

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

The Village Plan provides information about the community, a discussion of important issues, and presents ideas and recommendations that are intended to guide future growth, development, and investment decisions. An overall objective of the Plan is to help the Village retain the attributes valued by residents while promoting actions that enhance the Village's character, prosperity, and quality of life.

The North Bennington Village Planning Commission prepared the Village Plan pursuant to Title 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117 of the Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act. It contains all of the required elements and is consistent with all of the goals enumerated in that statute. Moreover, while this Plan is based primarily on the particular needs of the Village of North Bennington, care was taken to ensure that it recognizes the Village's role within the region and its relationship to the surrounding towns of Bennington and Shaftsbury.

Beginning in February 2007, the Planning Commission gathered data, held public meetings, and met with local officials, residents, and other interested parties to compile information for the Plan and to identify and analyze issues that are important to the community. A draft Village Plan was developed during this process and public hearings were held to assess the acceptance of the ideas presented in the document. After final revisions were made, the Plan was forwarded to the Village Trustees for a final hearing and adoption. The Village Plan remains in effect for five years after which it will need to be updated once again.

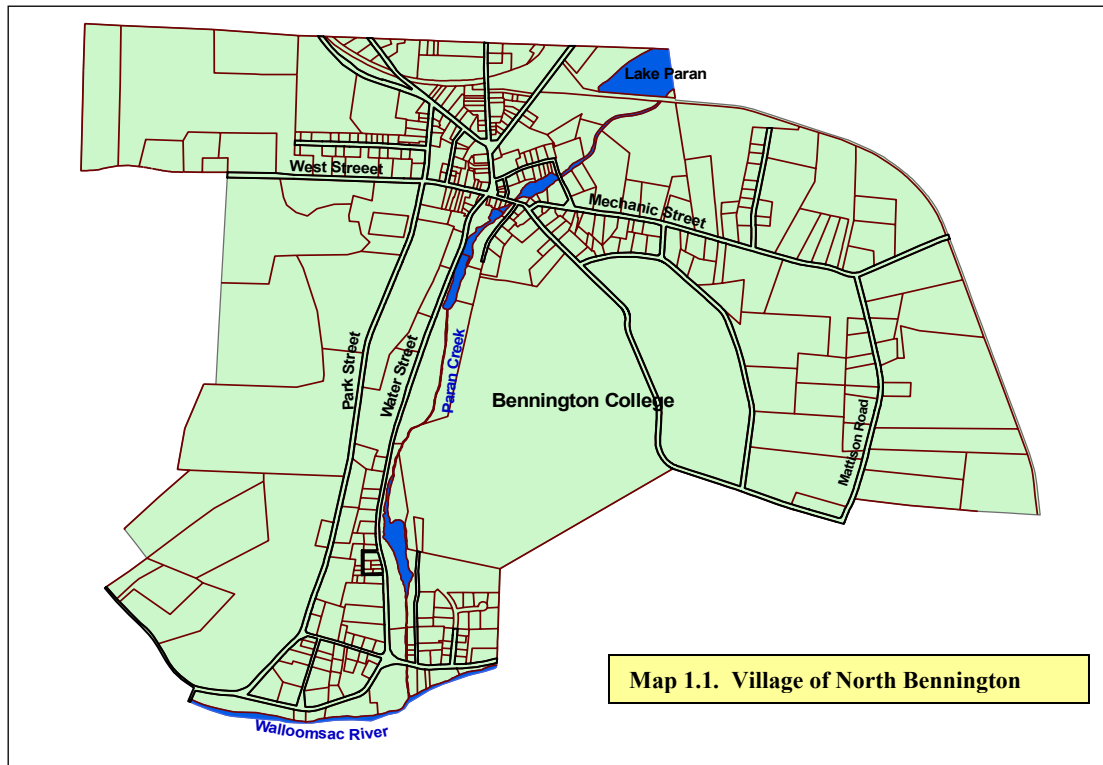
There are many issues addressed in the Plan, but a few main themes are evident. Of paramount importance is preserving the character of the village: the closeness of the community, the quality of facilities and services, the central importance of Paran Creek, the historic architecture, and valued open spaces. The Plan also emphasizes the need to protect the quality of the environment, to provide opportunities for economic development, and to ensure that residents have access to a range of housing options. Unique issues associated with redevelopment of historic mill buildings, the importance of the local elementary school, the relationship between the Town and Village, and the presence of Bennington College in the community also are explored in detail in the Plan.

Effective implementation of the Village Plan is, of course, critical to its success. It is therefore important that the Plan be referred to by local, regional, and state officials and organizations when undertaking actions that will affect the community. The Planning Commission and Trustees must consider the Plan when preparing amendments to municipal bylaws and ordinances, and when considering significant municipal expenditures and pursuing grant opportunities. Because the Plan provides the basis for



Railroads are an important part of North Bennington's history; today the depot building houses the Village offices.

many Village regulations, it should be consulted by developers interested in investing in the Village and by local and state regulatory boards when reviewing land use applications. The Village also should work to ensure that plans developed, and actions taken by, neighboring municipalities and state or federal agencies are compatible with the Plan.



## 1.2 Physical Geography

North Bennington is located in the northwestern portion of the Town of Bennington, although the Village exists as a separate municipality. It occupies a total land area of 2.1 square miles, centered on Paran Creek, which bisects the Village as it flows from Lake Paran in the north to the Walloomsac River at the southern municipal boundary. The village center is located in the north-central part of the community along Vermont Route 67A (Water Street), the highway that roughly parallels Paran Creek through the Village. Route 67, entering the Village from New York via Shaftsbury, intersects Route 67A at the northern edge of the village center and connects to Route 7A in South Shaftsbury.

Commercial development is limited to the area in and around the village center, and industrial development lines much of the low valley along Paran Creek. The land rises rather abruptly on either side of the valley. Some of the Village's most important open lands are located on the hillside that lies to the west of Paran Creek and the Bennington College campus occupies much of the high ground on the east side of the valley. The eastern part of the Village consists of scattered residential development and patches of open fields and woodland lying along a terrain of gently rolling hills. Lake Paran is at the northeastern extreme of the Village, with relatively level land lying

between the Lake and the Bennington and Shaftsbury town lines. The highest density of residential development exists around the village center and in the southern part of the Village along and near Route 67A.

Most land in the Village is at a relatively low elevation and slopes are generally not very steep. Other than small drainageways, surface water resources are limited to Paran Creek and its associated millponds and wetlands, Lake Paran, and the Walloomsac River. A network of local roads branching off from the state highways provides access to outlying areas of the Village (Map 1).

### 1.3 History

The area now occupied by North Bennington was originally settled by Joseph Haviland in 1761, and named Haviland's Mills. The waterpower provided by Paran Creek drew people to the area and a number of mills were sited along the waterway. In 1776 Haviland's status as a Tory caused villagers to rename the community Sage City, after his son-in-law, Moses Sage.

The village continued as an important industrial center, with early mills producing flax, paper, textiles, lime, marble, iron ore, lenses, furniture, and carpenter squares. Although the dams and millponds along Paran Creek today provide aesthetic value rather than power for manufacturing, the Water Street corridor remains a center of light industry for the region.

With the concentration of manufacturing enterprises in the area, it was natural that residences would be built nearby as well as a variety of commercial and institutional buildings. The center of the village developed at the north end of Water Street, where roads and eventually the rail and trolley lines running between Bennington, New York State, and towns to the north intersected. Retail stores, offices, a bank, library, restaurants, and other businesses were soon clustered amidst attractive homes in this area.



North Bennington developed along the shores of Paran Creek.

Construction of the railroad in the 1850s prompted creation of Lake Paran as a dam was built under the rail line that crossed the valley and continued to Bennington. Unfortunately, the dam burst in 1852, destroying factories and residences downstream along Paran Creek. The rebuilt buildings from that era form the basis of the current architectural character along Water Street, where manufacturing uses are today integrated with commercial, professional, and residential uses.

Land immediately to the east and west of the village center and the valley of Paran Creek remained very rural in character. The Hall-Park-McCullough family owned a considerable amount of farmland on the west side of the valley where Trenor Park built the "Park-McCullough House" in 1864. Park also was responsible for construction of the school, bank, Congregational Church, and the rail station. Meanwhile, a large portion of the Jennings farm and estate on Bingham Hill, east of the valley, was made available for the establishment of Bennington College,

which opened in 1932. The college campus today occupies 18 percent of the total land area of the Village.

Two Vermont governors were from North Bennington: Hiland Hall who served two one-year terms from 1858 through 1860 after having served five terms in Congress, and John G. McCullough who became governor in 1902 and resided at the Park-McCullough House.

The Village is today a unique and special piece of Vermont, with an historic village center surrounded by a rural landscape and attractive residential neighborhoods. An important goal of this Plan is to find ways to preserve the special historic qualities of the community while allowing for appropriate growth and development. For example, the Village has recently dealt with issues surrounding proposals to change the use of historic industrial buildings while maintaining their architectural integrity. Other initiatives have led to conservation of the historic open spaces that are so valued for their scenic and recreational values.

An excellent timeline of North Bennington's history can be found in the publication, "North Bennington & the Paran Creek – Past and Future: 1739-2005."

#### **1.4 Demographic and Economic Profile**

Fluctuating enrollment levels at Bennington College, combined with changing methods used by the Census Bureau to count college students, makes it difficult to get a clear understanding of population trends in North Bennington Village. There has been a slight downward trend in population in the Town of Bennington over the past 15 to 20 years, and that seems to be the case in North Bennington as well. The estimated population of the Village in 2005 was 1,368, while the population of the entire Town of Bennington (including North Bennington) was 15,375. The age distribution of residents in the Village is similar to that of the Town, although the median age of 28 years is quite young, no doubt because of the presence of Bennington College students.

The Village's residents live in a variety of housing types. There are a total of 499 housing units in North Bennington (of which 45 are vacant – as of the 2000 Census). About 60 percent of the housing units are owned by the occupants and 40 percent are rented. Median monthly housing costs for homeowners (\$911 – with mortgage) and renters (\$561) are comparable to those in the Town of Bennington.

Income levels are higher for residents of North Bennington than for residents of the Town of Bennington or for Bennington County as a whole. Median household income (1999 data) for Village residents is \$40,132 and median family income \$46,818, each about 15 percent higher than the medians for the Town. While a number of families in North Bennington are living at below the poverty level, the percentage of families in poverty (6 percent) is only half that experienced by the Town as a whole.

For a small municipality, North Bennington has a remarkably diverse economy. The industrial heritage of the Village remains intact, although fewer people work in manufacturing positions than in the past. The Bennington County Industrial Corporation is housed in an industrial building on lower Water Street. That building serves an industrial "incubator" for several small manufacturing concerns. Further north on Water Street, National Hangar occupies historic and new buildings adjacent to Paran Creek and



the Bennington Microtechnology Center has plans to grow into the expansive facilities on the opposite side of the road.

The Village also is home to a number of small service businesses, including professional offices (e.g., architects, financial services), retail stores, a bank, a post office, and a library. Of course, Bennington College is a major employer along with the local public elementary school and four small private schools. The Village also includes the Vermont Arts Exchange, located in an old mill building, and the Park-McCullough House, currently operating as a non-profit organization. The Sage City Symphony, founded in 1972 by Lew Calabro, includes over 60 musicians and provides four free concerts yearly for the community.

While many Village residents are employed at one of these local businesses or organizations, many others work in the Town of Bennington or in other nearby communities. Easy access to local and regional employment centers allows people to live in a small rural village and drive to work in other areas. An increasing number of people also work from their homes, either operating home businesses or working remotely and visiting a central office as needed.



A Canada goose wanders along the shore of the millpond by the Bennington County Industrial Corporation Building.

## **Chapter 2: Vision for North Bennington's Future**

### **2.1 Vision Statement**

**North Bennington will retain its strong sense of community by preserving its historic character and by providing services and natural, cultural, and recreational resources that contribute to an outstanding quality of life for its residents.**

New development in the village center area will provide further economic activity while maintaining the architectural character and historic form of the area. Mixed uses will ensure that the area stays alive with residences, community services, and a variety of small businesses. Outlying areas will be distinct from the village center and will support lower density residential growth while preserving important open spaces.

A thriving local economy will be based on a variety of economic activities including light manufacturing and technology-based businesses in the industrial zones along Water Street, small scale retail and professional businesses in and around the village center, and jobs in the education sector at Bennington College and the local school. An increasing number of people will be able to work, at least part time, from their home offices because of new telecommunication technologies. Convenient access will exist to major employment centers in Bennington and other large regional centers.

The Village Historic District and individual historic landmarks around the Village will be protected and investment will ensure that historic buildings are well-maintained and fully utilized. New developments will be coordinated with existing development and will enhance the scenic village and rural character of the community.

All residents will have access to adequate and affordable housing. A variety of housing types will be available and new residents will be able to find housing that meets their needs and which is convenient to the village center, schools, and employment centers.

Local and state roads and bridges will be kept in good repair and a system of sidewalks, pathways, and trails will link residential neighborhoods to the village center, schools, nearby recreational areas, and to adjacent town centers in Bennington and South Shaftsbury. Residents will be able to safely travel by bicycle, catch a bus into Bennington, or take the train from North Bennington to New York City.

The North Bennington Graded School will continue to provide outstanding educational services to the community; middle and high school students will be well-served by the Mount Anthony Union public school system.

Many cultural and recreational opportunities will present themselves, including extensive offerings at the Vermont Arts Exchange and Bennington College. Recreational lands at the McCullough Woods, Lake Paran, and along the Walloomsac River will be expanded and connected by an extended series of paths and trails.

Municipal services will be provided in a manner that is cost-effective and highly responsive to the needs of local residents.

Above all, North Bennington will be known as a close-knit community with a very high quality of life, a strong economic base, a variety of business types and cultural and recreational amenities, and a unique historic character.

## 2.2 **Goals**

It is useful to identify specific goals to provide focus and direction to policy statements and recommended actions. The following goals correspond with the elements of the Village Plan: Land Use; Economic Development; Natural Resources, Historic Resources, Housing, Transportation, Community Facilities and Services, and Energy. The goals are consistent with the 13 specific goals of 24 V.S.A. Section 4302.

1. **Plan development to maintain the Village's historic settlement pattern** of a compact center with a diversity of land uses surrounded by lower density residential development and rural open spaces. Efforts to strengthen the village center as a focal point for the community and to revitalize existing neighborhoods near the center should be supported. The historic industrial character of the land and buildings along Paran Creek and Water Street should be maintained, either through clean and productive manufacturing facilities or through architecturally appropriate rehabilitation that provides opportunities for a mix of light commercial and residential development.

Development in rural areas shall respect the need to protect existing residences, scenic landscapes, and natural resources. Important open lands, natural resources, and areas used for public recreation should be protected from incompatible uses. Development planning and provision of public infrastructure should discourage auto-oriented sprawl and facilitate a sense of community and connections to the village center and adjacent neighborhoods.

2. **Support economic development opportunities** that will benefit local businesses and residents. The local economy should be based on businesses that provide satisfying and rewarding employment while maintaining high social and environmental standards. Regulations and public investments should consider the potential for facilitating appropriate business development and subsequent private investment.

Recognize the importance to the community of a variety of economic enterprises. Encourage manufacturing and technology-based businesses that provide good employment and effective long-term use of historic industrial properties. Provide opportunities for rehabilitation and re-use of historic buildings, including mixed uses in appropriate zoning districts. Support small businesses in commercial districts and home-based businesses that do not adversely affect neighboring residential uses. Work cooperatively with the Town and public service companies to ensure that infrastructure is available for desirable new industries. Promote the use of local products and resources in economic activities.

Recognize the importance of local public schools to the local economy. Ensure that educational programs meet the needs of students and local businesses. Work with the Bennington College to ensure that employment opportunities are available to local residents and that the college develops in a manner consistent with Village objectives.

3. **Maintain the historic and architectural heritage of the Village** through use of public investment and regulation. Encourage architecturally appropriate modifications to historic structures to enable reuse for appropriate purposes, as defined by the Zoning Bylaws. Building (re)construction within the Village Historic District must conform to the guidelines contained in the Bylaws.

New development in outlying areas should be sensitive to historic development patterns and should not detract from the character of the traditional rural landscape.

4. **Ensure the availability of an adequate supply of housing that is affordable** and desirable for all of the Village's residents. Single-family, multi-family, rental, and ownership opportunities all must be available in sufficient quantity in the community. The highest concentration of housing will be located near the village center, and rehabilitation of existing buildings near the center for mixed uses, including housing, shall be encouraged.

Pursue opportunities for development of affordable housing, and for improving the quality of existing housing stock, through collaboration with appropriate organizations such as the Bennington Regional Affordable Housing Corporation.

Housing at Bennington College shall be carefully planned to meet the needs of the college community, in conformance with the college master plan, and in a manner that is consistent with the overall objectives of the North Bennington Village Plan and Zoning Bylaws. Other group housing and "accessory" apartments and cottages can meet an important housing need, but must be developed in strict conformance with local and state regulations.

5. **Provide a safe, convenient, and efficient transportation system** that includes well-maintained roads and bridges as well as facilities and services that encourage other modes of travel, including bicycle and pedestrian, rail, and public transportation.

Implement traffic calming, access management, and aesthetic streetscape improvements to improve safety and enhance the aesthetic character of the state highways in the Village.

The Village's system of sidewalks should be maintained with high-quality materials and should provide access throughout the village center. The existing system of paths and trails should be maintained, with public access assured, and expanded where possible.

Recognize the importance of convenient and well-planned parking, with pedestrian connections from public or private parking lots to destinations served by those facilities.

Continue to maintain the historic rail depot building and consider options for use of the related land and buildings in the vicinity, and support efforts to return passenger rail service to the community.

6. **Provide excellent community facilities and services in the most efficient and economical manner possible.** Evaluate the quality and cost-effectiveness of public services provided by the Village and those provided by the Town and determine if the existing systems are best for North Bennington or whether alternative forms of service delivery should be pursued. Work closely with the Town to ensure that the needs of the Village are understood and met.

Municipal utilities shall be maintained in good condition and any extensions or expansions coordinated with the Village's land use plan and growth objectives.

High quality educational, vocational, and child care opportunities must be available to meet the needs of all residents and businesses. The cost of education must be controlled, but with recognition given to the value of a having a local elementary school in the Village.

A variety of recreational facilities and opportunities must be available for residents and visitors. Support efforts to maintain or provide access to outdoor recreational areas – such as woodlands, trails, and waterways – that are important to the community. Encourage cooperation among the Village, Paran Recreations, Vermont Arts Exchange, the Lions Park, and other interested organizations in the development of a comprehensive recreation plan.

7. **Promote the safe and efficient use of energy and utilization of renewable energy resources.** Support efforts to develop renewable energy generation facilities in areas where environmental and aesthetic concerns are minimized and pursue efforts to increase the energy efficiency of all buildings and municipal vehicles. Town and Village-wide energy conservation initiatives should be supported and encouraged.

8. **Protect significant natural and scenic resources.** Important open spaces, scenic vistas, and shorelands should be protected through acquisition by appropriate conservation organizations and through careful site planning of new development. Provision of access to Lake Paran, Paran Creek, and the Walloomsac River, as well as maintenance and improvement of water quality and the historic dams and millponds, are priorities for the Village. Expand efforts to improve water quality and habitat in Lake Paran by addressing aquatic weeds, concentrations of Canada Geese, and siltation.

Industrial activities must not discharge pollutants into the environment, and residential backyard burning for waste disposal or outdoor low-efficiency boilers shall not be allowed in the Village.



## ☞ NORTH BENNINGTON & THE PARAN CREEK ☞



### MAP KEY

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|--|--|
| 1. Eagle Square Manufacturing Co.                  | 6. 2 <sup>nd</sup> dam and mill pond at Haviland's Privilege |
| 2. Paran Creek – feeds Lake Paran                  | 7. 3 <sup>rd</sup> dam and mill pond at National Hangar Co.  |
| 3. Paran Conservation Project                      | 8. 4 <sup>th</sup> dam and mill pond at BCIC                 |
| 4. Railroad trestle dam and spillway               | 9. Paran Creek – outlet to Walloomsac River                  |
| 5. 1 <sup>st</sup> dam and mill pond at Fire House | 10. Iron red earth on Ore Bed Road                           |
|  | 11. Henry Covered Bridge over the Walloomsac                 |





## Chapter 3: Natural Resources

### 3.1 Introduction

North Bennington is located in an area rich in natural resources and those resources have contributed to the development of the community and to the present quality of life enjoyed by residents. The Village grew and prospered because of the presence of Paran Creek's water power and rich agricultural soils supported a farming community that helped to maintain the rural character and scenic views characteristic of the landscape that surrounds the village center. Natural resources today provide important environmental benefits, scenic value, and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

### 3.2 Water Resources

#### Paran Creek

Paran Creek runs through the heart of North Bennington, connecting Lake Paran on the north side of the Village (the lake also is bordered by the Town of Bennington and Shaftsbury) with the Walloomsac River to the south (Map 3.1). Two south-flowing tributary streams, draining the east and west sides of the valley, combine to form Paran Creek in Shaftsbury. The stream then flows into Lake Paran and outlets from the dam on the south side of the lake to continue down through the center of the Village.

