

# 1 | Introduction

The Town of Waitsfield has a rich history and heritage grounded in the Vermont doctrine of freedom and unity. Our agrarian past has left a legacy that is prominent in our landscape and continues to influence the character of our community. While we are indebted to our past, the town's recent history has been one of transition.

The changes that have affected the town mirror those influencing the state as a whole. Our resource-based economy, founded on agriculture and forestry, is now built on recreation and an enviable quality of life. Thus, Waitsfield has been transformed from a quiet farming town to a resort destination, bedroom community and, increasingly, a center for innovation and commerce. This transformation has not been without costs to tranquility, the landscape, and the insular nature of the community. Waitsfield has managed, however, to retain many of the best elements of its past and merge them with a modern economy driven by tourism, technology, accessibility, and respect for our natural and social heritage.

As we look to the future, we can conclude that change will become more rapid and that the consequences of town decisions will become more profound. To best confront the future, the town should look to its past, to the path provided by our forebears. In this way, we can arrive at the following principles that are found throughout this plan:

- ◆ Open debate, accessible institutions and democracy are the bases of our local government;
- ◆ Economic and cultural opportunities for local citizens enrich the entire community;
- ◆ Access to quality education, a livable wage and safe and affordable housing are critical elements of a civil society;
- ◆ All current and future residents of the town share the same rights and responsibilities, regardless of status or background;
- ◆ As our economy becomes more globalized, focusing on sustainable development and the careful stewardship of local resources will become increasingly important;
- ◆ The town's heritage, as defined by the historic settlement pattern of concentrated villages

surrounded by an open countryside and forested mountains, is among its greatest resources; and

- ◆ Individual rights and responsibility to the community should be balanced, as provided by local, state and federal law.

## 1.A AUTHORITY, HISTORY & PURPOSE

**Authority.** Authority to adopt and implement the town plan is provided by the Vermont Planning and Development Act (hereafter referred to as The Act), 24 VSA, Chapter 117.

**History.** Waitsfield's first plan was the original town charter of 1782, which established a subdivision plan for the town and prescribed how private property would be developed. The modern era for town planning began when the town adopted its first town plan in the early-1970s. In 1980, the town began to coordinate its planning program with other Mad River Valley towns through the Valley Growth Study, which resulted in a major revision to the town plan in 1983, and a subsequent update of that plan in 1988.

In 1993, the Planning Commission undertook a comprehensive re-write of the plan. The result was a plan with a much broader scope and level of detail than the prior plan. It served the community well, and was re-adopted with minor amendment in 1998. In 2005, the Planning Commission completed a significant update of the 1993 plan, and incorporated the outcome of the many planning and community outreach efforts that occurred during the previous decade.

**Purpose.** The town plan is the principal policy statement for the Town of Waitsfield. It articulates the aspirations of the community, and provides a framework for achieving those aspirations. It is intended to guide how the town addresses such diverse community issues as land development, the provision of municipal services and facilities, environmental protection, economic development and transportation.

In developing this plan, an attempt was made to look beyond the typical five-year time frame of many municipal plans. The Planning Commission tried to consider the factors that will affect the town's growth well into the future, and to define how we as a community should work to influence those factors. In addition

to guiding local officials and citizens in making decisions regarding our future, the town plan is intended to be relied upon as the basis for making decisions in a number of specific settings. Such uses of the plan include the following:

- ◆ Provide the framework for planning the future of the town.
- ◆ Guide local decision-making in local regulatory reviews. While the Town Plan is not a regulatory document, it does provide a basis for determining compliance with plan policies in specific regulatory settings.
- ◆ Serve as the basis for local decision-making during the Act 250 review process, most importantly guiding the Planning Commission and Selectboard in making determinations of compliance with the town plan.
- ◆ Provide a foundation for updating and revising land use regulations.
- ◆ Assist in the ongoing update and implementation of the capital budget.
- ◆ Assist with the formulation of local policies and programs.
- ◆ Serve as the primary resource document for private parties desiring to learn of the town and its goals and policies.
- ◆ Establish a basis for the town's interactions with neighboring towns and with other levels of government.

**Format.** This plan contains a short town history; 10 chapters addressing a range of topics, including all plan elements required by the Act; and an implementation section (chapter 13) that includes a prioritized list of policy implementation tasks. A list of relevant planning studies and other reference materials is provided as Appendix A. A series of maps is presented in Appendix B, and Appendix C contains the results of the 2009 public opinion survey.

Each chapter presents background information and analysis, which provides a basis for plan goals, policies and tasks. The narrative included in these chapters is not intended to serve as specific policy statements. Such policy statements are located at the end of each chapter as goals and policies. For the purpose of the Waitsfield Town Plan:

- ◆ Goals express broad, long-range community aspirations relative to one or more categories of topics. They should be considered aspirational statements for the community.
- ◆ Policies are statements of the town's intent, or position, with regard to specific issues or topics. In certain settings, such as during Act 250 proceedings and local zoning and subdivision reviews, policy statements shall serve as the basis for determining a project's conformance with the plan. While other sections of the plan, including goal statements, provide useful context for understanding policies, the policies alone serve as the final statement regarding the town's position.
- ◆ Implementation tasks are specific actions to be taken by an identified entity to support one or more policies and achieve the community's long term goals. Where feasible, the municipal entity responsible for carrying out the implementation task is identified. Where a partnership with a private entity is desirable, such partnership is noted as being encouraged. Tasks are designed to assist the town to achieve its long-term goals. Failure to implement a specific task, however, does not alter or negate a specific plan policy.

