

[June 7, 2017 - The following report has comments relating to changes in the new Draft Town Plan.](#)

The Purpose of Enhanced Consultation

The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission's contract with the Department of Economic, Housing, and Community Development (Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development), and Vermont Statutes require the Commission to carry out consultation meetings with all of the towns in the region. The goals are to develop a more consistent and meaningful relationship between the RPC and the Municipality, and to improve the effectiveness of municipal and regional plans, and planning programs by achieving the goals of Title 24, §4302.

Outcome of Consultation

Through this consultation process we hope to better understand the needs of our communities and to have our communities understand how we can work together to advance better planning. Consultations will involve the discussion of important local and regional issues, local planning and training needs, new statutory requirements, planning programs and opportunities available through the TRORC, and importantly, consideration of how effectively the municipal plan addresses Vermont's statutory planning goals.

This consideration will include a qualitative review of the municipal plan, with suggestions as to how the plan might be improved to more effectively satisfy the statutory goals referenced above. Specific findings are reported on each of the following questions:

1. Which parts of the plan are particularly effective in implementing the statewide goals?
2. In which areas do we believe the plan falls short in advancing those statewide goals?
3. What specific opportunities exist to improve the town plan so that it more effectively addresses the statewide goals?

This consultation and plan review is separate and distinct from the formal municipal plan approval process carried out pursuant to 24 V.S.A. §4350, but it does contribute to the municipal confirmation action specified under that section of the Planning and Development Act.

Enhanced Consultation Agenda Items for Thursday, April 25, 2013

- Important local & regional issues
- Local planning and training needs
- New statutory requirements
- Planning programs and opportunities
- TRORC services
- Qualitative review of Municipal Plan

Norwich Town Plan Review

The Norwich Town Plan was adopted on December 14, 2011. The 2011 Plan represented a substantial revision from previous plans.

Required Elements

1. **Statement of Objectives, Policies, and Programs:** The Plan is a very clearly written series of goals, policies and action items.
2. **Land Use Plan:** The Norwich Town Plan contains a Land Use Plan which includes most of the required items. It is well written and contains a reasonable amount of detail, with the exception of specifying the types of commercial uses allowed in each Land Use Area. [Norwich does not specify detailed “types” of commercial uses but relies on Site Plan Review Criteria and performance standards to address the physical and visual impact of proposed non-residential uses on the immediate neighborhood and the Town. The plan does specify that the existing village business district is most appropriate for businesses serving the needs of the local community rather than those primarily drawing customers from outside Norwich.](#)
3. **Transportation Plan:** The Transportation plan includes a detailed overview of existing transportation infrastructure. Municipal policy on new roads is indicated. [Support for new roads has been removed](#)
4. **Utility and Facility Plan:** The Utilities and Facilities plan is only a general inventory. It does not contain any information regarding future needs of facilities, potential costs of maintenance or upgrades and potential financing methods as is required by statute. [Specific information on town buildings including current condition, future planned improvements and financing policies for construction and long term maintenance have been added to the Facilities Section on Pages 8-3 and 8-4.](#)
5. **Natural Areas, Scenic and Historic Features:** The Plan discusses natural, scenic and historic areas effectively. Specific scenic features could be more clearly identified. [Map of Ridgeline and Scenic Areas has been added to the Maps section.](#)
6. **Educational Facilities Plan:** Education is adequately addressed.
7. **Implementation Plan:** The Plan contains a broad range of action items that tie into four implementation themes which are excellent. Action items do not identify the specific municipal panel or group that would implement them. [A list will be in the Appendix at end of document](#)
8. **Relationship to adjacent towns and the region:** The Plan provides an analysis of the land use patterns of surrounding towns, carefully identifying areas that are or are not consistent.
9. **Energy Plan:** The Energy Plan does not adequately address the community’s energy resources, needs, scarcities or costs as is required by statute. [Additional information has been added on energy sources, usage, costs, and future projections as the Town actively moves to more sustainable renewable energy.](#)
10. **Housing Element:** The Plan effectively recognizes Norwich needs additional affordable housing and discusses possible avenues to encourage such growth.

11. **Economic Development Plan (new):** The Plan contains an economic development element that provides an overview of Norwich’s economy and discusses sustainable economic development. The location, type and scale of economic development are addressed in the Land Use chapter.

