



# Village of North Bennington, Vermont

## Municipal Plan

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Adopted by the Trustees of the Village of North Bennington  
June 10, 2025

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June 10, 2025**

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## Introductory Note: No plan is of any value without implementation!

Only through action can this plan be realized. Our Planning Commission is actively moving forward with key initiatives. First among them is emergency planning. **No other topic trumps planning for the safety of our citizens.** In this pursuit the Commission has the backing of the Village Trustees.

### Emergency Planning

- The Planning Commission has advocated for reducing the risk of flooding by challenging VTrans to maintain the dam at the headwaters of the creek around which our Village has developed.
- The Planning Commission in concert with Vermont Emergency Management, VTrans, and the Dam Safety Program will work to update the dam's Emergency Action Plan.
- The Planning Commission has advocated for creating a shelter within the Village, and the Trustees have voted a budget line item for a reserve fund to begin the process. Providing for emergency power to the Village School auditorium will be central to that initiative, as will training volunteers.
- The Planning Commission has advocated for removing the Fire Station from harm's way in the case of a flood. Additionally, as a Village resource the existing building is limited by not being handicapped accessible. Money will be sought for a long-term solution when that may be possible again.
- The Village is improving intersections and adding pedestrian sidewalks in an effort to limit accidents and injuries. Additional traffic calming measures are planned.
- The Village has been in touch with the Federal Railway Administration and PHMSA concerning regulating the storage of vast quantities of LPG gas on the edge of our Village and stands ready to address this risk should the practice continue.
- The Planning Commission has been working with the Town of Bennington on additional annexes for their Local Emergency Action Plans. These encompass the Village. An Extreme Heat Event Annex has been written. An Extreme Cold Weather Event Annex will follow.
- Members of the Planning Commission are engaging in courses and county-wide committees to gain certifications and experience appropriate to emergency planning.

While emergency planning is our initial focus, a dearth of workforce housing is critical to the community's economic and social well-being.

### Workforce Housing

A State-wide housing crisis continues. Nevertheless, and quite surprisingly, given the size of our Village and the extent of land that is conserved in perpetuity or is a college campus, many dwelling units have been added in the past ten years. The primary means of this expansion, the conversion of industrial properties to multi-dwelling unit facilities, unfortunately has been maxed out.

Recent legislation has been passed concerning housing. Acts 47 and 181 have the expectation that private developers will be incentivized to construct more dwelling units through easing of local zoning restrictions and the removal of duplicative land use regulations. Some additional benefits may accrue to developers who find parcels that could be developed within the central area of the Village or areas outside the center of the Village but are served by municipal water and sewer infrastructure. Time will tell whether the changes that have been made to our Land Use Regulations due to these Acts will result in additional dwelling units. Unfortunately, nothing in these Acts changes a developer's incentive to maximize profits by building the largest homes that the market will bear.

