

I. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the process that was followed to arrive at the Irasville Growth Center Master Development Plan. The Irasville Growth Center offers many benefits: the creation of a center of community life where residents and businesses can come together in comfortable surroundings, the transformation of the Route 100 highway corridor to a dignified street worthy of economic prosperity and community pride, and a greater sense of place as residents enjoy their community's natural and historic environments on foot and bike paths, and public open spaces.

BACKGROUND

The notion of preserving community values is popular in Vermont. Local initiatives in many Vermont villages, towns and cities have promoted economic development, preservation of special historic and natural sites, and community identity. State and federal government, local residents, private businesses, and non-profit organizations have supported the concepts of sustainable growth, downtown revitalization, affordable housing, and open space planning as ways to thoughtfully manage the state's future, so that our quality of life is preserved and even enhanced. As residents in communities work together to create a vision for the new millennium, new ways to achieve the desire for places for people to live and work in harmony with the scenic landscape of Vermont are becoming more attainable.

Under the leadership of the Waitsfield Planning Commission and Select Board and aided by the Mad River Valley Planning District, planning concepts were developed for new growth and development in Irasville. The desire to create a planned "growth center" was identified by the Town over 10 years ago and has been supported by residents and town officials. The Town, the Mad River Valley Planning District and residents have been involved in the development of this plan.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this project is to complete a critical portion of the overall Master Development Plan for the Irasville Growth Center in the Town of Waitsfield. Careful, thorough planning for Irasville is needed to achieve Waitsfield's planning goals.

The Town of Waitsfield and the Mad River Valley Planning District completed the first phase of the Irasville Growth Center Master Development Planning Project and identified the most significant physical, economic, institutional, financial, social and regulatory problems that are discouraging desirable growth center development. Taken together, these

problems are leading to environmental degradation, and favoring undesirable land use patterns in the Town and Valley:

1. The lack of a comprehensive approach to managing stormwater for the area has resulted in degradation of water quality, caused permitting problems, and discouraged compact growth.
2. There is a significant acreage of low-value wetland areas in the Growth Center that, because of the required permitting, forces scattered, low-density development.
3. Existing zoning regulations provide no incentives for mixed use development, do not address design or other permitting issues (e.g. stormwater, wetlands and wastewater).
4. Irasville lacks municipal water and sewer infrastructure, leading to low density development and degraded surface and groundwater quality.

These combined factors promote development of single use, low density projects on small parcels; thereby avoiding the need for increased septic capacity or innovative treatment, complex wetlands permits, stormwater management review, and Vermont’s Act 250 land use permitting. In addition, a Housing and Commuting Study was done by the Mad River Valley Planning District in 1998 that highlighted the vital economic and environmental importance of creating more employment opportunities within Irasville. The results of this study show that while approximately two-thirds of Valley residents work in the Valley, wages earned at jobs in the Valley are consistently lower than wages earned at jobs outside of the Valley. This economic problem leads to more commuting, creating more traffic on rural roadways and effecting air quality and a reduced quality of life. Making more space available for business growth and affordable housing within Irasville will directly address this vital community and environmental issue.

The primary objectives of this project are:

1. Improve the physical and environmental outcomes of growth and development in the Irasville Growth Center.
2. Make more land in the Irasville Growth Center available for compact, mixed use development through master development planning for wetlands and development areas.
3. Improve environmental conditions within the growth center through stormwater management and wetlands planning.

As outlined at length in the Town Plan, Irasville has been designated as the Town’s growth center. While it has substantial commercial development on both sides of Route 100, there are also several acres of wetland areas within the largest undeveloped portion of the growth center west of Route 100. Responsible land development in this area is required to enable Irasville to function successfully as a growth center. In order to properly develop this area, the Irasville Growth Center Master Development Plan must incorporate wetland mitigation and stormwater management.

The concept for Irasville is to create a place and define an orderly process that would guide development in such a manner that a new growth center could be developed. On the pragmatic side of the equation, the development of a plan for municipal sewer and water for Waitsfield Village and Irasville are essential to the vision of having a compact mixed use village center for the community. The hope is to create a “heart” of the community that recognizes the physical and environmental constraints of the village and is tailored to the unique qualities of Irasville.

