

12 | Land Use

12.A OVERVIEW

This chapter describes a future land use plan for Waitsfield. In doing so, it is partly a culmination of the preceding chapters of the plan. Many of the policies related to the protection and enhancement of cultural and natural resources, housing, and economic development are closely related to land use. Likewise, land use decisions and policies have an impact on how the town deals with the needs of a growing population, addresses transportation needs, and provides community facilities and services. To avoid redundancy, the policies of previous chapters related to land use are not reiterated, although those considerations are all reflected in the following discussion.

Identifying a common plan for the use and development of land, and achieving that plan through government policies and regulations, is among the most important, and controversial, planning issue faced by local communities. Historically, almost all land use decisions were made by individual land owners. Because of the profound impact that these many individual decisions have on the community, affecting property values, the demand for public services and facilities, environmental health, public safety, the availability of finite resources, economic opportunity, and the local quality of life, land use decisions are increasingly recognized as a legitimate public concern. These concerns must be balanced with the legal rights of landowners which are defined by a combination of local, state and federal law, and are afforded basic protections under both the Vermont and U.S. constitutions.

12.B CURRENT LAND USE

Existing land uses are the result of more than 200 years of Waitsfield's development and evolution. As stated elsewhere, Waitsfield is a rural community with a working landscape, a regional commercial center, a bedroom community, a tourist destination, and is home to a variety of species, habitats and natural resources. This is reflected in the dominant land uses and types of land cover that presently exist.

A dominant characteristic of Waitsfield is the extensive forest cover, especially in mountainous areas and on steep slopes rising from the valley floor. The

town's physical character, however, is defined by the contrasting patchwork of that forest with large areas of farmland, especially in the vicinity of Waitsfield Common and the valley floor, and an attractive built environment. Commercial development is concentrated in existing centers, Waitsfield Village and Irasville, and in the Limited Business and Industrial Districts. Residential development is widely distributed throughout town, although concentrations exist in the village centers and in rural areas served by major roads near the villages.

12.C SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Waitsfield has been actively involved in land use planning and development regulation since the early-1970s, and to a lesser extent for many years prior. The future land use plan for the town builds upon historic precedent and past planning efforts. Put simply, it is based upon the desire to maintain and reinforce the town's traditional settlement pattern. This pattern is distinguished by the following distinct features:

- ◆ Compact, mixed use village centers, and industrial areas, served by major transportation routes;
- ◆ A rural landscape surrounding the village centers, encompassing working farms, open meadows and forest and low density residential development;
- ◆ Small, compact residential "hamlets" located in appropriate locations throughout the rural landscape; and
- ◆ The least accessible and most fragile areas, including the mountainous eastern boundary, remaining essentially undeveloped.

To this end, the town has designated distinct land use districts, each with a different character and subject to different development pressures and land use considerations (see Map 11 in Appendix B). Overlapping some of these districts are "overlay" districts which have been established for the historic Waitsfield Village area, the mapped areas of flood and fluvial erosion hazards, and the area that was formerly the Commercial Lodging District. These overlay districts contain provisions that apply only to certain lands or structures within the underlying district. The

following sections describe the unique development context of each district, identify key considerations regarding future land use and development, and establish the foundation for goals and policies set forth at the end of this chapter.

It is noteworthy that much of the discussion regarding land use involves consideration of land use regulations. Where appropriate, non-regulatory tools and programs are also addressed, although these were included to a greater extent in previous chapters. The reason for this is that the Town Plan serves as the blueprint for the town's land use regulations. An important goal of any planning process that results in the adoption of land use regulations is to balance the legitimate interests of the community—as expressed through public policies—with the rights and expectations of individual landowners. The extent to which a community achieves such a balance, however, is always subject to individual judgment and interpretation.

12.D FOREST RESERVE DISTRICT

The Forest Reserve District is defined as all land with an elevation of 1,500 feet and above, a total of approximately 4,800 acres, most of which is located in the Northfield Range. The district boundary was established due to geographic and geological characteristics which make these upland areas poorly suited for development. This is especially true at elevations above 1,700 feet, which deserve special consideration regarding land use and development. Distinguishing features of the Forest Reserve District include:

- ◆ Extensive areas of steep slopes, especially above an elevation of 1,700 feet;
- ◆ Thin, highly erodible soils;
- ◆ Over 32 miles of small, fragile headwater streams;
- ◆ Highly visible and scenic hillsides and ridge lines;
- ◆ Very limited access to maintained roads, with no maintained roads serving land above 1,700 feet;
- ◆ Large tracts of productive forest land and, according to the Vermont Biodiversity project, extensive areas of core wildlife habitat.

Although portions of the Forest Reserve District were once used for agriculture, as evidenced by stone walls and patchwork forest patterns, it is almost

entirely forested today. Historically, development in the forest reserve district has been limited, with scattered camps and very few single-family homes. All existing year-round homes are located below 1,700 feet. Changing construction and transportation technology in recent years, however, and a growing market for lots which offer a big view, have increased development pressure in this district. This raises several land use concerns, summarized below.

Road Access. The Forest Reserve District encompasses the least accessible areas of town. Few roads provide access, most of those being unmaintained Class 4 roads (such as Palmer Hill, Northfield Gap and Bowen Roads in the Northfield Range, and the Dana Hill Road in the southwest corner of town). Because of the physical conditions found throughout this district, road improvements are expensive and difficult to maintain. This is exacerbated by the distance from other town roads and services.

Proposals to upgrade Class 4 roads to provide year-round access for residential development have been made in recent years. Such upgrades could alter the character of the district through increased pressure to subdivide large parcels for year-round residences, resulting in the fragmentation of wildlife habitat. Emergency access to development in this district is also difficult due to site conditions, and the potential exists for conflict between year-round automobile traffic and other traditional activities, such as logging operations and recreation.

Residential Development. Related to the encroachment of maintained roads into this district is the increased attraction of the area for residential development. The district has traditionally been used for timber production, primitive camps and recreation. Not only will additional residential development lead to further land fragmentation, it could: burden the town with increased demand for services in remote areas; increase the potential for conflict between homeowners and other traditional users of the area; result in the diminishment of water quality in headwater streams; and adversely impact prominent ridge lines and hillsides.