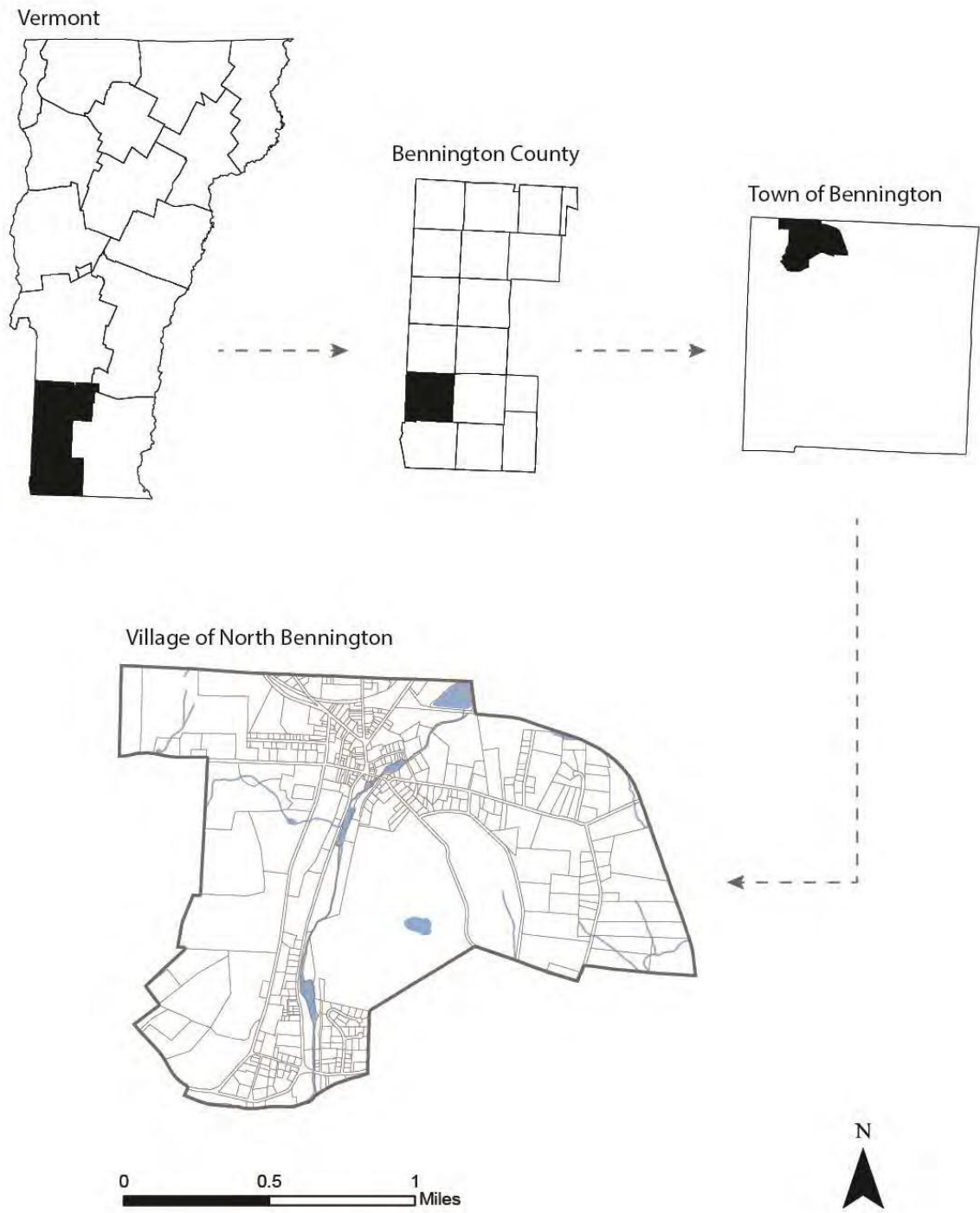
The Village is taking an approach to the need for additional housing that is intended to reinforce community, provide open land, support the character of the Village, but most importantly create workforce housing. This is accomplished by several means.

- District boundaries have been slightly adjusted to add several parcels to the central area of the Village.
- A new category of planned unit developments is included in the Land Use and Development Regulations. The new category is called Cottage Court Developments. These are incentivized by shorter duration reviews and sufficiently explicit requirements to assure that the development is in the best interests of the Village and can easily be approved by the Development Review Board. The area of the dwelling units is limited.
- The Trustees may entertain permit fee relief or possibly property tax incentives for Cottage Court Developments.
- Developer outreach events are intended to be scheduled to support the development of workforce housing.
- Outreach meetings with Bennington College are intended to be scheduled to coordinate efforts to create more dwelling units.
- A short-term rental ordinance shall be drafted to limit impacts on long-term rentals.

While these two topics are our initial focus, the recommendations at the conclusion of each chapter of this Municipal Plan will guide future agendas. The Planning Commission will continue meeting eleven times a year with special focus on those recommendations.



Municipal Plan of the Village of North Bennington, Vermont



## 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.

This Village Plan was first developed in 2007 when 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. Revisions in 2013 and 2018 updated data, findings, and policies to be consistent with Vermont State requirements and based on input from the Planning Commission. Public hearings were held to assess the acceptance of the ideas presented in the document and the Village Trustees adopted the plan after a final hearing. The Village Plan remains in effect for eight 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.

