

Mount Holly Town Plan

Adopted _____

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BACKGROUND

This plan is intended to provide a clear, written standard for orderly development that will preserve the town's distinctly rural character and appearance, while providing community services, as well as recreational and cultural opportunities. It is intended that the Plan be used in a positive manner as a tool in guiding the direction of growth and development in a way which is both economically feasible and environmentally acceptable. Results of efforts to achieve these goals will be measured by the future residents' quality of life.

The Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act (Title 24 V.S.A., Chapter 117), authorizes, but does not require towns to develop plans.

However, the state limits the authority of towns that do not plan. For example, towns without current plans may not adopt a capital improvement program or levy impact fees, and they have no standing in Act 250 proceedings in which development proposals are evaluated for their impact upon the town.

Chapter 117 has been amended on several occasions since 1967. Major revisions occurred in 1988 and with the passage of Act 200 in 2004. These laws sought to integrate local, regional, and state agency planning in a bottom-up process; strengthened the role of town plans regarding local, regional, and state decision making; and established state planning goals.

Act 200 also created a process for regional planning commissions to approve town plans that are consistent with state planning goals.

The state passed Act 115 to assist towns in their efforts to avoid some of the results of development that were dramatically changing the character of the state in the late 1960's. The state does not discourage development but believes that the plans can enable a town to:

1. Protect its residents from overcrowding, traffic, and loss of privacy and quiet
2. Direct growth and development to provide an optimal physical and cultural environment
3. Protect private property
4. Reduce property taxes

24 V.S.A § 4382 specifies twelve elements that must be included in a plan adopted by a town: a statement of objectives, policies, and programs; a land

use plan; a transportation plan; a utility and facilities plan; a statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas; an educational facilities plan; an implementation program; a statement indicating how the plan relates to development trends in adjacent communities; an energy plan; a housing element; an economic development element; and a flood resilience element. In addition to containing all the required elements, plans must also be consistent with a series of statutory goals listed in [24 VSA §4302](#). Consistency with the goals means that the goals have been considered and addressed in the process used to prepare the plan, not that the plan include all the goals.

A Vision for This Plan

The vision for the Mount Holly Town Plan is to reflect the collective values and goals of the Town's residents and to develop policies designed to guide future development in alignment with these values and goals. The official adoption of the Plan represents a conscious community decision about the Town's future character, its priorities for land use, and its conservation of physical resources, based in large part on Mount Holly's sense of identity as a Town and its residents' desire to carefully preserve those qualities that distinguish it.

The Mount Holly Town Plan will help ensure some local control over the future of our community. It directs state agencies to take only those actions in Town which are compatible with the goals and policies of the Town Plan.

The Mount Holly Town Plan sets forth goals and policies that establish a standard for review in Act 250 proceedings and other state regulatory processes. The language used is intended to be sufficiently clear for any citizen to understand and be guided accordingly. Its provisions shall be "mandatory in nature" and contain sufficient specificity to withstand a legal challenge.

Mount Holly's residents believe strongly that their community is a unique and special place, a belief resulting in a sense of civic responsibility and shared commitment to the Town's welfare.

The unique and special character of Mount Holly is principally derived from the rural character of the community, its historical land uses and settlement patterns, and the natural beauty of its mountain setting, containing large areas of wooded and open land, wetlands, and other habitats.

The Town Plan is designed to protect and reinforce all of these cultural and physical elements and, particularly, to preserve the rural nature of the Town by directing well-considered and controlled growth.

These aims are beneficial to both the individual landowner and the community at large, for it is the protection of the rural character and beautiful natural setting that underpins both the economic value and the aesthetic value of all land in the Town. Achieving these aims may, from time to time, involve conflicts in specific situations between a landowner and the community. Adoption of clearly stated ordinances will be helpful in minimizing such situations, and it is equally important that there be a variety of procedures and forums for discussion and a willingness to listen respectfully to one another, so that a full and fair consideration is given to the differing viewpoints.