In order to limit the adverse impacts of additional residential development in this district, the upgrade of roads and subdivision of large forest parcels should be discouraged. If residential development does occur, careful site selection and screening of new homes

should occur, and landowners should be encouraged to restrict further subdivision of large parcels. It is especially important that development be limited to those areas that are most accessible and pose the fewest physical constraints and lowest risk of environmental degradation—land below an elevation of 1,700 feet.

Forestry. Much of the property within the Forest Reserve District is managed in accordance with a forest management plan, and two large parcels are in public ownership and under multiple-use management (Scrag Town Forest and Camel’s Hump State Forest). As was stated elsewhere in this plan, good forest management can ensure a sustainable income from timber harvesting while maintaining a healthy environment. A key to good forest management is incorporating best management practices to ensure water quality, minimize soil loss, promote forest regeneration, maintain and enhance habitat and create forest conditions that are aesthetically pleasing.

Programs are available to provide financial incentives to landowners in return for sound management of their property. The state current use program provides tax relief for landowners in return for forest management, and several state and local programs are available to purchase conservation easements from willing landowners.

Wildlife, Headwater Streams & Recreation. Important to any consideration of land use and/or development activity in the Forest Reserve District is the potential impact on wildlife habitat, aesthetics, water quality in headwater streams, and the availability of an adequate land-base for dispersed, non-commercial outdoor recreation such as hiking, hunting, and snowmobiling. The public has a clear interest in protecting some of these resources, such as clean water and viable wildlife populations.

Maintaining access for recreation, however, is largely dependent upon the cooperation of landowners. Several large parcels have been posted to prohibit recreational use in recent years, emphasizing the importance of maintaining Class 4 roads for recreational use, and securing better access to Scrag Forest. Other options to maintain public access, including property tax abatement in exchange for leaving property unposted, should be explored.



12.E AGRICULTURAL-RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

The largest land use district in Waitsfield, encompassing approximately 10,860 acres, is the Agricultural-Residential District. Within this district is the majority of the town’s cleared land, including several active farms, significant wildlife habitat (especially deer yards), the majority of the town’s housing units, and a handful of small businesses.

As its name implies, this district was established to accommodate two dominant land uses, agriculture and housing. With single-family homes on lots of varying sizes being the dominant type of housing, maintaining a balance between these two land uses, while maintaining the district’s rural character, is an ongoing challenge. Issues associated with this challenge are addressed below.

Rural Character. The landscape within the Agricultural-Residential District is a critical element of Waitsfield’s rural character and special charm. The term rural character may be ambiguous, although the Mad River Valley Rural Resource Protection Plan loosely defines The Valley’s rural character as the historic working landscape formed by open farmland, barns, farmhouses and other historic structures, the scenic backdrop formed by forested hillsides and mountains, tree shaded roads and a meandering river.

Maintaining the town’s rural character has long been a planning goal of the community, and continues to be emphasized within this district. Methods to maintain the rural landscape include continued support and protection of working farm and forest land, and balancing that with the careful development of new housing. Achieving this balance is among the most important land use challenges facing the community.

The need for additional affordable housing, especially ownership opportunities for middle-income households, is critical to Waitsfield's economic and social well-being. New approaches that support residential development in appropriate locations while protecting the land base needed to maintain a working landscape in this district are required for Waitsfield to avoid losing its rural character and to prevent excessive development.

Agriculture & Forestry. Despite widespread decline in agriculture in many areas of Vermont, farming has fared relatively well in Waitsfield in recent decades. Presently, nearly 3,300 acres of land is open, much of which is in agricultural production. This includes three dairies and 30 other diversified farms as counted by the 2007 Agricultural Census.

In addition to commercial agriculture, there has been a sharp increase in the number of residents keeping horses over the past 10 years. This helps to maintain the agrarian landscape, fosters a direct relationship between landowners and the land, and provides a market for local agricultural products such as hay.

Maintaining a land base for farming and forestry not only helps to maintain Waitsfield's rural character and working landscape, it contributes to the local economic base in a sustainable manner. In the face of global climate change and an increasing world population, maintaining a local food supply may prove in the long run to be critical to the community's survival.

At the same time, the current demand for housing options for local residents is not expected to decline in the near future and a significant portion of the town's new residential growth will likely occur in the Agricultural-Residential District. Maintaining a land base for the production of food and fiber while accommodating the demand for housing is among the greatest challenges facing Waitsfield.

Methods to prevent the conversion of farmland to development and support the economic viability of agriculture include both regulatory and non-regulatory programs. Both should focus on the most productive farm and forest land, such as large tracts of primary agricultural soils, and on lands which are characterized by multiple resources (e.g., outstanding scenery, historic structures, wildlife habitat). When considering the appropriate tool(s) to maintain the economic viability of farmland, it is important to maintain a long-term perspective of what is economically viable,

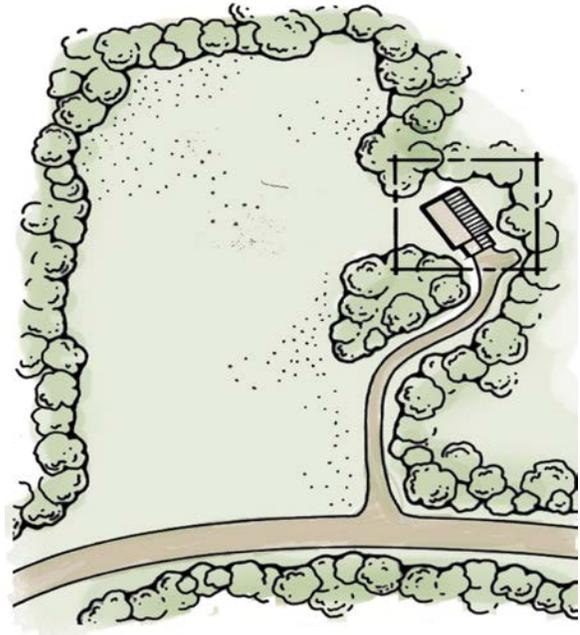
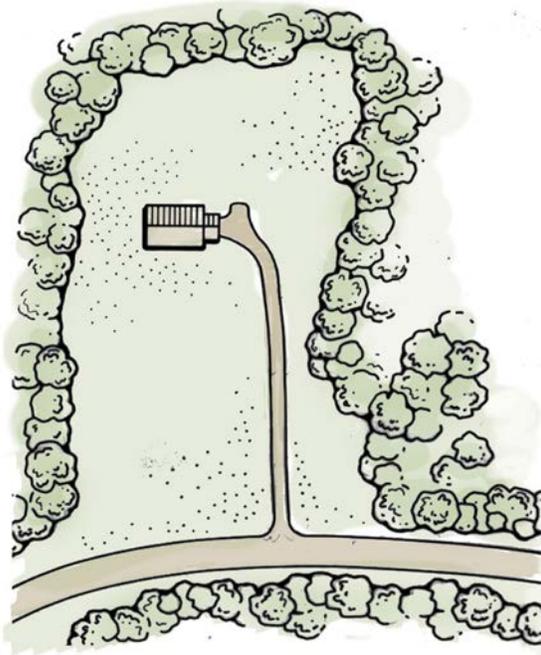
rather than making such a determination at a single point in time.

