

Norwich Planning Commission
Regular Meeting – September 9th, 2025 6:30pm

To be Held in person in the Tracy Hall Multipurpose Room and via Zoom
Zoom Information:

Topic: Planning Commission

Time: Sep 9, 2025, 6:30 PM

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81307504748>

Meeting ID: 813 0750 4748

888 475 4499 US Toll-free

****ANNOUNCEMENT****

PLEASE JOIN US TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 9th when Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Planning Commission (TRORC) staff will join the Planning Commission to discuss the recent Act250/Housing Act update and review a draft of the revised Regional Future Plan Map. Possible revisions to Norwich's portion of the regional future land use map could broaden core village and downtown areas, creating more room for growth and housing, while also expanding the categories for rural use in the Town. This is a good chance for Norwich Residents to provide early input on this draft document. The Regional Plan covers all lands within the TRORC Region.

AGENDA

1. Open Regular meeting; determine quorum
2. Approve Agenda
3. Presentation from Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Planning Commission to discuss the recent Act250/Housing Act update and review a draft of the revised Regional Future Plan Map.
4. Approve minutes from July 8th and August 12th, 2025
5. Adjourn

Enclosures:

[TRORC Regional Plan Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Draft Minutes July 8th, 2025](#)

[Draft Minutes August 12th, 2025](#)

Regional Plan - Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is TRORC

The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) is a regional planning commission. Maintaining a Regional Plan is just one part of its activities. You can see the entire range of its work [here](#).

Q: Is TRORC a state agency?

No, TRORC, like all regional planning commissions, is a ‘political subdivision’ of the state. That means that we are created by the state.

Q: What area does TRORC cover?

TRORC covers 30 towns and 3 incorporated villages in parts of 4 counties. You can see a map of the Region [here](#).

Q: Does TRORC have to prepare and adopt a Regional Plan?

[Yes](#).

Q: Where can I find the current Regional Plan adopted in February, 2025?

You can find the current Plan [here](#). There are links to the entire Plan, as well as each part. There is also a map viewer of the future land use map so you can see that in more detail.

Q: How is the Plan made?

The Plan is drafted by regional commission [staff](#) and then discussed at Board meetings as well as meetings with the general public before having a set of formal hearings.

Q: What is the purpose of a Regional Plan

Regional Plans have several statutory [purposes](#) and must further the [state planning goals](#).

Q: Where can I follow the Regional Plan drafting process?

TRORC maintains a web page that shows any drafts, meetings, and hearings [here](#).

Q: How is the Plan adopted?

The Plan is regionally adopted by the [TRORC Board](#) after a [required public process](#). And then the Plan must go through an [approval process](#) with the [Land Use Review Board](#) for a ‘determination of regional plan compliance’. After this approval the Plan is fully adopted.

Q: What is the TRORC Board?

The Board is made up of representatives appointed by each member town's Selectboard, plus several at-large members.

Q: Are TRORC's Board meetings public?

Yes. TRORC is covered under Vermont's [open meeting law](#), just like towns, and our Board is considered a non-advisory body. You can find our agendas and schedule of upcoming meetings [here](#) and minutes of past meetings [here](#).

Q: What are the parts of a Regional Plan?

A Regional Plan is required to cover several topic areas, referred to as [elements](#), but may have different formats. Our Plan begins with an [Introduction](#) that explains the Plan's layout and uses. This is an excellent way to understand Regional Plans.

Q: What subjects does a Regional Plan have to cover?

A Regional Plan is required to cover several [elements](#), including ones on natural resources and working lands, energy, transportation, utilities and facilities, housing, economic development, flood resilience, and future land use.

Q: Does the Plan have to have a future land use map?

Yes, the Plan is required to have [several maps](#), often as part of each element. The [future land use map](#) is one of these.

Q: What is a future land use map?

It is a map of the entire region with lands placed into 'future land use areas'. Lands are placed into these areas largely based on their current or desired usage, their physical characteristics, the functions they perform, and the infrastructure that is serving them.