## 1.B PARTICIPATION & COORDINATION

**Participation.** Waitsfield residents have a rich tradition of democracy and participation in town government. Spirited debate, and occasional discord, is a predictable part of resolving important community issues. This plan builds upon that history of public discourse and supplements it with a focused public outreach effort designed to solicit greater community input regarding key issues facing the town's future. In advance of revising the plan, the Planning Commission distributed a survey to town residents and property owners in October 2009 that covered the wide range of topics addressed in this plan. A report summarizing the survey results is included as an appendix to this plan.

Before holding formal public hearings on this plan, the Planning Commission advertised that a preliminary draft was available and solicited the advice of town residents and landowners, interest groups and affected parties. Local non-governmental organizations, especially those that have been identified as playing a potential role in partnership with the town

to implement specific tasks, were also invited to review the draft and provide comments on the preliminary draft.

As is usually the case, there is room for additional public involvement at all levels of the planning process. The use of surveys and questionnaires, public forums and greater coordination between interest groups and the town has ensured the past participation of town residents in local decision-making. The ongoing coordination with local citizen groups, businesses and regional agencies will ensure that such involvement continues to shape town policies.

**Regional Coordination.** The Town of Waitsfield has been meeting regularly with the neighboring towns of Fayston and Warren to discuss issues of mutual concern for more than 25 years. This relationship was formalized by the creation of the Mad River Valley Planning District (MRVPD) in 1985. The MRVPD is a unique entity that has undertaken a number of planning initiatives designed to address issues of shared concern among the towns of Waitsfield, Warren and Fayston.

In addition to the wealth of information available through these planning efforts, this cooperative relationship allows Waitsfield to coordinate its local planning program with those of neighboring towns through the MRVPD's staff and Steering Committee, thereby ensuring plan compatibility with Fayston and Warren. This coordination has resulted in, for example, the recognition of Irasville as the Mad River Valley's commercial "downtown" in Fayston's, Warren's and Moretown's town plans.

Some formal relationships between the towns exist in order to address specific community needs such as the Washington West Supervisory Union and the Mad River Resource Management Alliance. In addition, several non-governmental organizations, such as the Friends of the Mad River, focus their efforts on the larger watershed, which includes all Mad River Valley towns. The Waitsfield-Fayston Fire Department and the Joslin Library are resources shared by Waitsfield and Fayston.

The policies set forth in this plan were crafted to ensure compatibility with the plans of neighboring towns, as required by state statute. Compatibility with neighboring towns is particularly important with regard to land use, where incompatible policies could result in conflicting development activities and land uses along town boundaries. Waitsfield's land

use plan calls for agriculture, forestry, low- to moderate-density residential development and very limited non-residential uses along the boundaries of Moretown, Northfield, Warren, Fayston, and Duxbury. These uses and densities are similar to those allowed in adjacent towns along the boundary.

Finally, the town continues to play an active role with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission. Through that involvement, potential conflicts with neighboring towns outside of the Mad River watershed can be addressed. More importantly, the town has considered the policies of the Central Vermont Regional Plan, and has subsequently drafted a town plan that is compatible and consistent with the regional plan.

**State Planning Goals.** Under the Act, Vermont towns are encouraged to plan in accordance with the state's planning goals and include specified elements within their plans. While this plan was developed foremost to meet the needs and reflect the desires of the Town of Waitsfield, careful attention was also made to ensure that all specified elements have been included, and that the goals, policies and tasks set forth in subsequent chapters are consistent with state planning goals.

**Acknowledgments.** This plan was formed largely in response to the active participation of Waitsfield residents and landowners over the years. That participation takes many forms, such as serving on local boards, attending hearings and meetings, returning completed surveys, and of course voting, and is the foundation of local planning. A special thanks to those Waitsfield citizens who continue to help shape our community's future.

The town history in Chapter 2 was first drafted by Rick Thompson in 1993. Historic photographs were made available by Jack Smith and the Waitsfield Historical Society. Aerial photographs were taken by Alex McClean through a project funded by the Mad River Conservation Partnership. Other photos were provided by David Garten, Sandy Macys, Dennis Curran and Beverly Kehoe.

Finally, this plan, and several of the planning studies and documents it references, was funded in part by Vermont Municipal Planning Grants awarded by the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.



## 1.C GOALS

- 1.C-1 The widespread involvement of Waitsfield citizens and landowners at all levels of the local planning and decision-making process.

## 1.D POLICIES

- 1.D-1 Provide opportunities for citizen input at every stage of the planning and decision-making process, and ensure that decision making occurs in an open, public environment.
- 1.D-2 Adopt a town plan which is consistent with state planning goals. This plan has been determined to be consistent with those goals.
- 1.D-3 Recognize that statutory hearings are a minimum level of public involvement and strive to exceed that level in all instances where public interest is evident. Public forums, direct mailings, broadcasts on Mad River Television and notices placed in local newspapers will be used to inform the public of governmental activities on a regular basis.
- 1.D-4 Review the town plan and related planning documents on a regular basis, and modify them as appropriate to address changing circumstances.
- 1.D-5 Continue to participate in the Mad River Valley Planning District to support regional cooperation and communication on matters of area-wide concern.
- 1.D-6 Continue active participation in the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission to coordinate local planning activities with those of neighboring towns and the regions, and continue to support regional organizations which most efficiently provide services and facilities to local residents and those of surrounding towns (e.g., Waterbury-Mad River Valley Solid Waste Alliance, Mad River Valley Recreation District, Waitsfield-Fayston Volunteer Fire Department, etc.).
- 1.D-7 Provide neighboring towns with an opportunity to comment on local matters of concern through notification of pending decisions which may affect them.