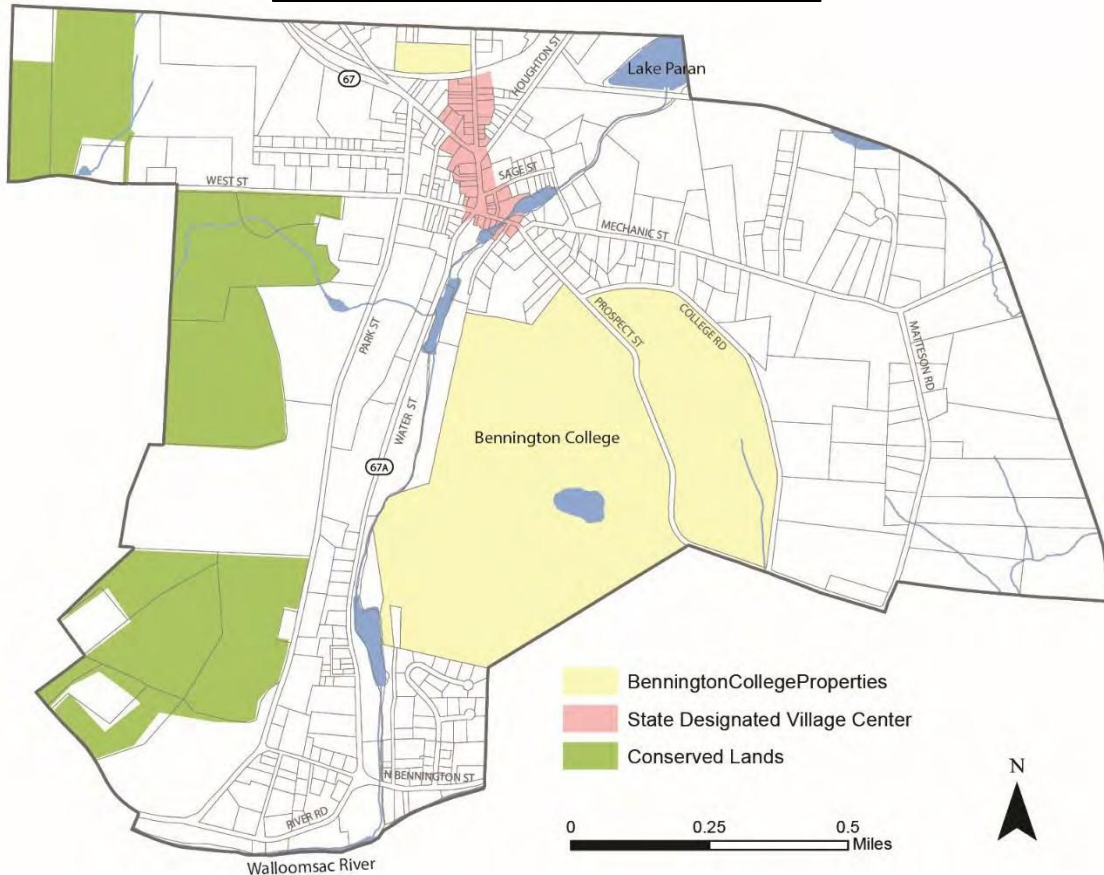
Effective implementation of the Village Plan is, of course, critical to its success. It is therefore important that the Plan be referred to by local, regional, and state officials and organizations when undertaking actions that will affect the community. The Planning Commission and Trustees must consider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



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

expenditures and pursuing grant opportunities. Because the Plan provides the basis for 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.

Map 1.1 - Village of North Bennington



## 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 among attractive homes in this area.



North Bennington developed along the shores of Paran Creek.

Construction of the railroad in the 1850s prompted the 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. The populations of both North Bennington and the Town of Bennington as a whole have been relatively stable. The estimated population of the Village in 2020 was 1,716 while the population of the entire Town of Bennington (including North Bennington) was 15,303 in 2021. The age distribution and median age (39) of residents in the Village is quite young, no doubt because of the presence of Bennington College students. Fifty-two percent of the population is female and forty-eight-percent male (all 2020 Census data and importantly all the North Bennington number include college students).

The Village’s residents live in a variety of housing types. There are a total of 520 housing units in North Bennington (of which 58 are vacant – as of the 2020 Census). About 65 percent of the housing units are owned by the occupants and 35 percent are rented. Median monthly housing costs for homeowners (\$1,442 – with mortgage) and renters (\$1,423) are comparable to those in the Town of Bennington, though rents are slightly elevated for the area (Census Bureau ACS 2020 Estimates).

Median household income for Village residents is \$62,125 and median family income \$73,991. The percentage of families in poverty is 12.1 percent.) (ACS 2022 Estimates).