Q: Is the Regional Plan zoning?

No. The Plan has no regulatory effect of its own.

Q: Is the Regional Plan eminent domain?

No, the Plan does not take any land.

Q: Can TRORC veto local zoning through the Regional Plan?

No, that is not possible or even logical.

Q: Can TRORC veto town plans through the Regional Plan?

No. Towns can seek [regional approval](#) of their plans, but are not required to. After a town adopts a plan, if seeking regional approval it must be found to be consistent with the Regional Plan. A plan that does not have regional approval is still a valid plan.

Q: Can the Regional Plan ban logging?

No, that is not possible.

Q: Can the Regional Plan ban farming?

No, that is not possible.

Q: Does TRORC or the Regional Plan create tiers?

No. Tiers will be created by the [Land Use Review Board](#).

Q: What are land use ‘tiers’?

‘Tiers’ are neither a state designated area for tax and grant purposes by the [Community Investment Board](#) nor a future land use area by TRORC. Tiers are a third thing that does not exist yet, but will be created by the [Land Use Review Board](#). Tiers are mainly to alter what would otherwise be the Act 250 jurisdiction. Please see our [handout on tiers](#) and follow the development of tiers by the Land Use Review Board [here](#).

Q: Does the Regional Plan designate areas?

This is complicated, but the short answer is not directly. ‘Designation’ is a certain state process that enables financial incentives. The Regional Plan describes future land use areas in its text and *delineates* them on its [future land use map](#), and the state currently *designates* areas through its own process. Two of TRORC’s most common core land use areas currently are ‘Village Settlement’ and ‘Town Centers’. Often the central part of these areas is also currently *designated* by the state as a ‘Village Center’. This [state designation](#) is separate from the Regional Plan, but the names are similar.

To bring these two processes more into alignment, our next future land use map will delineate areas that will essentially also become the map for the new state designations. Due to [Act 181](#), in our 2026 Plan revision, many of our smaller core areas will be called ‘Village Centers’, which is *currently* one of five state designations. The [Community Investment Board](#) will review our map and, hopefully, use what we *delineate* as ‘Village Centers’ as the area they will then *designate* as ‘Village Centers’.

Q: What does the Regional Plan mean to me?

The Plan is a great place to find out about many issues and the Region. It supports many actions beneficial to individuals, from energy assistance to increasing childcare. The Plan also has some policies that would affect developers that trigger Act 250, or build cell towers or electrical generation. See our handout – [The Regional Plan and You](#).

Q: What does the Regional Plan mean for my town?

Towns can use the maps, data, and policies of the Regional Plan for much of what is needed for their town plan. The Plan also recommends ways that TRORC can help towns, and it raises some municipal concerns, such as the need for more funding for sewer systems, to state and federal agencies. Having certain areas called out on the future land use map creates the ability for those local areas to get or keep some grant funding and tax credits under a revised state designation program.

Q: Is the Regional Plan used in Act 250?

Yes. For decades [projects regulated under Act 250](#) have been required by the [District Environmental Commission](#) to conform to regional and town plans where these plans have mandatory and clear policies.

Q: How can I tell if the Regional Plan is mandatory?

Mandatory policies use words like ‘shall’ and ‘must’. Most of the Plan is advisory and uses words like ‘encourage’ or ‘should’.

Q: What projects are regulated by Act 250?

That is a long answer, since it depends on what town it is in and where in that town, but this [page](#) is where to start. As a general rule, building 5 housing units or creating five lots never triggers Act 250. Agriculture and forestry are also exempt from Act 250.

Q: Is the Regional Plan used by the Public Utility Commission?

Yes. Projects regulated by the PUC under a 248 (grid-connected electrical generation) or 248a (cell towers) process are looked at with an eye to regional and town plans. Such plans are at least given ‘due consideration’ when the PUC reviews projects, and may be given more stringent (but not mandatory) ‘substantial deference’ in certain cases.

Q: If a town’s zoning is different than the Regional Plan, what happens?