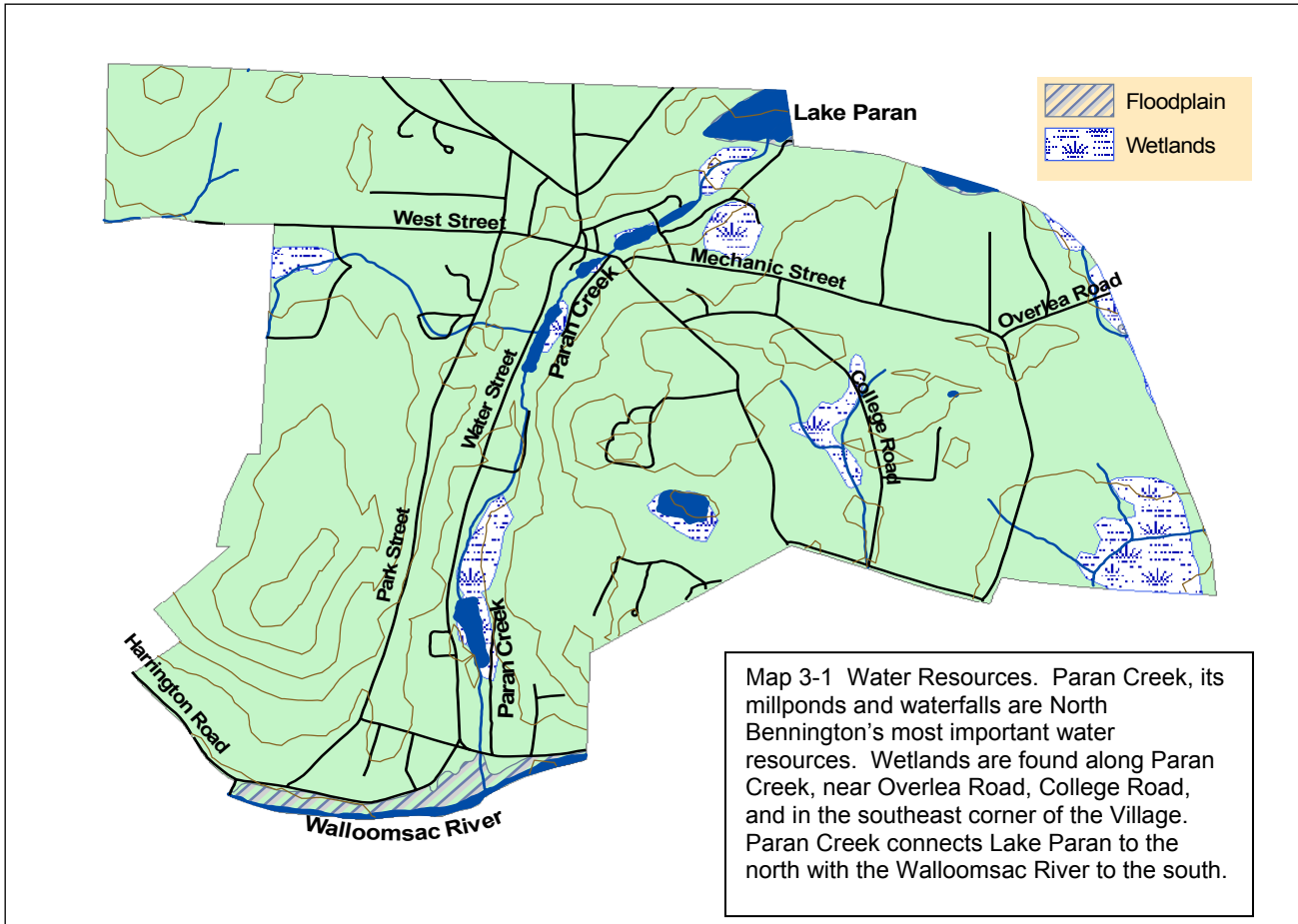
People were originally attracted to the area by the stream and its water power, and it has been modified and associated with development in North Bennington since those first settlers arrived. Four mill ponds exist along the stream: Upper Mill Pond, Grist Mill Pond, Cushman Pond, and Polygraphic Pond. Those ponds, the cascades that flow from them, and the stream itself are outstanding natural resources. Paran Creek today is an important scenic resource that also serves as a natural drainageway while providing habitat for fish and wildlife.

Historic buildings line much of Paran Creek, particularly on its north and west sides, some of which remain in light industrial uses while others have been converted to alternative uses such as the Vermont Arts Exchange and the Haviland's Privilege condominiums. Much of the land along the south and east sides of the stream is wooded and, particularly along the Water Street corridor, slopes steeply up a hillside. This combination of a stream, historic architecture, and the natural landscape creates an exceptionally scenic resource at the heart of the Village.

It is important that both the stream's water quality and the scenic character of the area be maintained. Siltation of the stream and the resulting loss of water quality,



Paran Creek's water power fueled early industry in the Village.



together with reduced depth and coverage of the millponds has become a serious concern to the Village. Procedures, costs, and environmental issues associated with dredging the sediment from the millponds and Lake Paran should be investigated. It is also critical that the dams which form the millponds be maintained in good structural condition; if their condition is allowed to degrade too far, the cost of repairs may prove prohibitive and the resources ultimately will be lost.

The Village also should pay special attention to preservation of the landscape that surrounds Paran Creek. Projects that involve investment in, and adaptive re-use of, historic streamside buildings should be supported. Those uses must be consistent with the Village's land use regulations, and may include redevelopment such as the ongoing work at the Vermont Arts Exchange, residential uses, and mixed uses that combine light industrial, limited commercial, and residential uses. The existing natural landscape alongside Paran Creek also must be preserved. The wooded slopes that rise from the stream toward the Bennington College campus and surrounding properties should be maintained in their current natural state.

Another objective associated with use and development along Paran Creek is provision of public access to the waterway. Although the stream itself is a public resource, most of the land along its shore is in private ownership. Commercial development along the stream, including reconstruction and re-use of historic

manufacturing buildings, should seek opportunities for inclusion of public access to the water and should maintain visual connections from public roads and walkways to the stream, ponds, and cascades. A public use pathway extends along the east side of Paran Creek from the end of Scarey Lane and along the western side of the Bennington College campus; public access along this pathway and protection of the wooded landscape it passes through, should be pursued.

### Lake Paran

Lake Paran occupies a natural basin at the northern edge of the Village of North Bennington. The lake's current shape, coverage, and depth were established by the railroad dam that was constructed in 1850. The surface area of the lake is now 36 acres and it lies at 647 feet above Mean Sea Level. Current uses of Lake Paran and adjacent lands include swimming, fishing, non-motorized boating, ice skating, hiking, and aesthetic appreciation.



Lake Paran is an important recreational, natural, and scenic resource.

Protection of the lake's water quality and conservation of surrounding land has been the subject of considerable effort in recent years. Eurasian Milfoil is a non-native aquatic weed that has infested the lake and control of this plant species is an ongoing need. Because development along the shoreline could cause erosion and lead to other sources of pollution, the Village, as well as the towns of Shaftsbury and Bennington, adopted shoreline protection provisions in their land use regulations that require that a natural buffer be maintained along the shore. Fortunately, a conservation effort involving private landowners, the Vermont Land Trust, the Vermont Housing and

Conservation Board, and the Sage City Syndicate has led to conservation of 56 acres and 2,976 feet of shoreline along Lake Paran and the upper portion of Paran Creek (Figure 3.1). Continued intermunicipal and regional cooperation will be necessary to ensure that water quality is not degraded by point or nonpoint discharges from upstream sources and that conserved lands are properly maintained and used.

### Walloomsac River

Paran Creek is a major tributary of the Walloomsac River, a substantial waterway that spans over ½ mile at the Village's southern boundary south of Route 67A and River Street (Map 3.1). The Walloomsac River provides valuable fish and wildlife habitat and is spanned by three covered bridges, including the Henry Covered Bridge in North Bennington. Much of the land lying along the river within the Village is in a floodplain area; development in this area must be very carefully planned to avoid flood damage and water pollution. One residential development is planned for the vacant parcel

immediately south of the Water Street/Hillside/River Road intersection; any development on this or any floodplain areas must meet state standards for development in flood prone areas and should preserve a natural vegetated buffer along the stream bank. Consideration should be given to acquisition and conservation of remaining open land along the Walloomsac River.



The Walloomsac River at the Henry Covered Bridge.

### Wetlands

Wetlands are areas transitional between aquatic and terrestrial systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface or the land is covered by shallow water. Benefits provided by wetlands include: flood and storm water control, maintenance of surface and ground water quality, open space and aesthetic appreciation, fish and wildlife habitat, and sources of nutrients for freshwater food chains.

In North Bennington, wetlands are found along Lake Paran, Paran Creek, and the Walloomsac River, as well as in other low-lying areas on the Bennington College



Wetlands are found in low-lying areas throughout the Village – here along Paran Creek.

campus, near College Road, on either side of Overlea Road adjacent to the old railroad bed, and east of Mattison Road (Map 3.1). More detailed study is needed to determine precise wetland boundaries.

The Vermont Wetlands Rules and federal regulations administered by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers provide protection for wetland resources. Any development planned in the vicinity of a wetland area should conform to all such regulations.

### **3.3 Soils and Agricultural Resources**

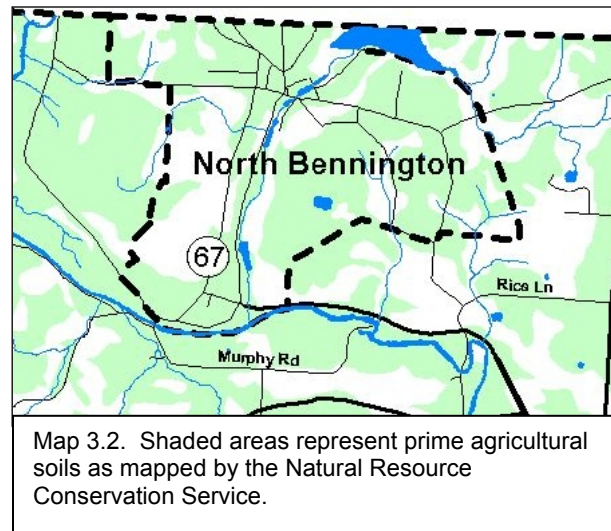
Soil conditions are a critical determinant of the suitability of land for various uses. Steeply sloping soils, for example, pose severe limitations for development. Development should be avoided in areas where slopes exceed 20 percent. In North Bennington, those areas are located primarily toward the south and west of Park Street, the western edge of the Bennington College campus along Paran Creek, and the slope between Park Street and Water Street.



The most important soil resource in North Bennington is the agricultural soil that covers an extensive portion of the Village (Map 3.2). Development on open lands that contain prime agricultural soils should be carefully planned so that existing or potential agricultural uses are not compromised. Where such areas exist within areas of concentrated development or within a designated village growth area, however, it is not required that agricultural viability be conserved.

A limited amount of farming takes place in North Bennington, but such uses are important and should be supported. Owners of agricultural land should be encouraged to utilize state

programs to help maintain open land and reduce the burden of property taxes. The Vermont Land Trust and other conservation organizations can be of assistance in conserving agricultural land while providing resources to maintain viable farming operations.



### **3.4 Natural Areas**

The Vermont Natural Heritage Program has identified one significant natural community in the southern part of the Village (Map 3.3), containing a unique stand of old growth oak trees. Development in the vicinity of this natural community must be carefully planned to avoid adverse impacts on the resource.

### **3.5 Scenic Resources**

The scenic quality of the landscape is one of North Bennington's most important assets. The visual appearance of the Village's natural and built environment, and the quality of life that it represents, is important to residents, visitors, and businesses. Of particular importance are scenic vistas and views that are seen from roads and other public spaces. In fact, some roadways have been identified as scenic in and of themselves. The Village designated Park Street a "scenic road" because of its unpaved surface, narrow profile, canopy of trees, and the rural landscape it traverses. Park Street intersects with West Street near the Park-McCullough House, where historic stone walls and elegant lawns and gardens backed by the mansion itself creates a unique and attractive streetscape.

The Park/West/McCullough/Harrington Road loop, which traverses land in both North Bennington and Bennington is an especially scenic route, favored by walkers, bicyclists, runners (it is the route of the Bennington Road Race), and those out for a scenic drive. The four-mile loop surrounds the Hall-Park-McCullough farm property and the "Mile-Around Woods," much of which is conserved and available for public use.

Outstanding vistas are obtained from several points along the trail network on these lands.

Other elements that add special scenic character to North Bennington include the Village's historic architecture, the significant water features mentioned earlier, and scenic vistas that include the surrounding rural countryside and mountains. The concentration of buildings and structures arrayed between the offset intersections, Lincoln Square, and the upper millponds of Paran Creek form a very important historic district that has local, statewide, and national significance. Special incentives and regulations are in place to ensure that the visual character of this resource is maintained. North Bennington also contains historic buildings outside the central village that contribute the scenic character of those areas. Historic resources are discussed in more detail in the next chapter of this Plan.

Scenic views are enhanced by the presence of contrasting visual elements, and in North Bennington water features provide such visual interest, whether looking at a cascade or millpond on Paran Creek, or the view across a wetland complex or the tranquil surface of Lake Paran. Other features such as a stone wall, mature trees, and a foreground meadow can frame or enhance a distant mountain vista. Public investments and private development should recognize important vistas and preserve the elements that make them attractive.



The rural character of the countryside is evident in this view looking over North Bennington from conserved lands above the Park-McCullough House.



### **3.6 Open Space and Conserved Lands**

North Bennington is extremely fortunate to have an abundance of open land that is either publicly owned or available for some level of public access and use. The Fund for North Bennington has acquired several properties including the Mile-Around Woods and some adjacent properties west of Park Street (Map 3.3). A number of popular hiking trails have been established on these lands, which connect to other conserved lands on the Hall-Park-McCullough Farm property and to the Short Aldrich Trail which forms a loop around the valley of Paran Creek. Other contiguous lands have been conserved through land trust partnerships and those open spaces provide extremely valuable scenic and recreational resources. The Village should continue to cooperate with the Fund for North Bennington, private property owners, and conservation organizations to ensure that this large block of land remains open and accessible to the public.

The trail network in the Village is discussed further in Chapter 8 of this Plan, but it is important to note here that the portion of the Short Aldrich Trail that follows the east side of Paran Creek from Scarey Lane to the village center passes through valuable forested open land at the western edge of the Bennington College campus. The Village should encourage the College to maintain this area in its natural state and to keep the trail accessible to the public.

The Bennington College campus includes large expanses of open land that contributes to the scenic beauty of the Village. Although the College is a private institution, it is by far the largest landowner in North Bennington and should recognize the value of maintaining open land and scenic vistas when developing and implementing its master plan.

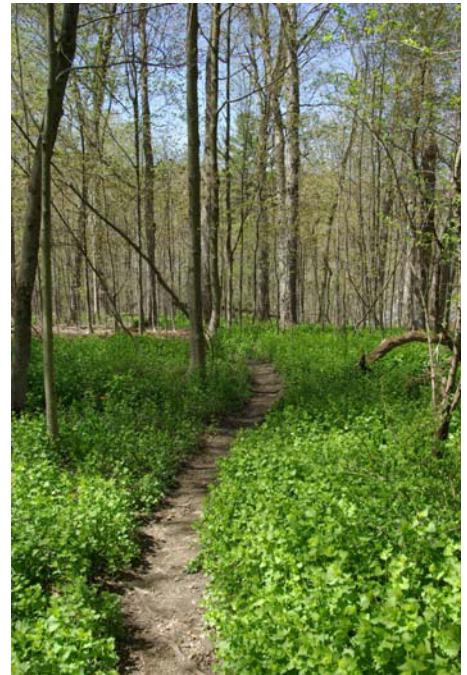
Another prominent nonprofit holding that is used extensively by the public is the Park-McCullough House. The lawn surrounding the historic mansion is accessible to the public and used for special community events, performances, and parties. The Village should work with the nonprofit organization that owns and operates the mansion and the grounds to ensure that it remains open and accessible to the community.

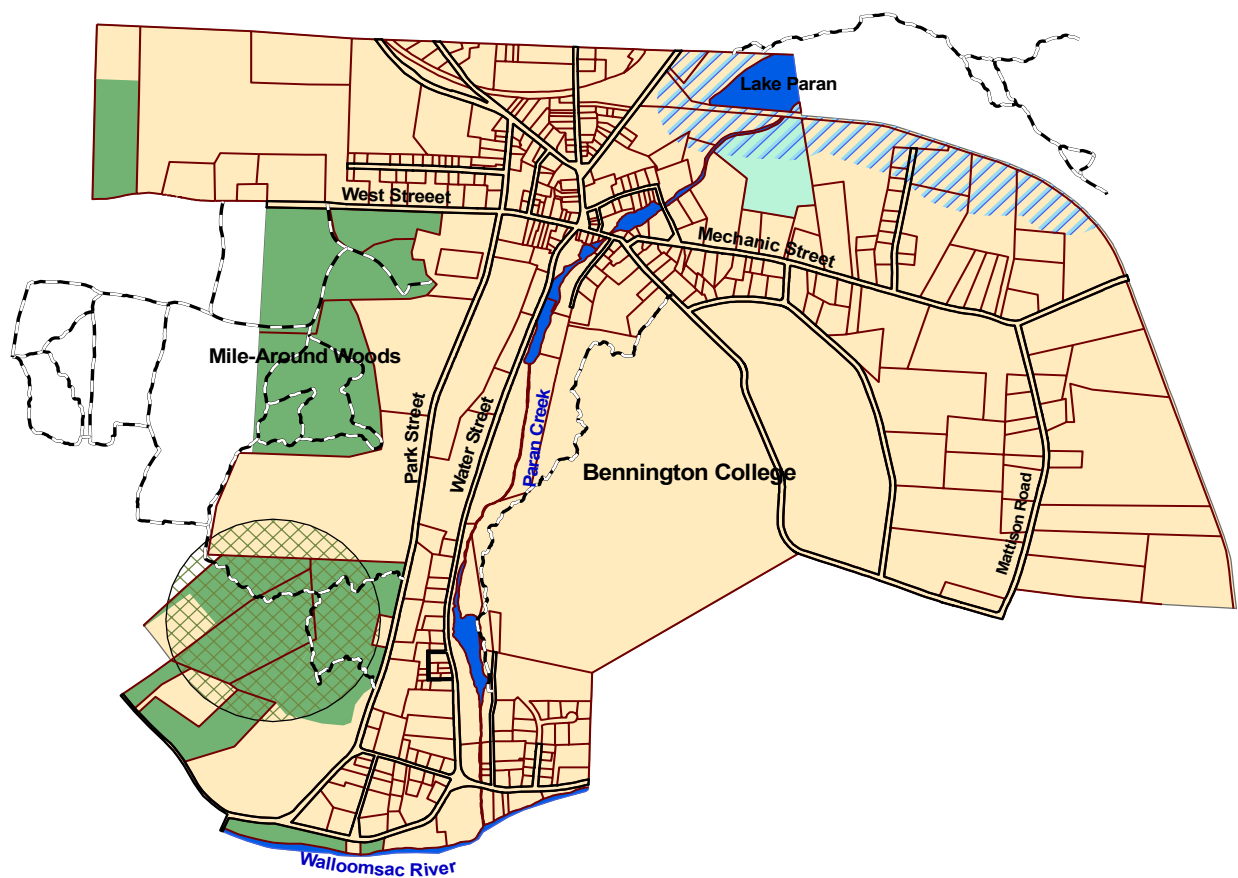
Other important open spaces in the Village include Welling Field and the access area to Lake Paran and Memorial Park and the playgrounds and playing fields on Houghton Street and at the elementary school. These areas are discussed further in the chapter dealing with public facilities and recreational resources. The open parcel of land located adjacent to the Henry Covered Bridge on the east side of the Walloomsac has been acquired by the Fund for North Bennington and is an excellent site for a simple public park that also provides access to the river.

Several small pieces of open space in the village center are important to the community and should be protected and enhanced. Lincoln Square is located at the intersection of Route 67A (Water Street), West Street, and Prospect Street and as such is particularly prominent in the life of the Village. A plan has been developed, and partially implemented, to expand the green space at the center of the square and to improve parking and pedestrian crossings in the area. The Village should continue to seek opportunities to fund further improvements to this area. Landscaped areas along Paran Creek, particularly those near the firehouse and Haviland's Privilege should be maintained and opportunities for additional public viewing and access points to the stream should be pursued.



Open spaces available for public use and enjoyment are especially important to residents of the Village. Some prominent open space resources include the small public access areas along Paran Creek, Welling Field, the boating and fishing access at Lake Paran, and the network of trails, including the Short Aldrich Trail along Paran Creek.





Map 3.3. Public and conserved lands, natural heritage sites, and public use trails in North Bennington.