Mount Holly today is facing increasing pressure to develop. Mount Holly is concerned about the impact of major projects within the Town and surrounding areas. Our town is bisected by Vermont Route 103, one of the state's most important east-west travel corridors, which could easily bring development that is in conflict with the historical settlement patterns of Mount Holly. As nearby towns see a proliferation of industrial scale renewable energy generation sites, we wish to plan for the impact they would have on our town. Mount Holly is also likely to experience development pressure in all areas of town due to growth associated with the Vail Resorts' Okemo Mountain Resort. In recent years, advances in wastewater treatment technologies has made previously undevelopable land available for residential development. Major changes in communications technology, such as the imminent arrival of cellular phone signal, being one of the few towns in the state to have 100% of homes served by broadband, and the pandemic-driven ability to work remotely are increasing pressure for new rural home sites in our town. It now becomes increasingly important to re-evaluate the Town's goals and objectives and present them in a new Plan that accurately represents the Town's best collective thinking. The Town of Mount Holly acknowledges the severe threat that climate change poses to every aspect of our daily lives and specific policies outlined in the town plan serve to address this serious concern.

The people of Mount Holly recognize that Mount Holly does not exist in isolation from the region and will be affected by what happens in the surrounding municipalities. However, the Plan does not suggest that Mount Holly should reflect the type and intensity of new development occurring elsewhere; rapid or incompatible growth will destroy those qualities that make Mount Holly unique. Through the implementation of the Plan, Mount

Holly can contribute to the region and the State by protecting and preserving this special and increasingly rare place. In so doing, the Town and its residents are exercising their best stewardship for these resources which have been so abundantly endowed them.

Goals

In order to achieve our vision, protect the natural environment, and guide future growth and development we identify the following goals:

1. Protect and preserve the rural nature, environment, scenic quality, and sense of community of Mount Holly.
2. Encourage, support, and maintain a community of residents and property owners with age, social, and economic diversity.
3. Address the town's changing needs through a continuous planning process involving input from members of the community.
4. Maintain the town's historic development pattern with a compact village center (tight, cohesive settlement patterns without strip development or sprawl) within a rural setting, surrounded by undeveloped areas.
5. Assure that basic needs of health, safety, education, housing, and recreation will be met and maintained at appropriate levels to be inclusive of a diverse population, and in accordance with the town plan.
6. Allow for future growth opportunities in a way that will effectively meet community needs regarding education, highway, fire protection, first response, and other usual public services, but will not place an undue burden, financial or otherwise, on the Town to provide community facilities and services.
7. Encourage and preserve the use of working lands for sustainable agricultural and forestry in order to keep these resources productive, preserve the rural character of the historic landscape outside the village center, support the local economy, and increase the availability of local products.
8. Encourage energy efficiency, energy conservation, and non-polluting renewable energy production while assuring that .
9. Assure that any project to create or modify highways, roads, trails, and drives will be consistent with the general character of the town, minimize the impact on the environment, foster desired development patterns, and ensure that the Town and State roads permit safe travel within and through the Town.

10. Require that, to the most reasonable extent possible, public utilities be located and maintained in such a way that they will not have an undue adverse effect on the scenic quality, ecology, public health, and land values of the town.
11. Protect significant educational, scenic, historical, architectural, and archeological features.
12. Encourage the development of cultural, educational, and performing arts programs and activities that may enrich the lives of town residents and visitors, and make the Town attractive as a year-round destination.
13. Preserve the character of the village center with mixed uses at a scale appropriate to the architecture and historic character of Mount Holly.
14. Prohibit incompatible and uncoordinated development activity and mitigate other development that may adversely impact any goals within this plan.
15. Conserve and protect key scenic environmental features including open spaces, steep slopes, notable ridgelines and peaks, dark skies, and clean air and water.
16. Support economic activity that will sustain a vibrant year-round resident population, while ensuring compliance with high environmental standards and which is in alignment with the Town's goals.
17. Protect and seek to expand large unfragmented forest blocks, habitat connectors, significant natural communities and habitats, vernal pools, lowland wetlands and riparian corridors.