Non-regulatory tools that have been used successfully in the past include the town's tax abatement program for working farms, which reduces the tax burden on farmers, and land conservation programs in which a conservation easement may be purchased on farmland, thereby removing the development rights and leaving the land affordable for farmers. All or portions of five farm properties, including three dairy farms, have benefitted from the purchase of development rights within the past 20 years.

Subdivision & Residential Development. Due to traditional land uses in the Agricultural-Residential District, a great deal of property remains in large parcels under agricultural or forestry management. As a declining percentage of town residents were engaged in farming, however, land subdivision, primarily for residential purposes, has reshaped large portions of the landscape in recent decades. While the subdivision of large parcels frequently benefit the community by providing housing sites for local residents and allowing the transfer of property between parties, poorly conceived subdivision can result in a degradation of the environment and severe impacts on scenic and natural resources.

For the past 25 years, the town has been actively guiding emerging development patterns through the regulation of subdivisions. While this has resulted in more thoughtful subdivision of land, and has ensured that the protection of important natural resources is a consideration during any subdivision application process, the rate of subdivision, and residential development, does not appear to have been affected. During the 1990s, 148 new lots were created, almost all of which were located in the Agricultural-Residential District and as shown on Map 14 in Appendix B, that pattern of residential development continued in the 2000s.

Through the subdivision regulations, the town can ensure that new development does not harm sensitive natural areas, that adequate sewage disposal and water supplies exist, that new roads and utilities are coordinated with improvements on neighboring properties and will meet minimum standards, that farm and forest land remain available for production, and that residential development is encouraged at appropriate densities in appropriate locations.



Common methods of limiting impacts on natural resources and fragile features is through the identification of buildable areas on proposed lots, typically through the use of designated building envelopes, and through the use of conservation or open space subdivisions. A building envelope is the area on which construction will occur, typically selected as the portion of the lot upon which development will have the minimum adverse impact. The illustrations above show how a building envelope can be used to allow for a house site while preserving the agricultural use of an open meadow.

Conservation subdivisions are intended to ensure that subdivision design is based on the identification and protection of key site elements, such as open fields, steep slopes, solar access, etc., and that building envelopes and site improvements are sited, and property boundaries configured, to minimize the impact and fragmentation of those features. Often, clustering of the development on the least sensitive portion of the subdivided parcel is an important feature of conservation subdivisions. The illustration to the left shows how a small subdivision can be designed in this manner.

Residential Hamlets & Density. As explained above, the Agricultural-Residential District is the primary location for housing development in the town

(although policies of this plan call for a greater concentration of housing within growth centers). Single-family homes on moderate sized lots (1-15 acres) comprise the majority of housing in this district. The demand for residential development will increase, especially if the factors contributing to the desirability of Waitsfield as a residential community continue as expected.

While the current zoning allows one housing unit on a single acre, some areas of town are better suited than others for moderate and high density residential development. This is especially true for areas near town services. Specific areas that have been identified for consideration for greater residential densities include:

- ◆ Land north of Waitsfield Village and west of Route 100;
- ◆ Land adjacent to Route 100 and the Warren town boundary, in the vicinity of Bundy Road;
- ◆ Opportunities for small-scale in-fill development in the area to the south/west of the lower East Warren Road, including the area served by the Hastings and Palmer Hill Roads;
- ◆ Other areas that may be identified through a public planning effort.

Those areas characterized by undeveloped open land, significant natural resources (e.g. floodplains, steep slopes, etc.), and limited proximity to town services, are not suited for moderate density residential development. These include:

- ◆ Productive farmland, especially along the Mad River/Route 100 corridor and the Common and East Warren Roads;
- ◆ Areas with steep slopes and extensive deer yards; and
- ◆ Higher elevation ridges and knolls which rise above the Mad River and are highly visible from Route 100.

Incentives to encourage higher density residential development and new residential hamlets (small clusters of houses configured in a traditional small-village pattern or oriented around common features such as a park or open space) in those areas that are appropriate for development, while discouraging development in other areas, should be explored. For such a strategy to work, the community will need to have an informed debate regarding desired development

patterns and residential densities in the Agricultural-Residential District.

Commercial Enterprises. Other than farming and forestry, housing is the primary land use in this district. Because of the potential conflict between residential and commercial uses, especially in a rural area, few commercial land uses are allowed in the Agricultural-Residential District. Potential conflicts include high traffic volumes generated by many commercial activities, noise and similar disturbances to neighborhood tranquility, and community support for strengthening village districts in Town which could be undermined by commercial sprawl.

A commercial activity which is of growing importance in the Agricultural-Residential District are home-based businesses. Advances in communications and technology, and the trend toward small cottage industries, have increased the important role played by home occupations in Vermont's economy. According to the 2000 census 10.2% of Waitsfield's labor force is employed at home, nearly double the percentage of the County's (5.9%) and state's (5.7%) labor force working at home. The challenge posed by home-based businesses is ensuring that they are compatible with the rural, residential setting, and do not impact neighboring properties through noise, outdoor storage or traffic, or disturb the residential character of neighborhoods.