-  Trails
-  Natural Heritage Site
-  Conserved Land
-  Shoreland Protection Area
-  Public Land

### **3.7 Policies and Recommendations**

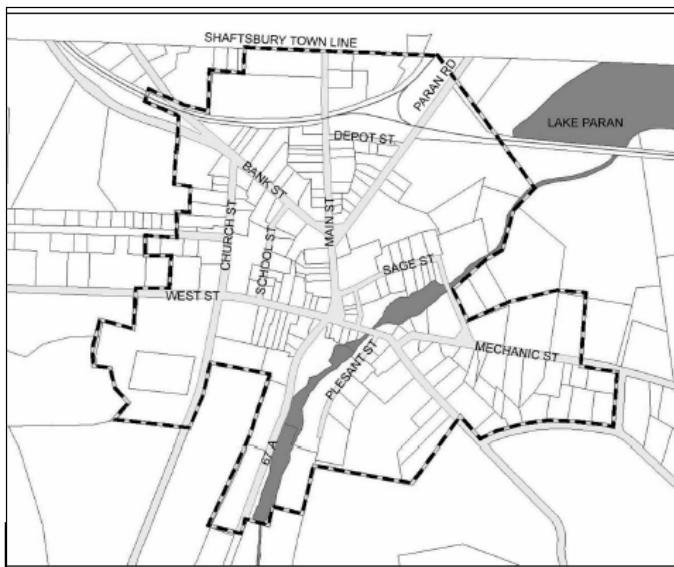
1. The water quality of streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, and wetlands must be protected. Buildings and uses that could have a negative impact on Lake Paran, Paran Creek, the Walloomsac River, or any wetland must be set back a sufficient distance from those waters. Specific regulatory setback requirements include:
  - a. Natural vegetation on land within 50 feet of a stream (not including ponds and millponds) shall not be disturbed and Development Review Board Approval is required for development within 100 feet of a stream.
  - b. Buildings and subsurface wastewater facilities within the Shoreland Protection Area (land within 500 feet of the high water mark of the shore of Lake Paran) shall be set back at least 200 feet from the shoreline.
  - c. A natural undisturbed buffer of at least 50 feet shall be maintained adjacent to any mapped wetland, unless a greater buffer is required by a State or Federal agency.
2. Any new development shall utilize erosion control measures to ensure that surface runoff does not adversely impact any watercourse.
3. Work with owners of property along Paran Creek to promote maintenance and restoration of historic buildings, protect water quality, and provide public access to the stream.
4. The Village should work with the Facilities Engineering Division at the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation to complete a plan for dredging the millponds and repairing the dams along Paran Creek.
5. Continue to work to control Eurasian milfoil (using new harvesting techniques) and limit waterfowl populations in Lake Paran to protect the natural and recreational uses of that small lake.
6. Development on land with slopes in excess of 20 percent should be avoided. Carefully plan development and require erosion control and soil stabilization for any development on slopes in excess of 15 percent.
7. Support land conservation and development that maintains agricultural viability in rural areas where prime agricultural soils are present.
8. Maintain and enhance the natural and built environment that gives the Village its unique scenic character. Incorporate scenic resource protection in land use regulations, development planning, and land conservation efforts.
9. Work to ensure that key open space parcels are protected and remain, or are made available, for public use. The existing network of trails on public and conserved lands should be maintained, improved, and where appropriate, expanded. Priority should be given to development of an integrated trail system, including new trails around Lake Paran and a trail following the old rail spur toward Bennington. Maintain public use and access at the parcel of land along the Walloomsac River that is adjacent to the Henry Covered Bridge.

## Chapter 4: Historic Resources

### 4.1 Historic District and Buildings

North Bennington contains a concentration of historic structures and those in the village center area form a unique district that has been recognized by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation and included in the National Register of Historic Places (added in 1980). The historic architecture and streetscape of the Village reflects both an accommodation of practical needs and a desire to create a visually appealing built environment. A number of periods and styles are represented in the District and among the other historic buildings and structures in the Village. The Village has taken additional steps to protect its unique character by adopting historic district design standards as a part of the municipal zoning bylaws, and by applying for and receiving designation as a “Village Center” that provides incentives for historic preservation activities.

The North Bennington Historic District (Map 4.1) encompasses much of the village center and includes 178 buildings of architectural or historical significance. Although not included in the original National Register designation, a number of structures along the Paran Creek valley are historic, architecturally significant, and related to the properties in the Historic District. The following descriptions are taken from the original survey work that led to the federal designation.



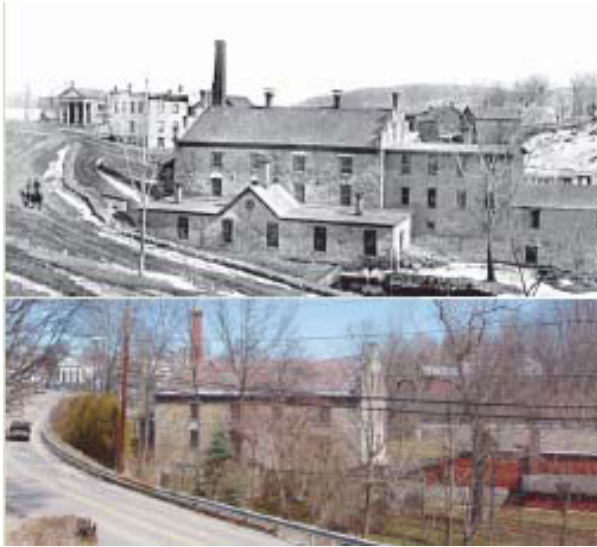
North Bennington's 19<sup>th</sup> century architectural character is nearly intact. Vernacular interpretations of Greek and Italianate Revival styles predominate, covered in some cases with decorative elements from later styles. A few examples of other styles are interspersed, including Federal, Gothic Revival, Second Empire, and Queen Anne. A small number of 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings include examples of Georgian Revival architecture.

Gable-roofed buildings of domestic scale constitute the characteristic building form in the

Village. Most of these buildings are constructed of wood; a few are of brick (generally the larger institutional buildings), while only three stone structures (including a bridge) exist in the Historic District. A majority of the buildings are painted white with contrasting trim.

A distinctive ornamental device appears on many of the Village's numerous slate-roofed buildings. Quite a few of these buildings – both principal buildings and barns or sheds – display alternating bands of implicated shingles arranged in various patterns. The





North Bennington has retained its historic character along with many of its historic buildings: the view north toward Lincoln Square and Powers Market is still recognizable and many old mill buildings and historic homes, including the Park-McCullough House and H.C.White (BCIC) Factory are still standing, although some are now used for different purposes.

incidence of this ornamental device suggests that the same local craftsmen were responsible for slating many of the roofs in the Village.

North Bennington achieved the pinnacle of both its architectural development and its commercial and industrial expansion around 1880, the year also marked by construction of the Second Empire style train depot that has been restored and today houses the Village offices. Most of the buildings in the Historic District had been constructed by that time and numerous mills and workshops were concentrated about dam sites along Paran Creek. Stores, offices, two hotels, and various craftsmen's shops contributed to the activity along Main Street.

Activity in the area began to recede over the next decade and when fires destroyed several major buildings much of the land remained vacant. Many of the commercial buildings of that area which remain have been converted to residential uses, although the center of the Village still contains restaurants, retail stores, offices, and institutional uses such as a bank and a public library. Some duplex and multi-family houses from that era recall the need for worker's housing; two surviving complexes of mill houses, "Brick Row" on Greenwich Street and the group of wooden homes on Sage Street.



The counterpoint to the local mill houses is the extravagant Park-McCullough House at the corner of Park and West Streets. The 35 room mansion was completed in 1865 for Trenor and Laura Park and is a classic example of the French Second Empire style. The house is now maintained by a nonprofit organization as a museum and cultural center for the Village.

Commercial buildings along Main Street share the Greek Revival or Italianate characteristics, materials, and scale of the residential buildings in the area. Only three brick commercial blocks exist in the historic district, representing three disparate fashions of commercial architecture spanning the latter 70 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. They range from the circa 1833 Greek temple style used for the structure that now houses Power's Market to the elaborate High Victorian Italianate Merchant's Bank building that was constructed in 1864. The 1903 Dwyer Block is a much less ornate commercial style.

The few surviving industrial buildings in the historic district represent a variety of enterprises and building types, although none remain in their original use. The stone constructed mill complex at Lincoln Square and Prospect Street was a grist mill, briefly the site for a village jail, was later converted to a paper mill, and now is a residential complex of seven condominium units. It is the only surviving example of an early 19th century water-powered mill of the type that gave North Bennington its industrial character. The main mill building was constructed in 1770 by Joseph Haviland or Moses Sage, while other buildings on the site were erected as late as 1833.

The Walbridge Red Mill is situated upstream on the Pleasant Street side. It now houses a hooked rug manufacturer and an architect's office. The first items manufactured there were stereoscopic viewers that were very popular in the latter part of the 19th century. A third mill, built along Paran Creek near Sage and North Streets was constructed in 1850 and may have been the first cotton mill in Vermont. It was destroyed by fire in 1913 and replaced by the present three story brick factory in 1920. The "Shea Mill," as it was known manufactured pallets and furniture. After briefly housing a machine company, the building stood vacant until the Village applied for and received a Community Block Grant and provided funding to the Vermont Arts Exchange to undertake the work of refurbishing the building and bringing it up to modern building codes. The VAE project has preserved a historic building while promoting many art and community based projects.

Dams that once generated water power for these old mills remain in place at four sites along Paran Creek. They no longer function to provide power, but are vitally important to the scenic beauty and historic character of the Village. The uppermost dam stands north of the Prospect Street bridge and impounds the water as far north as the bridge at North Street. The second dam at the former Stark Paper Mill (now Haviland's Privilege), was rebuilt with concrete in 1913 and presently impounds a small



Historic dams, with their waterfalls and millponds are vital community assets that require preservation.

pool. The third dam is not too visible, being part of north end of the Bennington County Industrial Corporation complex.

None of these dams have been professionally inspected for many years. Silting of the mill ponds is increasingly a problem. A study should be undertaken on the safety and future of this waterway. A flood event in 2000 indicated that concerns over the dams and waterway involve safety as well as aesthetic and environmental concerns.

Another prominent historical structure in the Village is the Stone Church at the intersection of Hillside and Water Street. The church was built in 1836 and currently is in a state of disrepair. It recently has been acquired by a Baptist church group that has been working on the extensive stabilization and repairs that are required to salvage the building. Consideration should be given to extending the Historic District south to the Stone Church and supporting efforts to preserve this and other historic buildings along the Water Street corridor.

#### **4.2 Policies and Recommendations**

1. Strict adherence to design standards for new construction or renovations within the Historic District is required, as specified in the Zoning Bylaws.
2. The adaptive reuse of historic buildings, rather than demolition and replacement, is preferred whenever practical and appropriate. Historic structures should be incorporated into site plans for new development.
3. Owners of properties within the Historic District and designated “Village Center” should pursue opportunities for funding and financial incentives that are available to support historic preservation.
4. Conduct a study and develop a plan to ensure the long-term structural stability of the Paran Creek dams and removal of silt from the millponds.
5. Consider extension of the Historic District to the south end of Water Street, incorporating buildings as well as the dams and millponds along Paran Creek.



The Stone Church is undergoing extensive restoration efforts.



This residential neighborhood along Sage Street includes a variety of historic mill housing.

## Chapter 5: Economic Development

### 5.1 A Legacy of Manufacturing

North Bennington developed around the water power that was generated from Paran Creek. The growth of the Village as a community and its economic prosperity has been tied to the manufacturing businesses that have constructed dams, mills, and factories along Paran Creek from the shores of Lake Paran to the Walloomsac River. Some of those buildings have burned down, while others have been occupied by a variety of businesses or have been converted to alternative uses, but the industrial character of the core of the Village remains and manufacturing still is important to the local and regional economy.



Water power along Paran Creek fueled North Bennington's early economy and it continues to have a profound impact on the character of the Village.

The Water Street corridor – Route 67A from Lincoln Square south to the Walloomsac River and the municipal border – contains several active manufacturing enterprises. McAdoo Rugs has been producing hand-hooked rugs in the old Harmon Square Mill along Paran Creek in the center of the village. The National Hangar Company occupies both historical and new industrial buildings between Water Street and Paran Creek, where they produce garment hangers in their 350,000 square foot facility.

Further south along the corridor, also located between the roadway and Paran Creek, is the historic H.C. White Company building, now owned by the Bennington County Industrial Corporation (BCIC). The BCIC works to promote quality jobs in the region by assisting businesses seeking to locate or expand in the area. The BCIC building on Water Street houses the organization's offices and serves as an "incubator" for small manufacturing concerns. Several thriving businesses, including Porta Brace – a world-renowned producer of cases for video equipment – are located in the

building. Recent interest in the building by developers involves proposals for adaptive reuse of the space, maintaining manufacturing in a portion of the structure while accommodating related light commercial uses in a portion, and redeveloping upper floors into housing units.

The large complex of buildings on the west side of Water Street is home to the Bennington Microtechnology Center (BMC). It is hoped that with upcoming growth in the regional microtechnology sector, the BMC will fill an important niche in the area of microsystems packaging processes and systems level integration, with an emphasis on microfluidics, microoptics and microsensors.

A particularly innovative and effective re-use of an historic mill building is the conversion of the old Paran Creek Manufacturing Company, located along the stream at the end of Sage Street, to the Vermont Arts Exchange (VAE). The arts community is very strong in North Bennington and VAE has given a home to cultural and educational





The National Hangar Company (left) and McAdoo Rugs (red building on right) are modern manufacturers occupying historic mill buildings along Paran Creek. National Hangar has expanded into new industrial buildings as well

programs that benefit artists and residents of the entire region. Use of the building continues to grow and support for its programs will allow for further rehabilitation and re-use of the building and site. The Village should support further development of the arts in the community; as North Bennington becomes known for the arts, it will draw additional businesses and tourism dollars to the area.

Other historic mill properties have been converted to alternative uses, notably the fine condominiums developed at the Haviland's Privilege facility. Continued use of these historic structures maintains the character of the Village and keeps this central corridor vibrant.

## 5.2 Educational and Nonprofit Sector

Bennington College is the largest landholder in the Village and certainly a key employer. The campus covers 470 acres (in both North Bennington and Bennington) and includes 60 buildings. The College has been an innovator in education since its opening in 1932 and continues to take pride in its creative approaches offered throughout its diverse program of studies. As Bennington College continues to prosper, it will be important for the Village to maintain a close relationship with the school's administration to ensure that development of the campus is consistent with both the College's master plan and with the goals and objectives of this Plan.



Bennington College is an important part of the Village and a major employer.

As a major employer, Bennington College offers job opportunities that Village residents should consider and also brings many talented people to the community who can enhance the quality of life with their enthusiasm and skills. Students, faculty, and staff also frequent local businesses and the College brings many cultural events that benefit the community.

The local public elementary school (North Bennington Graded School) also is a significant employer, as are the private Southshire School and the Early Childhood Center at Bennington College. Most importantly, these schools also prepare the youth of the community for secondary school, provided for the most part by Mount Anthony Union High School and the Career Development Center. The quality of the education offered at those schools is critical for both the students and for area businesses. The Village should support efforts to maintain and enhance the quality of the schools and relationships between the schools and area employers.

North Bennington is home to several significant nonprofit employers, including the Head Start program, a homeless shelter, the McCullough Library, a nursing home, the historic Park-McCullough House, and the Vermont Arts Exchange. These organizations provide important community services while offering meaningful jobs for a number of people. It is important to recognize the importance of these entities and support their continued operation.



The McCullough Library is an important community asset in the center of the village.

### **5.3 Small Businesses and Home Occupations**

The area from Lincoln Square north to the Depot has long been a center of business activity in the Village. This historic “village commercial” area contains a strong assembly of small businesses that serve residents and give North Bennington its own identity as a true center of commerce and activity. The area contains fine restaurants, general stores, banking and financial offices, specialty stores, a gasoline station, and professional offices, including three architectural firms. Although limited commercial development associated with on-site manufacturing operations may develop along Water



North Bennington's village center contains a diversity of small businesses in a historic setting.

Street, it is important that the village center remain a focal point for the type of small retail and professional use that is consistent with the character of the area.

The Village zoning bylaws provide for “home occupations,” or the use of a small portion of one’s home for certain types of business

operations. This home-based employment and telecommuting is becoming an increasingly popular option with advances in information technology. Many of these home occupations provide flexibility for workers and reduce transportation-based energy consumption. Such practices should continue to be supported as long as the uses and intensities are consistent with the standards and guidelines set forth in the zoning bylaws, and do not alter the residential character of neighborhoods.

#### **5.4 Resources to Support Business Development**

North Bennington is an attractive location for development of small businesses for a number of reasons. First of all, the quality of life available to business owners and employees is outstanding, with a beautiful natural environment, a historic village center, and a surprising number of recreational and cultural resources. The Village also is served by public water and sewer systems and high speed internet access is available throughout the community. The industrial buildings and sites in the Village have significant potential for re-use and re-development, and a number of buildings in the village center offer locations for commercial uses. Finally, the Village is located near transportation facilities in Vermont and New York that offer relatively easy access to major market areas.

It will be important for the Village to work together with the Town, the BCIC, and other business interests, to ensure that these existing resources are maintained and that other resources are developed. Economic development analyses of the regional economy have suggested that more attention needs to be directed toward additional workforce development activities and the provision of high quality and affordable housing.

#### **5.5 Policies and Recommendations**

1. Support existing businesses and new economic development activities that provide high-quality jobs while enhancing the historic character of the Village. Special attention should be given to initiatives and investments that will preserve historic buildings through re-use. Mixed uses may be allowed in these buildings, in conformance with zoning standards, provided such uses do not have adverse impacts on the environment, nearby residential neighborhoods, the vitality of the village center, or on roads or other public infrastructure.
2. The village center shall maintain its historic character while permitting infill and redevelopment of compatible commercial and professional uses.
3. Maintain good transportation connections to Bennington and the region. Attention should be given to maintenance of quality roads and bridges, renewed rail transportation, and improved access for bicycles and pedestrians.
4. Ensure that the latest telecommunication technologies are available to the Village and that public water and sewer service is adequate for future growth.



5. Maintain and enhance the quality of life – cultural, recreational, environmental, and historic resources – and seek opportunities for improving the Village’s housing stock to attract business owners and employees.
6. Ensure that residents have access to educational opportunities, continuing education, and a variety of workforce development activities that meet the needs of area businesses.
7. Communicate with Bennington College to ensure that growth at that institution benefits the Village and offers employment for residents.



The Haviland's Privilege property is an attractive redevelopment of old mill buildings on the shoreline of Paran Creek.



The Vermont Arts Exchange, seen from across a mill pond on Paran Creek, is an example of a successful adaptive re-use of a former manufacturing building.

## Chapter 6: Land Use

### 6.1 General Development Pattern and Planning Framework

The Village's land use plan derives from the historic development pattern that developed around the compact village center and the industrial corridor along Paran Creek and Water Street. Development in the village center should be guided by the objective of maintaining a relatively densely developed core, with preserved historic buildings and compatible new construction supporting a diversity of land uses. Land along Paran Creek, from the end of Sage Street south to the Walloomsac River, is intended to retain its historic character and include a mix of uses that allow for effective use of historic mill and manufacturing buildings as well as compatible uses on adjacent properties.

The village center should be surrounded by moderate density residential development, with traditional neighborhoods developed at scales that are consistent with the village landscape. These "village residential" areas offer convenient access, including pedestrian access, to North Bennington's commercial and public uses. Most of these areas should be served by public water and/or sewer to support a concentration of housing in the immediate vicinity of the center.



A principal objective of the land use plan is to maintain the historic character of the village and the quality of life for residents.

The landscape east and west of the village center and the Paran Creek corridor is more rural in character and includes some unique properties and situations. The Bennington College campus occupies a large tract of land immediately east of Paran Creek and extending to College Road and the Bennington town boundary. Relatively low-density rural residential development exists between Bennington College and the eastern boundary of the Village, extending north to Lake Paran.

The land slopes upward west of the Paran Creek valley, with little existing development beyond Park Street. Indeed, most of this land is conserved, either through ownership or conservation easement. The Village intends for most of this land to remain

open and undeveloped, with regulations allowing very low density residential development on private lands. Adjacent properties in the Town of Bennington also have been conserved to maintain a large contiguous tract of open space.

The North Bennington Zoning Bylaws contain specific land use regulations pertinent to each land use district depicted on the Land Use Map (Map 6.1). Those bylaws also contain standards and guidelines to ensure that new development does not have an adverse impact on the environment, neighborhoods, the historic district, or transportation systems and other public infrastructure. The following section of the Plan includes a brief description of each land use district; at this time, no changes are proposed to the recently revised and adopted Zoning Bylaws.

## **6.2 Land Use Districts**

### **Village Residential Districts**

Areas that are intended to support primarily residential development are included in several “Village Residential” (VR) Districts. These districts support varying densities of housing depending on their location. The varying locations, lot sizes, and types of residential uses permitted in the different VR Districts provide for development of different housing types at different cost levels. Although small-scale and incidental non-residential uses are allowed in the VR Districts in accordance with Vermont law and the North Bennington Zoning Bylaw, such uses must be strictly limited in their extent so that they do not alter the essential residential character of these areas.

The highest development density is allowed in the VR-3 (3,000 square feet per dwelling unit) District, a small area near the south end of Water Street that currently contains a very compact housing development. Zoning standards allow for a variety of redevelopment strategies for this area. All occupied buildings in this district must be connected to both municipal water and sewer systems.

The VR-10 (10,000 square feet per dwelling unit) District is located immediately adjacent to the commercial district in the core of the village center. All of these properties are located in the Historic District and new home construction and major additions are required to follow design guidelines set forth in the Zoning Bylaws. All dwelling units in the VR-10 District must be connected to both



Village Residential Districts include historic areas with small lots (VR-10 on Bank Street, top), moderately sized lots (VR-20 subdivision off Royal Street, middle), and large lots (VR-120, bottom).



municipal water and sewer systems.

Surrounding the VR-10 District is the moderate density VR-20 (20,000 square feet per dwelling unit) District. There also are two areas of VR-20 zoning near the southern limits of the Village. Lots in this district must have more land in open space (not covered by buildings) and need be connected to either municipal water or sewer systems, but not necessarily both.

The largest Village Residential District is the VR-40 (40,000 square feet per dwelling unit) District. There are three distinct areas in this land use designation. The largest is located east of the Bennington College campus and consists primarily of large lots along Mattison Road, Mechanic Street, and Overlea Road. Further subdivision in this area is possible, and buildings do not need to be connected to either public water or sewer systems, although all local and state environmental and health regulations must be satisfied. A second VR-40 area covers the “Homestead Mews” housing development, which is fully built out at the present time. A small section of VR-40 zoning is situated east and north of Park Street, between conserved land and denser village development. Limited future development is possible on this small tract of land.