Figure 1: Orthophoto of Irasville Today



Figure 2: Site Location

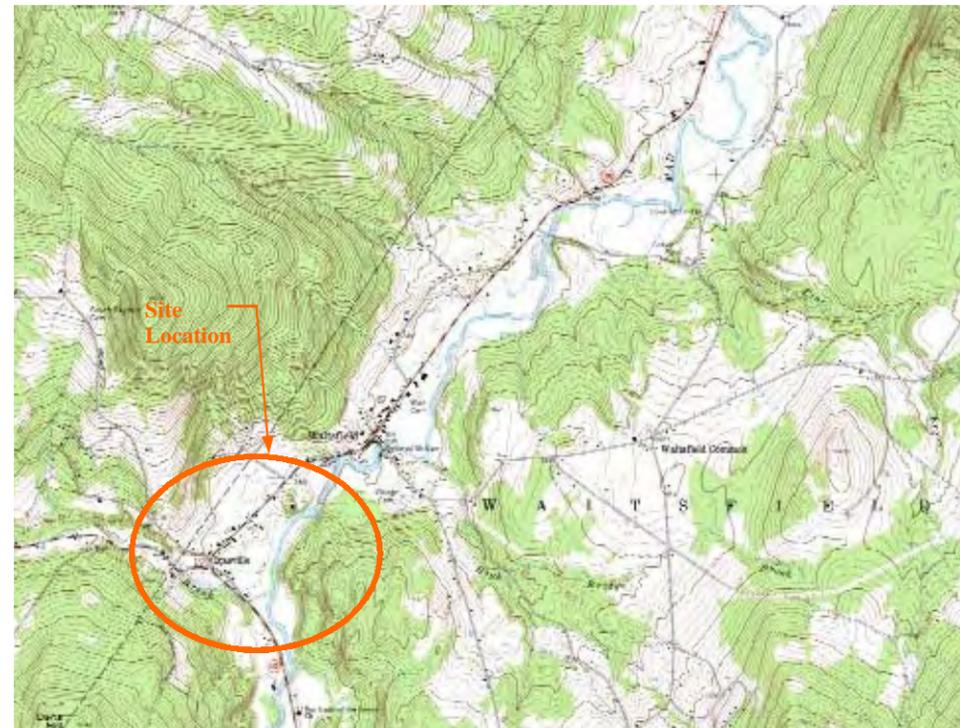


Figure 3: Existing Multiuse Building in Irasville

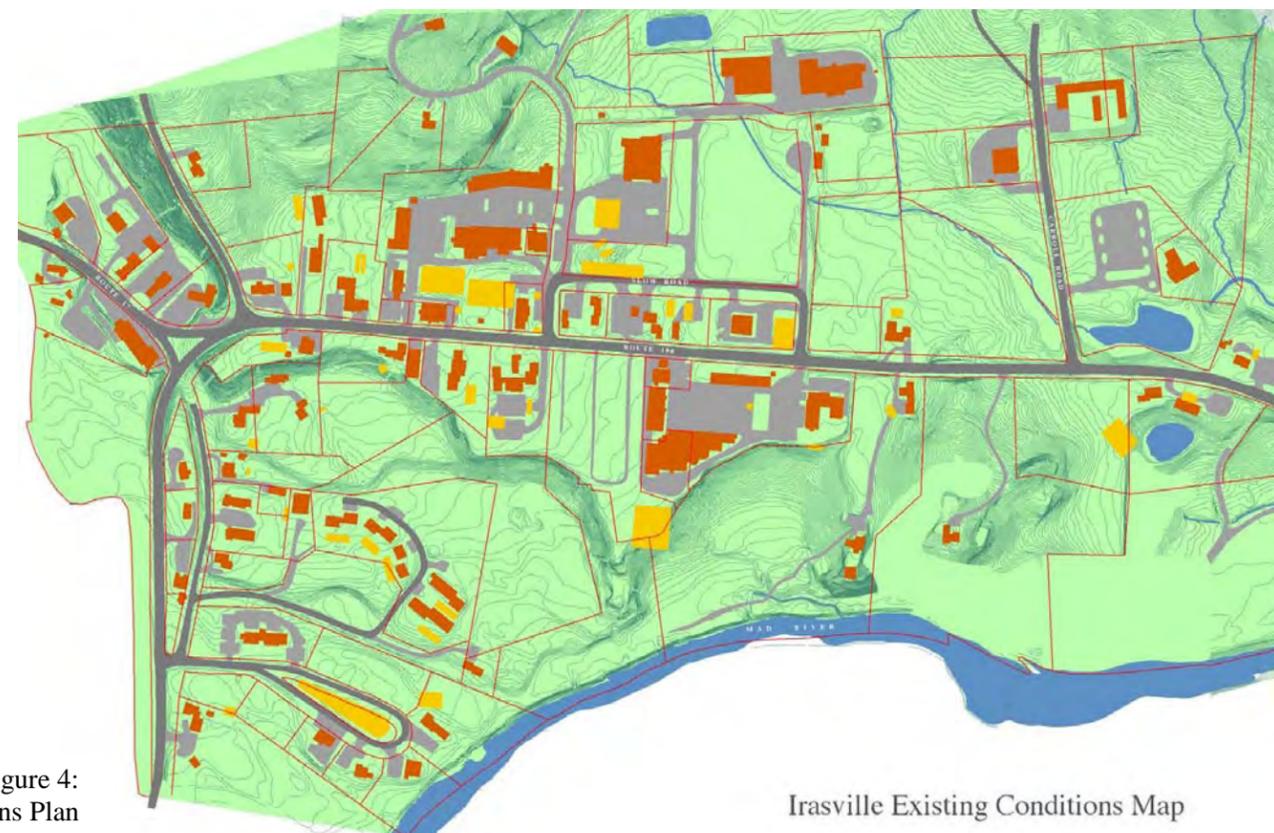


Figure 4:
Existing Conditions Plan

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT AREA

Irasville is approximately 190 acres of land within the Town of Waitsfield bordering Route 100 on the east and west sides, from the Fiddlers Green Shopping Center to the edge of Waitsfield Village historic district in the Mad River valley. Vermont Route 100 runs through the Growth Center. To the northwest of Route 100, the terrain slopes gently to the east or southeast. The Growth Center is bounded by the Waitsfield-Fayston