



Town Plan Fact Sheet

The Town of Mount Holly Planning Commission is proposing to update the Town Plan. Copies of the proposed plan are available in the town office and on the town's website. A public hearing on the proposed plan is scheduled for 6:00 PM on November 15, 2023. See attached notice.

Why do we need a town plan?

A town plan is a vision for growth that reflects the collective values and goals of the town's residents. The purpose of the proposed plan is to provide clear, written standards for Mount Holly's orderly development, allowing for economic growth, the provision of community services, and recreational and cultural opportunities, while also preserving the town's distinctly rural character and appearance. It is intended to be used positively to guide the direction of growth and development in an economically feasible and environmentally appropriate way.

Town plans play an especially critical role in communities like ours that have no zoning. In the absence of zoning, the State has Act 250 jurisdiction over commercial development on any lot larger than one acre, and the town has no role in Act 250 proceedings if it has no town plan. In other words, the town plan allows the town to have a say in the State permitting process.

In addition, 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, nor may they adopt or amend any bylaws such as subdivision or other land use regulations.

The town plan also has a vital role in the town's success in obtaining funding through government and private grant programs. In fact, towns that do not have a plan are ineligible for certain State grant programs. Even if eligible, the town's success in obtaining grants, both public and private, is directly tied to whether the grant would further well-articulated goals identified in the town's plan. Because grant funding is critically necessary to meet Mount Holly's many infrastructure needs, a town plan is essential.

Finally, a town plan is required for Belmont to retain its Vermont Village Center Designation, which is due for renewal by April 2024. The benefits of the designation include priority consideration for State grants, eligibility for Neighborhood Development Areas, and a variety of tax credits for revitalization and improvements.

These incentives are an important factor in, among other things, attracting new businesses and vitality to the community, and meeting the land use goals.

Why is an update necessary?

In 2020, the Select Board identified the need to update the town plan and instructed the Planning Commission to begin the process. Several reasons were identified for this, but an important one was that the Rutland Regional Planning Commission had made clear that the current plan, adopted in 2018, did not actually comply with State requirements. That problem deepened with the State's adoption of Act 47 this year, which added new requirements for town plans.

Importantly, the 2018 plan also is too ambiguous, lacking both the specificity and clarity of purpose that courts have held are necessary for the town's interests to be taken into account in Act 250 proceedings. See *In re JAM Golf, L.L.C.*, 2008 VT 110, ¶ 14. The updated plan's strengthened policy statements will increase the likelihood that the State will take those interests into account when evaluating proposed commercial development on lands in excess of one acre. For example, policy statements that say X or Y "should" be done, as the 2018 plan says, are routinely disregarded by the State as too ambiguous and lacking in decisiveness. The State will pay attention to our policies only if they say X or Y "shall" be done.

In addition, we have been told by the State that the current plan is not sufficient to support renewal of Belmont's Village Center designation. In contrast, the State's Department of Housing and Community Development has informed us that the updated plan does meet all of the State's requirements.

Importantly, the updated plan includes an expanded economic development section. The plan seeks to encourage people to live year-round in Mount Holly by promoting a vibrant economic environment through increased housing, improved infrastructure, and diverse and engaging recreational, entertainment, and cultural activities. At the same time, the plan seeks to preserve that which makes the town special by protecting its natural beauty and rural character.

What is the plan based on?

This Plan was developed over the course of three years of twice monthly meetings by the Planning Commission with the participation of engaged citizens.

The Plan is informed by residents' responses to the town's 2022 Community Vision Survey, which among other things demonstrated overwhelming consensus among residents on the importance of preserving our rural character, working lands, and

natural environment. These attributes are seen as vital to community well-being and the local economy.

The Planning Commission also solicited input from those knowledgeable about and responsible for delivering vital services to the community, including the school, the volunteer fire department, the rescue squad, the library, and other organizations in the town.

Finally, the Planning Commission consulted with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, the Rutland Regional Planning Commission, and various State agencies, to be sure that the updated plan meets all of the State's many requirements to be valid and effective.

How does the plan affect me?

The proposed town plan does not itself limit, control or otherwise regulate residents' property rights. It articulates goals for the future and specifically states a preference that those be achieved through voluntary, non-regulatory means. If the citizens of the town believe that additional regulations are needed to meet the town's goals, then that would require an entirely separate hearing and adoption process with many opportunities for public involvement. However, nothing in this plan requires the town to adopt any new regulations.

The proposed plan has these important potential benefits for our citizens:

- It enhances our ability to obtain government and private grants that help ensure the maintenance and improvement of critical infrastructure - such as septic, roads, and stormwater - that benefits us all while also keeping our taxes lower.
- It promotes orderly economic development that sustains and enhances town services, such as the school and emergency services, improving our lives and making our town a desirable and safe place to live.
- It minimizes the negative impacts that often accompany new development, and so protects the qualities of our community that we cherish - its natural beauty and rural character - that attract people to live and vacation here. In doing so, it also protects our property values.
- It helps to avoid incompatible uses or nuisances that could cause conflict among neighbors and within the town.
- It articulates needs identified by our citizens so they may be considered in the town's planning and budgeting processes.
- It improves the likelihood of funding for conservation projects, either by the town or by individual property owners if their land is identified as having conservation value.

Town of Mount Holly
Planning Commission

Notice of Public Hearing
November 15, 2023

Pursuant to [24 V.S.A. §4384](#), the Mount Holly Planning Commission will hold a public hearing at 6:00 PM on November 15, 2023 at the Mount Holly Town Office and via Zoom. The purpose of the hearing is to receive public comment on the proposed Mount Holly Town Plan.

Statement of Purpose: The purpose of the plan is to articulate community goals with respect to planning for land use and public services in compliance with state planning goals.

Geographic Areas Affected: All areas within the Town of Mount Holly.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81130174129?pwd=9zflTj7SdyaBRbaCH9Tg3oYdNPyVr.1>



+1 646 876 9923 US (New York)
Meeting ID: 811 3017 4129
Passcode: 794066

Copies of the proposed Plan and companion Planning Commission Report are available for review at the Town Office and on the town website (<https://www.mounthollyvt.org/planning-commission/town-plan/>).

If you wish to make a public comment but do not have the ability to comment remotely during the meeting, please email your comment(s) in advance of the hearing to Mount Holly Planning Commission at planningcomm@mounthollyvt.org or mail to Mount Holly Planning Commission at P.O. Box 248 Mount Holly, VT 05758.