A VR-120 District (120,000 square feet per dwelling unit) covers the northwestern extreme of the Village. This area is characterized by large open spaces with a few homes set well back from the road. Because of the large lot sizes, connections to public water or sewer systems are not required.

### Village Commercial District

At the heart of the Village, covering an area along Main Street from Lincoln Square north to the Depot and the Shaftsbury town line, is the “Village Commercial” (VC) District. This district allows the greatest variety of residential, commercial, public, and professional uses in North Bennington. The minimum lot size for a principal use or



This historic brick building in the VC district now houses a popular restaurant.

dwelling unit in the VC District is 10,000 square feet, although conversions of existing structures to multi-family dwellings at higher densities may be permitted as specified in the Zoning Bylaws. The VC District is located entirely within the Historic District, and any new commercial construction, including additions or alterations to existing buildings, is subject to review under the Village’s historic district design standards.

Much of the unique character of North Bennington is attributable to the VC District. It is important that this area retain its historic character while supporting a diversity of uses that draws people to the area to shop, dine, and enjoy public amenities. Residential uses intermixed with commercial uses will ensure that the area retains this vitality throughout the day and week. There are opportunities for infill development and adaptive re-use of buildings in this area. New



businesses should be provide useful products and services for residents, good employment opportunities, and should contribute to the sense of a distinct and thriving small commercial center.

### Village Residential-Professional District

The Water Street corridor south of Lincoln Square presents some unique land use planning challenges. Adjacent land uses include a mix of new and older industrial uses and buildings, residential dwellings on lots of varying sizes, and an old church building. Some of the buildings are not fully utilized or are in need of rehabilitation. Water Street (Vermont Route 67A) is an arterial highway that carries relatively heavy traffic volume between Bennington and outlying towns and rural areas.

In 2006, the Village voted to reclassify parcels along this corridor that had previously been zoned VC and VR-20 to a “Village Residential-Professional” (VRP) designation. These parcels consisted primarily of residential lots and underdeveloped parcels located between and across from larger industrial buildings. The purpose of the VRP District is to provide a suitable location for residential development, professional offices, and certain limited institutional uses that promote sound economic development while encouraging re-use of properties in a manner that will lead to an attractive streetscape along this important approach to the village center.

It is hoped that the more flexible zoning standards for this district will encourage rehabilitation and re-use of existing residential structures and undeveloped land. The resulting mix of uses will provide some vitality and economic opportunities while not adversely impacting traffic flow or safety on Water Street and without detracting from the primacy of the VC District as the Village’s



The VRP district along Water Street has significant potential for mixed use redevelopment.

center of activity and public life. The minimum lot size in the VRP District is 20,000 square feet, although permitted professional and institutional uses may be permitted on the same lot as residential units without requiring additional lot area.

### Industrial Districts

Existing industrial complexes are sited on lands with an “Industrial” (I) land use classification. The National Hangar Company, Bennington Microtechnology Center, and Bennington County Industrial Corporation along Water Street are found within this land use designation, as is the Vermont Arts Exchange property at the end of Sage Street.

The purpose of the Industrial Districts is to promote the general welfare and sound economic development of the Village and to encourage appropriate industrial establishments as well as compatible commercial and residential uses. This mixed use

development pattern is intended to promote economically viable redevelopment of historic industrial properties, to improve site design, and to provide and maintain open space and public access to waterways.

A variety of industrial uses are allowed in the I Districts, subject to specific performance standards specified in the Zoning Bylaws. In addition, retail uses closely related to the manufacturing operations on the site (e.g., display and sales of items produced on the site), and professional offices and restaurant uses are allowed in historic buildings within the I Districts. Residential uses may be located in upper stories of historic industrial buildings and in new construction as specifically provided for in the Zoning Bylaws.



The Bennington Microtechnology Center represents a major opportunity for expansion of clean industry in the area.

essential character of historic structures, provide landscaping along Water Street frontage, and utilize acceptable access management techniques to minimize traffic congestion and safety hazards.

### Education Campus District

The “Education Campus” District is intended to provide Bennington College with the ability to develop its campus in an attractive and efficient manner. Such development must occur in accordance with the overall master plan for the College. A copy of the master plan is maintained in the Village Offices and provides a clear indication as to the location, size, and use of existing buildings and proposed buildings and lands, as well as the location of existing and planned roads, parking lots, and other infrastructure. Bennington College should update the master plan periodically and must submit any revisions to the Development Review Board of the Village for comment and a determination of whether the plan is consistent with the Village Plan.

Considerable flexibility in the design and location of new development is afforded through this master plan process, but a natural vegetated buffer of at least 50 feet must be maintained between any structures and the College property line. Any building construction within 200 feet of a property line is subject to site plan review by the Development Review Board. No building may exceed 45 feet in height.



Future use of open land at the Bennington College campus is an issue that is important to the Village.

If at any point Bennington College proposes to transfer part of its property to a party not associated with the College, said land shall be reclassified as part of the VR-40 District, and the subdivision shall be subject to review by the Planning Commission and Development Review Board as specified in the Zoning Bylaws.

### Conservation District

The “Conservation” (CONS) District includes a number of large parcels west of Park Street and east of the Bennington town line, as well as one parcel east of Park Street (Map 6.1). As noted, many of these parcels have limited development potential because of ownership and/or conservation easements. The purpose of the CONS District is to allow for limited residential development while supporting natural resource based uses in a manner that maintains environmental quality, discourages sprawl, and enhances scenic, open space, and historic qualities.



An open field in the Conservation District.

In addition to natural resource based uses (e.g., agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation), one and two family dwelling units, and related uses, are permitted at a maximum density of one unit per 200,000 square feet of lot area. In no event may buildings cover more than five percent of a lot in the CONS District.

### Resource Protection Districts

North Bennington’s Zoning Bylaws contain several sections that deal with protection of specific resources. Three of those regulations cover defined geographic areas and are discussed here.

The Historic District, discussed in Chapter 4, was established to provide the Planning Commission and the Development Review Board with a consistent tool for reviewing and approving any new development within this important historic part of the



Village. At the same time, it provides property owners with a guide to development practices which are in keeping with the character of the Village. The design standards contained in the Historic District regulations apply to all new commercial construction and modifications to existing commercial properties within the Historic District, and to construction of new homes and substantial additions to residential properties within the Historic District. The design standards apply to both building and site design.

A number of historic preservation and building improvement incentives also are available to property owners within North Bennington's designated Village Center. These incentives include income tax credits and priority consideration for certain grants and siting of State facilities.

The Shoreland Protection Overlay District area extends 500 feet inland from the shore of Lake Paran. This District is intended to provide a safety zone to avoid flood damage, preserve aesthetic qualities, protect public waters from pollution, protect spawning grounds and wildlife habitat, and prevent erosion. Any use involving the disposal or storage of hazardous materials is prohibited in the Shoreland Protection District and land within 200 feet of the lake shoreline is to be kept in its natural condition to the extent possible, with buildings and wastewater disposal systems excluded from this buffer area entirely.

A Flood Hazard Area has been identified along the floodplain of the Walloomsac River. The area and regulatory provisions are based on State and federal mapping and insurance requirements. By controlling the type of development and the nature of construction in this area, the Village seeks to protect public health and safety, and protect the community against the costs associated with flood damage.



The land immediately adjacent to Lake Paran is included in a special resource protection overlay.



### **6.3 Policies and Recommendations**

1. A variety of residential types, including, one-family, two-family, and multi-family dwellings should be provided for in appropriate locations within the Village, consistent with the dimensional and use requirements set forth in the Zoning Bylaws. Residential development should be carefully planned to blend harmoniously with the natural terrain, avoid adverse impacts on environmental resources, and to be compatible with any nearby historic structures or districts.

Residential neighborhoods should be enhanced with amenities such as street trees, parks, and pathways or sidewalks as appropriate to the location.

2. Several land use districts in North Bennington can accommodate a mix of compatible uses, as defined by the Zoning Bylaws. The Water Street corridor, in particular, is a good location for a mix of uses, as historic buildings in the Industrial District may allow for limited commercial uses related to the manufacturing uses on the premises, and upper floors may be redeveloped as residential units. Industrial uses are appropriate, but must not adversely impact nearby neighborhoods or cause environmental damage.

The Village Residential Professional District along Water Street contains a number of properties where conversions to professional and/or small institutional uses could be appropriate. Careful site planning for any such mixed use projects will be necessary to ensure the adequacy of parking, vehicle ingress and egress, pedestrian mobility and safety, protection of resources, and access to Paran Creek.

3. A diversity of small-scale commercial uses, mixed with residential units, is desirable in the Village Commercial District. Building and site design are particularly important in this historic area and strict adherence to the design guidelines included in the Zoning Bylaws is required. In addition, private developments should provide appropriate amenities such as landscaping, benches, bicycle racks, historically appropriate signs, and other suitable items. Adaptive re-use of historic buildings to include a mix of uses is strongly encouraged.

Municipal investments to improve the historic center of the Village and support private investment in this area are important. The Village should ensure that an attractive streetscape is maintained, that sidewalks are well maintained, and that roadways and intersections are safe and attractively designed.

4. The Education Campus District includes the campus of Bennington College. The College must plan future development in conformance with its master plan and any proposed changes to that master plan must be presented to the Village for consideration as provided for in the Zoning Bylaws. Development at Bennington College must not adversely impact residential neighborhoods or the ability of the Town or Village to provide necessary services.

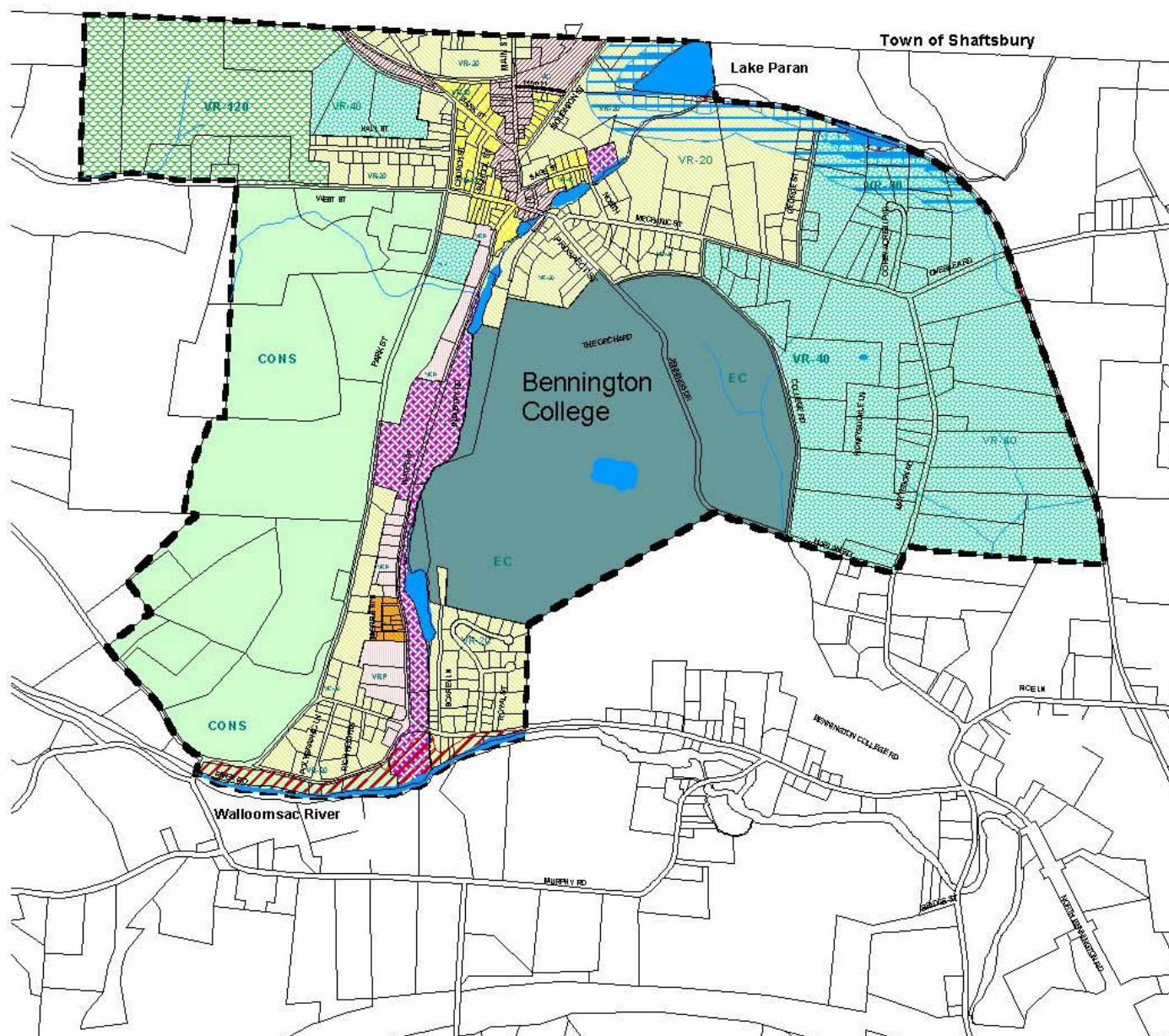
5. Low density residential development and open space uses are appropriate in the Conservation District. Land conservation, low-impact recreation, and related uses are suitable in this area.
6. New construction as well as reconstruction of structures in the Historic District must be sensitive to the need to protect the Village's unique character. The design guidelines contained in the Zoning Bylaws must be strictly enforced. Consideration should be given to extending the Historic District to the Stone Church at the south end of Water Street and the inclusion of the historic dams and millponds of Paran Creek.
7. Any development in the Flood Hazard Area or the Shoreland Protection District must be carefully planned to avoid adverse impacts on water resources. Building construction and site modifications shall be limited to areas of these districts where permitted pursuant to the Zoning Bylaws.



Autumn colors along West Street near the Park-McCullough House.

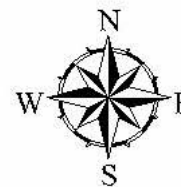


# Village of North Bennington, Vermont Land Use Map



- Shoreland Protection Overlay (200 Feet)
- Shoreland Protection Overlay (500 Feet)
- Flood Hazard Area
- Land Use Districts**
- VR-3 4 acres
- VR-10 24 acres
- VR-20 264 acres
- VR-40 287 acres
- VR-120 92 acres
- VRP 12 acres
- VC 23 acres
- I 35 acres
- EC 229 acres
- CONS 274 acres

1000 0 1000 2000 Feet



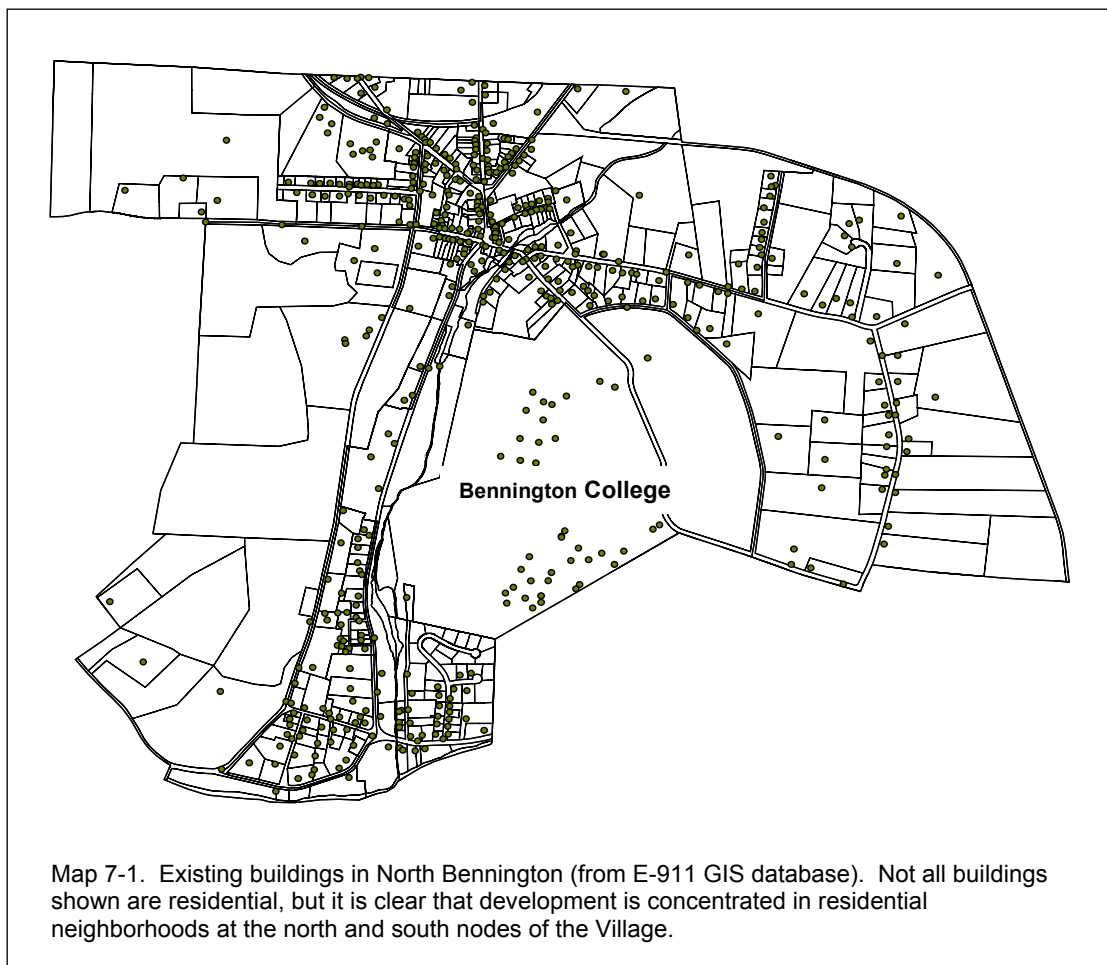
Map produced August 28, 2006 by BCRC

## Chapter 7: Housing

### 7.1 Existing Conditions

As of the year 2000, North Bennington contained 499 housing units, of which 265 were owner-occupied, 189 were renter-occupied, and 45 were vacant (U.S. Census of Population and Housing). In addition, 378 people were reported to be living in “group quarters,” primarily college dormitories and nursing homes. The average number of people living in the 454 occupied households was 2.31, just under the town and county averages.

The majority of the North Bennington’s housing is located in and around the center of the Village, in the Village Commercial and surrounding VR-10 and VR-20 zoning districts, and in the neighborhoods along and near the south end of Water Street (VR-20 and VRP zoning districts). Single-family, two-family, and multi-family structures are located in these areas on relatively small lots. Large lots and low-density development, primarily single-family homes, are located throughout the remainder of the Village (Map 7-1).





The State of Vermont has identified the provision of “affordable housing” as a central goal for local, regional, and state planning efforts. Housing affordability is determined by two factors: the cost of a house or apartment and the ability of a household to pay that cost. A standard measure assumes that housing is affordable when a household pays no more than 30 percent of its income for rent and utilities or for mortgage, taxes, and insurance.

The median monthly cost of home ownership in North Bennington (2000 data) is \$911 and the median monthly rent (2000 data) is \$561. Total housing costs exceed 30 percent of household income for a total of 111 households in the community, indicating a need for some lower-cost housing. At the same time, it is important to provide a range of housing opportunities to ensure that people can live in the Village and to prevent residential sprawl in outlying rural areas. For example, the 2005 Bennington Town Plan includes an analysis that demonstrates that a strong demand exists in the area for houses in the \$150,000 to \$200,000 level.

## **7.2 Residential Build-Out Analysis**

A residential “build-out” is a process that can be used to approximate the number and location of new dwelling units in the Village. In this manner, it is possible to determine how much capacity the community has, given existing zoning and public infrastructure, to support new residential growth. A computer program, “Community Viz”, that runs on the ArcGIS platform was used to calculate potential future residential growth in the Village.

The build-out makes numerous assumptions and is not intended to reflect what the Village will look like in the future. For example, it uses existing zoning dimensional requirements to estimate possible building locations and eliminates from the analysis parcels that are conserved or fully developed, as well as any wetlands and land within the 200 foot Shoreland Protection Zone along Lake Paran. It does not consider the location of existing houses on lots, the presence of steep slopes or rights-of-way, property owner intentions, or other impediments to development. Higher density zones were assumed to be developed with 20 percent of the land not available for density calculations (i.e., used for roads, rights-of-way, or unavailable due to parcel geometry or other factors) while the lower density zones were assumed to be developed with 30 percent of the land unavailable for density calculations.

