentially call for a moratorium on biomass use for fuel due to air quality implications.

Alice intends to be working on River Corridor Bylaws; she will team up with Becca, with assistance from Brian Voigt and Stacey Pomeroy (DEC).

Keith Cubbin has been looking into gathering engineering quotes for Meadow Road Bridge work.

## **8. Wastewater Planning Project Update**

JB reported that a meeting is on the schedule for January 8, and that technical boring work is ongoing. He explained that he, Joshua Schwartz, and Chach Curtis had attended a helpful roundtable with representatives of various towns; the three spent most of their time with the funding resource team. JB further outlined upcoming funding possibilities and other networking opportunities. An interview with Chach was aired on WCAX last week.

The final design work continues; it is anticipated that it will be wrapped up by early summer.

Alice noted that a Clean Water Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for the coming week; on the agenda is an item related to planning for an upcoming community wastewater assistance presentation where both large and small installations will be covered.

## **9. PC Work Plan 2025**

The current work plan was reviewed, with agreement that the biggest continuing priority is the Irasville Master Planning process, with river corridor bylaws also to be addressed in the near future.

JB then reviewed the table of items still to be considered by the group. These include cannabis regulations, consideration of changes to the Limited Business District, and other potential bylaw amendments. It was noted that any work on STRs should wait until Warren completes their process of initiating an ordinance and following through with registration, as this will provide further insight on ways to address the matter. Jonathan asked that members provide suggestions for other topics to be covered. Alice noted that she had heard comments regarding the benefits of increasing PC/DRB communications.

Town Plan revisions were discussed. It was noted that a revision is needed before the standard eight-year requirement timeline, as there were deficiencies noted by the RPC in the Child Care and Energy Plan sections of the version approved and adopted in October 2023. AnnMarie suggested

that the Housing chapter also be updated to ensure the Plan is in compliance with the HOME Act, and to include anti-displacement language. Alice pointed out that the Regional Plan will also be providing housing numbers for towns as well as some other information.

#### **10. Other Business**

AnnMarie provided a summary of a recent workshop she attended titled 'Navigating Vermont's Climate Risk and Building Resilience.' The event was hosted by the non-profit Rebuild By Design as well as the Vermont Council for Rural Development. AnnMarie spoke of the participation by CROS (Community Resilience Organizations), and their work in assisting with needed organization of volunteers and other assistance following disasters. This group is advocating for an increase in State staff to help in these situations. She also mentioned that a need for anti-displacement policies was discussed at the workshop, which in rural areas is likely to focus on loss of farmland, gentrification, and related aspects of development. Creation of adequate social infrastructure mechanisms for providing information after a disaster was also a topic of discussion. Alice noted that much of this information as it relates to Waitsfield is included in the LEMP and LHMP; AnnMarie indicated that she will speak with Fred Messer regarding putting together some general information and making it readily available to the public.

#### **11. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Carol Chamberlin, Recording Secretary

**TOWN OF WAITSFIELD PLANNING COMMISSION  
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING TO CONSIDER  
PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE WAITSFIELD ZONING BYLAWS**

In accordance with state statute [24 V.S.A. Chapter 117 §4441], the Waitsfield Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on **Tuesday, February 18, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.** at the Waitsfield Town Offices to receive comments on proposed amendments to the Waitsfield Zoning Bylaw. This will be a hybrid meeting and the **public may attend in person at the Waitsfield Town Offices or remote via Zoom** with telephone and/or video access. To join the meeting remotely, use this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9190265312>

**Meeting ID: 919 026 5312**

**Or call: 1 929 205 6099**

The Planning Commission identified one primary focus area for revising zoning bylaws, supported by the goals and recommendations of the Waitsfield Town Plan: the protection of the Town's public water source.

The Town of Waitsfield recognizes that many residents rely on groundwater for their safe drinking water supply, and that certain land uses have the potential to contaminate groundwater, particularly in shallow/surficial aquifers, or when contaminants can get into a bedrock aquifer. To ensure the protection of these drinking water supplies, this bylaw establishes a zoning overlay district to be known as the Groundwater Protection Overlay District ("GPOD").

The purpose of the GPOD is to protect public health, safety and welfare by minimizing the potential for contamination of vulnerable aquifers and source protection areas as authorized under 24 V.S.A. §4414(2), as well as preserving and protecting existing and potential sources of drinking water supplies. It is the intent of the Town of Waitsfield to accomplish this through the adoption of this GPOD, which provides standards to regulate particular uses of land and land development with the foregoing purpose in mind, in addition to those currently imposed by existing zoning districts or other state and federal regulations. It is intended that public education and cooperation will complement this effort.

The GPOD is superimposed on the Agricultural-Residential District and Forest Reserve District or other zoning districts within the area of the mapped GPOD and shall apply to all land development within the GPOD.

All of the proposed amendments and regulations are consistent with the Act, including the goals set forth in §4302, and are in conformance with, and are intended to implement, the Waitsfield Town Plan.

The full text of the proposed amendment can be found here:

[https://www.waitsfieldvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Boards/Planning Commission/Meetings/2025/01/Final\\_GPOD\\_for\\_adoption.pdf](https://www.waitsfieldvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Boards/Planning_Commission/Meetings/2025/01/Final_GPOD_for_adoption.pdf). Copies of the full text of the proposed amendments to the zoning bylaws and a report prepared in accordance with §4441 of the Act are available at the Waitsfield Town Offices during regular business hours. All interested persons are requested to attend and provide comments during the public hearing. Written comments may also be submitted to the Waitsfield Planning Commission via mail to 4144 Main St. Waitsfield, VT 05673 or via email to the Planning and Zoning Administrator at [pza@gmavt.net](mailto:pza@gmavt.net).

## Groundwater Protection Overlay District

### Adoption Timeline

- 1) 12/17/2024: PC approved Table 2.12, corresponding definitions and Map - **Complete**
- 2) 1/14-15/2025: Warned meeting in Valley Reporter for 1/16/25 issue; submitted materials to CVRPC and ACCD; submitted materials to abutting towns - **Complete**
- 3) 2/18/2025: PC public hearing for adoption
- 4) 2/19/2025: Send PC approved GPOD to Selectboard
- 5) March/April: Select Board public hearing for adoption (could be later depending on Town Administrator vacancy)

# IRASVILLE VILLAGE MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

## MEETING #7

1/21/2025

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

### IN-PERSON LOCATION:

Waitsfield Town Office

### VIRTUAL PARTICIPATION OPTION:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9190265312?omn=81360188384>

Meeting ID: 919 026 5312

## MEETING OVERVIEW & PREPARATION

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### Meeting Purpose

- Review initial conceptual design sketch prepared by SE Group and project core team.
- Discuss plans for the next phase of public engagement.

