

TOWN OF MOUNT HOLLY, VERMONT

TOWN PLAN

Adopted June 26, 1971

Background and Purpose

Mt. Holly is a rural town located on a hilly plateau on the central ridge of the Green Mountains. Its altitude ranges from about 1200 feet above sea level to 3343 feet at the summit of Okemo Mountain. Its principal population center, the village of Belmont, at 1850 feet, is one of the highest in the State. The town lies astride the watershed of the Green Mountains, since the streams in the eastern part of town drain eastward into the Black and Connecticut Rivers, while the waters in the central and western parts of town drain northwestward via Mill River and Otter Creek into Lake Champlain. The town's altitude and its remoteness from urban industrial centers give it an unusually clean, fresh air. Its location also places it in a belt of unusually high annual snowfall.

In total area Mt. Holly is one of the larger towns in Rutland County, with 29,338 acres. About one-fifth of the town is public land, in Okemo State Forest on the eastern border (2,770 acres), and the Green Mountain National Forest in the southwest (2,839 acres). Much of the land in the town is forested, or is reverting to forest from former pastures and meadows.

The soil in Mt. Holly is mainly very stony and acid, requiring much clearing and liming to produce high yields of crops, but excellent for tree production. Since many areas in the town have moderate to steep slopes, with shallow soil on rock ledge, or with tight soil layers at 18 to 24 inches, the absorption and drainage characteristics of the soil are often poor.

Agriculture and forestry have always been major concerns in the town. Dairy products, maple products, timber, pulpwood, and Christmas trees have been staples of the town economy. Numerous small woodworking industries developed in the nineteenth century, using water power and steam to produce lumber, tools, bowls, furniture, carriages and children's toys. Other small factories provided local needs, such as cheese, wool, bricks, and leather. However, with the exhaustion of virgin timber and the centralization of industry in the latter nineteenth century, these industries gradually died out. In the present century farming has also declined, as it became harder for small farms to survive in an era of large, mechanized farms.

The resulting economic depression has been offset by three principal factors. The reversion of land to forest has been reviving lumber, pulpwood, and Christmas tree production. The automobile has opened up the town as a residential area for workers in businesses and industries in centers at some distance from the town, such as Rutland, Ludlow, and Springfield. The unspoiled mountain, forest, and pastoral beauty of the town, together with the development of nearby ski areas, has attracted growing numbers of people for vacations, recreation, and retirement.

Since there is every likelihood that these trends will continue, it is the purpose of this plan to provide for the orderly development of Mt. Holly as a rural agricultural, residential, and recreational area, while protecting the values, the health, the safety, and the economic welfare of its present inhabitants and conserving its natural resources, particularly its great scenic beauty. The plan necessarily takes a long-range view, but it deals more specifically with the years 1972-1977.

Population

The population of Mt. Holly grew steadily through the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, reaching a peak in 1870 of 1,582 citizens. The economic decline which followed brought a sharp decline in population, to less than one-third of that number. However, the decade of the 1960's saw a rapid resurgence of population growth in Mt. Holly, from 517 to 687 citizens. This rate of growth (32.9%) is more than double that of Rutland County (12.7%) and Vermont as a whole (14%) in the same period. Considering the rising population in the country generally and the growing popularity of 'second homes' in Vermont, there is every likelihood that Mt. Holly will see continuing pressures of rapid population growth in the years ahead. Measures must be taken to keep this growth within the limits set by the fragile mountain environment.

Housing and Land Use

The decline of agriculture and the rising demand for residences in Mt. Holly have changed the pattern of land use in the town. Rapid increases in land values and property taxes are making it difficult for the owners of former farm lands to keep their property. Land speculators and housing developers are beginning to exploit this situation. They are acquiring large tracts of land and subdividing them into small lots for ski chalets and vacation homes.

Most of the substantial homes which survived the lean years are once again occupied, on a permanent or seasonal basis, and many have been attractively refurbished. A number of new homes have been built for year-round or vacation residence. Mt. Holly now has about 215 vacation homes, a majority owned by people from out of state. These constitute nearly half of the residences in town, and they provide about a fourth of the tax base. However, sharply rising costs of new construction and the resulting shortage of low-income housing have affected Mt. Holly. There has been a rapid influx of mobile homes, located on separate lots widely scattered about the town. There is also a growing risk of fly-by-night developments.

These changes create dangers of overcrowding, excessive burdens on town facilities, pollution of water resources, and spoiling of scenic areas. The town should therefore move as rapidly as possible to develop zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and lakeshore controls, to protect itself against such dangers.