A limited number of other commercial activities may be compatible with residential neighborhoods in rural settings. These include small lodges and inns and certain recreation and cultural facilities. Such uses can be designed to minimize potential conflicts with residential development and actually be an amenity to area residences. Methods to avoid or mitigate adverse impacts include limiting large scale activities and large traffic generators, ensuring that buildings and uses are of a scale and design that are compatible with residential uses, and locating such uses in historic structures that are no longer viable for their original function (e.g., historic barns—see Chapter 4).

Resource Extraction. The demand for the extraction of such natural resources as sand and gravel and potable water for commercial sale are also important issues relating to land use in the Agricultural-Residential District. Unlike most other land uses, resource extraction by its very nature must occur where those resources are located. This presents the potential for

conflict with such other less intensive land uses as housing and recreation.

Sand and gravel extraction may be controlled through zoning to ensure minimal impact on scenic resources during operation and after restoration of the site. Such safeguards as screening, landscaping, restoration plans, bonding for restoration, restricted hours of operation, limited rates of extraction and appropriate traffic management can be considered while reviewing proposed extractions. The impact of trucking sand and gravel on town roads is of particular concern. This may also be addressed by controlling the number, duration and character of truck traffic to ensure road safety, minimize impacts on the neighborhood and avoid excessive deterioration of town roads.

The commercial extraction of groundwater is another issue which has been much discussed locally in past years. Commercial groundwater extraction could provide benefits to the town, including the potential for maintaining large tracts of undeveloped open space. As productive land becomes less economically practical to manage solely for agriculture and forestry, other financial incentives need to be available for landowners to maintain large tracts of undeveloped land. Commercial water extraction provides such an incentive.

Many of the same issues relating to gravel extraction also apply to water extraction, although the disruption of a site resulting from water extraction is not nearly as severe as a gravel pit. Truck traffic and impacts to groundwater are important considerations. With regard to traffic, however, alternative means of transporting water (e.g., pipelines) could be available that are not possible with gravel extraction.

The impact of groundwater extraction on neighboring water supplies, and on the public interest of ensuring that an adequate supply of water remains in the community, are also important issues. Prior to any large-scale withdrawal, safeguards to ensure that neighboring water supplies will not be adversely affected should be established, and issues associated with the impact of privatization of a basic life resource, and the transport of that resource out of the watershed, should be addressed.

12.F ADAPTIVE REDEVELOPMENT OVERLAY

The Adaptive Redevelopment Overlay District encompasses an area of nearly 560 acres along the Route 100 corridor between Irasville and the Warren town line, which was formerly known as the Commercial Lodging District. The distinguishing feature of this district is the presence of several commercial and cultural facilities: the Featherbed Inn, Lareau Farm Inn/American Flatbread, Madbush Inn, and the Yesterday Design/Build School.

In 2009 changing economic conditions, including hotel development at Sugarbush Resort and the expansion of certain existing uses beyond what was originally anticipated, prompted the reconsideration of the Commercial Lodging District's purpose. This resulted in the creation of the Adaptive Redevelopment Overlay District, which allows for the redevelopment and expansion of certain existing sites and businesses in a manner that promotes sustainable, tourism-oriented development in an area historically designated and used for such purposes.

Rural Character. The general character and landscape of the Adaptive Redevelopment Overlay District is similar to that of the surrounding Agricultural-Residential District. District boundaries were generally drawn to exclude highly visible areas and productive farm land, which mitigate the impacts of non-residential development. The district is also served by the Mad Bus, although the distance from village centers necessitates that most commercial activities be automobile-dependent.

The same strategies used to maintain the rural character of the Agricultural-Residential District apply to the Adaptive Redevelopment Overlay District. Regardless of the use, careful consideration should be given to ensure that new development is well screened and landscaped, takes full advantage of natural site conditions and does not detract from the character of adjacent properties, including those on the west side of Route 100. Site design should reflect the traditional rural character of the Route 100 corridor, and every effort should be made to discourage suburban or strip development patterns within this district. In instances involving agricultural land, an effort should be made to site development in a manner which preserves the existing character of open fields. Commercial uses should only be allowed at very low densities, preferably in association with the preservation of open space.

Land Use. A key concern regarding the future of the Adaptive Redevelopment Overlay District has been the appropriate mix of uses that should be allowed here. The overlay district allows certain small-scale industrial businesses that are compatible with the rural setting and can be expected to promote well-paying jobs. Such uses are envisioned to be low-density (e.g., require a sizable acreage) and to be associated with value-added processing of local agricultural and forest products (e.g., food products, wood products), thereby linking the businesses to policies designed to protect the town's rural character and working landscape. thereby linking the businesses to policies designed to protect the town's rural character and working landscape.



12.G WAITSFIELD VILLAGE DISTRICTS

Waittsfield Village historically served as the town's commercial and service center, although much of the retail and commercial base has shifted to Irasville in recent decades. But most community services, including the fire department and ambulance service, library, town offices and elementary school, remain in the village.

Village Character. Waittsfield Village is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a Historic District. The village exemplifies a classic New England development pattern characterized by a compact development center, dominant public buildings and contrast between the village and surrounding countryside. While the village's historic character is largely intact, much of the contemporary development at the northern end deviates from the traditional styles found elsewhere in the village.

An important element of the village's historic character is the sharp contrast between the compact village and the surrounding countryside. The wooded hillside west of the village, and farm fields to the east, are subject to conservation easements and will remain undeveloped. The Mad River and the exposed ledges and winding character of Route 100 to the south also define strong boundaries and a clear southern gateway to the village.

The area to the north of the village, however, including agricultural land bordering Route 100, is critical to maintaining the sharp distinction between the village and the surrounding countryside. The northern boundary of the Waittsfield Elementary School property and the row of pine trees north of the Waittsfield Telecom property create a strong northern gateway.

Discouraging single-story architecture also should help maintain the village's traditional scale, and careful consideration should be given to the impact of signs and lighting to avoid detracting from the pleasant streetscape found in the village. Opportunities for enhancing the streetscapes should also be pursued, including planting trees to reinforce a canopy along Route 100 and Bridge Street and to ensure the continued presence of shade trees in front and side yards.

To ensure that future development is compatible with the village's historic character and to discourage the demolition of historic structures, a Historic Waittsfield Village Overlay District was adopted in 2002 and two distinct zoning districts were established.