## AGENDA DETAILS

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1. Welcome
2. Presentation & discussion of initial conceptual design sketch
3. Upcoming Public Engagement Activities
4. Wrap-Up/Next Steps



# Village Master Planning Steering Committee

**January 21, 2025 at 10:30 a.m.**

Join Zoom Meeting  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9190265312?omn=81360188384>

Meeting ID: 919 026 5312

**Planning Commission**

Beth Cook  
Robert Cook  
Emma Hanson  
AnnMarie Harmon, Vice-Chair  
Becca Newhall  
Alice Peal  
Jonathan Ursprung, Chair

**Planning & Zoning Administrator**

J. B. Weir

**Town Administrator**  
*Vacant*

\*\*A quorum of the Planning Commission may be present at the meeting. This item is intended to serve as a work session and no action will be taken by the Planning Commission at this meeting. Allowed pursuant to 1V.S.A.§310(3)(D)\*\*

**Town Clerk**  
Jennifer Peterson

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Steve Lewis

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# MAD RIVER VALLEY

## PLANNING DISTRICT

Fayston • Waitsfield • Warren

### Staff Report January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Waitsfield Community Wastewater Project

Recreation  
Transportation  
Data

Conservation  
Municipal  
Other

#### Waitsfield Community Wastewater Project

- **Project Coordination**
  - Joshua leads regular Project Coordination Team Meetings and Engineering Technical Team (ETT) meetings.
- **Engineering, Design, & Permitting**
  - The ETT is working with the project engineer on various design elements, including collection system design, pump station sizing, property owner discussions, etc.
  - Joshua located a variety of historic construction drawings along the collection system (ROW and existing utility information) and made them available to the project engineer for incorporation into the collection system design.
  - Field work has been completed (topographic surveying, wetlands, rare plants, and cultural resources). This information has been incorporated into a base map for subsequent design drawings.
  - Geotechnical borings have been completed.
  - Munn Site wastewater loading test has been completed. Joshua has reviewed the resultant loading test report, to be submitted to DEC.
  - Historic Resource Inventory efforts are underway.
  - Staff are coordinating between the engineering consultants of this project and the VT-100 Active Transportation Corridor Scoping Study for opportunities of potential colocation.
- **Funding**
  - The United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA RD) Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Waitsfield Community Wastewater Project's (WCWP) Environmental Assessment (EA), which was published in the Valley Reporter's 12/12 and 12/19 editions, received no public comment. This deemed it complete and the project received a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Notice of the project's FONSI ran in the 1/2 edition of the Valley Reporter. Staff is awaiting final USDA RD confirmation that the town's application for funding is deemed final and complete.
  - Staff are hosting representatives from USDA RD on 1/22 for a tour and info session.
  - Joshua is preparing a pre-application to the Vermont Community Development Program's (VCDP) 1/22 deadline.
  - On 12/20 Joshua met with Melissa Bounty of the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation (CVEDC) to discuss project funding strategy. The WCWP is listed as #2 on the 2025 Central Vermont Regional Project Priority List.
    - <https://www.centralvermont.org/regional-project-priority-list>
  - Joshua has been in communication with ACCD staff about potential funding opportunities.
- **Vermont Village Water & Wastewater ARPA Resource Day | 1/3**
  - Staff and two members of the ETT represented Waitsfield at this VT DEC-organized day-long event focused on supporting ARPA-funded village water & ww projects to address major challenges, barriers, and opportunities, as well as identify steps & tasks in the path to success for these projects and begin

planning a timeline, resources, and action steps. Eight communities were represented, with approximately 30 people in attendance (1/3 from communities, 2/3 resources).

- The event increased clarity on the various project, which include capacity, equity, technical, managerial, financial, and regulatory. It also built meaningful connections across communities and with resource providers.
- **Video: Vt. towns need infrastructure upgrades to solve housing crunch | 1/2**
  - Joshua was interviewed for a WCAX segment, which focused on Waitsfield's wastewater project as an example of needed infrastructure upgrades to address housing.
  - <https://www.wcax.com/2025/01/02/vt-towns-need-infrastructure-upgrades-solve-housing-crunch/>
- **Article: Inside Elizabethtown's 60-year journey to a public sewer system | 1/4**
  - Rowland, T. (2025, January 4). Inside Elizabethtown's 60-year journey to a public sewer system. *Adirondack Explorer*.
  - <https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/elizabethtown-sewer-project>

## Recreation

- **Conservation Recreation Visioning**
  - On 12/16, staff met with the CRV Leadership Team and discussed the project status and potential for MRVPD's involvement in the next year. CRV's primary funding (VOREC) ends at the end of March, and they are engaged in envisioning what their next stage can look like (CRV 2.0). They are beginning to develop this 2.0 structure and anticipate finalizing it by the end of March. At this time, there is no consensus from the full CRV Steering Committee on its next step priorities, which will set the stage for the structure.
  - Staff attended the CRV Steering Committee's 1/8/25 meeting, which included a priority-setting exercise. That effort will continue at the next CRV SC mtg, scheduled for 1/27.
- **Press Release: Vermont's Outdoor Recreation Economy Grows to \$2.1 Billion in 2023 | 12/19**
  - State of Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development. (2024, December 19). Vermont's Outdoor Recreation Economy Grows to \$2.1 Billion in 2023 [Press release].
  - <https://accd.vermont.gov/press-releases/vermonts-outdoor-recreation-economy-grows-21-billion-2023>

## Transportation

- **VT-100 Active Transportation Corridor Scoping Study**
  - On 1/3, MRVPD and Mad River Path met with VHB at their offices to review the scope alignment. This created a to-do list from VHB, which Sam and Misha have been addressing via work in the field, walking the corridor, measuring distances to the utility poles and the widths of the shoulders, checking slopes, identifying constrictions, and talking to landowners.
  - Staff are coordinating between the engineering consultants of this project and the Waitsfield Community Wastewater Project to identify opportunities for potential colocation.
  - The next project Advisory Committee is scheduled for 2/12.
  - A second public meeting is anticipated for the middle of March.
- **Sugarbush Access Rd Shared Use Path, Segment II**
  - Staff assisted in submitting an application for funding on behalf of the Town of Warren for Segment II of the Sugarbush Access Rd Path through the Vermont Department of Transportation's (VTTrans) Transportation Alternatives Grant Program (TAP).
- **2025 Downtown Transportation Fund Grants | Deadline: 2/17**
  - Waitsfield and Warren are eligible to apply to the Downtown Transportation Fund (DTF), which supports safe, multi-modal, and resilient transportation systems that reinforce downtown and village center economic development and revitalization efforts. Availability of up to \$200,000/grant with a 20% match intended to be used primarily for implementation. Waitsfield and Warren were each recipients in 2022.
  - <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/downtown-transportation-fund>