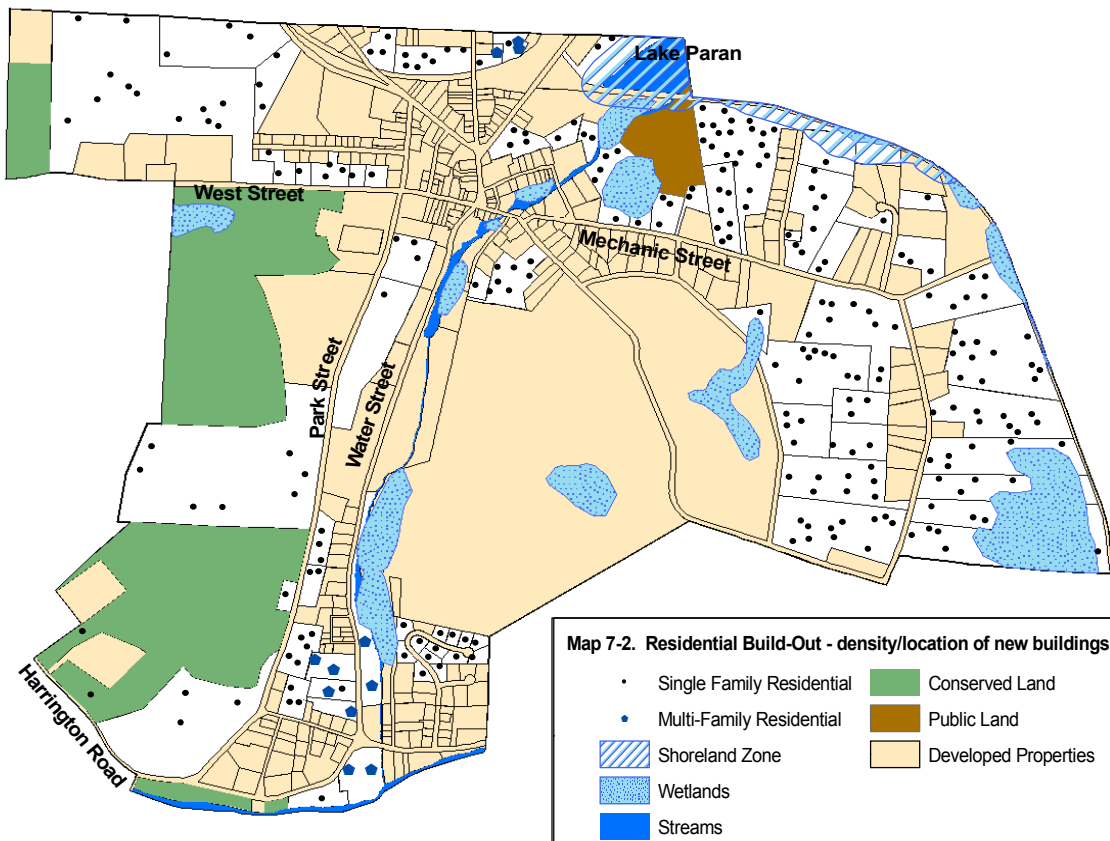
The build-out program allowed for two-family dwellings in the Village Commercial District and Village Residential Professional District and multi-family dwellings in the Industrial District. All other zoning districts were restricted to single-family dwellings, even though it is possible to develop accessory dwelling units on most of those parcels. A single lot area requirement of 8,000 square feet per dwelling unit was used for the Industrial District even though there is no density requirement for dwelling units developed in the upper floors of historic industrial buildings.

Although these assumptions indicate that there will be significant real-life variance from the resulting projections, they do provide a reasonable basis for assessing the amount of future residential development that is possible in the Village. The projected 280 additional dwelling units (Table 7-1 and Map 7-2) could lead to a

population increase of approximately 645 people based on current average household size. It is likely that reaching this level of development would take several decades.

**Table 7-1. Residential Build-Out; potential new dwelling units by zoning district.**

Conservation	13
Village Residential – 120	14
Village Residential – 40	100
Village Residential – 20	96
Village Residential Professional	9
Village Commercial	8
Industrial	40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>280</b>



This map represents potential new residential development based on existing zoning regulations, availability of infrastructure, and certain physical conditions of the land. It does not represent any actual planned development and may not include all actual constraints to development.

### 7.3 Local Issues and Design Considerations

The build-out model reveals that there is sufficient capacity in the Village to accommodate significant growth including increases in population and housing of up to 50 percent over existing levels. The Village is planned to be an area of relatively dense development, with the most concentrated development and most diverse uses located in the village center and along the Water Street corridor. Much of the area around the village center already is built to near capacity, but a considerable amount of future residential growth can be accommodated in the Industrial and Village Residential zones along Water Street. Because of the large amount of undeveloped land in the eastern part of the Village, considerable growth is possible in this lower density (approximately one dwelling unit per acre) land use district.

There are a number of housing issues and needs that are unique to North Bennington. Although Bennington College has on-campus housing available for a majority of its student body, some off-campus housing in the Village is needed; currently one building in the Village houses 14 students. In addition, there is a strong unmet demand for rental housing for College faculty, many of whom prefer to rent locally during the academic year. The College also employs over 200 staff, and local availability of additional affordable housing would benefit this workforce.

One opportunity to address many of these housing needs exists in the form of underutilized historic industrial buildings and land along Paran Creek and Water Street. The Village's land use plan and zoning regulations now allow for conversion of the upper floors of such buildings to residential space while also allowing for new residential structures on some of the vacant industrial lands. Development densities in excess of those projected in the build-out forecast would be possible if those buildings were fully redeveloped and the desirable location adjacent to Paran Creek and the Bennington College campus would address many of the Village's housing needs.



Adaptive re-use of historic industrial buildings provides an opportunity for meeting a variety of housing needs in the Village.

It is important to maintain a diversity of housing types in and around the village center. The higher densities permitted in this area and proximity to services makes the area desirable for elderly or mobility disadvantaged residents and ensures that nearby commercial uses remain vibrant and active throughout the day and week.

The Vermont Planning and Development Act recently was amended to promote affordable housing opportunities. The Village Zoning Bylaw was revised to reflect these requirements, and now allows additional opportunities for multi-family dwelling units, accessory dwelling units appurtenant to single-family houses, and planned manufactured home parks.

Development of affordable housing can present a significant challenge when land and construction costs are very high. The Village should work with private developers as well as organizations such as Housing Vermont, the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, and the Bennington Regional Affordable Housing Corporation to obtain special grants and funding that will allow for construction of affordable housing units and, potentially, restoration of historic structures.

Certain characteristics should be represented in existing and developing residential neighborhoods. New residential development should include as many of the following elements as possible:

- Architecture which is compatible with the character of the Village and surrounding neighborhoods, but which provides some variety in design among and between structures.
- Relatively narrow streets that slow traffic and form a connected network with existing streets.
- Parking areas for cars and garages that are not prominent in building or site design.
- In all but the most rural parts of the Village, buildings sited relatively close to the street, with porches and walkways that connect to public sidewalks along the street.
- Sidewalks and/or pathways that traverse the development and connect to public open spaces, adjacent neighborhoods, and any concentrations of public activity such as commercial areas or schools.
- Streets and sidewalks should be treated as public spaces and integrated with existing and new parks to foster a sense of neighborhood and community.
- Landscaping that is carefully planned with appropriate trees and grass strips along streets and sidewalks.
- Whenever possible, a range of housing types (ownership, rental, one, two, or multi-family – as permitted in the zoning bylaws for the district) at a range of price levels should be provided.
- Any new or rehabilitated housing should be as energy efficient as possible.



Mechanic Street is a typical narrow residential street in the eastern part of the Village, where zoning allows for a one unit per acre density.



#### **7.4 Policies and Recommendations**

1. Provide a variety of housing options at a range of cost levels to satisfy diverse needs and income levels.
2. Work with public, private, and nonprofit housing agencies and developers to provide housing that meets the needs of low-moderate income and elderly and disabled persons.
3. Work closely with Bennington College to ensure that student housing is available on campus for those seeking it and that off-campus housing suitable for student use is provided. Seek opportunities for additional housing for College staff and particularly rental housing for faculty.
4. Conserve existing housing stock and support efforts to rehabilitate existing houses and to renovate underutilized non-residential buildings as new apartments or condominiums.
5. Residential development should be designed to be compatible with the character of the Village, provide safe, comfortable, and attractive neighborhoods for residents, and include amenities such as sidewalks, landscaping, and public open spaces.
6. Energy efficiency should be an important consideration in new and renovated housing.

## Chapter 8: Transportation

### 8.1 Overview

A safe, convenient, attractive, and efficient transportation system is essential for residents of North Bennington as well as for visitors and businesses. The Village is served by a network of local, state, and private roadways, bridges, and parking areas; sidewalks, pathways, and trails; and a rail line and depot. Public transit services and air transportation facilities also are available in the area. Each individual mode is important as are the connections between the modes and relationship between land uses and transportation facilities. Map 8-1 provides an overview of the Village's transportation system.

### 8.2 Roadways, Bridges, and Parking Facilities

The first roadways in North Bennington provided access to settlements and mills along Paran Creek. Eventually those principal access routes became state highways connecting the Village with Bennington (Route 67A), communities in New York State (Route 67 West), and with Shaftsbury and other Vermont towns to the north (Route 67 East). A small network of local roads was developed as the Village center grew to provide access to residential and commercial land uses, while a few roads reached out to serve the farms and surrounding rural countryside.

Over the years some roads have been extended, some discontinued or reoriented, and new roads built to serve new developments. All of the roads have been modified through widening, resurfacing (only Park Street, Welling Road, and a short section of Lake Paran Road remain unpaved today), realignment, and in places the addition of curbs, sidewalks, and drainage features. Many of these changes have been positive, enhancing access and safety for residents, while others have encouraged unsafe vehicle operating speeds, discouraged pedestrian and bicycle use, and have adversely affected the visual quality of historic streetscapes. The challenge faced by the Village today is to maintain its network of roadways, bridges, and parking facilities in a cost-efficient manner while identifying and undertaking necessary improvements.

**Table 8-1. Miles of Village and State Highways in North Bennington.** Class 1 Village highways are state system highways maintained by the Village. Class 2 Village highways support relatively high traffic volumes and serve as important collectors and/or connections between communities. Most roadways in North Bennington are Class 3 roads, providing access to adjacent land uses.

<u>Highways</u>	<u>Mileage</u>
<b>Village Highways</b>	<b>9.377</b>
Class 1: Bank Street, Water Street, Main Street, Lincoln Square	1.667
Class 2: White Creek Road	0.080
Class 3: All other local roadways	7.630
<b>State Highways</b> (Route 67 and 67A)	<b>0.402</b>

North Bennington contains 9.779 miles of public roadways (Table 8-1). Most of these roadways are maintained by the Village's Highway Department, with only short stretches of Routes 67 and 67A under the jurisdiction of the Agency of Transportation's

District 1 office. The Village also contains a number of private roadways, most notably the interior roads that serve the Bennington College campus. It is important that all roads, public and private, be maintained in good condition and consistent with local and state design standards to keep maintenance costs down and assure for safe travel and emergency vehicle access.

### Roadway Improvement Projects and Needs

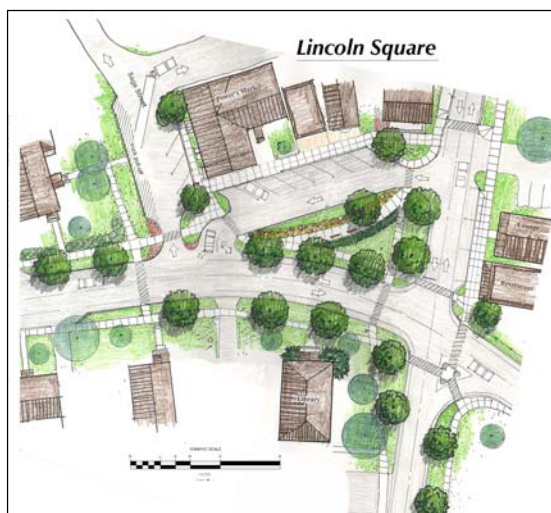
A number of needed improvements to the Village's road system have been identified. The most recently completed project included badly needed maintenance (repaving and replacement of a retaining wall) and upgrade (curbs, sidewalks, and intersection realignments) along the full length of Water Street. This project was managed by the Agency of Transportation as a necessary improvement to a Class 1 town



The recently completed Water Street project, together with privately funded improvements at adjacent properties, provided new sidewalks and curbs along with the resurfaced roadway.

highway that serves as an arterial connection in the State highway system. In addition to providing an improved roadway surface and intersection alignments at either end of Water Street, the project greatly improved pedestrian access and safety throughout the corridor. Additional efforts are needed to provide better access control (see section below on Access Management) and to enhance the aesthetics and traffic flow around Lincoln Square at the north end of the corridor.

The Village obtained a Transportation Enhancement Grant that is providing funding for the design and



One potential design for future landscaping, pedestrian, and traffic flow improvements at Lincoln Square.



Plan for improvements at the Bank Street – Main Street intersection.

construction of improvements at intersection of Bank Street and Main Street. The intersection (of two state highways carrying high volumes of through traffic) is characterized by too much pavement and lacks defined access drives for the gas station on the corner. These conditions encourage excessive vehicle speeds and pose an obstacle and safety hazard for pedestrians. The large expanse of unbroken pavement also presents a very unattractive streetscape at one of the most prominent locations in the Village.

The bridge on Route 67A that spans Paran Creek between the Hillside/River Road and Scarey Lane intersections is functionally deficient (narrow width, poor sight distances, and substandard pedestrian facilities). The bridge is a state system structure and should be replaced – it has not been a sufficiently high priority because its structural condition is acceptable. When it is replaced, the Village should work with the Agency of Transportation to see that all of its deficiencies are remedied: adequate width provided, adjacent intersections aligned to ensure adequate sight distances, and a sidewalk included on the bridge.

Depot Street presents a unique situation, a small roadway that provides access to the Village offices, state owned land along the rail line, and a connection to Houghton Street. The street is owned by the State of Vermont on land that is leased to Vermont Railway, complicating its management and maintenance. The Village should work to obtain outright ownership of Depot Street.

Any roadway improvement projects should be evaluated prior to design and construction to determine if there is a need and an opportunity to provide improved conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians. Although the Village does have an extensive system of sidewalks, pathways, and trails for pedestrian use (Section 8.4), it is important to recognize that the Village's public road systems generally provide the most direct routes for people whether they are driving, walking, or cycling.



Bicyclists are important users of the roadway system; adequate space should be provided for safe riding. Crosswalks should be marked and maintained to enable safe pedestrian crossings.

Shoulders of adequate width should be provided where needed and hazards such as rail crossings, drainage grates, and debris from gravel drives with inadequate paved aprons should be removed or modified. Pedestrian crossings should be carefully planned in



conjunction with the system of walkways and markings maintained so that they remain clearly visible.

Privately owned and maintained roads are another important part of North Bennington's roadway system. Those roads must be built to the same design standards as comparable public roads. Emergency vehicles must be able to access all land uses along private roads, bicycle and pedestrian movements must be safely accommodated, and road base, surface treatments, drainage, and landscaping must be carefully installed to ensure that the road functions well and does not pose a burden to the Village should it become a public highway in the future.

### Parking

Safe, convenient, and attractive vehicle parking areas are a necessary component of the transportation system. Because the Village center and commercial/industrial areas along the Water Street/Main Street corridor were developed prior to the dominance of the automobile as a primary means of transportation, parking is not always as convenient as businesses or customers would like. On-street parking does exist around Lincoln Square and along a portion of Main Street; this parking arrangement is very viable and also serves to narrow the effective roadway width and encourage slower vehicle speeds. When possible, commercial and residential properties should provide off-street parking on their properties to meet peak parking demand. Some public parking has been developed near the firehouse and the parking lot at the Depot has recently been improved. All new development must demonstrate that adequate parking is available, either on-site, shared (as provided for in the Zoning Bylaws), or in public lots or in designated places along public streets. Off-street parking areas should be carefully planned to provide for safe vehicle ingress, egress, and circulation, and should include landscaping and provisions for safe pedestrian movements between parking areas and adjacent land uses.



Private roadways must be designed to meet Village standards, providing for features such as good pavement, markings for bicycle and pedestrian travel, and proper drainage ditches.

### Access Management

Access management deals with the relationship between the roadway network and adjacent land uses. The highway system needs to provide for safe and efficient through traffic movement as well as access to residences, businesses, and other uses located along the roadways. These two functions often come into conflict and access management is a set of principles and tools that can be used to minimize these conflicts. Specific benefits of access management planning include:

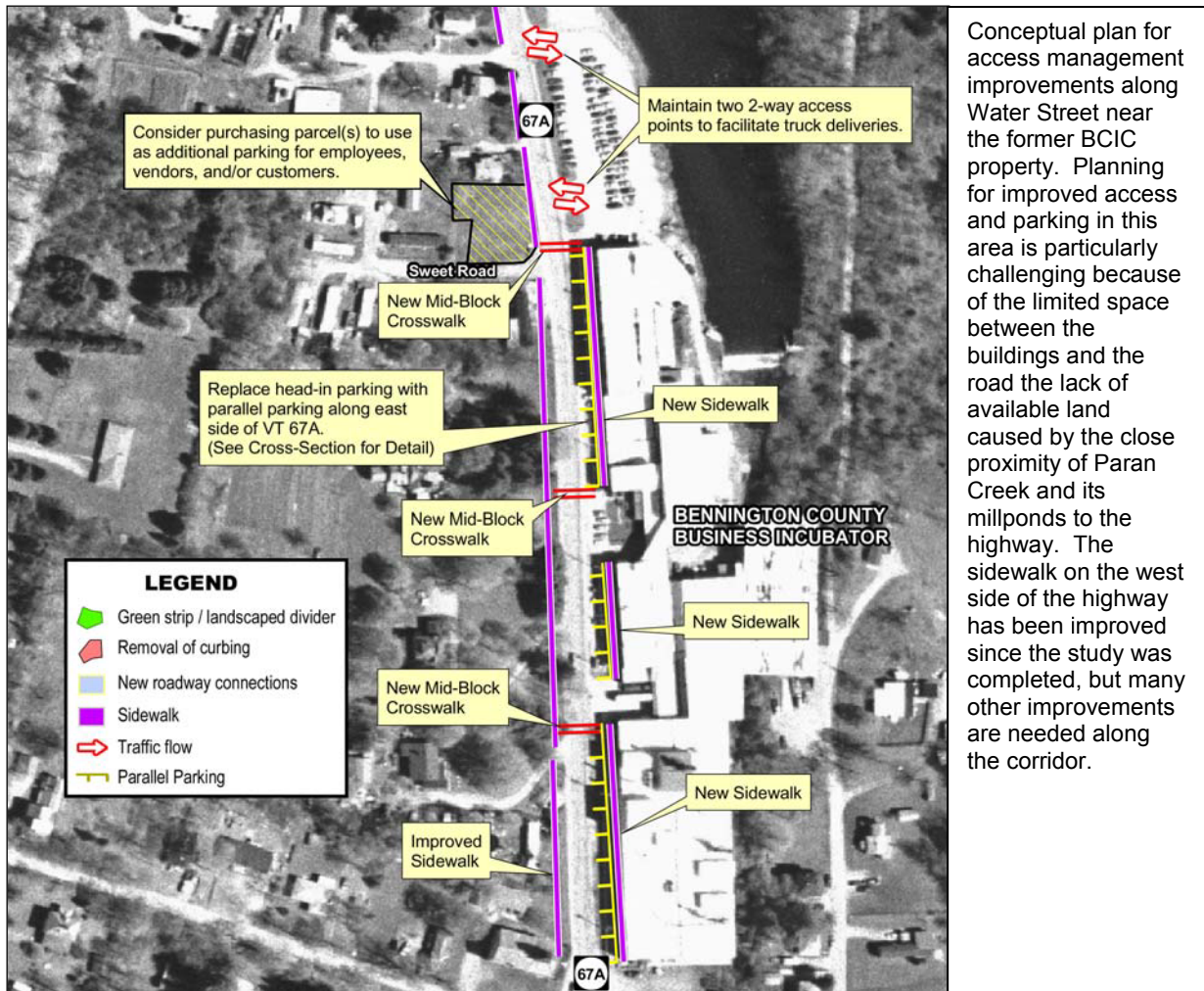
- Improved traffic flow by decreasing delays and occurrences of vehicle blockages;

- Improved vehicular and pedestrians safety by eliminating conflict points;
- Support for economic development through improved access;
- Support for local land use plans; and
- Improved aesthetics and community character by incorporating landscaping, sidewalks, and lighting into the design of intersections and driveways.

A number of specific techniques have been developed to achieve these benefits. The Vermont Agency of Transportation and the Bennington County Regional Commission sponsored a study of access management issues and opportunities along the Route 67A corridor (completed in 2005). That report included a number of generally applicable recommendations that can be used when considering new highway projects and developments as well as conceptual plans for specific locations along the corridor. General recommendations that should be incorporated in all transportation and land use planning activities include:

- Intersection design and spacing should minimize conflict points between traffic entering and exiting driveways and streets;
- Limit the number and width of curb cuts while regulating spacing and alignment (which may involve closing or relocating existing curb cuts);
- Remove turning traffic from through traffic lanes on higher speed / intermunicipal roads;
- Require connections between adjacent lots for both vehicles and pedestrians;
- Restrict parking to the side or rear of buildings;
- Construct sidewalks from the public right-of-way and parking lots to storefronts and building access points;
- Provide safe access routes for bicycles and racks for bicycle storage;
- Require submission of master plans for large complex developments that account for future parking and access needs;
- When possible, require access drives to intersect existing side roads or new service roads rather than high speed through roads;
- Plan for roadway connections between adjacent developments and discourage dead-end roads;
- Require traffic impact studies for large-scale development projects as well as construction of necessary improvements identified in those studies.

The Route 67A Corridor Access Management Plan included conceptual plans and specific recommendations for the area at the north end of Water Street, the National Hangar industrial complex, and the Bennington County Industrial Corporation . That Plan should be consulted when new highway projects or site development/redevelopment is planned along the corridor. An example of the types of access management proposals considered in that Plan is illustrated in the figure below, which focuses on the need for improved parking, pedestrian facilities, and some type of access control at the BCIC property along Water Street.



### Traffic Calming and Aesthetic Considerations

A longstanding concern in North Bennington has been the speed of vehicles passing through the community, particularly since the Village's main streets also serve as arterial highways connecting communities to the west and north with Bennington's busy commercial districts to the south and east. Traffic calming involves the use of physical changes in the roadway to reduce vehicle speeds. Many traffic calming techniques also enhance roadway aesthetic qualities by reducing expanses of pavement and increasing landscaping.

