

XI. Implementation

Implementation of the goals and policies outlined in this document depends upon the cooperative efforts of the Region's member communities, along with the efforts of the numerous local, regional, state and federal agencies, and private interests involved in land use planning activities. The RPC must work with all of these groups to successfully implement this Plan, and the Plan has been written with this idea as its foundation.

At the federal level, the Regional Plan can be used to justify and prioritize the use of federal funds for community development, transportation improvements, natural resource protection and management, and other investments. Careful planning and clear statements of regional goals and priorities help to ensure that federal money is spent usefully and fairly. State funding can be secured through the same process, and state government can use the Regional Plan in several other ways, as well. One of the goals of Act 250 is to include local and regional planning concerns in the state regulatory process. These concerns are addressed by requiring developers to show that projects will conform to local and regional plans. Regional plans are used in the certification of solid waste facilities and in the granting of certificates of public good for electric generation and transmission facilities; they may also have an effect on state policy through the statutory requirement for review of state agency plans (24 V.S.A. §4305(d)).

At the local and regional levels, the Regional Plan interacts with plans of surrounding regions, municipal plans adopted by member towns, and with the activities of developers and other private groups. Implementation of this plan can only proceed if its goals and policies are compatible with those of adjoining regions and member towns. It is the responsibility of the RPC to provide assistance to its members in the development of their town plans and to help ensure that those plans are in the best interest of not only an individual town, but for all towns in the Region. This Plan sets forth guidelines for the most effective implementation measures to be developed by local governmental bodies with assistance from the RPC. Finally, it is the duty of the RPC, through the adoption of this Plan, to provide general advisory guidance for managing the growth and development of the Region. Additionally, the Plan should provide guidance to developers to help ensure the orderly, efficient, and healthful use of land and resources.

A. Determination of Substantial Regional Impact

The RPC should act as a review agency for any proposed development of substantial regional impact. The RPC is required under Vermont law (24 VSA §4345(a)) to define "substantial regional impact as that term may be used with respect to its region." As such, the RPC defines "substantial regional impact" as:

Any proposed development of such size, scale, character or intensity of use that it has a sustained influence upon: the growth and development in adjacent towns; the regional economy; affordable housing stock; or regionally important cultural and natural resources or infrastructure; and meets one or more of the following criteria:

1. It may affect the Region's economy by:
 - (a) Generating new employment equal to or greater than 1 percent (1%) of the Region's existing employment as measured by the Department of Employment and Training; or
 - (b) Increasing the cost or availability of affordable housing in the town in which the project is located or in adjacent towns;
2. It may affect the infrastructure capacity by:
 - (a) Substantially affecting the safety of the traveling public on highways and other transportation facilities within other towns;
 - (b) Generating peak hour traffic equal or greater than five percent (5%) of the peak hour capacity of the transportation network serving the project site;
 - (c) Contributing to a reduction in the peak hour Level of Service (LOS) from D to E or from E to F;
 - (d) Substantially changing the service area or capacity of utility services, including but not limited to, public water and sewer systems, demand for energy, and/or solid waste services;
 - (e) Generating student populations that will adversely affect school capacities in one or more neighboring communities and/or union high school districts;
or,
 - (f) Creating capital improvements such as the extension, upgrading or enlargement of electrical transmission lines.
3. It may change the existing settlement patterns in the Region by:
 - (a) Requiring the alteration, degradation or destruction of designated regionally significant historic, cultural, natural, aesthetic or scenic features;
 - (b) Locating in geographic areas that have not supported the type, scale or intensity of proposed development in the past, and is not supported by local or regional Future Land Use Maps; or,
 - (c) Disregarding the scale, architectural or design features of nearby existing structures.
4. It may affect the natural resources of the Region by:
 - (a) Producing excessive pollutants or substantially degrading air or water quality;
 - (b) Altering, degrading or destroying the animal and/or plant habitat as identified in this Plan as worthy of protection; or,

- (c) Substantially fragmenting or reducing the area or productive capacity of regionally significant forested and agricultural lands;

The definition of substantial regional impact shall include both individual project proposals as well as cumulative impacts of multi-phased projects as described in this Chapter. Proposed developments that have substantial regional impacts may have positive as well as negative impacts.

An impact analysis should be provided for any project of substantial regional impact. The analysis should include such effects as population growth in other towns, impact on infrastructure capacity (roads, traffic congestion, public water and wastewater facilities, schools, etc.), and impacts on cultural and natural resources (critical wildlife habitat, water quality, scenic resources, etc.).

1. Cumulative Development Impacts

When certain development occurs incrementally, there is concern for the impacts resulting from that cumulative growth. Development or a series of developments, when located within a limited geographic area, under the control of a single applicant, and planned incrementally over a relatively short period of time, can produce environmental, social, and economic impacts that are contrary to sound and coordinated comprehensive planning, which is the goal of this Plan and Vermont law. Incremental development review methods have the potential of failing to adequately evaluate the cumulative impacts of growth within an area. (Examples of this kind of development could include a large multi-phased subdivision or recreational area such as a ski resort.)

In these situations, the RPC may request cumulative impact review by requesting, coordinating and reviewing cumulative impact studies. The scope of each cumulative impact study or master plan should address impacts to both the natural and human environment and offer measures to avoid and/or mitigate adverse impacts. The costs of such studies shall be borne by the applicant.