- **AARP Community Challenge Grants | Deadline: 3/5**
  - AARP Community Challenge grants fund quick-action projects that help communities become more livable by improving public places, transportation, housing, digital connections, and more. This year, the AARP Community Challenge is accepting applications across three different grant opportunities:
    - **Capacity-building microgrants** are paired with additional resources, such as one-on-one coaching from national nonprofit organizations, webinars, cohort learning opportunities, and more for improving walkability, bike-ability, implementing safe and accessible home modifications, and disaster preparedness training.
    - **Demonstration grants** fund projects that encourage replication of exemplary local efforts. This year's focus is on improving pedestrian safety with support from Toyota Motor North America; expanding high-speed internet access and adoption with funding support from Microsoft; reconnecting communities divided by infrastructure; and implementing housing choice design competitions.
    - **Flagship grants** support projects that improve public places, transportation, housing, digital connections, and community resilience.
  - AARP Vermont will host an informational webinar about the Community Challenge on 1/21 at 1 PM.
  - [aarp.org/vt](http://aarp.org/vt)
  - <https://events.aarp.org/event/VTCCG25/summary>
- **VTrans Electrify Your Fleet Program | Deadline: 6/30/25**
  - The Vermont Agency of Transportation is offering rebates of up to 25% of the purchase price (maximum \$2,500) for a range of electric vehicles, including all-electric vehicles, plug-in hybrids, e-bikes, cargo e-bikes, adaptive cycles, electric motorcycles, and electric snowmobiles. Fleet owners can receive up to 20 incentives over the program's duration. Recipients must order approved vehicles within 30 days of executing a grant agreement and complete the purchase or lease within 90 days, though exceptions may be granted for supply chain delays. Base MSRP limits apply, and applicants are encouraged to leverage additional federal tax credits and local utility rebates to maximize their savings. Applications are accepted through an online form on a first-come, first-served basis.
  - <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/climate/incentives/Electrify-Your-Fleet>

## Data

- **Data Request**
  - On 1/8 staff responded to a request from Warren resident Lucy O'Brien seeking MRV demographic data (individuals >60 years of age & individuals with disabilities). Staff researched and provided the demographic data sourced by the United States Census Bureau's 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates.

## Conservation

- **VT Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB) Conservation Grant Program | Deadline: Rolling**
  - VHCB's Conservation Grant Program offers funding to support projects of statewide or local significance that conserve natural areas, recreational lands, agricultural properties, and historic sites in Vermont. Eligible applications include nonprofit housing and conservation organizations, Vermont municipalities, and certain state agencies. Funding can be used for projects such as conserving working forests, protecting natural habitats, preserving historic buildings, and ensuring long-term public benefits through conservation easements or similar legal protections. Grants may provide up to \$150,000, plus associated costs like appraisals, options, and closing fees, with a required match of one-third of total project costs.

Applications are reviewed as received, and applicants must engage with VHCB staff to discuss their project before applying.

○ <https://vhcb.org/our-programs/conservation/apply-for-funding>

● **Clean Water Design and Implementation Block Grant | Deadline: Rolling**

○ The State Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) Clean Water Design and Implementation Block Grant funds projects that mitigate sediment and nutrient pollution to Vermont's surface waters. Eligible activities include preliminary (30%) and final (100%) engineering design and implementation projects such as floodplain and stream restoration, wetland and lake shoreland protection, stormwater management, agricultural pollution prevention, forestry, and specific road projects. Grants offer up to \$15,000, with no match required for non-regulatory projects; regulatory projects may have different match requirements based on the applicant type. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and reviewed monthly until funds are depleted. Prospective applicants should review the Vermont Clean Water Initiative Program Funding Policy for guidance. For more details, contact NRCC Grants Specialist Lina Smith at [lina.smith@vacd.org](mailto:lina.smith@vacd.org). All projects must be completed by December 10, 2024.

○ <https://www.vacd.org/design-implementation-rfa/>

● **MRV Flood & Climate Resilience Series**

○ In the aftermath of the 7/10/24 rainfall event and related impacts, MRVPD and Friends of the Mad River (FMR) have discussed collaborative opportunities to engage the MRV community on flood and climate resilience. The first community event was Living with a Mad River on 10/16 at Valley Players Theater. This MRVPD & FMR co-sponsored event featured Shayne Jaquith, Watershed Restoration Manager for The Nature Conservancy, exploring how historical human inhabitants changed the river's natural flow and how those impacts contribute to some of the challenges we face today.

○ A second collaborative community event is being planned for spring 2025. We look forward to inviting leaders from neighboring towns in the Winooski Watershed to share their experiences following the 2023 and 2024 floods.

○ Looking ahead, MRVPD and FMR see opportunities to continue hosting important discussions, from bringing together road crews to debrief storm response to resurfacing strategic flood resilience frameworks built following Tropical Storm Irene.

○ FMR has applied for funding support from the Lake Champlain Basin Program, and MRVPD has provided a letter of support.

● **Friends of the Mad River Update**

○ In addition to the Flood & Climate Resilience Series, FMR is focusing on a variety of different engagement activities for the upcoming year+:

- Vermont Master Naturalist Field Day in September
- Watershed Project Roadshow to selectboards
- MRV Library partnership and community events
- MRV Triathlon partnership

○ FMR is hiring a Watershed Project Coordinator to help support clean water, protect ecological integrity, and build watershed resilience. This full-time temporary position is funded by grants for up to 2 years.

■ <https://www.friendsofthemadriver.org/jobs.html>

● **Beaver Activity in Irasville**

○ Staff were included in dialogue from Misha Golfman of Mad River Path, adjacent property owners, the Waitsfield Selectboard Chair, the Waitsfield Conservation Commission Chair, and others concerning increased beaver activity behind the Skatium adjacent to Heart of the Valley Path. The activity has resulted in a significant increase in water level and damage. Partners are discussing options, which include communication and coordination with the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department (VFWD).