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. An industrial building on lower Water Street provides space for several small manufacturing businesses, including Sterling Gun Drills,

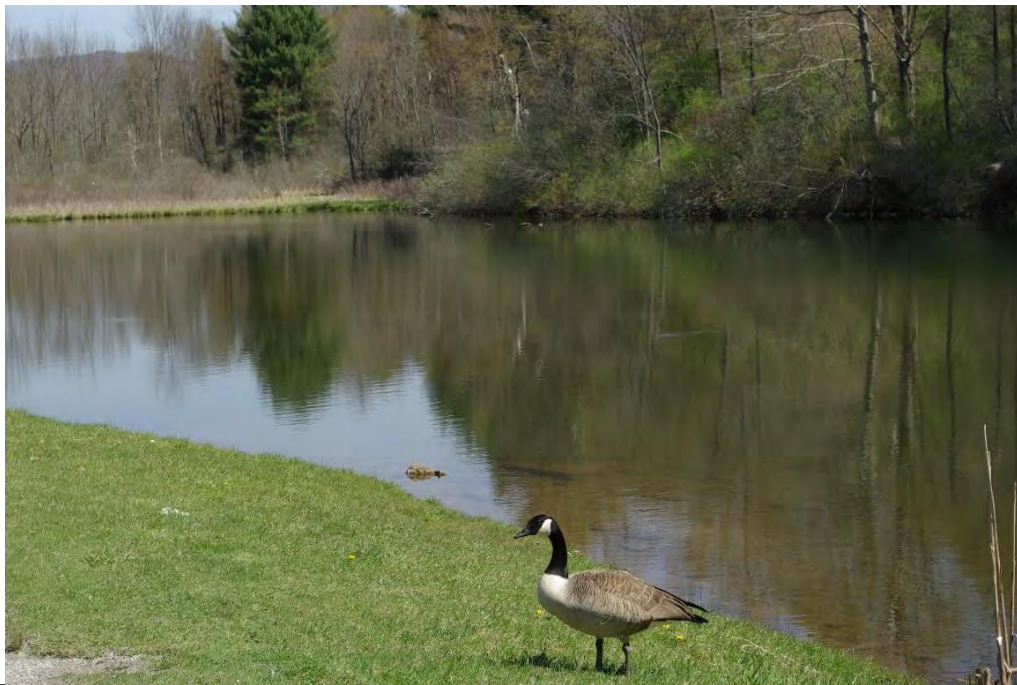


Inc. Further north on Water Street, National Hangar occupies historic and new buildings adjacent to Paran Creek and the Maple Brook Farm artisanal cheese company occupies the expansive facilities on the opposite side of the road.

The Village also is home to a number of small service businesses, including popular restaurants, professional offices, retail stores, auto repair, a gas station, a pop up bakery, a bed and breakfast accommodation, as well as a post office and library. Of course, Bennington College is a major employer along with the local independent school. The Village also includes the Vermont Arts Exchange, located on Main Street, the Park-McCullough House, currently operating as a non-profit organization, and the Left Bank, a community space that hosts local events and rents office spaces. The Sage City Symphony, founded in 1972 by Lew Calabro, includes over 60 musicians and provides four free concerts yearly for the community.

Rehearsals and concerts are held at Bennington College.

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 (38%). An increasing number of people also work from their homes (24.5%), either operating home businesses or working remotely and visiting a central office as needed or walk to work (30%). The average commute is slightly more than 13 minutes.



A Canada goose wanders along the shore of the millpond along Water Street.

## **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 or catch a bus into Bennington.

The Village School of North Bennington, an independent academy formed in 2013 when the village's long-standing public graded school closed, provides 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.

The village will incorporate climate change in its plan and actions, and help its residents, to the extent possible to do the same. The Village will pursue all opportunities to reduce emissions in its facilities and vehicles and take steps to increase resiliency relative to the impacts of climate change. It will develop and be prepared to execute plans to address sudden short-range or long-term climate impacts.

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 14 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. Redevelopment and new construction must be permitted in accordance with flood and erosion hazard area regulations and should be concentrated in historically developed areas of the Village.

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 quality local schools to the local economy. Ensure that educational programs meet the needs of students and local businesses.

Work with Bennington College to ensure that employment opportunities are available to local residents and that the college develops in a manner consistent with Village objectives.

Recognize that climate change impacts, particularly those related to weather represent potential adverse impact to the Village's economy.

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 shall 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 Cornerstone Housing Partners.

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.

All efforts related to house, as well as commercial properties and the Village's municipal properties, shall be done in a manner that reduces carbon emissions. Energy efficiency in construction and via building codes should be encouraged and adopted.

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.

The Village should pursue and encourage its residents to pursue the use of electric vehicles due to the latter using energy that is becoming increasingly lower in carbon due to the addition to the electrical grid of carbon-free renewable resources.

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.