B. Implementation

The Regional Plan should be implemented in a number of ways. Most implementation measures rely on coordination with municipal planning and regulation efforts, as well as the efforts of other municipal, regional, state, federal and private entities. Implementation of the Regional Plan consists of the following measures:

- **Municipal Planning.** The RPC will offer assistance to municipalities as they prepare new or updated plans, bylaws, ordinances, and other implementation tools. RPC staff will help local planning commissions assemble and analyze data, conduct research and surveys, and prepare text and maps. Whenever requested by a municipality, the RPC will also review local plans to evaluate their consistency with the goals of 24 V.S.A. §4302, and their compatibility with the Regional Plan and the approved plans of other municipalities in the region. Currently, all towns have plans approved

and planning processes confirmed by the RPC, which makes them eligible for the state municipal planning grant program.

- **Training.** The RPC will organize, sponsor, and conduct workshops and training seminars for local officials as well as hosting workshops with state agencies and the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (Vermont Interactive Television). RPC staff frequently meets with local boards to address specific issues and/or concerns and is often the most effective means of outreach to its member towns. The GIS Planner often assists towns with specific mapping needs and training of local officials.
- **Special Projects.** Member towns often want to undertake special planning studies to address a particular issue in their community, e.g. resource mapping, transportation studies, emergency (rapid) response plans. The RPC is available to assist towns either as a principal consultant or with technical and data support services.
- **Mapping.** Every effort will be made to ensure that GIS activities are supported and accessible to municipalities in the Region. The RPC has a full complement of GIS hardware and software and a GIS Planner (as well as other staff) trained in the operation of such systems. The RPC has undertaken many mapping projects for its towns in the past, and will continue to do so in the future.
- **Grant assistance.** The RPC will continue to assist municipalities in the preparation of applications for grants to support planning initiatives, housing or economic development projects, and other programs of public benefit, e.g. Municipal Planning Grants, Municipal Education Grants, EPA Brownfields Grants, and Town Highway Structures Program. The RPC will also continue to assist towns and agencies with project management services.
- **Collaboration.** RPC's goals can also be achieved by close collaboration with other state, private and/or public organizations as well as other regional planning commissions. Combining resources can be an effective means of achieving a common interest and reinforce the commission's goals and programs. It also provides an opportunity to aggregate resources that might not otherwise be available.
- **Committee Assignments.** The RPC established special focus committees to address particular issues of importance to the Region. These committees include: Executive, Budget, Personnel, Permit Review and Town Plan Review Committees. The RPC also appoints members and staff to serve on the boards or committees of other organizations, such as the Connecticut River Joint Commission's Vermont Watershed Advisory Commission. The RPC also established two advisory committees to guide two of the organizations bigger programs: the Transportation Advisory Committee

(TAC) and Brownfields Steering Committee. The RPC needs to evaluate the work of its committees and assignments annually.

- **Reviews of State Agency Plans.** It is important for the RPC to coordinate with state agencies and evaluate the impacts of state agency plans and programs on municipalities and the region, and to provide responses accordingly.
- **Development Reviews.** Under state law the RPC is enabled to participate in various regulatory and non-regulatory proceedings. The RPC takes a very active role in reviewing every Act 250 application that it receives to determine conformance with the Regional Plan. The RPC should be active in proceedings that have a bearing on the Region: Department of Public Service (Section 248), Water Resources Board, and Rules put forward by state agencies.

Additional implementation measures rely on coordination with municipal planning and regulation efforts, as well as the efforts of other municipal, regional, state, federal and private entities

C. Plan Relationship

For this Plan to be effective, the plans of adjacent regions and member towns must be considered and efforts made to ensure that all plans are coordinated and consistent with one another. It is therefore advisable to review the appropriate plans to determine if conflicts exist and resolve any differences cooperatively. As of the adoption of this Plan, all towns in the Region have duly adopted municipal plans approved by the RPC pursuant to 24 V.S.A. §4350. Upon request by member towns, the RPC works with local planning commissions to draft or amend municipal plans; if a town wishes to have an Act 200 approved plan, this process includes helping the local planning commission to incorporate the required elements and planning goals into the plan. It is equally important to respect the wishes and planning goals of towns without approved plans. The RPC strives to include the perspectives of these towns in its deliberations through local representation on the Board of Commissioners.

The three Vermont regional planning commissions that adjoin southern Windsor County are Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee, Windham and Rutland Regional Commissions. A fourth adjoins the Region to the east in New Hampshire: the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission. Each has adopted a regional plan. The RPC has reviewed each of them, and taken care to ensure that the goals, policies, and recommendations of the Regional Plan are compatible with those of plans adopted by adjacent commissions. Due to the developmental nature of the local, regional, and state agency plans, the RPC provides elements of its plan for review and continually reviews elements of adjoining regions and member communities for consistency. The RPC is working with the various local, private and state entities to ensure planning consistency at all levels. As such, the RPC has provided each town in the Region; the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs; the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources; the Southern Windsor/Windham Solid Waste Management District; Conservation Commissions; Chambers of Commerce; regional

development corporations; and abutting towns and regional commissions with copies of the draft of the Regional Plan and an invitation to comment.

Each town plan in the Region uses different future land use designations or terminology; however, many of these proposed designations are similar in nature or effect. In so far as most town plans designate areas of concentrated development to be surrounded by rural areas, the Regional Plan is compatible with all of the town plans in the Region.

Should conflicts between the Regional Plan and plans of adjacent regions or member towns arise, the RPC will attempt to resolve them to the benefit of all affected parties, so that the future visions of all affected parties can be realized. RPC staff can assist municipal planning commissions in updating town plans at their request. In doing so, the update process will strive to: encourage compatibility with neighboring town plans, lead to more effective management of the Region's lands, and attain both the state planning goals and the goals and policies of the Regional Plan.