Nothing, zoning and plans are different things. Local zoning is a local matter, though state statute lays out what towns can and can’t do, and all zoning has to further the state’s land use goals.

Norwich Planning Commission

Regular Meeting – July 8th, 2025 6:30pm

Members Present: Jeff Goodrich, Jaan Laaspere, Bob Pape, Mary Gorman

Zoning Administrator: Steven True

Public Present: Jeff Lubell

Meeting Opened: 6:30 pm

1. Open meeting; quorum met

2. Approve Agenda

Goodrich moved, seconded by Bob Pape, to approve the agenda.

Motion passed 4-0

3. Correspondence

The board accepted Jeff Lubell's correspondence on behalf of the Affordable Housing Subcommittee (AHSC) regarding how upcoming changes to Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Planning Commission (TRORC) future land-use maps will affect Act 250 & State Designation programs. Laaspere notes that this is the first item on the agenda, and reserves conversation to that item.

4. Comment from the Public on items not on the agenda: No public present to comment on items not on the agenda.

5. Act 181 and Land Use Review Board (LURB) Overview

- a. In light of an upcoming visit from TRORC staff to talk about the changes to their Future Land Use Map, members discussed and reviewed a presentation from Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) regarding Act 181 & the newly formed Land Use Review Board.
- b. Discussion focused on the Future Land Use classifications of Villages and Village areas as they relate to the Tier 1A/B Act 250 exemptions and the new state designations.
- c. Members discussed housing targets as product of the new regional plan.
- d. There was consensus to prepare for the upcoming visit by TRORC scheduled for September. Jaan to reach out to TRORC for more details. Staff to circulate background material.

6. Discussion of 2025 Priorities and Goals

- a. Members discussed starting work on the next round of amendments to the Land Use Regulations. Members were asked to circulate items from their notes to include in the next round of amendments.
- b. Members discussed the upcoming Municipal Planning Grant with members advocating for a transportation/pedestrian focus and others for updating our scenic resource

inventory. The FY26 MPG will be released at the end of the month with a deadline for submission in November. Staff to circulate MPG info when it's available.

- c. Members reviewed a presentation from TRORC regarding Municipal Capital Plans & Capital Budgets. The consensus from members was to open the Town Plan to include a Utilities & Facilities chapter, as this is a prerequisite to conducting Capital Planning work.

- i. Jeff Goodrich **MOTIONS** that as a first step to create a Capital Planning Program the Planning Commission write a Utilities & Facilities chapter of the Town Plan for adoption by the Selectboard. Bob Pape seconds.

Motion passed 4-0

- ii. Staff to circulate representative chapters from other Town Plans in the region.

7. Approve minutes from June 10th, 2025

- a. *Jeff Goodrich moved, seconded by Bob Pape, to approve minutes with changes. Mary Gorman abstains.*

Motion does not carry a majority (3-0), Approval moved to next regular meeting

8. Adjourn

Bob Pape moved, seconded by Jeff Goodrich, to adjourn the meeting at 8:17pm

Motion passed 4-0

Norwich Planning Commission

Regular Meeting – August 12th, 2025 6:30pm

Members Present: Jaan Laaspere, Mary Gorman, Ernie Ciccotelli, Bob Pape, Christian Spalding

Not Present: Vincent Crow, Jeff Goodrich

Zoning Administrator: Steven True

Public Present: Linda Gray, Mary Albert, Jeff Lubell, Kathleen Shepard, Richard Gere

Meeting Opened: 6:31 pm

1. Open meeting; quorum met

2. Approve Agenda

Gorman moved, seconded by Spalding, to approve the agenda.

Motion passed 5-0

3. Correspondence

Steven True introduced a letter from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development announcing the FY26 Municipal Planning Grant. The Chair accepted the communication into the record with consensus from the board.