town line, which runs along the toe of steeper slopes to the northwest. To the southeast of Route 100, the Growth Center is bounded by the Mad River. A steep 20 to 35-foot high terrace escarpment runs through this portion of the Growth Center, but above and below the escarpment, slopes are moderate to gentle.

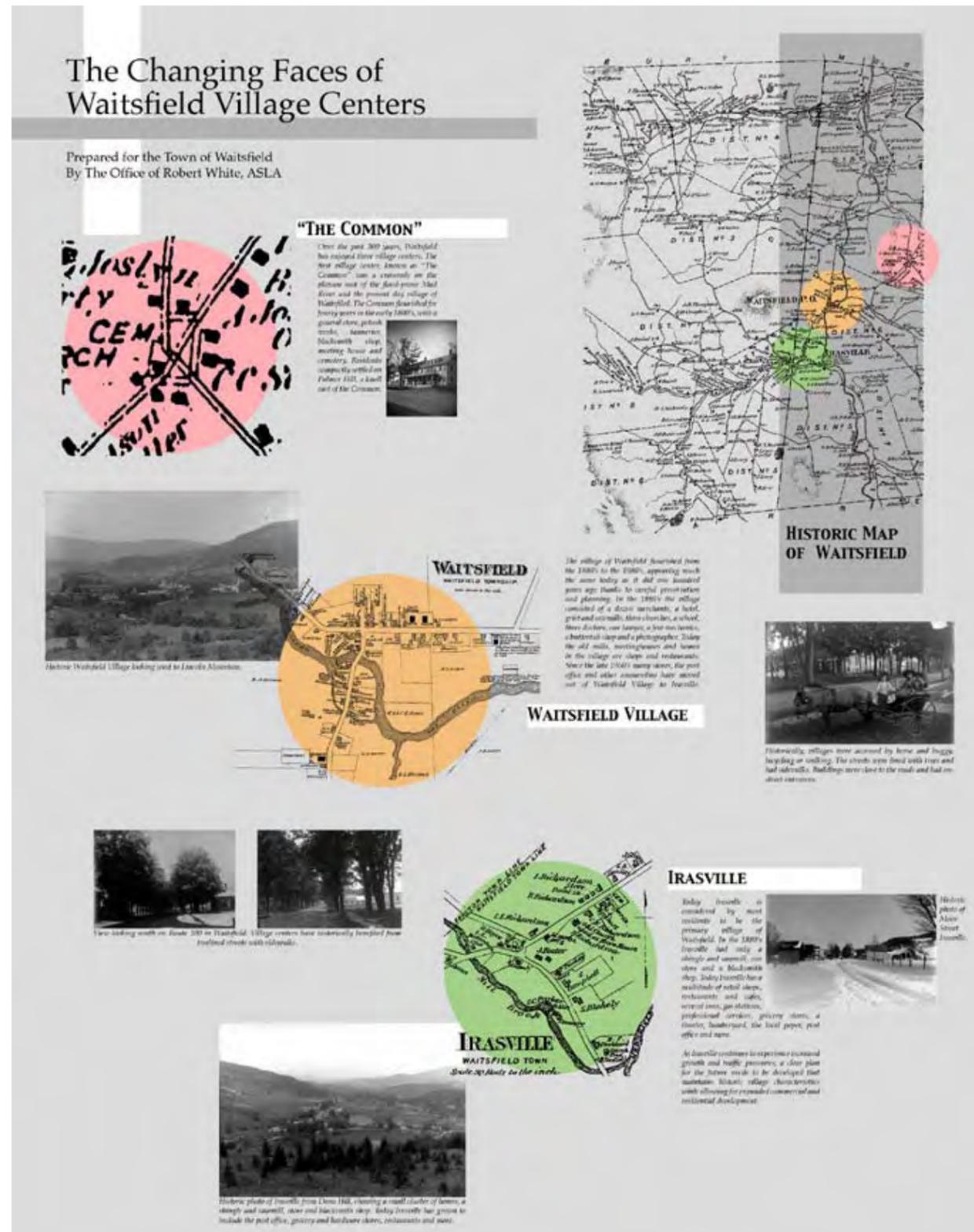
Currently, there is a variety of existing businesses and residences within the Growth Center boundaries. A majority of these exist on the west side of Route 100. A secondary road referred to as the "Slow Road" was developed a number of years ago, which is parallel to Route 100. A number of businesses are accessed from the Slow Road rather than directly from Route 100.