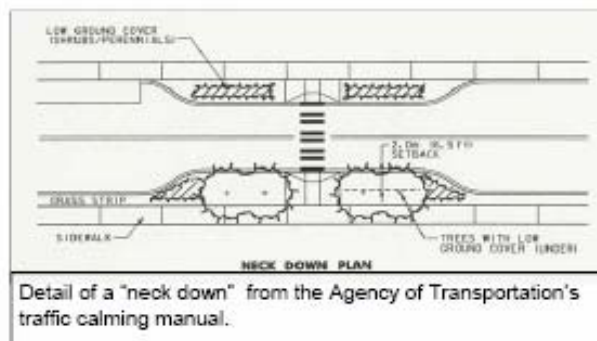
Some of the most common traffic calming techniques, and those which should be considered when undertaking roadway improvements in the Village, include:

- Reduction of motor vehicle travel lane width in village center areas;
- Center islands and pedestrian refuges at crossing locations in roadways and raised and/or textured crosswalks;
- Bulb-outs at crosswalks;
- On-street parking;



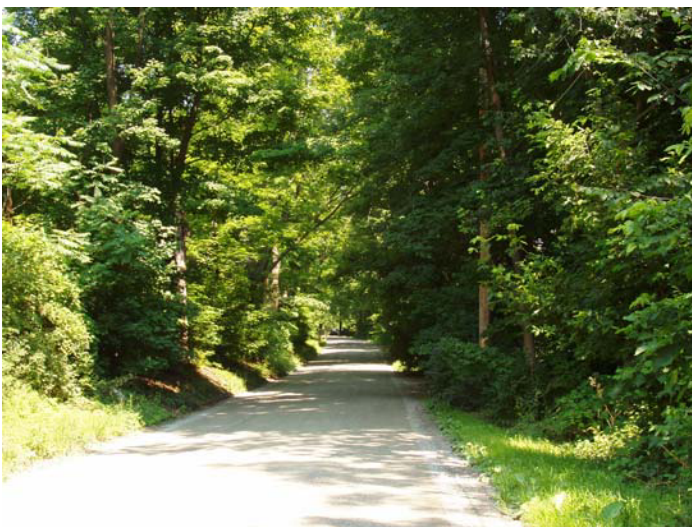
- Pavement markings;
- Installation of roundabouts at certain intersections;
- Landscaping and planting of street trees along roadways to promote a feeling of entering and driving through a human-scale village center.

Landscaping and aesthetic elements of roadway design should be considered when planning new roads and maintaining or improving existing roads anywhere in North Bennington. Roads are public spaces and the vantage points from which people most often view and experience the Village, and as such, they should be attractive and carefully integrated with the surrounding landscape.



The Village should work to maintain public roadways in a safe and attractive condition, and should give special attention to care, conservation, and planting of new street trees where and when appropriate in the public right of way. Other traditional landscape features such as sidewalks, benches, lampposts, and curbside landscaped strips also should be provided and included in site plans of new land development.

It would be particularly beneficial to remove the overhead utility lines that clutter the appearance of the Village streets, particularly in the Village center and surrounding historic district. The Village should pursue State matching funding for including relocation or burial of the lines as part of future roadway projects, or should seek grants from other sources to accomplish this work. Removal of the lines would not only eliminate a distracting element from the historic streetscape, but would also enable plantings of additional street trees.



The narrow road profile, gravel surface, and mature trees that arch over the roadway make Park Street a particularly scenic road and an important community asset.



Overhead utility lines in the Village's historic district should be relocated or buried to reduce visual clutter and allow for enhanced landscaping.



### **8.3     Public Transportation**

Public transportation provides a vital service to people who do not have access to a car and also can reduce fuel use and traffic congestion. The Green Mountain Community Network operates fixed route bus and demand response car and van services. Funding to support these programs is provided by the Federal Transit Administration and the Vermont Agency of Transportation.

The “Green Mountain Express” fixed route bus service stops at commercial, residential, office, educational, and medical facilities throughout Bennington. Connections to that bus route from South Shaftsbury and North Bennington are provided via a separate bus that stops several times a day, Monday through Saturday, at the North Bennington Depot, Homestead Greene and Homestead Mews, Paulin’s gas station, and the Bennington Microtechnology Center. It may be appropriate to consider an additional stop Lincoln Square (or replacing the Paulin’s stop with a stop at Lincoln Square) to serve the Library and businesses in the center of the Village.

The Green Mountain Community Network also provides door-to-door transportation to and from medical appointments, as well as special trips for elders, nursing home residents, and persons with disabilities. Several other human service agencies in Bennington also provide similar van-based services for their particular clientele.

Limited regional bus service is available from Bennington, with two daily trips to Albany offered by Yankee Trails and four daily trips to Manchester (with possible connections to Rutland) provided by the Green Mountain Express. Improved intercity bus service would be beneficial to the area and efforts to establish regular east-west and north-south connections should be supported.

### **8.4     Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities**

The importance of considering opportunities for safely accommodating pedestrians and bicycles on and adjacent to the network of roadways in North Bennington was discussed earlier in this section and the developing system of trails in and around the Village, largely on conserved lands, was briefly described in Chapter 3. Walking and bicycling are important transportation modes that should be encouraged whenever possible.

#### **Sidewalks**

Several Village streets are lined by sidewalks, providing for access from the street to adjacent residences and businesses and accommodating people walking between destinations such as residential neighborhoods and the school, post office, or commercial



This popular walking route along Prospect Street needs an upgraded sidewalk facility.

areas. A major sidewalk reconstruction project was recently completed along Water Street, providing a much enhanced corridor between Lincoln Square and the lower end of Water Street. That sidewalk currently crosses the Hillside/River intersection and the bridge over Paran Creek, but ends at that point; a crosswalk exists, but a sidewalk extension is needed to provide a safe connection for the two segments of the Short Aldrich Trail (which continues down Scarey Lane). The sidewalk also should be continued a short distance down Route 67A to provide access to the residential neighborhood at Royal Street.

The Village Trustees have identified additional sidewalk sections that are in need of repair, reconstruction, or extension. The Bank Street / Main Street intersection project will include a sidewalk and improved crosswalks at that busy intersection, and the Village plans to improve the sidewalks along Bank Street from that intersection to Church Street. The existing sidewalk/walkway from Lincoln Square up Prospect Street to the pedestrian gate at Bennington College also has been identified as a priority project.

Sidewalks within the Village's historic districts must be carefully integrated with the architecture and site features of the area. A green strip between the curb and sidewalk should be included when feasible and crosswalks should be carefully sited at locations which are visible and where vehicle speeds are not excessive. Amenities such as park benches, shade trees, and informational signs for pedestrians should be made available when possible.

### Trails and Pathways

North Bennington is fortunate to have an outstanding network of trails available for residents. Those trails exist in three areas (Maps 3-3 and 8-1): the Mile Around Woods and adjacent conserved lands in North Bennington and Bennington; Lake Paran



The Mile Around Woods trail is a very well-maintained pathway that connects to a network of marked "singletrack trails"

recreation area and adjacent conserved lands in North Bennington, Shaftsbury, and Bennington; and the Short Aldrich Trail section along the east side of Paran Creek and adjacent trails and pathways either existing or planned around the Bennington College campus. Efforts by the Fund for North Bennington and Bennington College to complete those trail systems should be supported and clear and safe connections between all of the trail systems should be established.

The Towns of Bennington and Shaftsbury also have developing trail networks and it would be advantageous for all three municipalities to coordinate their efforts and create pedestrian connections between the various trails

and nearby sidewalks. Shaftsbury has constructed sidewalks neighborhoods around South Shaftsbury and to their municipal park east of the Village. Early planning for creating a pathway connection between the Lake Paran trails and the South Shaftsbury pedestrian system is underway and should be supported.



The unused rail line between Bennington and North Bennington would make an ideal multi-use bicycle and pedestrian pathway until such time as it may be needed again for rail use.

Bennington has developed a river walk in the center of the Town and has received funding to extend that walkway along the unused rail spur and up to the Molly Stark School. The Town is interested in finding a way to connect that pathway to the Village of North Bennington, either along the Walloomsac River to at least Silk Road and then through Bennington College to Prospect Street, or via the remainder of the rail spur to the North Bennington Depot. At present, Vermont Railway leases the rail spur from the State of Vermont and refuses to consider allowing such a “rail-trail” project, but the idea has gained support and should be considered. The rail-trail would provide the most direct connection between Bennington and North Bennington, and would provide a safe alternate route for bicyclists who currently have to negotiate the hazardous commercial strip along Route 67A and Northside Drive to make that trip.

#### On-Road Use

Of course, low traffic local roadways also are used by pedestrians and bicyclists and need little improvement to safely accommodate such use. The Village should ensure that these roads are



North Bennington's roads are popular walking and running routes; one of the region's premier sporting events, the Bennington Road Race, is staged on Village streets each May.



maintained in good condition (good pavement on roads such as Mechanic Street that are frequented by bicyclists) and are characterized by physical conditions and speed enforcement which discourage high vehicle speeds (on roads like Park Street and West Street frequented by walkers and runners).

## **8.5 Rail Transportation**

Trains are an important part of North Bennington's past and may be equally important in the future. The Village sits on the main rail line that provides service between Hoosick Junction, New York and Vermont's western corridor which extends north to Burlington, with a branch line to the west at Rutland. North Bennington was the site of a busy passenger terminal (today's Village office building) and saw considerable freight traffic passing through, with some moving down the spur line to industrial sites in Bennington.

Rail traffic through the Village currently is limited to occasional freight shipments, with one local business, Whitman Feeds, receiving a considerable amount of material by rail. There have been a number of proposals to re-establish passenger service between Manchester and North Bennington, and the Amtrak hub at Albany (Rensselaer), New York over the past few years, and some track improvement has been accomplished as a result. Additional physical improvements and financial subsidies would be required for such service to begin, and the idea has lost some momentum of late.



North Bennington was once a busy center of railroad activity and may be again. Fortunately, modern trains produce far fewer emissions

It is likely, however, that rail transportation will become an increasingly attractive option as gasoline prices and automobile congestion continue to increase in coming years. Consequently, it is advisable to maintain the main rail line in good condition and to make track improvements whenever possible so that start-up costs will be minimized when economic and political conditions allow for a new focus on rail service.

The condition of the track has been upgraded to the point that relatively little additional work is needed to physically accommodate rail service to North Bennington from New York State. New rails, ballast, and road crossings are needed in places for service to be continued to Manchester; any extension beyond Manchester would be very expensive. At the present time, efforts should be focused on getting basic passenger service to North Bennington and if that proves successful, additional improvements allowing service further into Vermont will be more feasible.



Any track upgrade that allows for increased passenger service also will encourage additional use for freight transportation. The Village would then have to ensure that road crossings are adequately and safely marked to protect the public. Funding for any needed improvement should be provided by the State of Vermont and/or rail service operators. Recent improvements at the North Bennington Depot would allow that building and site to function as a viable passenger terminal, but additional work should be done on adjacent State owned rail property to provide for sufficient parking and other facilities. The Green Mountain Express bus already stops at the Depot and its schedule could be adjusted to coincide with the arrival of a train.

The spur rail line between North Bennington and Bennington is not currently used, but it must be preserved for future use – either for rail service to industrial sites in Bennington or as a multi-use pathway – through continued public ownership. It would be very feasible to provide a 10 to 12 foot wide pathway for pedestrians and bicycles over the existing rail line and even to operate a low-speed trolley between the two municipal centers. If dedicated rail use of the line were to be needed at some future time, it would be possible to re-establish service. In the meantime, it makes sense to put this valuable public asset to good use.

## **8.6 Air Transportation**

The William H. Morse State Airport is a general aviation airport located in the western part of Bennington and is an important part of the region's transportation infrastructure. The availability of this local airport is an important economic development asset that can help attract businesses to the area – which may benefit the industrial Water Street corridor in North Bennington.

Most residents of the area rely on the Albany (NY) International Airport for regular passenger service. Albany International also serves business and tourist travelers to the Bennington County area. Efforts to maintain good traffic flow along the VT 9/NY 7 corridor should be supported so that access between the region and that airport is not inhibited.

## **8.7 Transportation Enhancement Grants**

The Village has been very successful in funding important local projects through utilization of the Transportation Enhancement Grants program. The Vermont Agency of Transportation oversees this federal program and awards grants annually. In North Bennington, Enhancement funds have been used to effect improvements to the Depot building and grounds, to design and construct improvements at the Bank/Main Street intersection (in progress), and to make improvements at the Park-McCullough House. Because the grants are designed to fund improvements to facilities or resources that “enhance” the transportation system, eligible projects could include sidewalk improvements, landscape and streetscape improvements, and potentially funding to pay for studies and work associated with repair of the dams along Paran Creek and dredging of the mill ponds (eligible because of the prominence of these features to an important arterial highway and village streets).

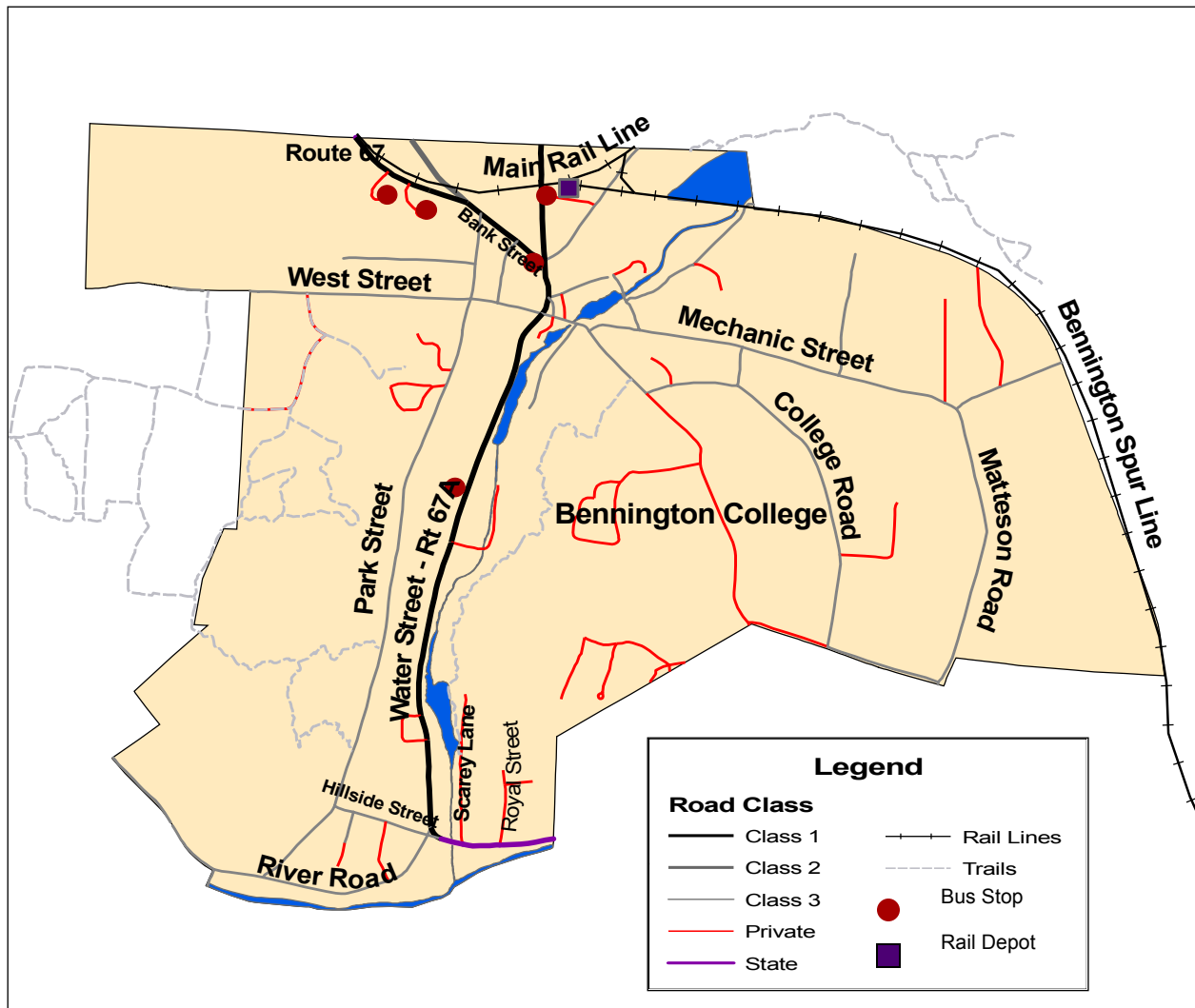
## **8.8 Policies and Recommendations**

1. The Village should prepare and maintain a five-year roadway and sidewalk improvement plan that includes priorities, costs, and proposed funding sources.
2. Excessive vehicle speeds through North Bennington pose safety concerns and detract from the Village character and quality of life. Intersection and roadway improvements should be pursued that utilize traffic calming to control vehicle speeds. The use of “jake” engine brakes by trucks on Village streets should be discouraged.
3. Roadways are important public spaces and should include attractive landscaping and pedestrian amenities, with planting of attractive street trees a high priority. Landscaping can be undertaken by the Village, private organizations, as part of local or state highway improvement projects, or mandated as part of the approval of private development plans.
4. Potential locations for additional public off-street parking should be found and existing parking areas clearly marked and well-maintained. Parking for private developments should be provided as required by the Zoning Bylaws.

Parking lots must provide adequate spaces for users of a site, include provisions for safe and efficient access and circulation, be carefully sited and fully landscaped to avoid adverse aesthetic impacts, and include safe and convenient facilities for pedestrian movements to and through the lots.

5. Continue to work to implement planned improvements at Lincoln Square, including enhanced green space and improved traffic flow and parking.
6. Work with the State of Vermont and Vermont Railway on ownership and maintenance issues associated with Depot Street. Eventual ownership by the Village could improve design and maintenance of the street.
7. Support plans to develop new trails and pathways in and around the Village and connections between those trail systems. Protect access and use of those trails and pathways through acquisition of easements when necessary. Work with the Town of Bennington to determine if it is feasible to develop a rail-trail along the rail spur between the two communities – and pursue funding and development for the project if appropriate.
8. Maintain traffic carrying capacity and safety on local and state highways through implementation of planned improvements and application of access management and traffic calming techniques.

9. Require that new public and private roads be designed according to Village and State standards. New roadway construction should avoid adverse impacts to natural or scenic resources.
10. New or reconstructed bridges should be consistent with the Village's historic character and shall include provisions for safe passage by pedestrians and bicyclists.
11. Highway paving and reconstruction projects shall include paved surfaces consistent with need and the Vermont State Roadway Design Manual and the Pedestrian and Bicycle Facility Design Manual.  
  
Identify and eliminate roadway hazards for bicyclists and provide signs, bicycle racks, and other facilities to support bicycle use.
12. Support railroad track upgrades and the reestablishment of passenger and freight rail service to and through North Bennington.
13. Support existing public transportation services and extensions to meet demonstrated demand.
14. Promote the utilization of alternative fuel vehicles and other energy conservation measures in the transportation system.
15. Seek opportunities to remove overhead utility lines from historic and scenic areas of North Bennington.
16. Continue to apply for and use Transportation Enhancement grants to improve the Village's transportation infrastructure and related facilities and resources.



**Map 8-1. North Bennington Transportation Facilities.**

Note: The Main Rail Line is in active use; the Bennington Spur Line is not currently being used.



## **Chapter 9: Energy**

### **9.1 Overview**

Energy is a basic need of our society, but much of it is derived from scarce resources, so effective planning for energy use and conservation is very important. Our transportation system relies on energy to propel the cars, trucks, buses, and trains that transport people and goods to, from, and throughout the community. Homes and businesses require energy to power appliances and machinery and to provide heat in the winter and cooling in the summer. The Village should undertake appropriate and feasible steps to encourage the efficient production, use, and conservation of energy.

### **9.2 Energy Efficiency Measures**

An Energy Committee established by the Town of Bennington identified a number of positive local energy conservation efforts. The municipal wastewater treatment plant uses the methane it generates for powering its own operation, efficient traffic and street lights are being installed, and conservation features have been incorporated into improvement projects at the municipal recreation center and other Town buildings. With the success of the wood chip based heating system at the new Middle School, the North Bennington Graded School is considering replacing its aging boilers with a biomass fuel based system as well. Bennington College also is planning to move to a biomass fuel system in the near future.

A carefully developed land use plan and transportation system also can promote energy conservation and efficiency. Both North Bennington and Bennington have land use plans that encourage a compact development pattern centered around village or downtowns, with low-density uses and conservation emphasized in outlying rural areas. Transportation investments should be focused on providing a variety of transportation modes – including pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit – within the densely developed areas and maintaining efficient traffic flow between such centers.

The design of residential, commercial, and industrial projects can contribute to energy conservation within North Bennington. As noted above, concentrated and mixed-use development reduces the need for lengthy travel between destinations and allows for energy-saving travel choices. Individual development projects that are compact, orient buildings to take advantage of solar gain for heating and natural lighting, vegetation for shading and buffering north winds, and energy-saving insulation and appliances will enhance conservation efforts.

New residential buildings should conform to energy efficiency guidelines being used for new State buildings; these could be incorporated into the Town's building codes. Legislation that provides tax benefits for investments in energy efficiency improvements in new or existing homes should be pursued and supported.

Energy conservation can support business vitality and growth by reducing costs and increasing operational efficiency. The Village should encourage businesses and industries to conduct energy audits, make energy improvements, and install renewable energy systems. New commercial and industrial construction should conform to the

minimum energy efficiency standards set forth in the Vermont Guidelines for Energy Efficient Commercial Construction.

Businesses and residents should be encouraged to take advantage of the programs offered by Efficiency Vermont, the State's energy efficiency utility. Efficiency Vermont reduces energy costs by offering technical assistance and financial incentives to help residents and businesses identify and pay for cost-effective approaches to energy-efficient building design, construction, renovation, equipment, lighting, and appliances.