● **VT DEC Drop-In Discussion: Locating Functioning Floodplains | 1/16, 9 am | Virtual**

- The next edition of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Drop-in Discussion will feature Rebecca Diehl at UVM about how and where topography can support community flood resilience. Rebecca Diehl is a Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography and Geosciences at the University of Vermont. Rebecca Diehl, with the UVM Water Resources Institute, is developing a landscape model for stream networks of whole watersheds in the Lake Champlain Basin. These models can identify locations with floodplain functions and better allow communities to locate places to attenuate flooding.
- The Drop-In Discussions are informal gatherings on the third Thursday of the month from 9 – 10 am hosted by VTDEC's River Corridor and Floodplain Protection program. No registration is required. The discussions support the work of municipal officials responsible for floodplain and river corridor regulations, as well as others involved in the work of flood resilience in Vermont. To support casual dialogue, the discussions are not recorded. For questions, feel free to reach out to [ned.swanberg@vermont.gov](mailto:ned.swanberg@vermont.gov).
- Join the meeting: <https://tinyurl.com/yj5rk9d6>

## Municipal

- **Irasville Village Master Planning Steering Committee (IVMPSC)**
  - The next IVMPSC meeting is scheduled for 1/21. <https://www.waitsfieldvt.gov/departments/projects/irasville-village-master-plan>
- **Warren Town Garage Site**
  - Staff are scheduled to attend the 1/27 Warren PC meeting to discuss their interest in exploring housing development options at Warren's existing Town Garage location.
- **Waitsfield Town Administrator Search**
  - Staff participated in discussions with an applicant for Waitsfield's Town Administrator position.
- **The Statewide Municipal Code of Ethics - Act 171**
  - Act 171 became law on 6/10/24 and drastically changed the ethical regulatory landscape for municipalities. It removes municipal authority to enact conflict of interest prohibitions tailored to address the specific needs, concerns, size, and values of their municipalities and replaces that authority with a new, top-down, one-size-fits-all, statewide Municipal Code of Ethics
  - <https://www.vlct.org/topics-all/ethics-and-conflicts-interest>
- **Land Use Reform Municipal Training**
  - CVRPC staff offered municipal officials and volunteers training on 12/19 focused on
  - recent land use reform and how it affects municipalities. Topics included Act 250 reform, flood safety, housing, conservation, and more. CVRPC has made available a recording of the training, presentation, and follow-up questions/responses
  - <https://centralvtplanning.org/cvrpc-training-and-workshop-recordings/>
- **Navigating Funding in the Post-Pandemic World | 1/15 | St. Albans**
  - The Vermont Community Development Association's (VCDA) Winter Conference 2025 is entitled Navigating Funding in the Post-Pandemic World. Over the last four years, new funding sources have emerged to support countless projects and communities around the state. In addition to those new funding sources, we have seen complexities, like higher-than-expected costs and capacity constraints. This is an opportunity to connect with fellow community champions, gain valuable insights, and contribute to building a brighter future for Vermont.
  - <https://www.vtcda.org/winterconference2025.html>
- **Municipal Planning Grant Program | Deadline: 3/31/25**
  - The Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development offers grants ranging from \$2,500 to \$30,000 for individual municipalities and up to \$45,000 for municipal consortiums to support planning and land use projects. Projects must align with municipal plans, regional plans, and statewide smart growth principles. A 10% cash match is required (except for first-time zoning/subdivision bylaw projects).

This cycle prioritizes age-friendly community initiatives supporting Age Strong Vermont. Municipalities must have a confirmed planning process to apply and cannot receive both MPG and Better Connections grants in the same fiscal year. Projects affecting State highways or village wastewater require coordination with VTrans or DEC, respectively. Applications are submitted through the GEARS system.

- <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant>

## Other

- **MRVPD Executive Committee**
  - The MRVPD Executive Committee met on 1/10. Meeting agendas and minutes are available at <https://mrvpd.org/agendas-minutes/>.
- **MRVPD Steering Committee**
  - The MRVPD Steering Committee met on 12/12. Meeting agendas and minutes are available at <https://mrvpd.org/agendas-minutes/>.
  - On 12/18, Joshua and Brian Shupe met with Sugarbush's administration team members to discuss the approved FY26 budget. The meeting concluded with an understanding of the FY26 funder amount and appreciation for MRVPD's efforts.
- **Bookkeeping**
  - MRVPD bookkeeping services will transition from Hall & Holden to Northbound Consulting by 3/1.
- **General Wait House**
  - Staff are awaiting final documentation from the Town of Waitsfield to sign a Gen Wait House tenant lease agreement from 1/1/25 to 12/31/25.
  - Wait House tenants held a work party on 12/18, which focused on cleaning up the building's shared spaces.
  - The Mad River Path applied for and secured a VTrans FY2025 Mobility & Transportation Innovations (MTI) grant to purchase three e-assist cargo bikes for use by Gen. Wait House employees.
- **UVM Medical Center Service Cuts**
  - On 1/8, the Letter of Concern from the three town select boards and MRVPD regarding the decision to close the Central Vermont Medical Center (CVMC) Family Medicine branch in Waitsfield was sent to the UVM Health Network (UVMHN) administration. The letter's distribution list included various individuals within the State government and locally.
  - Staff discussed the situation with Jay Ericson, Director of Communications & Engagement, UVMHN - CVMC, which included an invitation to attend a future MRVPD Steering Committee meeting.
  - To date, staff have received responses from Senator Ann Cummings and Rep. Ann Watson.
- **2025 Trend Report for Planners | 1/29 | Virtual**
  - The American Planning Association and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy are hosting an online event to launch the 2025 Trend Report for Planners, an in-depth look at the key trends and signals shaping the year ahead. Participants will explore existing, emerging, and potential future trends that planners want to be aware of and understand so that they can act, prepare, and learn. The report includes about 100 trends and signals, exploring them in future scenarios, deep dives, podcasts, and more.
  - <https://tinyurl.com/dew5z4n9>
- **GMNF Roundtable | 4/10/25 | TBD**
  - The Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) annual roundtable will take place on 4/10, location TBD. Staff have attended in past years and have found it to be a valuable in learning project updates and enhancing opportunities for collaboration. The event will consist of a more traditional "meeting" of Central Vermont stakeholders in the morning, sharing GMNF's program of work and up-dates from the natural resources community. The afternoon will consist of field visits showcasing some of the local work that has been accomplished in the past year and work GMNF hope to accomplish in the coming year.