Surface water from the Growth Center northwest of Route 100 is collected by a small stream that has its headwaters on the steep hillside to the northwest of the Town line. Near the intersection of Carroll Road and Route 100, an artificial pond receives stream flow. The pond overflows into the natural stream channel that then continues northeastward to its confluence with the Mad River at the southwestern edge of Waitsfield village. Southeast of Route 100, numerous groundwater seeps issue from the terrace escarpment and, combined with surface water flow draining down over the face of the escarpment, enters the Mad River through two small streams.

Substantial areas of wetlands occur on both sides of Route 100 in the Growth Center. Wetlands northwest of Route 100 are dominated by wet meadows and riparian wetlands. To the southeast of Route 100, there are marshes, wet meadows, forested, and scrub-shrub wetlands.



Figure 5: Existing Store



HISTORIC PERSPECTIVES: IRASVILLE AND WAITSFIELD

Many Vermont communities have grown around historic commercial and industrial centers that have been a focal point of community life and work for many years, decades, even centuries. Irasville originally was a small settlement within the Town of Waitsfield. The area historically had a farm-forest economy bordered by other small towns with a relatively low decentralized population. Waitsfield has had three village centers over the past 300 years. The first, known as the Common, was a crossroads on the plateau east of the flood-prone Mad River and the present day village of Waitsfield. The Common flourished for forty years in the early 1800's with a general store, potash works, tanneries, blacksmith shop, meetinghouse and cemetery. Early residents settled on Palmer Hill, a knoll east of the Common.

Waitsfield Village, the second center, flourished from the 1880's to the 1980's, appearing much the same today as it did one hundred years ago thanks to careful planning and preservation. In the 1880's the village consisted of a dozen merchants, a hotel, grist and saw mills, three churches, a school, three doctors, one lawyer, a few mechanics, a butter tub shop and a photography studio. The old mills, meeting houses and homes in the village are shops and restaurants now.

Irasville had only a shingle mill and a sawmill, one store and a blacksmith shop in the 1880's. Today, Irasville is considered by most residents to be the primary village and commercial center of Waitsfield. Since the late 1960's, many businesses have moved out of Waitsfield Village to Irasville. It is home to numerous retail and service oriented businesses, a multitude of shops, restaurants and cafes, several inns, gas stations, professional services, grocery stores, a theater, lumberyard, the local paper, the post office and more.

In the early 1980's, commercial development in Irasville occurred primarily on Route 100. Since then, planning policies have pointed new development away from Route 100, with service drives, commercial blocks and shared parking lots located away from them. While this has worked well from a traffic standpoint, the development pattern is still automobile dominated. The Town has avoided becoming a classic commercial highway strip development. However, there are few residents who can relate to Irasville as a traditional town center. The look and feel of Irasville is also not really a village center because people must still drive to everything. Route 100, which is the "Main Street", has little in the way of pedestrian character or amenities such as sidewalks or street trees. Whereas Irasville is regarded as an important economic engine for the town, the manner in which development took place is decidedly not in the form of a traditional village center by Vermont standards.

Figure 6: Historic Waitsfield Panel