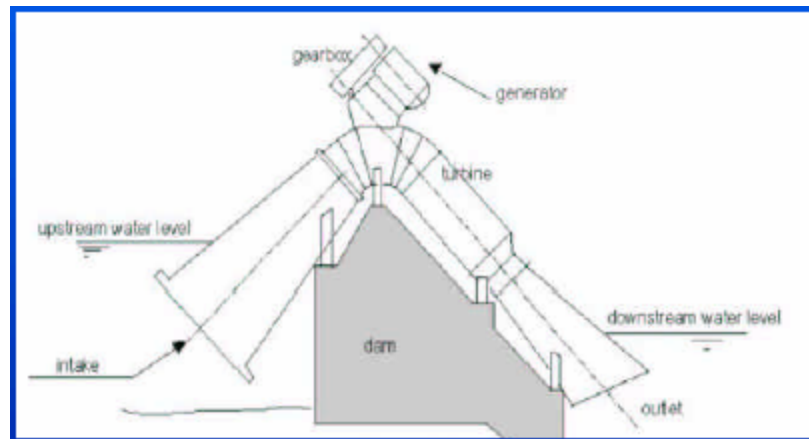
The Village does have the ability to make energy-saving decisions when purchasing new vehicles and equipment, which should be as cost and energy efficient as possible, and when renovating municipal buildings. The potential for use of biodiesel fuels in any diesel powered vehicles should be considered as well.

Educational efforts can contribute a great deal to energy conservation by making residents and businesses aware of the value of using energy efficient appliances, construction techniques, and other practices. For example, fluorescent light bulbs are up to six times as energy efficient as incandescent bulbs; incentives to encourage their use should be continued. Educational programs on home and small business weatherization and energy efficiency could be shown on CAT-TV.

### **9.3 Renewable Energy Resources**

Generation of energy from renewable resources supports conservation of non-renewable resources while helping to maintain a clean environment. Potential renewable energy resources in North Bennington include:

- Hydroelectric energy from Paran Creek and to generate power at the water treatment facility;
- Small scale wind turbines to provide electricity for residential and light commercial uses;
- Solar energy to heat water and generate electricity from photovoltaic cells;
- Wood and other biomass powered boilers and turbines public buildings and industries;
- Geothermal energy to supplement heating and cooling systems in residential and commercial buildings.



Schematic design of a small hydroelectric turbine of the type that could operate at the dams along Paran Creek.

Most of these renewable energy systems involve relatively small-scale systems that would be installed and used by individual home or commercial/institutional building owners. The series of dams, millponds, and waterfalls along Paran Creek appears to present an opportunity for small-scale electricity generation that would require cooperation of the Village government, State of Vermont, and adjacent property owners. At one time, most of the electricity generated in the State derived from small hydroelectric facilities, so potential exists to again put the water power of Paran Creek to use, but studies need to be completed to assess feasibility at each of the dams. Restoration of the dams and accessory structures together with installation of small hydroelectric turbines would also help preserve these important community resources.

Several steps would be necessary to construct a functioning hydroelectric system(s) along Paran Creek:

1. Conduct a preliminary site assessment to calculate potential power production and determine if further steps are warranted.
2. Complete a feasibility analysis that considers detailed estimates of energy output, system design, interconnection, regulations, and financial feasibility.
3. Identify financing for capital and operating costs.
4. Obtain required local, state, and federal permits.
5. Purchase and install equipment – connect to grid.

Private businesses that specialize in implementation of hydroelectric plans can provide valuable assistance. It also would be prudent to conduct an analysis of necessary dam repairs and dredging costs whether hydroelectric generation at the dams proves feasible or not.

#### **9.4 Policies and Recommendations**

1. Encourage efficient residential and commercial site planning and building construction.
2. Provide dedicated facilities for bicycles and pedestrians and improvements to roadways to encourage walking and biking.
3. Support public transportation services, ride-sharing programs, and efforts to bring passenger and improved freight rail service to the area.
4. The Village should continue to strive for energy efficiency in its municipal buildings, vehicles, and equipment.
5. In cooperation with private businesses, the State, and interested residents, study and evaluate the feasibility of small-scale hydroelectric generation at existing dams along Paran Creek.

## **Chapter 10: Community Facilities and Services**

### **10.1 Overview**

An impressive number of facilities and services essential to residents' quality of life and the economic vitality of the Village are provided by public agencies, service organizations, and nonprofit entities. The type and extent of services required changes as the population of the community changes and as new technologies and opportunities emerge. Provision of public services is somewhat complicated in North Bennington because some are provided directly by the Village government and others are provided by the Town of Bennington. In addition, a sizable percentage of students attending the North Bennington Graded School live in the Town of Shaftsbury (but within the North Bennington School District). The availability of existing facilities and services will be documented in this chapter, along with identified needs, and opportunities for improving coordination with other municipalities and nongovernmental organizations.

### **10.2 Water Supply**

The North Bennington Village water supply derives from the Basin Brook watershed in Shaftsbury. Two reservoirs and a treatment plant are located off Buck Hill Road, also in Shaftsbury. Average daily usage in 2006 was 327,000 gallons per day, serving 684 connections (including Bennington College and an area of Shaftsbury – both of which maintain their own distributions systems). The design capacity of the system is 500,000 gallons per day, leaving over 150,000 gallons per day in uncommitted capacity. The water system does have an equivalent back-up supply as required by federal regulations.

Recent improvements have included a new meter that measures flow from the source to the reservoirs and a furnace at the Water Department garage. Service lines to adjacent properties were replaced as part of the Water Street reconstruction project. An engineering hydraulic analysis was recently completed to help identify and plan for future improvements; a principal issue being ultimate replacement of four and six inch mains with 8 inch mains. The current distribution system is illustrated on Map 10-1.

Total operating expenditures for 2006 were approximately \$290,000, offset by usage fees of \$2.50 per 1000 gallons. Long-term debt on capital items was reduced by over \$100,000 in 2005, resulting in a reduction in that portion of users' water bills.

The water system is effectively providing a vital service to the community, with uninterrupted access to a clean supply of water. All required testing has been completed and all samples have met federal standards.

### **10.3 Sewage and Stormwater Disposal Systems**

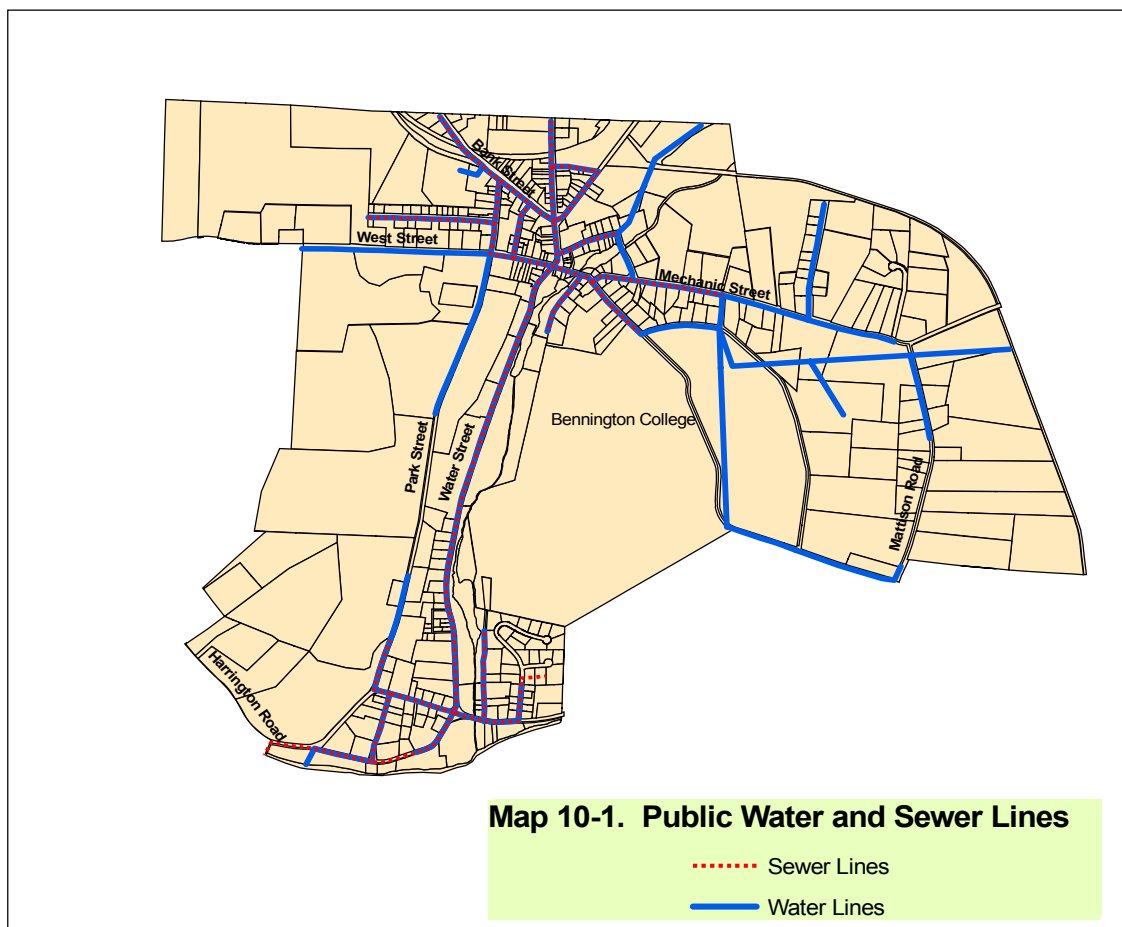
North Bennington is served by the Bennington Town sewer system, with lines collecting wastewater from residential areas at the south end of the Village, from the mixed use corridor along Water Street, and throughout much of the Village center up to the Shaftsbury town line (Map 10-1). The entire sewer system is owned and maintained by the Town of Bennington, and includes a treatment plant on Harrington Road with a



design capacity of 5.1 million gallons per day. Current use of the plant is approximately 4.0 million gallons per day. Planned improvements to the system, including line replacements and repairs in North Bennington, are expected to reduce infiltration and result in a drop in usage.

Operation and maintenance of the system is funded by user fees. Because most Village properties connected to the Bennington sewer system are served by North Bennington's water system or by a private well, the Town has expressed a concern that sewer fee collections are sometimes problematic (i.e., the Town cannot shut off water to properties that do not pay their sewer fees). Because it may be desirable to make additional sewer connections within the Village, a policy and procedure for enabling new connections should be agreed upon.

Storm water management is a challenge in places within the Village, as the storm sewer system is limited. Roadside ditches and natural drainage courses provide storm water drainage in many locations. Drainage structures should be installed as part of roadway or other improvement projects; recent improvements have been made along West Street. It is important that storm drainage be carefully managed to prevent flooding and to avoid direct discharges of contaminated waters to surface waters.



#### **10.4 Fire Department**

The North Bennington Fire Department (the oldest chartered fire department in Vermont) is housed in a two story brick structure near the Village center on Prospect Street, just east of Lincoln Square. The current annual budget for the Fire Department,



Vermont's oldest volunteer fire department occupies this centrally located building just east of Lincoln Square.

paid for with Village tax revenues, is approximately \$57,000. The Department works aggressively to raise additional funds to minimize the impact on taxpayers while still allocating sufficient funds to ensure that equipment and vehicles are well-maintained and up to date.

As a volunteer organization, the Fire Department relies on a dedicated group of individuals who are willing and able to respond to a variety of calls over the course of the year, and who must also spend many hours in training programs. The Village

is fortunate to have such a vital service provided at relatively low cost and should continue supporting the Department's planned expenditures.

#### **10.5 Emergency Medical and Health Care**

Primary emergency medical care services are provided by the Bennington Rescue Squad, a non-profit corporation staffed by 44 members. The Rescue Squad provides paramedic level care and operates four ambulances equipped for advanced levels of patient care. Southwestern Vermont Regional Ambulance, with three ambulances and 14 employees, specializes in inter-facility transport and also provides mutual aid support when needed.

Regional health care facilities and services are concentrated in and around the Southwestern Vermont Medical Center in Bennington. That facility offers a full-range of inpatient and outpatient services, with numerous medical professional and technical offices located near the hospital. Mental health, substance abuse and services for mentally handicapped residents are provided through the United Counseling Service, with its principal office located near the hospital in Bennington.

#### **10.6 Police Protection**

The North Bennington municipal charter requires that the Village maintain a police department, but that service can be acquired through contracted services. In fact, the service is provided primarily by the Bennington Police Department. The portion of the Town's general fund allocated for the Police Department is approximately \$2.6 million; based on its contribution to the grand list, the Village pays almost \$175,000 of

that amount. The Village also has hired the Bennington County Sheriff to provide supplemental enforcement of speed limits.

The Village has considered whether it would be possible to provide comparable levels of police protection through an alternate, and potentially less expensive, method. It is unlikely that a Village police department could be formed, staffed, and equipped to provide 24-hour coverage for less than the amount paid to the Town for those services. However, other alternatives exist, including contracting with the County Sheriff or State Police, as is done by most small towns in Bennington County. Such a change would, of course, require a modification to the tax payments made by Village residents to the Town.

## **10.7 Education**

Most of the Village's children attend the North Bennington Graded School, which offers instruction in grades kindergarten through six. The school draws students from a district that includes all of North Bennington and a portion of Shaftsbury ("District One"). Approximately 60 percent of the student population lives in North Bennington and 40 percent in Shaftsbury. The Graded School, housed in a historic building on School Street, has seen many expansions and renovations over the years, the most recent completed in 1999.

Seventh and eighth grade students attend the new Mount Anthony Union Middle School on East Road in Bennington. High school students attend Mount Anthony High School on Park Street in Bennington, which also houses the Southwest Vermont Career Development Center (CDC). The CDC works with local businesses to provide youth and adults with the skills required to meet the needs of the local employment market and offers specialized training and re-training courses to groups of employees.

The North Bennington/District 1 School Board includes five people representing the two communities in the District. The local school district and the Mount Anthony Union district are both constituents of the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union.

At the present time, these public educational facilities are adequate to meet the needs of the community. A developing concern is a declining enrollment at the Graded School, which leads to a reduction in state aid and leads to higher per student spending (also adversely affecting local property taxes) because of the relatively fixed costs of running the school. The community may have to consider alternative means of increasing enrollment at the school and/or finding a way to reduce costs. The North Bennington Graded School is a critical component of the community and its continued successful operation is of great importance to the Village.



Most elementary students attend the North Bennington Graded School.

One small private elementary school, The Southshire Community School, is located in a renovated residence on Bank Street. It provides education in grades kindergarten through six, with approximately one in seven students coming from North Bennington or Shaftsbury District One.

The significance of Bennington College to the Village has been discussed earlier in this Plan. Bennington occupies an attractive campus in North Bennington and adjacent lands in Bennington. It is a liberal arts college that offers instruction in many subject areas and is particularly well known for its visual and performing arts curriculum. Bennington College offers many opportunities for Village residents to enjoy performances, exhibitions, and educational opportunities within the community. Current enrollment at Bennington is approximately 800. Located nearby in Bennington are Southern Vermont College and a campus of the Community College of Vermont. Other prominent colleges, including Williams College and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute are within an hours' drive of the Village.

### **10.8 Child Care**

The availability of safe and affordable child care services is important to local residents and to the area's economy. There are three registered home day care facilities located in North Bennington according to a database maintained by the State of Vermont. In addition, Country Corner Day Care and the Early Childhood Center at Bennington College offer licensed facilities and programs for preschool age children. Additional information on these facilities as well as information on services for families, providers, employers, and people interested in opening a new facility can be found through the Child Development Division of the Vermont Agency of Human Services and the Bennington County Child Care Association.

### **10.9 Electricity and Telecommunications**

Electricity and telecommunications (including land and wireless telephone, cable tv/internet, and wireless internet) are fundamentally important to local residents and businesses and are critical to future economic development in North Bennington.

Electric service is provided through Central Vermont Public Service (CVPS), the State's largest electric utility company. Existing electric service to the community is adequate and CVPS offers an Economic Development Incentive Program to support new and expanding industries. Siting of new overhead power lines, switching boxes, and maintenance of existing power lines should recognize the scenic and historic values of the community, and new service connections should be routed underground.

High speed cable internet services are available in North Bennington and the Village should participate in planning for state of-the-art communication technologies. Telephone service is increasingly being conducted by wireless providers and it is important that good service be available throughout the Village. At the same time, telecommunication towers must be located with great sensitivity to the environment and to scenic views. A visual proliferation of towers and antennas can be avoided through careful siting and co-location on single tower structures.



## 10.10 Library

The John G. McCullough Free Library is housed in a two-story brick building in the center of the Village. The Library was built in 1921 and given to the community by Eliza Hall Park McCullough in memory of her husband, John G. McCullough, a former governor of Vermont, legislator, and businessman. Its mission is to: “provide materials and services to persons of all ages in order to meet their educational, professional and recreational needs. Special emphasis is directed toward stimulating children’s appreciation of reading and learning.” The Library has opening hours each day from Tuesday through Saturday.

From its first years, the library building has served as a hub of community activities, hosting lectures, concerts, meetings of civic groups, reading clubs, and art shows. As the collections have grown, however, the available public meeting space has shrunk greatly. If the library is to regain its role as civic meeting place and cultural center of the village, new space will need to be provided beyond the boundaries of the existing building.

The Library has established a number of specific objectives. Items associated with improving the physical facility include:

- Installation of an elevator
- Construction of a handicap accessible bathroom
- Provision of a meeting room, a comfortable reading room, a sitting area for parent’s in the children’s library, and a gallery/concert space
- Expand the Library’s storage capacity.

Other objectives include ensuring that materials and programs are current and informative; support and provide educational programs for children and adults; give patrons an appreciation of North Bennington; and grow its endowment to support its mission.



The John G. McCullough Free Library is located in the center of the Village where it is as an important public meeting place as well as a source of information and educational materials.

Recent activities and improvements include: a new website that provides patrons with direct access to accounts from home, development of a wireless “hot spot” at the Library; a regular newsletter; acquisition of new computers and improvements to the front and rear entrances; and provision of a number of special programs for residents and members.

The Village has approved an annual appropriation to the McCullough Free Library and also supports the Bennington Free Library, located in Bennington’s downtown, through its share of the Town’s General Fund. Residents should continue to use and support these valuable community assets.

#### **10.11 Solid Waste**

The Village supports Bennington’s solid waste management efforts through its contribution to the Town’s general fund (approximately \$8,500 of a \$110,000+ budget). The Town owns a solid waste facility on Houghton Lane which is leased to a private operator. Over 3,000 tons of solid waste are handled annually at the transfer station with a volume-based recycling rate of nearly 40 percent. Household hazardous materials are disposed of through use of a waste oil collection facility and an annual hazardous waste collection day. Continued incentives to encourage recycling will reduce long-term solid waste disposal and associated environmental costs.

#### **10.12 Recreational Facilities**

North Bennington residents enjoy a variety of recreational opportunities within the Village. Lake Paran was described in Chapter 3, and the importance of this local water body to residents cannot be overstated. The lake is easily accessible from both the access area near the dam and from the entrance to the day use area on the Shaftsbury side of the lake. Paran Recreations, Inc. is a nonprofit organization that oversees summer recreational activities at the day use area. Swimming, canoeing, summer camps for children, evening concerts, and a variety of other activities take place each summer, with funding provided primarily through memberships, gate fees, and municipal appropriations from Bennington and Shaftsbury. Fishing and boating from the access area near the dam are very popular as well. Much of the land surrounding the lake has been conserved and is available for public use; a trail network is being developed that will provide further recreational opportunities in the area.

The infestation of Eurasian water milfoil in Lake Paran is a continuing concern that must be addressed and the dam must be maintained to ensure its long-term viability.

Paran Creek and the Walloomsac River present recreational opportunities as well. Key considerations include the need to maintain and improve the dams along Paran Creek and the objective of removing sediment from the millponds to ensure that they continue to provide open water. The engineering study to assess needed dam repairs and plan dredging discussed earlier in the Plan also would support these recreation-based objectives.

Playing fields are located at Welling Field and at the Norshaft Memorial Park on Houghton Street, which also includes a playground. A small playground also is located at the North Bennington Graded School. Historically, there has been no public park in



North Bennington contains a number of small parks and recreation fields, including playing fields for baseball and other youth sports.

the southern part of the Village, but the recently acquired land along the Walloomsac on River Road will be developed into a park so that residents can enjoy public open space bordering the river.

The extensive, and continually developing, network of trails present in the Village and surrounding lands has been discussed in Chapters 3 and 8, but should be noted here for their important contribution to the recreational offerings for

residents. Those trails should be maintained in good condition and efforts made to provide safe connections between segments.

Most Village recreational facilities are maintained by the community or private nonprofit organizations, with some minor annual municipal appropriations. Village taxpayers also support the Town's Recreation Department through its contribution to the general fund. In fact, Village taxpayer support for the Town's Parks and Recreation Department is second only to its support of the Town Police Department. All of Bennington's recreation facilities, including the Recreation Center and its indoor pool, are available to Village residents on the same terms as for Town residents.

To ensure that residents derive maximum benefit from the array of recreational resources and opportunities in the area, a comprehensive recreation plan for the Village should be developed. All interested organizations – the Village, Parag Receptions, the Fund for North Bennington, Lions Park, Vermont Arts Exchange, schools, and bicycle/pedestrian advocates should participate in the preparation of the plan.

### **10.13 Arts and Culture**

North Bennington has an active and vibrant cultural life owing to a number of institutions, organizations, and individuals devoted to creative pursuits. The facilities, as well as the faculty and students, at Bennington College provide extraordinary opportunities for Village residents to attend performances, exhibitions, and to participate in a variety of cultural and educational activities. The Village and College should work to ensure that both are informed of events and activities that may be of interest to their respective communities.