Statewide Planning Goals

1. **Land Use:** The Plan recognizes the need for good planning in order to protect its natural resources, preserve agricultural land and maintain its rural character and scenic beauty. Many of the land use patterns proposed appear designed to concentrate dense mixed-use development within the village center. But, the size of the area designated as Village Center/Route 5 is a concern because it appears to encourage village-scale commercial (including retail) development beyond the natural edges of the Village. The language regarding types of commercial land uses allowed in Land Use areas is fairly vague. [See #2 in Required Elements](#)
2. **Economic Development:** The Plan looks at economic development from a standpoint of sustainability, which is excellent. It recognizes the balance between expanding municipal infrastructure to encourage economic development and avoiding undue expense for the community.
3. **Education:** Adult education and vocational education are addressed.
4. **Transportation:** The Transportation element recognizes the need for multi-modal transportation and acknowledges the benefits of concentrating development near existing facilities. Norwich does seem willing to expand the number of roads which may have a negative impact on the landscape. [Support for the expansion of new roads is removed](#)
5. **Natural, Scenic, and Historic Resources:** The Plan does a very good job of addressing natural, scenic and historic resources. Quality habitat blocks are identified.
6. **Air, Water, Wildlife, and Land Resources:** Norwich’s Plan appears to effectively maintain and improve air, water, wildlife and land resources.
7. **Energy:** Efficient use of energy and the development of energy resources are discussed.
8. **Recreation:** As proposed by the Plan, growth will not negatively impact the value and availability of recreational resources. Recreational opportunities are discussed.
9. **Agriculture and Forestry:** The Plan has sub-section that discusses agriculture and forestry in a thorough manner. However, there is no guidance as to **how** action items relating to forestry and agriculture might be implemented. [Existing Site Plan Review and Subdivision Review Criteria specifically address minimizing adverse impact on farm land and larger blocks of forest land. These criteria implement Actions I.3.d, e, f, & g and I.10.a, b, & c.](#)
10. **Efficient use of natural resources/extraction and restoration of earth resources:** Mineral resources are minimally addressed. [This is addressed in Objective I.2 and Actions I.2.a – f.](#)
11. **Safe and affordable housing:** All forms of housing are addressed in the Plan, including accessory dwelling units.
12. **Community Facilities and Services:** The Plan seeks to maintain a pattern of growth that does not exceed the community’s ability to provide services and appears to carefully consider the

costs of increased development and the potential expansion of services that would be needed to accommodate such increases.

13. **Child Care:** Child care is effectively addressed.

Regional Plan

The Norwich Town Plan is thorough and well-written Plan that considers many elements of planning that other communities do not, and should be lauded for this approach. However, a conflict between the Norwich Town Plan and the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan does exist.

The Land Use Area designated as Village Center/Route 5 is large, extending well beyond the natural boundary of Norwich's village. Assuming that all uses appropriate in a village center are allowed in all locations designated on the Future Land Use Area Map, the potential for sprawl and strip development along Route 5 beyond the interchange is high. A lack of specificity regarding the types of commercial uses allowed in this area make it challenging to determine the extent of the conflict, but in analyzing Norwich's zoning ordinance, it appears that retail uses are allowed along Route 5 and around the Exit 13 I-91 Interchange. In order to ensure the health of villages and downtowns within our Region and to remain consistent with the goals of §4302 (which explicitly call for a pattern of compact village and urban centers surrounded by open countryside), the Regional Commission has established the policy that:

"Principal retail establishments must be located in Town Centers, Designated Downtowns, or Designated Growth Centers to minimize the blighting effects of sprawl and strip development along major highways and maintain rural character."

Because of the apparent allowance of a broad range of commercial development that clearly could include principal retail establishments such as a dry goods store or grocery store, TRORC staff would be unable to recommend the Norwich Town Plan for board approval as it is written. In order to be harmonious with the Regional Plan, land uses outside of the natural village boundary would need to exclude principal or primary uses. Uses such as those at King Arthur Flour which have a retail component that is secondary to the primary use of the compound (which serves as the business' headquarters) remain acceptable.

As it is written, the Norwich Town Plan and the Regional Plan conflict within parts of the Village Center/Route 5 Land Use Area. This conflict would manifest itself for any development proposed in this area that requires an Act 250 permit.

Summary

Strengths

- The Plan a very clearly written series of goals, policies and action items.
- The Plan addresses elements that are generally not considered in the scope of a Town Plan, including sustainability and long range fiscal planning – this is excellent.
- The Plan recognizes the balance between expanding municipal infrastructure to encourage economic development and avoiding undue expense for the community.
- Analysis of the land use patterns of surrounding towns is very good. It carefully identifies areas that are or are not consistent.
- The Plan recognizes the need for good planning in order to protect its natural resources, preserve agricultural land and maintain its rural character and scenic beauty.

Weaknesses

- The Village Center/Route 5 Land Use Area is not consistent with State Land Use goals or the Regional Plan. The Regional Plan does not recognize the longterm pre-existing Commercial District on the east side of Route 5 South and that the existing Village has limited capacity for growth/expansion. This needs to be addressed by the Regional Commission with consultation with the Town in future revisions to the regional land use plan.
- Norwich does seem willing to expand the number of roads which may have a negative impact on the landscape. Support for expansion of roads has been removed from this draft.
- The Plan does not contain any information regarding future needs of facilities, potential costs of maintenance or upgrades and potential financing methods as is required by statute. This information has been included in the Facilities section.
- The Energy Plan does not adequately address the community's energy resources, needs scarcities or costs as is required by statute. These have been included in the Energy Chapter.
- Action items do not identify the specific municipal panel or group that would implement them. A list will be added in the Appendices.

Opportunities

- Work with the Regional Planning Commission to meet the requirements of state statute.
- Collect information regarding community facilities from the Selectboard to provide further detail to Utilities/Facilities chapter.
- Utilize TRORC energy chapter template to draft an energy chapter that meets state planning requirements.
- Consider identifying the specific municipal panel or group that will implement action items.