4. Comment from the Public on items not on the agenda:

None

5. Review feedback from TRORC regarding Future Land Use maps/Housing Targets

- Jaan Laaspere spoke to his meeting with Peter Gregory and Kevin Gieger of Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Planning Commission (TRORC). At the next regular meeting, September 9th, 2025, TRORC will present a draft of the Future Land Use map to the Commission and interested parties.
- Laaspere directed members to TRORC's Future Land Use FAQ as posted on the TRORC website.
- True discussed his meeting with Kyle Hanson and Kyle Katz of TRORC. True remarked that the Regional Plan containing the Future Land Use map is set for adoption at the end of 2026, becoming effective in 2027. True noted that a Future Land Use map is commonly included in a Regional Plan. (See 24 V.S.A. § 4348a(12))
- Members discussed land use categories, the new State designations (Neighborhoods and Centers), the new Act 250 exemptions (Tier1a, Tier1b, Tier 2 & 3) and how they apply to the Future Land Use land use categories and classifications.
- Members discussed how the future land affect new housing targets set under the upcoming regional plan.
- Jaan Laaspere reiterated that any proposed development in the Town must pass through local zoning regulations.
- Jaan Laaspere anticipating a Special Meeting in September asked members to come up with availability later in the month.

6. Review of Affordable Housing Subcommittee Charge

- Members discussed and compared the AHSC charge as written by Jeff Lubell and the version contained in the current draft of the Selectboard handbook
- Consensus was reached to proceed with the Selectboard version, revised as follows:
 - i. *Under the umbrella of the Planning Commission's statutory duties, it is the charge of the Affordable Housing Subcommittee to provide recommendations and guidance to, and work with, the Planning Commission, Town Planner, Selectboard, and Town Manager on issues related to affordable housing in Norwich*
- Mary Gorman makes a **MOTION** to approve as revised, seconded by Bob Pape. Motion carried unanimously (5-0)

7. Review of Solar Siting Subcommittee Charge and discussion of an Enhanced Energy Plan

- Mary Gorman gave a background statement reiterating discussions had at the most recent solar siting committee meeting and provided context for the Charge.
- Members discussed the charge and its contents providing feedback.
- Members of board and members of the public in attendance discussed input into Enhanced Energy Plan (EEP).
- After this discussion, Mary Gorman makes a **MOTION** to dissolve the Solar-Siting Subcommittee. Ernie Ciccotelli seconds. The board discusses the motion. **MOTION** fails to carry (0-5).
- Consensus was reached to proceed with the following charge:
- This committee will work to:
 - i. *Ensure that the Town Plan provides clear, accurate guidance regarding the development of solar energy projects in the Town of Norwich. Guided by the laws of the State of Vermont, bearing in mind the town's character, topography, location of critical utilities, and desires of all of its residents, the Solar Siting Committee will define in the Town Plan clear criteria for any solar project requiring Public Utility Commission (Section 248 Process) review.*
 - ii. *The Solar Siting Committee will engage with other town groups such as the Energy Committee, the Conservation Committee, and will continue to welcome input during its meetings to hear feedback from members of the public.*
 - iii. *The Solar Siting Committee will provide input to the efforts of the Planning Commission to develop an Enhanced Energy Plan for the Town of Norwich.*
- Bob Page **MOTIONS** to accept the charge as written. Ernie Ciccotelli seconds. The motion carried unanimously (5-0).

8. Discuss Capital Planning Work Plans and Assignments

- Jaan Laaspere discusses his correspondence addressed to the Selectboard and his plan to discuss the Planning Commission intention to develop a Capital Planning element during public comment at the September 13th regular Select board meeting.
- Christian Spalding and Bob Pape volunteer to lead this effort within the planning commission.

9. Approve minutes from June 10th, 2025, July 8th, 2025

- Bob Page makes a **MOTION** to approve the June 10th Minutes, Ernie Ciccotelle seconds, All in Favor, Mary Gorman abstains.

- Insufficient quorum to pass July 8th, 2025, minutes, action postponed until next regular meeting.

10. Adjourn

Bob Pape moved, seconded by Mary Gorman, to adjourn the meeting at 8:36pm.

Motion passed 5-0