One community organization that draws participants from both local residents and from Bennington College is the Sage City Symphony, noted for its policy of commissioning new works by major composers (in some instances student composers) as well as playing the classics. The Symphony performs several times over the course of the year.

The Vermont Arts Exchange (VAE) has occupied the old Sage Street Mill building since 1992, providing high quality multi-disciplinary arts classes including

music, dance, and the visual arts for people of all ages and incomes. VAE's educational programs include mentoring and community service opportunities for area youth as well as the opportunity to work with artists in classes that provide sequential learning. Over the past several years, VAE has also been the site of a popular music series, held in its basement.

Other important venues for music and other arts events include Lake Paran (its summer "Music at Lake Paran" programs on Friday evenings in the summer), the McCullough Free Library (hosting readings, chamber concerts, and lectures), the "Art in the Park" outdoor sculpture area, and the Park-McCullough House, which holds concerts, readings, community theater events, and even hosts a summer croquet league.

A great deal of information, including photographs and videos, depicting Village history and the people of North Bennington can be found at the Historical Society's "Museum Without Walls" site on the internet.

#### **10.14 Cemetery**

The North Bennington Cemetery Association maintains the Grandview Cemetery, and the Village has supported its efforts to complete recent projects including upgraded roads, removal of brush, and a new enclosure for the rules and regulations sign.

#### **10.15 Village and Town Relationship and Service Options**

North Bennington has a unique and very strong identity as a distinct community. The municipality is currently chartered as a village, sharing a number of services with the Town of Bennington. Because of its distinctive character and because of questions regarding services received from the Town, there have been some questions raised as to whether the Village should endeavor to formally separate itself from the Town and become an entirely distinct municipality ("Sage City," perhaps?).

A number of issues would have to be satisfactorily addressed before any such action was taken by the Village, Town, and State Legislature (all of which would have to be agreeable to the change). North Bennington would have to identify each of the services currently provided by the Town of Bennington and determine how they would be replaced. The method of service delivery as well as the cost for all local governmental functions would have to be thoroughly explored. A brief overview of Town and Village records indicates that the following are some of the major points to consider:

- ❖ **Police Protection:** By far the largest portion of North Bennington's contribution to the Town's General Fund goes to support the Bennington Police Department. The Village charter requirement that a police chief and department be maintained has been covered by this reliance on the Bennington Police Department, which provides service to North Bennington as a part of the Town. The Village has occasionally felt it necessary to contract with the Bennington County Sheriff for additional speed patrols.

Most of the small towns in Bennington County rely on contracted services with the Bennington County Sheriff and/or the Vermont State Police to provide patrols on a particular schedule. If the Village were to separate from the Town, police



services could be contracted for in this manner, although the 24-hour coverage provided by the Bennington Police Department would no longer be available. It is likely that the contracted services would cost significantly less than the  $\pm$  \$175,000 currently paid to the Town.

- ❖ Land Records/Grand List: Land records and listing services currently are provided by the Town. If the Village were to separate from the Town, those services would have to be provided locally. It would be somewhat complex to initially segregate the Village and Town records, and once separated, North Bennington would have to employ a part-time municipal clerk and also maintain a local grand list overseen by a Board of Listers. It is likely that these services would cost Village taxpayers more than they currently pay to the Town (approximately \$4,500 for the Town Clerk and \$6,800 for “Listing”), but there would be a benefit in having the services available locally.
- ❖ Administration, Planning, and Code Enforcement: Staff at Bennington’s Town Office oversees all of the various functions of local government and provides administrative support to everything from accounting to solid waste management. Although many of these administrative functions, currently supported by the Village through its contribution to the Town General Fund, primarily provide services outside the Village, quite a few would have to be assumed locally if North Bennington were to exist as a discrete municipality. On the other hand, the Village currently pays the Town nearly \$20,000 for planning, zoning, and code enforcement services even though it maintains its own Village Plan, land use regulations, and the boards and part-time staff that are responsible for implementation of those documents. It is likely that to effectively assume the administrative functions required to operate a small municipality, North Bennington would need to hire a full-time administrator or manager and a full or part-time administrative assistant. Those local staff people could perform general administrative and management functions as well as taking on basic planning and community development roles. The total cost for those personnel would need to be documented and compared with the current local share of the Town budget.
- ❖ Sewer Service: Much of the North Bennington is served by the Town of Bennington’s sewer system. That system is funded through user fees collected by the Town. If North Bennington separated from the Town, it is likely that Bennington would require that the new municipality or some newly established sewer district be directly responsible for maintaining the system within the municipality and paying for usage and any additional capacity at the sewage treatment plant. The local municipality or district would, in turn, have to collect fees from users of the system to pay the Town and to cover its own maintenance expenses (services which could be contracted out, perhaps to the Town). Further research would be required to determine the net cost to the Village of such a transition.

- ❖ Recreational Facilities: The Town budget includes considerable expenses for parks and recreation, and consequently, North Bennington taxpayers contribute over \$70,000 to support operation of these facilities. As a separate municipality, North Bennington would no longer pay those costs, but residents would pay a higher non-resident fee to use Town facilities such as the pool at the Town Recreation Center. Of course, North Bennington also would have to ensure that the parks and recreation facilities located within its jurisdiction (many are currently funded and operated by private or nonprofit organizations) were adequately maintained.

The largest portion of the current North Bennington budget covers the Village Highway Department. With a small road network for a community of its population, that department still requires approximately \$200,000 in annual operating funds. As noted earlier in this chapter, the North Bennington Fire Department and Water Department each are funded locally and would also continue to operate as they do at the present time.

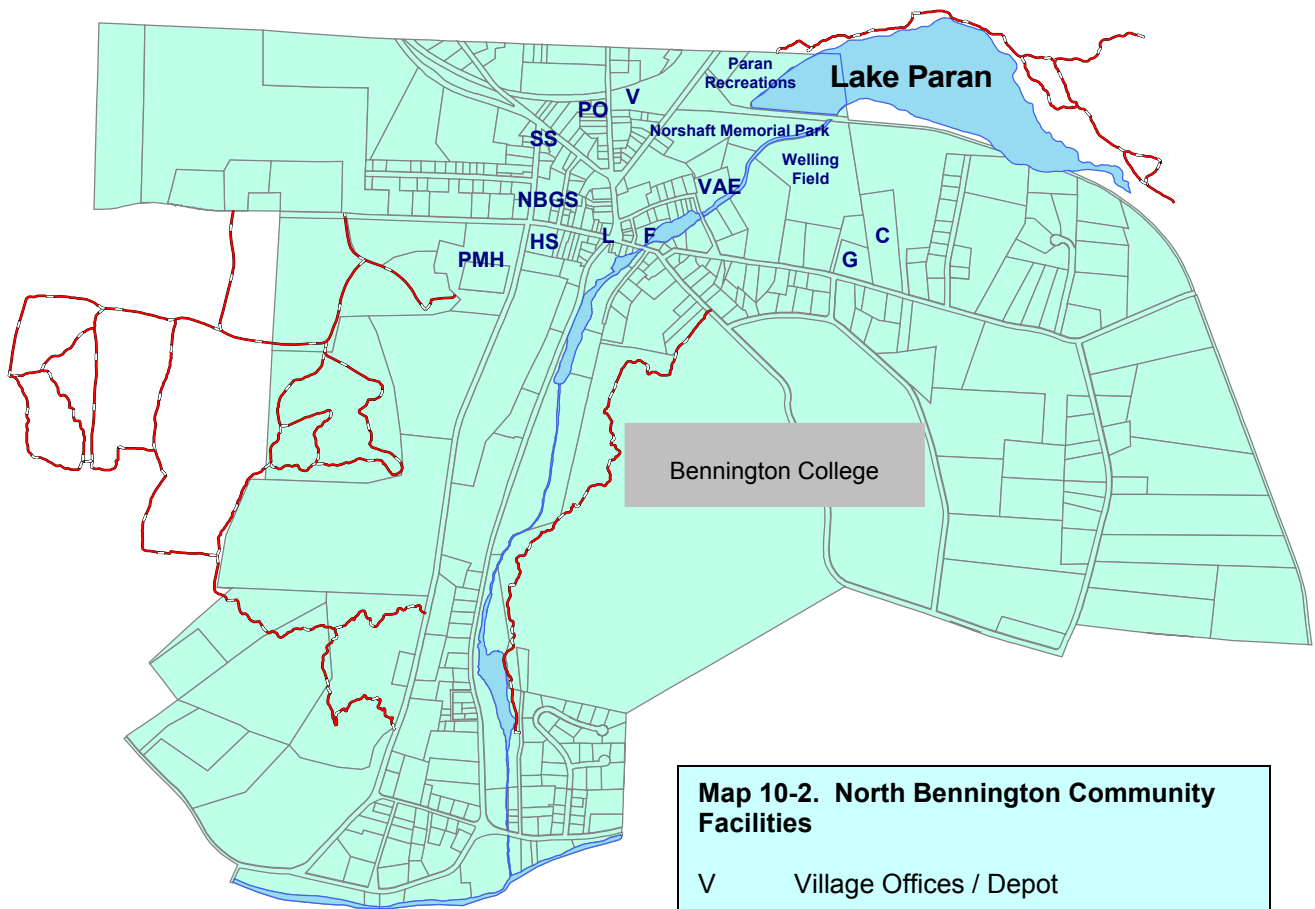
A comparison with budgets of small rural towns in Vermont with populations comparable to North Bennington's reveals that (non-highway) per capita expenditures in North Bennington are relatively high. Of course, North Bennington is a fairly complex community, with the infrastructure of a small urban area, but such comparisons do suggest that savings might be achieved with an alternative form of governance. A less concrete, but significant, benefit of establishing a fully discrete municipality is an enhanced identity as a unique community. If North Bennington decides to pursue these matters further, a detailed plan and accounting of needed services and related costs should be prepared and discussed at public forums.

#### **10.16 Policies and Recommendations**

1. The availability of an adequate supply of clean water is vital to the Village. The North Bennington water supply system should be maintained and improved as needed.
2. North Bennington should continue to cooperate with the Town in the operation and management of the sanitary sewer system. Opportunities to improve and expand the storm water sewer system should be sought and such improvements incorporated into local and state highway projects or private developments whenever possible.
3. The Village should continue to support agencies and organizations that provide critical emergency services such as the North Bennington Fire Department and the Bennington Rescue Squad. Funding for the Bennington Police Department is provided through support of the Town general fund; the Village may investigate other options for providing necessary public safety services.
4. High quality education must be available for residents at the local elementary school and at the middle school, high school, and career development center in Bennington. Continued operation of the North Bennington Graded School is

extremely important to the community; efforts to expand enrollment, control costs, and support strong educational programs are critical.

5. The Village and Bennington College should continue to cooperate and further integrate the college into the life of the community.
6. A variety of childcare services should be available locally to meet the requirements of residents and employers, and should be compatible with the residential and commercial neighborhoods in which they are located.
7. The Village should support efforts to provide the best possible electricity and telecommunication based infrastructure. New facilities, such as telecommunication transmitters and receivers, should be provided as necessary, but must be sited with sensitivity to environmental, scenic, and neighborhood concerns.
8. Support should be given to the continued operation and improvements at the McCullough Free Library.
9. Continue to work with solid waste planners and local residents to reduce excess waste production and to expand recycling efforts.
10. The many recreational facilities available in North Bennington are important to the quality of life for residents. The Village should support the groups and organizations that develop, operate, and maintain the parks, playing fields, swimming and fishing areas, trails, open spaces, and other local recreational resources. The Village should work with interested organizations to evaluate the feasibility of acquiring an aqua-harvester for weed control in Lake Paran. Facilities in the Town of Bennington also are important to Village residents and should continue to be available.
11. North Bennington's reputation as a center of arts and culture should be supported and enhanced.
12. North Bennington should continue to explore options for municipal governance and the provision of necessary public services. The Village should cooperate with the Town in studies to determine if the existing charter and arrangements with the Town are best serving residents and taxpayers of North Bennington. Any alternative systems, including formal separation from the Town, should be thoroughly studied and costs of providing services clearly documented.



**Map 10-2. North Bennington Community Facilities**

- V Village Offices / Depot
- PO Post Office
- NBGS North Bennington Graded School
- SS Southshire School
- HS Bennington Head Start
- PMH Park-McCullough House
- L McCullough Free Library
- F North Bennington Fire Department
- VAE Vermont Arts Exchange
- G Village Garage
- C Cemetery
- Trails



## **Chapter 11: Consistency with State Planning Goals**

### **11.1 Statutory Requirements**

The Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act encourages towns and villages to develop plans that are compatible with the plans of other municipalities in the region and with the regional plan, and which are consistent with the goals that are contained in 24 V.S.A. Section 4302. The following section (11.2) will detail this Plan's consistency with those goals and Section 11.3 will include a brief discussion of the North Bennington Village Plan in the context of the Bennington County Region and its other municipalities. The statute also requires that the Plan include a recommended program for implementing the objectives of the Plan. That requirement is met through the specific policies and recommendations that accompany each individual element of the Plan.

### **11.2 Consistency with State Goals**

A municipality must demonstrate that its planning process satisfies certain goals (24 V.S.A. 4302(b)):

- To establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework;
- To encourage citizen participation;
- To consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development;
- To work with other municipalities to develop and implement plans.

North Bennington has a long established planning program, implemented through the Village Trustees, the Planning Commission, and a Development Review Board, the Village Plan and Zoning Bylaws (which also include historic district regulations), a part-time zoning administrator, and active participation in the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC). Citizen participation is actively encouraged at all stages of the planning process; numerous public meetings are held every year to discuss a variety of planning issues. A guiding principle of the Village's planning effort is to manage growth so that it reinforces North Bennington's unique historic character and enhances the quality of life of residents. At the same time, careful attention is paid to protection and wise use of resources, with special attention given to the waters of Paran Creek and the irreplaceable open spaces that surround the Village. The Village works with other municipalities on a regular basis, both because of the close functional relationship it has with the Town of Bennington and through its active involvement in regional planning through the Bennington County Regional Commission.

- 1. To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.**

North Bennington developed as a dense cluster of small manufacturing, commercial, and residential structures and uses along Paran Creek. The Village land use plan is designed to reinforce that historic settlement pattern by allowing dense mixed use development in the village center and in the industrial and mixed use districts along Water Street. Relatively high-density residential neighborhoods, served by municipal water and sewer systems, surround this core area while outlying parts of the Village are zoned for low-density residential and conservation uses. In addition, historic district regulations promote designs and land use patterns that maintain historic character while conservation initiatives have preserved large tracts of rural land outside the village center.

**2. To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.**

The Village Plan contains an Economic Development chapter that identifies important business needs and opportunities. Emphasis is placed on both maintaining a high quality of life and providing necessary infrastructure, both key to attracting and retaining good businesses. The Plan specifically encourages adaptive re-use of historic manufacturing buildings along Paran Creek, and notes potential for mixed uses including provision of needed residential units on upper floors. Bennington College is identified as a major employer and economic driver, and small business growth in the center of the Village is encouraged by recent regulatory changes.

**3. To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.**

The Plan discusses the importance of the North Bennington Graded School to the Village, as well as the other primary and secondary schools in the area. The relationship with surrounding towns and school systems is noted as is the need to maintain sufficient enrollment at the Graded School. The Plan also notes the importance of the Career Development Center and of cooperating with area businesses to ensure that students receive training in appropriate skills. Post-secondary educational opportunities are available at Bennington College as well as at two other colleges in Bennington and at other nearby institutions.

**4. To provide for safe, convenient, economic, and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.**

North Bennington maintains its own highway department and continually seeks to effect roadway and bridge improvements when funding allows. A recent upgrade of Water Street, together with sidewalk construction, has greatly improved that critical highway corridor through the Village. Intersection improvements at Lincoln Square and Bank Street are planned and conceptual plans for improved access, traffic calming, and parking have been developed. All local and state roadway projects are evaluated to

determine how to best accommodate pedestrian and bicycle travel. The Village has an extensive sidewalk and pathway network that is being extended and upgraded and road conditions are being improved for bicycles whenever possible. North Bennington is served by the local public transit provider and opportunities for improving routes and services are being considered. Rail transportation has been central to the historical development of the Village and potential track and service upgrades are encouraged.

**5. To identify, protect, and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape.**

One full chapter of the Plan is devoted to identification and protection of important natural resources, including water resources, soils, natural areas, scenic resources, and open spaces, and another full chapter documents historic districts and structures. Each of those chapters details strategies for the protection of those resources; those strategies include acquisition of key resources and lands, environmental and land use regulations, historic district and design standards, and initiatives for creative use of important structures and sites.

**6. To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, and land resources.**

In addition to the protection strategies noted above, the Village works with State agencies and local organizations, including the Fund for North Bennington, to protect important natural resources. Of particular concern is the quality and aesthetic character of Paran Creek, its millponds, Lake Paran, and the associated dams. The need to complete a comprehensive engineering analysis and plan for restoration of the dams and millponds is discussed in the Plan. In addition, the Village land use plan and regulations contain standards to ensure the protection of environmental resources, and outlying areas are included in low-density rural and conservation districts.

**7. To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.**

The Energy element of the Plan contains numerous recommendations to encourage energy conservation and the utilization of renewable energy resources. Building siting and design, energy-efficient transportation alternatives, and an efficient land use plan are promoted in several parts of the Plan. Renewable energy resource opportunities in the Village are identified, with special emphasis on the potential for development and use of small hydroelectric facilities.

**8. To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.**

Recreation resources throughout the Village are identified, and methods to maintain and improve access to open lands, trails, and public waterways are discussed. Recreational parks, playing fields, and playgrounds are important, especially to area

youth, and efforts to maintain and improve the quality of those facilities are supported. Lake Paran is a unique recreational resource located partially in North Bennington; recreational opportunities at the Lake are discussed along with challenges such as control of nuisance aquatic vegetation. Village taxpayers also contribute a considerable amount of money toward the Town of Bennington's recreation department budget and can utilize any of those parks and the municipal recreation center and swimming pool.

**9. To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.**

North Bennington is a relatively small village with an urban core that has limited agricultural and forest resources. The Plan does identify areas containing prime agricultural land and development is to be planned to conserve those areas whenever possible. Much of the forested and agricultural land within and adjacent to the Village has been conserved through the efforts of the Fund for North Bennington and the Vermont Land Trust. Considerable open land on the Bennington College campus also contains productive soils and is not planned for development.

**10. To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.**

Clean industries that make use of local natural resources are encouraged. Opportunities for small industrial and commercial uses along Paran Creek provide opportunities to enhance the area's natural beauty while highlighting the Village's historic connection to this important waterway. Land use policies require protection of resources and consideration of aesthetics following any extractive operation.

**11. To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.**

The Plan's Housing and Land Use elements discuss the variety and density of housing planned for the various areas of the Village. Infrastructure availability allows for relatively dense housing development, including infill development and adaptive re-use of historic buildings, in the Village center and along the Water Street corridor. Accessory apartments and other innovative housing development options are provided for in the Plan and implementing bylaws. Cooperation with local and statewide housing organizations is encouraged.

**12. To plan for, finance, and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.**

The Plan contains a comprehensive description of all of the public facilities and services available in North Bennington. Issues and opportunities for providing improved or more efficient services are identified. A section of the Plan also deals with the rich cultural life of the Village and its importance to the economy and quality of life for residents. Because many services are shared with the Town, and because North Bennington contributes over \$300,000 to the Town's general fund, the relationship



between the two municipalities is explored in the Plan. Issues associated with alternative governance models are summarized for further discussion by the Village and Town.

**13. To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care workforce development.**

The need for quality child care – as both a necessity for residents and for economic development – is explicitly identified in the Plan. A variety of child care facilities are permitted throughout the Village and the need for effective workforce development is discussed. The Village Plan identifies service agencies and organizations that exist to provide financial and technical assistance to child care providers.

**11.3 Relationship to the Bennington Regional Plan**

North Bennington is identified as an important village center in the Bennington Regional Plan. Such areas are considered appropriate locations for concentrations of mixed use development at moderate densities. The Regional Plan also encourages preservation of historic districts and buildings within villages and efforts to maintain the historic scale and neighborhood qualities of these areas. In addition, the maintenance of rural open land between planned village and urban areas is seen as critical to preserving and reinforcing the preferred landscape pattern. North Bennington's land use plan is consistent with these regional planning objectives in that it supports, through regulation and provision of infrastructure, compact village style development surrounded low-density residential development and protected open space.

As a distinct village within the Town of Bennington, North Bennington must closely coordinate many governmental functions with the Town. Moreover, many North Bennington residents work in Bennington, attend school or obtain other necessary services there, and shop in the larger community's stores. It is critical, therefore, that the two communities regularly share information and that public projects, investments, and priorities are coordinated. The Plan discusses the many areas of common interest between the Village and the Town and provides an overview of alternative methods for providing and financing the provision of services.

North Bennington also borders the Town of Shaftsbury, and roads, public water and sewer, recreational facilities, schools, and several other important public resources are shared between these two communities. Many of the students at the North Bennington Graded School live in Shaftsbury (within the North Bennington School District), and these students are critical to the continued viability of the local school. There also are plans to extend pathways from North Bennington, around Lake Paran in Shaftsbury, and to eventually connect to the village area of South Shaftsbury. Cooperation in these and other areas will continue to be important to both communities.

North Bennington also contains a number of natural resources identified for their regionally significance. These resources, such as Lake Paran, Paran Creek, the McCullough Woods, and the North Bennington Historic District all receive protection through Village planning policies, guidelines, and regulations.