Better forms of inexpensive housing need to be fostered. Some concentration of development into clusters or villages is desirable, to prevent its dispersal throughout

the town, with the resulting higher cost in services and the reduction of open land and forest capable of supporting farms and wild life. Strip development along all the main roads is also undesirable because it creates traffic hazards. But the number, location and density of housing developments should be restricted to prevent pollution and the overtaxing of town facilities. Lot sizes should be tailored to varied conditions in different sections of the town.

Measures should be taken to ensure that, in any future housing development in town, if a community sewage disposal system is required, the developer and not the Town will be required to bear the expense of constructing it. The developer should also be required to provide roads which meet Town standards.

Continuing agriculture should be fostered in those areas of the town where it is economically practical, to preserve open spaces and the town's rural character. The lakeshores should be protected from overdevelopment and sources of pollution. The higher elevations and steeper slopes should be kept free of development. The accompanying map shows the land use pattern that results from these policies.

Industry

Mt. Holly is crossed by a railroad line, with flat land nearby which might seem suitable for industrial development. The location of industry in town might seem economically desirable, broadening the tax base and providing jobs.

However, the flat lands near the railroad are swampy and subject to flooding, which reduces their potential as industrial sites. Furthermore, since the town's economy is largely geared to residence, agriculture, forestry, and recreation, large-scale industry does not seem practical. The dangers of air and water pollution, together with the strain on town facilities such as schools, roads, parking space, and water supply, also weigh against major industrial development.

Small-scale businesses and industries which are environmentally "clean" seem more appropriate for Mt. Holly, particularly those associated with recreation, agriculture, and forestry. The natural environment provides an excellent educational resource which might be developed. With a little advance organization, students from urban environments could be brought into town for brief periods to study nature and rural occupations at first hand. Such an educational industry could benefit the town economically.

Transportation

Mount Holly is served by 15 miles of State Highway, 14.5 miles of State-Aid Roads, and 51 miles of Town Roads. State Highway Routes 103 and 155 are major arteries crossing the town. Route 103 is heavily traveled by both commercial and pleasure vehicles. Since Route 155 has recently been fully paved and converted into a State Highway, its traffic load is also increasing.

The State-Aid Roads extend from Route 155 in Tarbellville through Belmont and Mt. Holly to the Shrewsbury line, and from Healdville to Belmont. These serve in part as feeders to 103 and 155.

Most of the Town Roads in Mt. Holly at the present time are dirt roads. Some of them remain impassable in the winter and spring. Quite a few Town Roads need to have the brush cut back on them and to be otherwise cleaned up. Some back roads have long been disused and neglected; these are unfit for travel and should be so marked. The Town Roads will require more money in the next few years, as more people are building on them and will demand improved service.

Most of the wooden bridges and culverts in town have been replaced by steel ones; however, there are still some wooden ones left.

The Green Mountain Railroad has train tracks running alongside of Route 103 through Mt. Holly. At the present time only freight service is available to Mt. Holly, but the future may call for a revival of passenger service.

The Vermont Transit Bus Line gives service to most places from Route 103 daily.

Sewage Disposal

There is no centralized public sewage collection and disposal system in Mt. Holly. The scattered settlement and the irregular terrain make it unlikely that there will be any, unless sufficient density of development occurs in some parts of town to require it. Therefore, sewage disposal in the foreseeable future will probably continue to be through individual septic tanks and leaching fields as at present.

Since the absorptive powers of the town soils are very limited, and since the gradients are often relatively steep, much of the town cannot accommodate large numbers of septic tanks in close proximity without creating serious health hazards. It is important therefore that the density of future development be restricted in terms of percolation tests and adequate space for leaching fields.

There is reason to believe that some existing homes have inadequate sewage disposal systems, and are discharging raw sewage or inadequately treated sewage into the waters of the town. Several streams are polluted at some points, Lake Ninevah has an unsafe level of mercury pollution, and Star Lake is subject to "bloom," or eutrophication, the excessive growth of algae, probably resulting in part from phosphates in detergents and fertilizers. The town should take steps to clean up its polluted streams and to protect the quality of water in its lakes.

Water Supply

Approximately one-third of the town residents draw their water from springs; most of the other homes have drilled wells, the depths varying from 60 to 320 feet. The village of Belmont has two small, separate spring-fed water systems serving several

homes. The other areas of the town will probably have to continue to rely on individual sources for domestic water. This is presently practical because of the wide spacing of dwellings. However, too great a density of development should be prevented, to avoid the double dangers of pollution and overtaxing of the underground water sources.

Water for fighting fires is drawn from any available stream or pond by the Volunteer Fire Department. The two water systems in Belmont are not large enough to support hydrants, but Star Lake and its outlet provide abundant water for this village. Installation of a few hydrants connecting the lake with points in the village would improve protection. In the more rural areas of the town, the digging of fire ponds with dry hydrants should be encouraged.