Village Residential District. The Village Residential District was established to maintain the residential character of the village outside of the historic commercial core in the vicinity of Bridge Street, and to encourage additional residential development. The presence of the polo field in this district presents an opportunity to establish a formal village green. This has begun with the donation of the polo field and the creation of the Flemer Field Community Green.

Efforts are needed to maintain the existing housing base of the village, and to discourage the conversion of residential properties to solely commercial uses. Requiring that some commercial uses, such as retail and offices, locate within mixed use buildings and encouraging upstairs apartments should maintain a housing base and protect the village's residential character.

Village Business District. Waitsfield Village historically served as the commercial and service center for much of the Mad River Valley. While many of the retail and professional businesses have relocated to the shopping centers in Irasville, between 80,000 and 90,000 square feet of commercial and institutional floor space is currently located in the village. Much of this total is comprised of professional office space and municipal services.

Existing retail uses are located throughout the village, especially on Bridge Street and along Route 100 north of Bridge Street, which has been designated as the Village Business District. Most of these businesses are craft and specialty shops primarily catering to out-of-town visitors. The Bridge Street Market Place, a commercial complex in the core of the village consisting of four historic structures renovated with the aid of federal historic preservation tax credits, was designed as a retail center. Because of a high demand for office space, much of the marketplace is occupied by non-retail uses. While these firms do not contribute to the village's attraction as a commercial destination, they do provide high quality employment unaffected by the cyclical nature of the tourism industry.

District Boundaries. The Village Business District should continue as a retail, service and employment center for the Mad River Valley. Specialty shops should be encouraged to occupy the storefronts along Bridge Street and Route 100, and professional and business offices should occupy rear areas and second floors.

At only 7.4 acres, however, the Business District does not encompass all properties that could be considered part of the village's commercial core. Modest expansion of the district both to the south and north could enhance the economic potential of the district, but should only occur if such expansion will not detract from the historic character of the village, or the residential character of the village residential district.

12.H IRASVILLE

The Irasville Village District has served as Waitsfield's principal growth center for nearly 30 years. Centrally located in the Mad River Valley at the crossroads of Routes 100 and 17, Irasville is the result of farsighted land use policies and public and private investment initiated in the 1970s and continuing through today. Encompassing approximately 190 acres, Irasville

was envisioned as a compact, mixed use village serving the commercial, cultural and housing needs of the Mad River Valley. Nearly 200,000 square feet of mixed-commercial space, over 80 residential dwellings, and several recreation facilities have been constructed in Irasville since it was first designated as a growth center.

Irasville not only serves Waitsfield residents, the neighboring towns of Fayston, Moretown and Warren all recognize Irasville as their communities' "downtown" in their respective town plans. This function as the Mad River Valley's downtown has been supported with strategic infrastructure improvements, including road construction to establish a partial grid street network, and planned sidewalk construction to provide pedestrian access within Irasville and a pedestrian connection to historic Waitsfield Village. The lack of community wastewater or water systems, however, coupled with the lack of integrated storm water management, have resulted in a fragmented development pattern and limited capacity to accommodate growth pressure. The construction of a municipal water system and a sidewalk from the elementary school to Route 17 in 2010-13 is a significant step forward in improving the downtown infrastructure.

Master Planning. Several master planning efforts have been initiated in the years since Irasville was first designated as the town's growth center. The goal of each of these efforts was the preparation of a master plan that:

- ◆ Illustrates the desired future development pattern within the district in a manner that reflects an efficient use of land and a high density, pedestrian oriented village center;
- ◆ Defines the development characteristics that should provide the necessary foundation for improved building and site design standards under the town's development regulations;
- ◆ Establishes a framework to ensure that development results in an interconnected network of roads and paths, which in combination will reduce reliance on the automobile and provide local alternatives to Route 100;
- ◆ Identifies open space that should be incorporated into development plans, including both formal (e.g., village green) and informal (natural area, wetland) types of open space; and

- ◆ Addresses facility and infrastructure needs, including storm water management facilities needed to address the potential water quality impacts of high density development in a coordinated manner.

Master planning efforts date back at least to the early 1980s. The first comprehensive physical design for Irasville prepared in 1997 proposed a compact downtown characterized by an interconnected grid of streets and sidewalks, well defined streetscapes, two village greens and multi-story buildings housing a mix of commercial, civic and residential uses.

That planning effort was expanded and further refined in the 2002 Master Development Plan for the Irasville Growth Center: A Vision for a New Village. The 2002 plan illustrates many of the design concepts that should characterize future development in Irasville, although further refinement of the plan is still needed.

While no single master plan has been formerly endorsed by the town, several key design concepts and development issues have been identified during the various master planning efforts. These are consolidated into a conceptual plan as shown on Maps 10 and 12 in Appendix B. These concepts and issues are addressed in greater detail below.

Settlement Patterns. Much of Irasville’s early development was designed to function as a more automobile oriented growth center, in contrast to Waitsfield Village. Thus, much of the development that occurred in the 1970s and early-1980s - Fiddlers Green, Mad River Green, Village Square, Shaw’s, Winter Park - lacks pedestrian orientation and scale, and these complexes are poorly integrated with one another.

Following an approximately 15-year lull in development, pressure to construct new office, retail and residential space resumed in the late 1990s. The expansion of Mad River Green and the construction of the Northfield Savings Bank, along with the associated construction of a new road serving those uses, marked the first significant development since the early 1980s. That project also marked a shift away from automobile-oriented development to a denser, more pedestrian-oriented pattern reminiscent of traditional Vermont villages. That is the pattern that should continue to characterize new development in Irasville. Defining features of this desired settlement pattern include:

- ◆ An interconnected network of roads and pedestrian paths;
- ◆ Well defined streetscapes, defined by closely spaced buildings fronting close to the road, sidewalks, street trees and, where possible, on-street parking;
- ◆ Opportunities for rear-yard “in-fill” development where defined streetscapes are not present or practical;
- ◆ Formal and informal open spaces, including a village green(s) and greenway network, possibly encompassing “green infrastructure,” such as storm water facilities;
- ◆ Multi-story buildings;
- ◆ A pedestrian scale of site and building design;
- ◆ A mix of uses, including upper-story dwellings where practical; and
- ◆ A density of development that is considerably higher than adjacent districts, especially the Agricultural-Residential District.