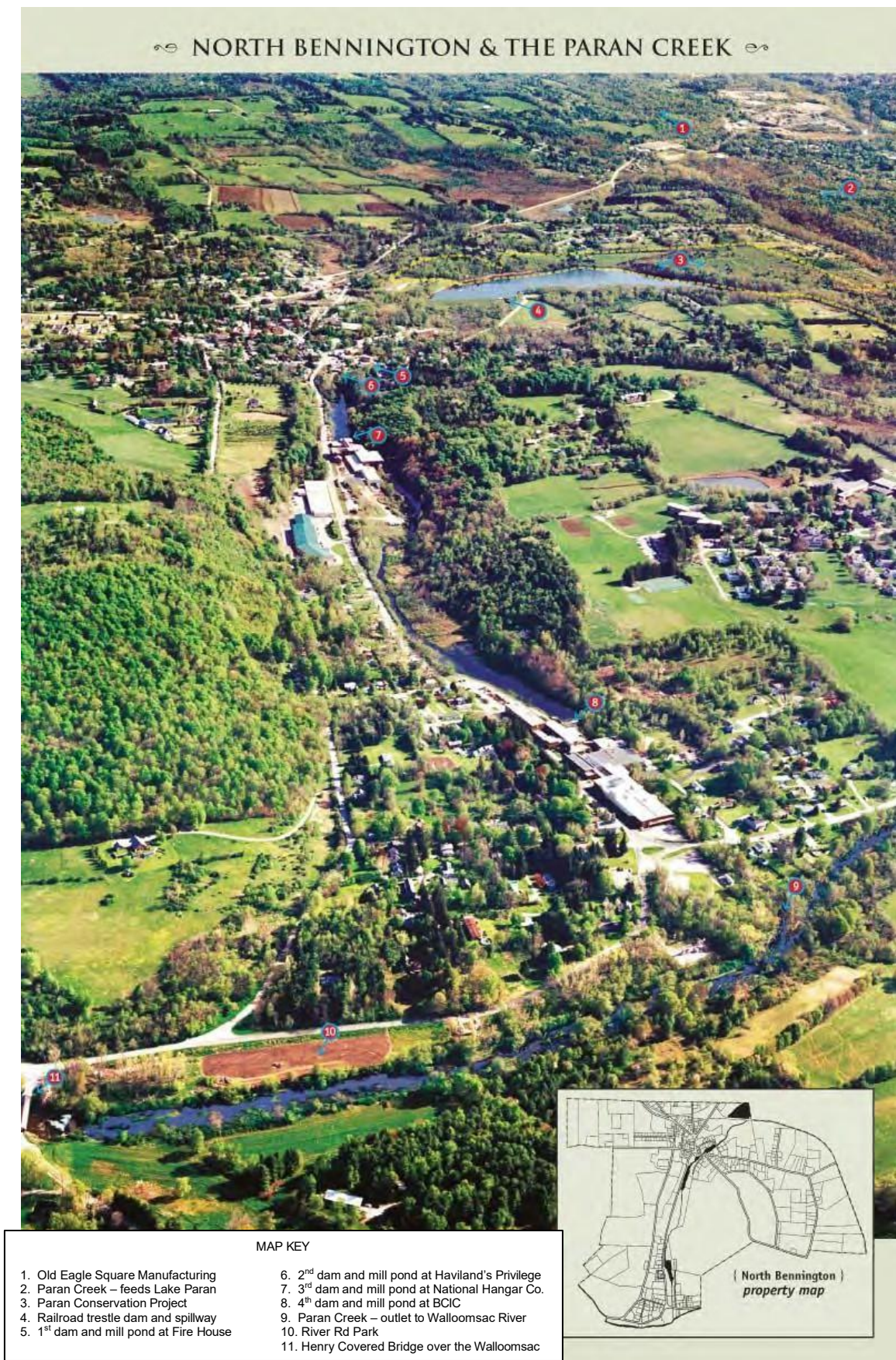
High quality educational, vocational, and childcare opportunities must be available to meet the needs of all residents and businesses. The cost of education must be controlled, but with recognition given to the value of a having a local elementary school in the Village.

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. **Utilize and promote efficient use of energy and cost-effective use of carbon-free energy.** 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 efficiency initiatives should be supported and encouraged. The Village supports the Town's Act-174 energy plan, consistent with state energy goals, and will cooperate in its implementation.
8. **Protect significant natural and scenic resources.** Important open spaces, scenic

vistas, habitat blocks and wildlife travel corridors, 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 should be minimized and outdoor low efficiency boilers should be regulated.