Solid Waste Disposal

The present town dump is illegal under the Vermont Sanitary Landfill Act of 1967, which required that all open dumps be closed by July 1, 1969, and that solid wastes be disposed of in sanitary landfill dumps or approved incinerators. Mt. Holly will soon be required to close its present dump and to make other provisions for disposal of its solid wastes.

Since a sanitary landfill dump requires a special kind of site and is extremely expensive to operate, Mt. Holly cannot afford to develop her own. The two principal alternatives for the immediate future seem to be: 1. to cooperate with other towns in the region in developing a joint sanitary landfill, or 2. to contract with a private collection agency to gather the town's solid waste in containers and export it to a private sanitary landfill. The latter solution seems more practical at present. In the longer run, the transportation of Mt. Holly's solid wastes to a regional recycling plant seems the most desirable and likely permanent solution. Stumps, stones, brush, leaves, grass, and fill can probably still be disposed of in a town site like the present dump. Junk cars and other large metal objects such as appliances and barrels can be collected at a town site and periodically disposed of by a car crusher. Funds are available from the State Highway Department for the development of sites for the disposal of bulky metallic waste.

Town Government

As the population of the town grows and the number of State laws bearing on town government increases, it becomes more difficult for the selectmen to cope with the growing complexity of their duties. The town should therefore continue to consider authorizing the selectmen to appoint a town manager to assist them on a part-time basis.

Another increasing problem is police protection. The growth of the town, the extension of tarred road surfaces, and the appearance of snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles raise the danger of traffic violations (especially speeding), vandalism, breaking and entering, and robbery. The town is almost without protection against

such crimes at present. Every effort must be made to secure additional police protection from County, State, and Federal sources until the town grows enough to be able to afford its own law enforcement officers.

In addition to regular maintenance of existing public buildings, the town should plan for the construction of new garage space to house the expensive road equipment which at present stands outdoors all year. An effort should also be made to solve the problem of providing toilet facilities in the Town hall.

The town should consider adopting capital budgeting—raising funds in advance for specific foreseeable expenses—instead of waiting till the needs arise and then borrowing at higher final cost to the taxpayers.

Communication between public officials and the people needs improvement. Between the annual town reports and town meetings, the townspeople receive little or no information about town government. Occasional news releases or local notices could remedy this situation. A more rapid system of communication with the Volunteer Fire Department than the present telephone chain needs to be developed.

Education

The people of Mt. Holly are well aware of the importance of good schools and have done much to provide them. Their cooperation and understanding in the face of rising costs and unfair cuts in State Aid have been outstanding. The town should do everything possible to regain a fair share of State Aid.

Our elementary school at this time has 35% more pupils than it was built to accommodate. The hot lunch program and the general-purpose room have been eliminated as a result of this overcrowding. Storage facilities are very inadequate. There is no provision for indoor physical education. As soon as possible, the School Board will have to find means to provide additional space and improved facilities. If the town continues to experience the same type and rate of growth, this should not be too difficult a problem to overcome, however, unusual spurts of growth will be extremely difficult to keep pace with.

At present our high school students attend out-of-town secondary schools, mostly in Wallingford and Ludlow, on a tuition basis. This is an expensive and unreliable arrangement, since there is no guarantee how long these towns will be able to accept tuition students. Wallingford High School, in particular, is working very hard to unionize with other towns. The only practical way to provide our children with a good high school education is to unionize with some neighboring towns. The School Board should seek to accomplish this within the next five years.