Act 181 §37 of 2024 Study Group

# A Report to the General Assembly on Affordable Housing Incentives

**Submitted to the Vermont General Assembly for Publication:**

January 15, 2025

## Contact

### State of Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD)

Alex Farrell, Commissioner, [alex.farrell@vermont.gov](mailto:alex.farrell@vermont.gov)

### The Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA)

Maura Collins, Executive Director, [mcollins@vhfa.org](mailto:mcollins@vhfa.org)

### The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)

Pollaidh Major, Director of Policy and Special Projects, [pollaidh@vhcb.org](mailto:pollaidh@vhcb.org)

### The Vermont Land Access and Opportunity Board (LAOB)

Ornella Matta-Figueroa, Advocacy and Engagement Director, [o.matta-figueroa@vhcb.org](mailto:o.matta-figueroa@vhcb.org)

Jean Myung Hamilton, Director of Program Development, [j.hamilton@vhcb.org](mailto:j.hamilton@vhcb.org)

### **To receive this information in an alternative format or for other record or accessibility requests, please contact:**

Chris Cochran, Director

Division of Community Planning & Revitalization

Department of Housing & Community Development

Agency of Commerce and Community Development

[chris.cochran@vermont.gov](mailto:chris.cochran@vermont.gov)

802-828-5249

All materials and appendices referenced in this document are available online and upon request.

# Table of Contents

Contact.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Acknowledgments .....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Recommendations .....	6
Act 250 .....	6
Funding Incentives.....	6
Inclusionary Zoning.....	7
Appeals of Permit Decisions .....	8
Brownfields .....	8
Tax Policy.....	9
Public Outreach.....	10
Expert Focus Groups .....	10
Focus Group Findings .....	11
Public Survey.....	13
Survey Objectives .....	13
Survey Design and Participation .....	13
Key Takeaways .....	13
Survey Findings .....	14
Open-Ended Feedback .....	16
Appendix.....	18

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Special thanks to VHCB's Annie Decker and Emily Phillips for their invaluable contributions to the survey and report. Their support, after joining the team later in the process, made a tremendous impact.



## Executive Summary

Building affordable housing in Vermont remains a formidable challenge, driven by high development costs, regulatory hurdles, limited infrastructure, and complex market dynamics. While the recent influx of federal funds has helped create affordable housing, many communities lack adequate water, sewer, and transportation systems for compact, cost-effective development. The old age of Vermont's housing stock adds to these pressures, and the increasing frequency of flooding has led to the loss of existing housing.

Although Vermont has made progress in regulatory reform, state and local permitting processes remain fragmented. They often favor lower-density, single-family homes over more affordable housing options that are attainable for a wider range of residents, including mixed-income, multi-unit development. Local opposition and concerns about preserving community character frequently delay or scale back projects, increasing the development cost.

These issues are compounded by an aging and limited construction workforce, rising material costs, and fierce competition for buildable land served by existing infrastructure. Consequently, many housing projects are financially unviable without significant subsidies—a shrinking resource as pandemic recovery funds diminish.

Overcoming this intricate web of challenges requires a coordinated strategy that advances regulatory reforms, prioritizes infrastructure investment, and offers strong support for home builders. Only through such comprehensive and systemic action can Vermont ensure access to affordable housing for all its residents.

Tasked with finding solutions, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the Land Access Opportunity Board (LAOB), the Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA), and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) began their work in 2024. From June through December, we engaged with stakeholders and focus groups and broadly surveyed over 750 Vermonters to gather ideas and suggestions to increase the supply of affordable housing in and around downtowns and village centers. Addressing the depth and breadth of this complex issue within a six-month timeframe was challenging. This report presents actionable recommendations for the next steps Vermont can take to incentivize affordable housing development in Vermont thanks to the thoughtful and dedicated participation of the team and stakeholders.

# Recommendations

The study group makes the following recommendations based on the research, outreach findings and analysis contained in this report.

## Act 250

**As Act 250 location-based jurisdiction reforms are implemented, adapt the priority housing project<sup>1</sup> regulatory incentives.**

1. **New Funding Incentive for Act 250 Tier 1A.** Extend municipal authority in Tier 1A<sup>2</sup> areas for priority housing project infrastructure bonds to help build affordable homes using debt serviced by municipal and education property tax increment.
2. **Remove Unit Cap on Act 250 Tier 1B.** Apply a priority housing project Act 250 exemption to Tier 1B areas with no unit cap to encourage affordable unit production.
3. **Make Act 250 Teir 1B the Default (Opt-Out vs. Opt-In).** Make Act 250 exemptions the default in all Tier 1B areas and establish that municipalities can only opt-out of Tier 1B with demonstrated progress toward housing production targets and fair housing compliance.

## Funding Incentives

**Continue to provide data-driven and needs-based funding for affordable housing solutions.**

1. **Subsidize Affordable Homes.** Continue to subsidize housing development to help close cost/affordability gaps to ensure ongoing affordability for renters and homeowners. Funding sources should be stable and predictable to allow

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<sup>1</sup> Priority Housing Projects are mixed-income housing projects with affordable units located within and surrounding certain state designated areas eligible for an Act 250 exemption. Find more information, [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Act 181 reforms Act 250 and establishes place-based Act 250 jurisdiction using tiers, mostly derived from the state's 11 regional plans. Tier 1 will include areas planned for development in and around centers where more land development will be exempt from Act 250. Tier 3 will include important natural resources where more land development will be subject to Act 250. All other areas of the state are Tier 2, which will mostly maintain the current jurisdiction. Interim exemptions apply as the tiers are established.

developers and municipalities to plan effectively. Support housing funders continued efforts to innovate funding and financing options.

2. **Continue strategic collaborations.** Foster partnerships across federal, state, non-governmental organizations, and philanthropic sectors to secure additional funding for subsidies. A recent example is the Housing Funders and Regulators Roundtable, which created a “one-stop shop” to help home builders access inter-agency funding sources and resolve regulatory issues early in the development process.
3. **Encourage Municipal Action for Affordable Homes.** Expand policy and funding incentives for municipal action that supports affordable housing, such as: municipal fee waivers, housing trust funds, land inventories and donations, infrastructure development, bonding for housing infrastructure, and land banking (for more information, see Act 181 Land Bank Study).
4. **Continue Municipal Planning Grants for Bylaw Modernization & Inclusionary Policies. Maintain Municipal Planning Grant** funding and Community Investment Board (formerly the Downtown Development Board) incentives to assist municipalities with implementing the HOME Act of 2023 and Act 181 of 2024 that expands opportunities for affordable housing development.

## Inclusionary Zoning

**Support inclusionary zoning (IZ)<sup>3</sup> as a local regulatory tool to increase the production of affordable housing.**

1. **Fund Municipal Inclusionary Zoning.** Provide technical assistance to communities seeking to draft and adopt local inclusionary zoning ordinances as a tool to mitigate the displacement of low- and moderate-income families, affordable housing loss, year-round housing loss, and high market demands (lack of affordability). One way

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<sup>3</sup> Local IZ ordinances can include mandatory requirements or offer incentives for developers to incorporate affordable, deed-restricted housing units into new or renovated projects. By addressing the impact of exclusionary zoning, IZ seeks to better integrate the housing market and ensure a steady supply of affordable housing. Ideally, IZ policies provide low- and moderate-income households with opportunities to live in high-amenity downtowns and village centers close to transit, jobs, schools, and stores. However, the [effectiveness of IZ in achieving these goals remains a topic of debate](#). Currently, three Chittenden County communities—Burlington, South Burlington, and Hinesburg—have adopted IZ ordinances. Winooski and Stowe have considered implementing IZ but are unlikely to do so due to its administrative complexity and their limited staff capacity.

to accomplish this could be support for inclusionary zoning through the Municipal Planning Grant program.