To achieve these development features, further refinement of the 2002 master plan will be required, and the town’s development regulations will need to be updated to reflect desired pattern. In addition, key development constraints, most significantly the wet meadows between Mad River Green and the Carroll Road, may need to be developed, provided that the ecological function of the wetlands can be mitigated.

Not only are the scale, design, location and orientation of buildings critical to Irasville’s emerging settlement pattern, but also the location and design of open space is critical as well. Future development should incorporate two key open space features into the overall design of the district—the establishment of a public green, or common, which can be used for community events, gatherings and recreation, as well as a less formal greenway and path network that would provide a natural contrast to developed areas.

Land Use & Character. As noted, Irasville encompasses a full range of land uses, including the Mad River Valley’s principal commercial and service enterprises, a mix of single- and multi-family dwellings (including several upper-story apartments), office space for a range of professional and business enterprises, and a limited amount of light manufacturing space.

The focus of most past development activity has been along both sides of Route 100 from the intersection of Bragg Hill north to the Couples Club driveway. This area provides the greatest opportunity for new construction and infill development and should be developed as the area's downtown core with a full range of commercial services, civic and cultural facilities, offices and multi-family housing. Surrounding areas, including land to the west and south of Winter Park and adjacent to Bragg Hill, provide opportunities for new residential neighborhoods.

The Irasville Business Park (formerly Mad River Canoe manufacturing buildings) and adjacent land north to Allen Lumber raise specific challenges to the community. Currently, buildings in this area are large monolithic structures that create more an appearance of an industrial park than a traditional village. Future development or re-development in this area should occur in a manner that minimizes, or reverses, potentially adverse impacts of such structures on the surrounding area through building design that reduces the mass and scale of large buildings and extensive landscaping and screening. Industrial uses, including service industries that do not provide on-site services or products to customers, should be limited to the area along the Fayston boundary between Mad River Canoe and Allen Lumber, and should not be allowed to encroach further to the east toward Route 100.

A third distinct area or neighborhood in Irasville is located below the upper terrace on which Mad River Green and Village square are located. Fiddlers Green is a low-density commercial complex housing offices and service businesses such as a car wash and laundromat. To the north of Fiddlers Green is a predominately residential area in which approximately 50 dwellings are located. Additional infill development consisting of commercial, office and residential uses is appropriate on land with frontage on the Fiddlers Green Road, but in a manner that uses land more efficiently than past development. Land to the north, served by the Dugway and Butcher House Roads, provides another opportunity for residential neighborhood development.

A generalized land use plan for Irasville, identifying appropriate areas for residential, industrial, commercial and mixed use development, is included as Map 12 in Appendix B.

Facilities & Infrastructure. The lack of water and wastewater infrastructure has been identified as a critical barrier to development within Irasville since the 1980s. With much of the best land already developed, the provision of water and/or wastewater systems remains the most important infrastructure need.

Again, how wetlands mitigation and storm water management issues are resolved will shape how the district develops and evolves over time. The 2002 master plan envisioned that several wet meadows could be developed with mitigation to maintain and enhance their limited ecological values.

Roads and pathways are another key infrastructure consideration. One of the most significant shortcomings of the 2002 master plan is the absence of possible future roadway connections parallel to Route 100 from Bragg Hill to Waitsfield Village. Where and how these road connections are established should be considered before any specific development eliminates a desirable connection opportunity.

Another public amenity that is supported by a wide cross section of local residents is open space, including one or more formal village greens of a size and character sufficient to serve as a community focal point and gathering place for events such as the farmers' market. Additional locations for a formal green include a portion of the open field adjacent to the Skatium. A defining feature of a village green, however, are clear boundaries defined by an attractive collection of buildings.

Finally, Irasville is well served by broadband telecommunications infrastructure and three-phase power. In the future, new utility extensions should be located underground, and the feasibility of burying above ground utilities should be explored.

12.1 INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

The Mad River (formerly "Fly-In") Industrial Park is located with direct access to Route 100 from the Airport Road. It was designed to accommodate industrial and other high intensity land uses in an area which would not adversely impact the quality of life found in more rural areas, and was located in an area which would not generate high traffic volumes in already congested areas, or detract from the historic character and pedestrian scale of Waitsfield Village and Irasville.

After several years with very limited development activity, the park changed ownership in the late 1990s and has seen a great deal of activity in the years since. In response to a realization that local zoning was inadequate to address recent development pressures, the Planning Commission worked with landowners and other local officials to revise the zoning standards and district boundaries in 2001. At its peak, an estimated 100 to 150 people were employed by businesses located in the park, though a large volume of the space remains unoccupied today.

Land Uses. Mad River Park is well suited for light industrial and manufacturing uses, and future development within the district should be primarily light industry and related uses. Commercial uses, especially those which generate high traffic volumes from customers or require frequent access to the general public, such as retail and some office uses, should be limited to enterprises that are intended to provide services and goods to on-site employees rather than the general public.

Performance Standards. The nature of many industrial uses often impact neighboring properties due to excessive noise, odors, vibration or similar results of industrial processes. To avoid such impacts, it is especially important that development in the Industrial District comply with well defined performance standards to address potential impacts which should be measured and enforced at the boundaries to the district.

Master Planning. Past development in the park has been the result of incremental subdivision of lots and subsequent development of single sites. While the building and site design have generally been of very high quality, the emerging development pattern does not reflect the most efficient use of the land. This is important as the district is comprised of a finite land area, and future expansion may pose conflicts with neighboring properties.

To ensure that the build-out of the park occurs in a logical, efficient manner, a master plan should be prepared prior to additional subdivision and site development. Such a plan should provide a conceptual build-out of the park, including lot and road configuration, which could be implemented over time and revised if needed.

12.J LIMITED BUSINESS ZONE

The Limited Business District is a small (45+ acres) area located east of Route 100, between Irasville and the Warren town boundary. The area was initially designated due to its central location within the Mad River Valley, although the intent was to limit development to commercial uses then in existence. Over the years, the area has grown to include a mix of uses that currently includes light industry, offices, a few residences and public facilities, including a VTrans maintenance facility and the Mad River Valley's only trash transfer station.

