

Norwich Village Plan Steering Committee

July 7, 2026 - Meeting notes

Key Outcomes

The steering committee reached consensus on the proposed village study area boundary (depicted in purple on the working map), with several notable expansions agreed upon during the meeting. The group clarified that the boundary is non-regulatory and serving as a planning study area to frame the upcoming village master plan. Discussions surfaced challenges including sidewalk ownership, building stock deterioration, bike/pedestrian connectivity, and community engagement strategy for the broader public process. The committee also aligned on a timeline to produce an RFP for an outside consultant by August 4th.

Decisions Made

- **Study area boundary confirmed** as the purple-outlined area on the working map as not a zoning or regulatory designation.
- **Hopson Road triangle** (the area between Hopson Road and Route 5) added back into the study area; noted as a connected residential corridor with pedestrian activity.
- **Northern gateway area** (French Farm Road / Church Street triangle toward the interstate) added to the study area.
- **Brown historic core** delineated within the purple area, roughly following the National Register of Historic Places boundary for Norwich Village; confirmed as non-regulatory but possibly useful for distinguishing planning treatment of the historic center.

Key Planning Challenges Identified

Sidewalk Ownership & Maintenance

- Many village sidewalks are owned by the Norwich Fire District, not the town.
- Prudential Committee has a long-range planning meeting July 31st — Steven will attend to raise the issue.

Bike & Pedestrian Connectivity

- **No safe bike route** from the village to Parcel 5 (primary recreation area connecting to Brookmead, Blue Ribbon, and the broader trail network); cyclists must ride single file on Beaver Meadow Road with blind corners. Acknowledged as not part of the village but an important missing connection.
- A **2021 Beaver Meadow Road sidewalk study** (350 pages, with a preferred alternative) exists for the area close to town.
- A **federal bike/ped grant application** has been submitted to study a shared-use path on Route 5 South; Hopson Road identified as possible parallel corridor.

Housing

- Housing identified as a critical planning topic in Vermont currently; the committee needs a clear set of questions before engaging the public.
- Historical examples offered as models for incremental change: Jones Circle, mid-century moderns on Hopson Road, and the senior center. Were these accepted without controversy when first built?

Opportunities & Ideas Discussed

- **Satellite village center:** The Route 5 South / Hopson Road node discussed as a distinct entity — question raised whether a vibrant satellite center depletes or complements the historic village core.
- **Stormwater master plan:** Grant already secured to conduct a stormwater study; relevant to resilience planning.
- **Grange as positive example**
- **Community building activities:** Low-cost, non-capital-intensive ideas (weekend volunteer activities, streetscape improvements) flagged as important alongside capital projects.
- **Middle schoolers** specifically recommended as highly effective participants — honest, creative, and capable of influencing parents who don't attend meetings.
- Suggestion to partner with a schoolteacher (history or social studies) to set up a display at school

Ideas for Public Meetings

- Show visual examples of what proposed changes look like (pictures of bump-outs, traffic crossings, comparable towns) rather than text descriptions to generate honest reactions.
- Show before & after examples from comparable towns (White River Junction, Springfield pocket park) and historical Norwich examples (e.g. Jones Circle, Norwich Meadow condos) to normalize change.
- Present the flip side of inaction: what Norwich looks like in 10 years without investment.
- Use the "what do you value / what's a negative / what's missing" framework to structure community conversations.

Action Items

- **Jean Richardson:** Draft scope of work / statement of work document with narrative, illustrations, and work plan — distribute by **end of day July 16th**.
- **Steven:** Attend Prudential Committee long-range planning meeting on **July 31st** to give background on village plan project, including study area map and sidewalk ownership topic.
- **Steven:** Update map to include Hopson Road triangle and confirm Church Street / French Farm Road triangle addition
- **All steering committee members:** Send ideas, observations, and challenge statements to Jean or Steven.

Next Meetings

- **July 21st** — Review draft scope of work and continue challenges/future vision discussion, including housing
- **August 4th** — Finalize RFP for distribution to consultants