2. **Technical Assistance for Compliance.** The ongoing responsibility of monitoring compliance with affordability requirements is a barrier to communities seeking to establish inclusionary zoning. Technical assistance to support affordability compliance monitoring could help alleviate this burden on municipalities.
3. **Explore Act 250 Tier 1A Affordability.** Explore the impact of an inclusionary requirement for projects in Tier 1A areas with over 100 units to increase mixed-income housing and affordable housing production.

## Appeals of Permit Decisions

**Ease permitting, reduce appeals, explore equitable access by underserved communities, and expedite conflict resolution for affordable projects.**

1. **Buffer Affordable Housing Projects from Appeals.** Research and establish a clear legal standard that protects affordable housing projects from development review downsizing or grounds for appeals that have an exclusionary impact on affordable housing.
2. **Expedite Appeals for Affordable Housing Projects.** Establish an appeals body able to provide expedited, consolidated, and time-certain review for appeals that include affordability, including priority housing, inclusionary zoning, or other projects that meet an affordability threshold.
3. **Support Rapid Remedies by the Human Rights Commission.** Continue to support the enforcement function of the Vermont Human Rights Commission to protect the public's interest in equal access to housing and pursue rapid remedies for development review downsizing and exclusionary appeals of affordable housing.
4. **Explore Equity & Access for Permit Appeals.** Study factors relating to affordable housing permit appeals and explore equity and access in future appeals structures, including who has status to appeal, timelines to resolution, and impacts to underserved communities in planning and regulation-making processes and development review.

## Brownfields

**Ease costs associated with brownfield remediation for mixed-income affordable housing.**

1. **Expedite Brownfield Reviews.** Expedite brownfield review, including reducing the comment period from 30 to 10 days.

2. **Provide Subsidies for Decontamination.** Subsidize costs of decontamination, including but not limited to developing a state facility for disposal for more affordable disposal.
3. **Study Regulatory Thresholds for Contamination for Adjustment.** Explore regulatory thresholds for contaminated soils among the states to understand how Vermont may vary and consider opportunities to reduce regulatory thresholds for contaminated soils.

## Tax Policy

### Explore tax policy to support affordable housing projects.

1. **Encourage Land Donation for Affordable Housing.** Provide tax incentives for land donations for affordable housing when in areas designated for growth and served by publicly funded infrastructure.
2. **Expand the [Charitable Housing Tax Credit](#).** Increase the charitable housing tax credit, currently limited to \$5 million, which is met annually.
3. **Explore a [Land Value Tax](#).** In addition to financing priority housing project infrastructure in Act 250 Tier 1A areas (see Act 250 recommendations above), support a land value taxation study by the Department of Taxes. Land value taxation is a method of property taxation that assesses the value of the land more than improvements. It removes the disincentive to invest and improve properties. It incentivizes developing higher-value but under-maximized infrastructure-served sites (like under-used parking lots in water and sewer service areas) for housing. A study would help frame policy alternatives, and model approaches to spur development.
4. **Consider Residential Tax Rate Impacts.** Study the impacts of the homestead/non-homestead tax rates on the supply of affordable year-round housing.

## Public Outreach

The public outreach process engaged a wide range of stakeholders to shape the policy recommendations included in this report. It began with targeted interviews with focus groups and professionals, including developers, housing advocates, and municipal officials, to identify barriers to affordable housing development and explore solutions and incentives to support development. Policy recommendations were drafted from the interview process and included in a broader public survey to gauge public support.

## Expert Focus Groups

The study group began its outreach by identifying expert stakeholders with direct knowledge and experience of policies on affordable housing production, including developers, housing advocates, and municipal officials. These stakeholders are listed in the appendix. Developers were interviewed one-on-one, and the other stakeholder groups were engaged using focus group discussions.

The focus group outreach had two objectives:

1. Identify policy and administrative alternatives based on stakeholder knowledge and experience; and
2. Frame broader public outreach on policy alternatives using a standard survey.

Relevant studies and existing literature also helped frame the questions for stakeholders. The study group leads asked the same questions of all participants. Participants were provided the questions before the interviews and focus groups. The questions asked include:

1. *What are the most significant regulatory barriers to affordable housing development?*
2. *What are the biggest non-regulatory barriers to affordable housing development?*
3. *On priority housing projects, what worked and what didn't?*
4. *In municipalities with an inclusionary zoning ordinance, what works for affordable housing development, and what does not?*
5. *What are the most effective incentives (subsidy or regulatory relief measures) to produce affordable housing development; what is adequate where/which situations?*
6. *What are effective regulatory (inclusionary) requirements to produce affordable housing development; what is adequate where/which situations?*
7. *What other administrative or governance factors should be considered for new public subsidy/ regulatory oversight?*

8. *If you could design a program, what would be your recommendation for replacing priority housing projects moving forward?*

The study group took general notes during the focus groups and interviews. The participants' statements are anonymized to the stakeholder audience unless written attribution has been previously coordinated and confirmed with the participant. The summary findings are below, with detailed notes available in the Appendix.

## Focus Group Findings

**A subsidy is necessary for affordable housing** to overcome market pressures, especially increasing production costs. Subsidies can take many forms, including regulatory relief (which lowers cost and timeline barriers), fee waivers, and direct funding.

**Priority Housing Projects (PHPs)** have been effective at delivering affordable mixed-income housing projects and bringing affordable housing developers 'to the table'. Stakeholders broadly support the PHP policy and suggested ways to maintain affordable housing for mixed-income households in the new land use framework.

**Inclusionary Zoning can be helpful in denser areas.** Developers noted that Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) works well in high-demand urban areas but requires subsidies to be feasible, especially in lower-income zones. They highlighted the challenges of IZ in rural areas where it may be less effective and more expensive.

**Certain market conditions are increasing housing costs.** Increased housing demand, workforce shortages, developer shortages, construction materials costs and supply chain issues, brownfield remediation costs, water/wastewater costs, other project infrastructure costs, and land acquisition costs have all contributed to higher housing costs and reduced supply.

**Market pressures are stressing affordability.** Many stakeholders mentioned market pressures related to second homes and short-term rentals and expressed concern for low-income displacement in high-opportunity (strong economy) communities to support affordable housing.