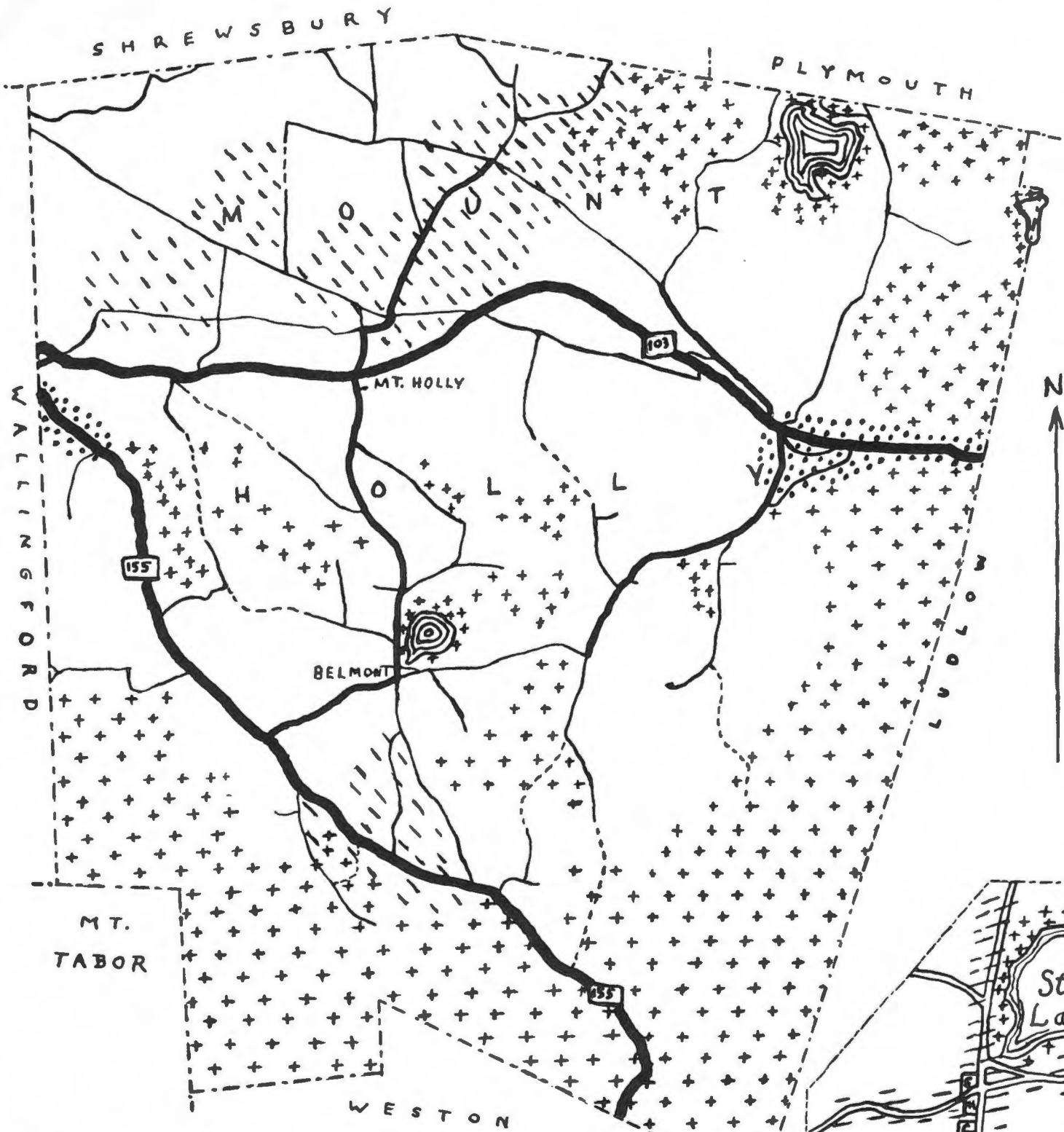
Recreation

The town should act to protect its value as a year-round recreation area. Trails can be

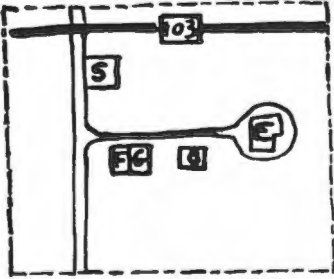
developed and marked for hiking, nature study, horseback riding, ski-touring, and snowmobiling. A map of such trails could be published. The lakes should be protected for swimming and boating, and the lakes and streams should be freed of pollution to improve fishing. Forest areas and open spaces should be maintained to foster wildlife and provide for hunting and camping. In the future the town may have to take steps to prevent the overuse of the area for recreation, since this could spoil it for that very purpose.

Execution

The Selectmen may appoint committees of two or three citizens each to help them in working out the details and putting into effect the provisions of this Plan, in any of the major areas where help is needed, such as roads, town government, finance and capital budgeting, and health.



BELMONT



MOUNT HOLLY

- FOREST, CONSERVATION, RECREATION
MINIMUM LOT SIZE 5 ACRES
- AGRICULTURAL + RURAL RESIDENTIAL
MINIMUM LOT SIZE 2 ACRES
- COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL
RESIDENTIAL
- RESIDENTIAL
MINIMUM LOT SIZE 1 ACRE
- MULTIPLE RESIDENTIAL
MINIMUM LOT SIZE 1/2 ACRE
- NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL

- STORE
- TOWN HALL
- TOWN GARAGE

- ARTERIAL ROADS
- FEEDER ROADS
- BACK ROADS

- STORE
- SCHOOL
- FIRE HOUSE
- TOWN OFFICE
- GARAGE