Character & Land Use. Due to past development, and state permit conditions associated with wetlands and deer yards located in the district, only limited land is available for future development. Existing uses may seek to expand over time, however, and some vacant and/or semi-developed land is available for additional development. Careful consideration should be given to site design, including:

- ◆ Landscaping and screening to avoid any adverse visual impacts along Route 100;
- ◆ The elimination of curb cuts where shared access with neighboring properties is possible;
- ◆ A restriction of retail sales and other traffic generators;
- ◆ Avoiding additional "frontage" lots which could reinforce a linear pattern of highway "strip development"; and
- ◆ Minimizing the impact on neighboring properties as a result of excessive or obnoxious odors, noise, or lighting.

In 2010, the Selectboard approved the addition of mixed-use development in order to support the inclusion of residential uses with other conditional uses in this district.

District Boundaries. Consideration was given to reducing the size of the district when zoning revisions were drafted in 2002. In response to landowner concerns, only minor changes to the existing boundaries were made to coincide with property boundaries. Future changes may be appropriate, although none should be undertaken that would increase the size of the district.

12.K HAZARD OVERLAY DISTRICTS

To minimize flooding (inundation) hazards, Flood Hazard Area regulations limit and regulate development within mapped floodplains that are susceptible to a 1% annual chance of flooding (i.e., 100-year floodplain). These regulations are required for town participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The town's regulations were updated in 2010 to meet NFIP requirements, in association with newly digitized flood maps.

At the same time flood hazard area regulations were updated, the town adopted fluvial erosion hazard area regulations for areas at risk from gradual or catastrophic stream bank failure. These regulations are intended to limit property loss and protect the public from hazards associated with stream channel movement.

Development in both overlay districts may be limited, subject to special design standards, or prohibited. Most development in these districts requires public hearing and conditional use approval from the Development Review Board, and documentation that applicable state permits or certifications have been obtained.

12.L GOALS

- 12.L-1 The preservation of Waitsfield's historic settlement pattern, defined by compact villages surrounded by rural countryside.
- 12.L-2 The regulation of land development in a manner which protects important cultural and natural resources while encouraging a range of land uses in appropriate locations.
- 12.L-3 Maintenance of a reasonable balance between community imposed limitations on land use and the rights of individual land owners.

12.M POLICIES

- 12.M-1 Maintain the town's historic settlement pattern of compact growth centers surrounded by rural countryside in accordance with the land use plan and associated land use districts described in this chapter and depicted on Map 11 in Appendix B.

- 12.M-2 Administer land use regulations, including zoning and subdivision regulations, in a fair and consistent manner, in accordance with all applicable development and land use policies of this plan.
- 12.M-3 Maintain the Forest Reserve District for the purpose of protecting significant forest resources and headwater streams and to limit development in areas with steep slopes, shallow soils, wildlife habitat, fragile features, scenic resources and poor access to town roads, facilities and services. To this end,
 - 12.M-3.a Land use and development shall be limited to forestry, outdoor recreation, small seasonal camps, and year-round residential dwellings below an elevation of 1,700 feet;
 - 12.M-3.b Roads and utilities shall not extend at or above elevations of 1,700 feet except to provide seasonal access to camps, forestry operations and for recreation;
 - 12.M-3.c Development shall be carefully controlled to avoid adverse visual impacts, degradation of water quality, and the large-scale fragmentation of wildlife habitat and productive forest;
 - 12.M-3.d When land is subdivided, provision should be made to ensure access for future forest management and to avoid potential conflicts between land uses;
 - 12.M-3.e Residential development shall occur at low densities (maximum of one unit per 25 acres), although house lots should remain small with the balance of the land being held in larger parcels, to avoid the fragmentation of forest land. PUDs are an appropriate means for clustering development in this manner.
 - 12.M-3.f Promote sustainable forest management to ensure the maintenance of water quality, the enhancement of wildlife habitat and the avoidance of adverse impacts on scenic resources, including upland areas in the Northfield Mountain range. (See "Acceptable Management Practices for Maintaining Water Quality on Logging Jobs in Vermont").

- 12.M-4 Maintain the Agricultural-Residential District for the purpose of supporting the continued operation and expansion of agricultural operations, forest management, the preservation of rural resources and natural features, and to accommodate low density residential development while encouraging moderate or high density clustered residential development in appropriate locations. To this end:**
- 12.M-4.a Limit land uses to agriculture, forestry, residences, land based uses (e.g., recreation, extraction) and very limited commercial or public facilities that are compatible with the rural, residential character of the district or support primary residential or agricultural uses;
- 12.M-4.b Provide for the creation of clustered residential hamlets in appropriate locations, while balancing those higher-density developments with lower-density development and land conservation elsewhere in the district; and
- 12.M-4.c Ensure that land subdivision and residential development is designed in a manner to protect the rural landscape (e.g., farmland, open meadows, forested ridge lines) and land characterized by fragile features (e.g., floodplains, wetlands, steep slopes), and to avoid the fragmentation and development of land containing significant areas of primary agricultural soils.
- 12.M-5 Land within the Adaptive Redevelopment Overlay District should continue to support agriculture, the preservation of rural resources and natural features, and accommodate moderate or high density clustered residential development and appropriate non-residential uses in appropriate locations. To this end:**
- 12.M-5.a In addition to agriculture, forestry, residential and land-based uses (e.g., recreation, extraction), allow for lodging and limited commercial uses as part of redevelopment as a PUD in order to promote mixed uses in former lodging properties;
- 12.M-5.b Provide for the creation of clustered residential hamlets in appropriate locations, while balancing those higher-density developments with lower-density development and land conservation elsewhere in the district; and
- 12.M-5.c Ensure that land subdivision and residential development is designed in a manner to protect land characterized by fragile features (e.g., floodplains, wetlands, steep slopes), and to avoid the fragmentation and development of land containing significant areas of primary agricultural soils.
- 12.M-6 Ensure that development within Waitsfield Village is compatible with the historic scale and pattern of development, and with historic architectural styles, and discourage the demolition or inappropriate alteration of historic structures.**
- 12.M-7 Maintain the Waitsfield Village Residential District for the purpose of allowing high density mixed use development, especially housing, in a classic village setting in a manner compatible with the historic character of the village. To this end:**
- 12.M-7.a Maintain a mix of residential, civic and commercial uses, while limiting retail and office uses to parcels adjacent to Route 100 and within mixed use buildings which contain residential dwelling(s);
- 12.M-7.b Maintain the well defined village boundaries and sharp contrast between the compact village and surrounding rural countryside.
- 12.M-8 Maintain the Waitsfield Village Business District for the purpose of allowing a high density mix of uses, including retail, services and offices, in the historic village core, and consider expanding the district to the south to include adjacent properties with similar uses.**
- 12.M-9 Maintain the Irasville Village District to serve as the Mad River Valley's primary commercial center, and Waitsfield's principal growth center, by allowing high density mixed use development in a compact development pattern. To this end, a full mix of**