**Reducing production costs requires long-term systems change.** Long-term changes mentioned in focused groups include building the construction workforce, exploring modular construction or modular components and pre-approved designs for affordability, modifying the tax code to reduce pressures on year-round affordable homes, creating new platforms for collaborative private/public investment, ongoing land use reforms, and support the structural capacity of non-profit housing developers.

**Affordable housing must be a primary public interest in all policies.** There are many competing public interests that affordable housing development is expected to address or pay for. These can appear as municipal impact fees, brownfield cleanup costs, agricultural soil fees, water/sewer enterprise infrastructure needs, discretionary review processes, school capital needs, or transportation improvements. Many stakeholders want to see affordable housing as a primary public interest so that competing public interests do not frustrate affordable housing delivery. Stakeholders suggested ways to address competing public interests to keep affordable housing projects on track, including accelerated review timelines, fee relief, or new mechanisms to subsidize municipal impacts or infrastructure connections in a fair and measurable way.

**Local resistance to affordable housing can slow or stop development.** Stakeholders reported that interested parties can disrupt housing projects on highly discretionary grounds like character of the area standards and viewshed protections, which can frustrate broader public interests like sufficient housing for all. Many stakeholders called for a faster way to resolve affordable housing permit disputes. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of ‘front-loading’ more decisions into the public plan-making and regulation-making process so development review and permitting becomes less discretionary and more predictable. Stakeholders also raised equity concerns about the forthcoming Act 250 Tier 1A and 1B jurisdiction (exempt and partially exempt areas), which rely on municipalities ‘opting-in’ to Tier 1 versus ‘opting-out’. There is concern that the opt-in requirement could result in wealthier and higher opportunity municipalities maintaining higher barriers to affordable housing than others.

**Vermont’s market conditions vary significantly by location.** In specific locations, resident displacement and the loss of year-round homes for workers to second homes are concerns. In others, very little large-scale development is happening or no development at all. Stakeholders emphasized that policy approaches must be linked to data and the Statewide Housing Needs Assessment.

**Local administrative capacity for affordable housing and housing-supportive infrastructure varies greatly.** For instance, resort towns can have major affordability needs but need more staff to negotiate and manage policy solutions affordability. The lack of local administrators and project managers can frustrate opportunities for affordable development in lower-capacity municipalities.

**Developers face real difficulties finding development-ready locations served by available infrastructure.** Stakeholders report that the land areas served by ready infrastructure, where other location-based incentives align, are extremely limited. Many called for a more permissive and coordinated approach to infrastructure investment and related development-ready incentives provided by the State.



## Public Survey

### Survey Objectives

The Housing Policy Survey was a nine-question survey developed to gather public input on actions that could most effectively promote mixed-income, mixed-use developments, support affordable housing development across the state, and enhance housing incentives within state-designated areas. While not designed as a scientific study, the survey was a tool to gauge public perspectives on proposed policy approaches and actions. The responses provide valuable insights into community preferences and priorities, offering guidance for shaping recommendations and future policy decisions.

The study group engaged a wide range of stakeholders as directed in Act 181, including housing developers, municipal officials, advocacy groups, and community members. A complete list of organizations that received the survey is provided in the Appendix. As a follow up to the findings of the policy experts and focus group interviews, the survey was developed to collect more detailed feedback from a broader pool of perspectives. The survey questions focused on key themes identified during the interviews and areas where policy consensus remained unresolved.

### Survey Design and Participation

The survey was conducted online using SurveyMonkey and remained open for 31-days, from December 10th to January 10, 2025. **757 responses were received**, reflecting input from a diverse range of stakeholders. Participants that identified as members of the public made up 65% of respondents, demonstrating significant engagement from this group. Municipal government officials constituted 20% of the responses, while state government officials, including state representatives, accounted for 15%. The survey's broad distribution through partner organizations and state representatives ensured inclusive participation and robust representation of various interests and demographics.

### Key Takeaways

As described in more detail below, the survey results demonstrate strong public support for a range of targeted actions that could address barriers to affordable housing development in Vermont. A consistent theme emerged across all questions: the need for streamlined processes, stable funding, and innovative approaches to effectively meet the state's housing needs. Mixed-income housing received overwhelming endorsement, with nearly 70% of respondents supporting the inclusion of units for different income levels in larger-scale developments. Similarly, participants emphasized the value of faster housing approvals and more predictable permitting as key incentives for affordable housing

development, reflecting a desire to reduce administrative delays that can impede construction and development.

Stable funding sources and infrastructure investments were also identified as critical priorities. Respondents ranked predictable revenue streams and funding for essential infrastructure — such as water, sewer, and transportation systems — among the most effective strategies for reducing development costs and supporting affordable housing projects. These findings highlight the importance of targeted financial support to ensure effective long-term planning for affordable housing and sustainable development.

Finally, respondents strongly supported addressing regulatory barriers, particularly by narrowing the scope of appeals and expediting the permit review process. Creative incentives, such as increasing unit limits in new 1A and 1B areas where projects include affordable units and promoting local inclusionary zoning, also resonated strongly. Collectively, the survey findings point to a clear public preference for policies that prioritize efficient permit review, provide predictable funding sources, and innovate in the new Tiered areas to tackle Vermont’s housing challenges.

## Survey Findings

Participants answered questions related to various potential actions that could be taken to address issues that may be barriers to affordable housing development based on the main themes that emerged during the stakeholder interviews. Charts showing details on all survey results can be found in the Appendix. An analysis of each question is provided below.

**Mixed-Income Housing Support.** A vast majority of respondents, almost 70%, expressed support for including a mix of units for different income levels in new, larger-scale housing developments to promote affordability. They emphasized the importance of enhancing housing affordability. 25% of respondents selected, “It depends on other factors,” noting that there is some nuance to the public’s preferred approach to incentivizing affordable housing and that blanket policies may not capture the complete picture of what is appropriate where.

**Incentives for Affordable Housing Development.** Faster housing approvals emerged as the respondent’s preferred incentive, including making the processes for obtaining permits for affordable housing projects quicker and more predictable. The next most popular potential policy action was support for needs-based funding. This would include providing funding incentives for housing partners like municipalities and public-private housing partnerships to further support affordable housing production for project components such as infrastructure and site control. These findings highlight the administrative and

financial hurdles that can impede housing projects and the need to simplify these processes and provide strategic financial support to support the creation of affordable housing.