- commercial, civic and residential land uses in locations as generally described above, shall be allowed.
- 12.M-10 Development within the Irasville Village District shall reflect the general development concepts outlined on Maps 10 and 12 in Appendix B. The resulting development pattern shall be characterized by:
- 12.M-10.a An interconnected network of roads, pedestrian paths and the multi-use Mad River Path;
 - 12.M-10.b Well defined streetscapes, defined by closely spaced buildings fronting close to the road, where practical, sidewalks, street trees and, where possible, on-street parking;
 - 12.M-10.c Formal and informal open spaces, including a village green(s) and greenway network, possibly encompassing "green infrastructure," such as storm water facilities;
 - 12.M-10.d Multi-story buildings (except in instances involving small accessory structures or where a multistory addition to a single-story structure is not feasible);
 - 12.M-10.e Pedestrian scale of site and building design;
 - 12.M-10.f A mix of uses, including upper-story dwellings where practical; and
 - 12.M-10.g A density of development that is considerably higher than adjacent districts, especially the Agricultural-Residential and the Adaptive Redevelopment Overlay Districts.
- 12.M-11 Notwithstanding the design guidelines set forth in #10 above, additional opportunities for residential in-fill development shall also be encouraged where well defined streetscapes are not present or practical. Such opportunities include the rear yards of existing buildings and on lots occupied by other uses.
- 12.M-12 Large buildings (in excess of 4,000 square feet) shall be designed to reduce their apparent mass
- and bulk, to create visual interest, and to achieve an architectural scale that is pedestrian friendly. This may be accomplished through the use of a combination of the following elements:
- 12.M-12.a Modulation (wall projections, recesses);
 - 12.M-12.b Articulation (varying building facades, footprints);
 - 12.M-12.c Variations in roof line (e.g., dormers, gables, cornices, decorative facings);
 - 12.M-12.d Upper story setbacks;
 - 12.M-12.e Fenestration (spacing of windows, entryways);
 - 12.M-12.f Smaller scale additions; and
 - 12.M-12.g Avoidance of pre-fabricated metal structures.
- 12.M-13 Policies and tasks regarding sidewalk and road improvements, water and wastewater infrastructure, wetlands mitigation, housing, and economic development related to Irasville should be pursued in a coordinated manner.
- 12.M-14 Integrate and encourage bicycle and pedestrian traffic within the Irasville Village District and adjacent districts, and the infrastructure to support it.
- 12.M-15 Maintain the Limited Business District for the purpose of allowing residential, non-retail commercial businesses, light industry and public facilities in a central valley location, in a manner that minimizes visual impacts as viewed from Route 100 and avoids a linear pattern of strip development.
- 12.M-16 Maintain the Industrial District as a non-retail commercial area and encourage a variety of light industries and compatible uses, separated from surrounding residential areas through screening, buffering and compliance with specific performance standards. A master plan should be developed to ensure the most efficient use of available land, and

to ensure that development occurs in a logical, integrated manner.

- 12.M-17 Through an ongoing planning process, ensure that capital improvement planning is coordinated with land use planning to avoid conflict.
- 12.M-18 Ensure that local regulation does not deny the reasonable use of property and that restrictions imposed on land use are based on clearly defined community objectives.
- 12.M-19 Refer to the goals, objectives and strategies set forth in this Town Plan during all conditional use, PUD, subdivision reviews and all state and federal regulatory reviews.
- 12.M-20 Adopt an Official Map to identify future road and trail improvements and important open space.
- 12.M-21 Explore the use of tax abatement as a method of obtaining public use of private lands in order to extend the Mad River Path.
- 12.M-22 Explore the adoption of an Adaptive Redevelopment Overlay District (“AROD”) similar to the current AROD district south of Irasville that would cover the area of Route 100 north of the Village Residential District that would offer increased flexibility for the redevelopment of existing commercial properties in that area while preserving the agricultural and scenic resources of this corridor to the town center.

12.N TASKS

- 12.N-1 Inventory development capacity within the Agricultural-Residential District to determine appropriate sites or areas able to support rural hamlets (clusters), while simultaneously strengthening resource protection standards elsewhere in the district. Update zoning regulations as needed. [Planning Commission, Conservation Commission]
- 12.N-2 Prepare an Official Map for the Irasville Village District depicting future public improvements, including

roads, sidewalks, paths and park areas, and a town green/common. [Planning Commission]

- 12.N-3 Implement a revised master plan for Irasville, including the development of a decentralized wastewater system, to accommodate higher densities of residential and mixed-use development, that includes housing, in appropriate locations within Irasville. [Selectboard, Town Administrator, Planning Commission]
- 12.N-4 Revise the towns zoning regulations to establish clear site and building design standards to guide development in Irasville in accordance with the aforementioned master plan, as revised and modified by the Planning Commission. [Planning Commission]
- 12.N-5 Pursue mitigation analysis of wetlands in Irasville, as addressed elsewhere in this plan, in order to accommodate future development needs and reinforce a compact development pattern in Irasville. [Planning Commission]
- 12.N-6 Review current administration and enforcement practices related to the zoning and subdivision regulations and ensure that all standards and associated permit conditions are efficiently administered and strictly enforced. [Planning Commission, Administrative Officer]
- 12.N-7 Evaluate historic preservation standards for Waitsfield Village to determine whether they are adequate to maintain the historic character of the Village, and strengthen said standards in the event they determined to be inadequate. [Planning Commission, Waitsfield Historical Society*]
- 12.N-8 Investigate future road connections and trail improvements in the Town Center.
- 12.N-9 Identify “visible” ancient roads before the 2015 deadline for the town to claim them.