**Funding Strategies for Affordable Housing.** Respondents' top choice of funding strategies, based on their potential to create affordable housing for lower-income households, was ensuring predictable funding sources to support affordable housing development, including the creation of stable revenue sources for affordable housing programs. This action could support long-term planning efforts by housing partners, including those led by municipalities and developers. The next most popular funding strategy identified by participants was funding to support infrastructure specifically. As described in the survey question, this would include the expansion of water, wastewater, stormwater, and transportation infrastructure to reduce the overall development cost burden on affordable housing developers and partners. Collectively, these findings emphasize the critical role of stable and direct funding mechanisms, including those that support infrastructure, in facilitating affordable housing projects.

**Addressing Environmental Barriers.** Respondents ranked providing financial subsidies to offset cleanup costs as the measure they believe would most effectively address this concern. Participants ranked updating the regulatory thresholds for handling these contaminated soils as the next most effective measure that could be taken. Concerns about the lengthiness of the brownfield remediation process emerged during the interviews with housing developers at the outset of the outreach efforts related to Act 181. Housing developers identified that a shorter and more predictable review process related to brownfield remediation would be most effective. While this feedback does not directly align with what we heard from survey participants, it is likely that the public and many developers would not be familiar with the intricacies of this process.

**Improving Permit Review Processes.** Respondents prioritized the narrowing of grounds of appeals of affordable projects, as well as faster resolution of permit appeals, as their top responses. This includes the need to focus appeals on true project defects, impacts, and direct harms and reducing the ability to file appeals based on exclusionary objectives for affordable housing projects. Respondents felt that implementing more explicit and expedited timelines for appeals and project reviews would provide greater certainty for housing developers. These findings point to a strong consensus on reducing bureaucratic delays and improving efficiency in permitting procedures, especially appeals processes.

**Strategies for Exempt Housing Areas.** With the implementation of Act 181 and the sunset of Priority Housing Projects in the state's designated areas, there is some concern that the incentives that currently bring affordable housing developers to the table

when large-scale developers are creating projects will be lost. The project team felt it was essential to include a question to this effect in the survey. However, it is the most technical question included in the survey and may have been difficult for some who are not as familiar with this process to participate. Participants ranked “increasing unit limits for affordable housing projects” as their top choice for an incentive in these areas. This would include strategies that would raise the maximum number of units allowed for housing developments, including affordable units in these Tier 1A and Tier 1B areas. Participants ranked switching the municipal opt-in option for Tier 1B areas to a municipal opt-out option as their second-choice strategy. Specifically, this would mean that instead of requiring municipalities to opt into the Tier 1B category areas, municipalities can opt-out if they can commit to fair and affordable housing targets at the municipal level in an alternative way.

**Supporting Mixed-Income Development.** Respondents believe that financial support, including increasing the amount of direct subsidies or low-interest loans for affordable housing projects as well as supporting efforts such as affordable housing development funds to provide revenue for affordable housing trusts or land banking were the most effective options. Expedited permitting, such as fast-track permitting for affordable housing developments, and promoting local inclusionary zoning, including municipal support for the development, adoption, and implementation of these zoning measures, also emerged as highly ranked options. These responses highlight the continued need for additional revenue sources to support affordable housing development as well as the respondent’s support for making permit review more efficient and aligning zoning with affordable housing goals.

### Open-Ended Feedback

Survey respondents cited regulatory improvements, infrastructure investments, the need for different types of “affordable” housing, funding mechanisms, equity needs, and bigger-picture policy goals as the most critical elements to encourage PHP housing. These are summarized in more detail below.

Regarding regulatory and zoning improvements, participants called for simplified and streamlined permitting processes to reduce costs and delays. Several participants suggested providing zoning templates and technical support to towns to update their zoning regulations, especially for implementing inclusionary zoning. Limiting the power of appeals to block projects and addressing frivolous objections were also frequently mentioned as critical steps to accelerate affordable housing development. A number of participants criticized Act 250, with some finding that Act 250 has contributed to the current housing shortage and others wishing for more environmental protection.

Infrastructure investments emerged as another priority. Respondents prioritized funding for water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure, particularly in village centers.

In addressing housing types and affordability, participants underscored the importance of promoting a mix of affordable, workforce, and market-rate housing to cater to diverse needs. Another key recommendation was expanding funding and incentives for “missing middle” housing and starter homes like those described in the ‘Homes for All’ program. Ensuring affordability for low-income households was a recurring theme. Many highlighted the potential of adaptive reuse of existing buildings, underutilized properties, and expanding support for modular and manufactured housing.

Respondents proposed several tax and funding mechanisms to support housing efforts. Suggestions included lowering property taxes to reduce the overall cost of living in the state by revisiting education funding models. Others suggested creating incentives for private developers through tax breaks or low-interest loans. Increasing state investment in housing projects and exploring tools like TIF districts were also emphasized. Some advocated for land value taxes and higher taxes on second homes to deter speculation.

Community engagement and equity were highlighted as essential components of successful housing policies. Addressing public opposition, often characterized as “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) attitudes, through outreach and education was seen as crucial. Respondents emphasized the importance of community integration in mixed-income housing projects and the alignment of housing policies with workforce needs and job creation efforts.

Participants also identified cost drivers as a major barrier to affordable housing. Tackling high construction costs by standardizing designs and encouraging local manufacturing were common suggestions. Eliminating redundant or costly regulatory requirements, such as excessive energy codes, was another frequently mentioned strategy.

Finally, respondents offered long-term policy suggestions and visions for Vermont’s housing landscape. These included encouraging universities to house more students on campus to free up housing stock, focusing on homeownership opportunities to build equity and stability, and increasing incentives for accessory dwelling units (ADUs). Many stressed the importance of protecting Vermont’s rural charm while addressing growth strategically, balancing density goals with preserving open spaces and small-town character.

# Appendix

To view the appendix, use this [link](#) or click below to access the full document.

Legislative Charge.....	2
Study Background.....	2
Housing Needs in Vermont.....	3
Regional Housing Incentives.....	4
State Housing Incentives.....	4
Study Group Meeting Notes.....	5
Meeting of June 17, 2024.....	5
Meeting of July 10, 2024.....	7
Meeting of July 12, 2024.....	11
Meeting of November 7, 2024.....	12
Meeting of December 19, 2024.....	14
Meeting of January 10, 2025.....	16
Focus Group Notes.....	17
Focus Group Participants.....	17
Regional and Municipal Officials Notes.....	18
Housing Advocacy Focus Group Notes.....	22
Housing Developers Interview Notes.....	24
Survey Materials.....	29
Promotion & Distribution.....	29
Survey Results.....	31
Open-Ended Responses.....	38
Priority Housing Project.....	62
2024 Flowchart.....	62
Most Recent Unit Data: Act 250 Exempt Priority Housing Projects.....	63