## 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 waterpower 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

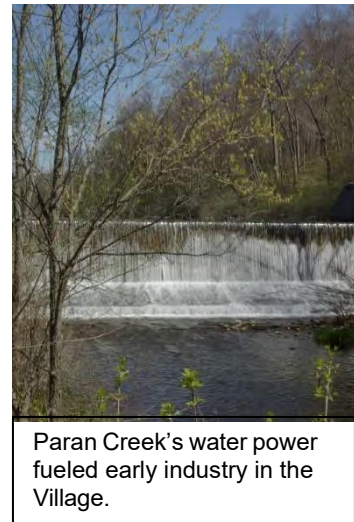
#### Paran Creek

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 waterpower, 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 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.

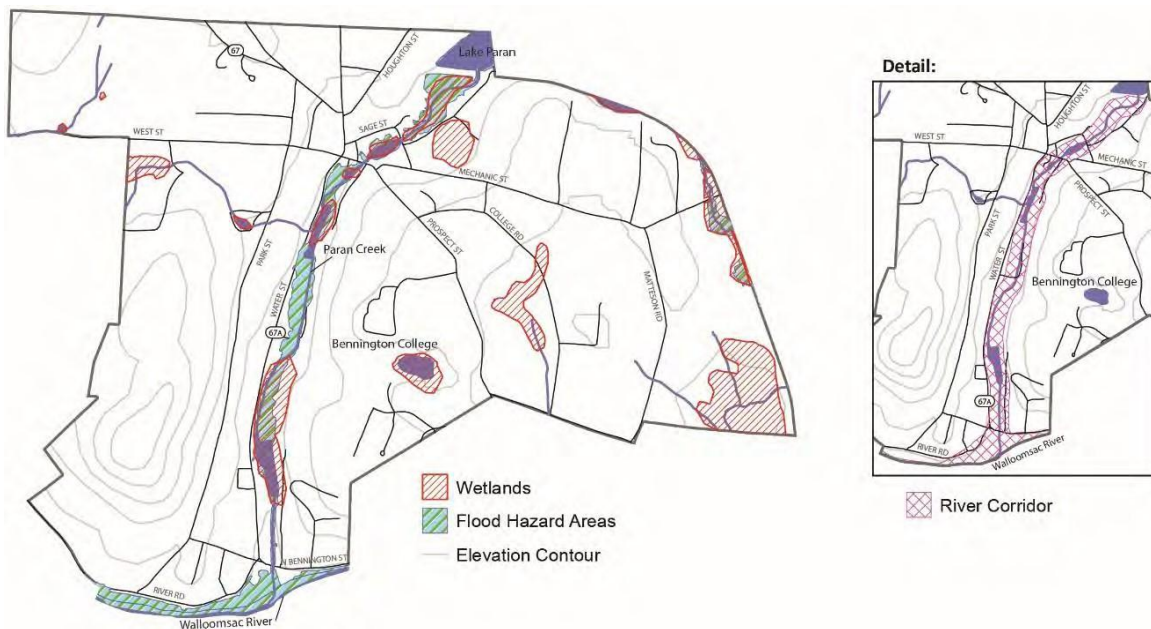
It is important that both the stream's water quality and the scenic character of the area be maintained. Siltation of the stream and the resulting loss of water quality, together with reduced depth and coverage of the millponds has become a serious concern to the Village. Procedures, costs, and environmental 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 rises to unnecessarily high levels. Though there has been recent interest in the state to fund removal of dams, North Bennington values its historic hydropower infrastructure and associated millponds and is committed to preserving these assets in the Village. A local group, the Paran Creek Watershed Project, which has been spearheaded by Bennington College, was established in 2016 to support long-term stewardship of Paran Creek water resources and explore opportunities to preserve and revitalize its historic functions. A key goal of the group is to restore the Creek's water quality by cleaning contaminants, improving the aquatic and riverine habitat, and responsibly restoring existing infrastructure along the waterway.

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 ongoing work at the Sage Street Mill, 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



**Map 3.1 - Water Resources.** Paran Creek, its millponds and waterfalls are North Bennington's most important water resources. Wetlands are found along Paran Creek, near Overlea Road, College Road, and in the southeast corner of the Village. Paran Creek connects Lake Paran Reservoir to the north with the Walloomsac River to the south. Flood and erosion (river corridor) hazard areas are highlighted.

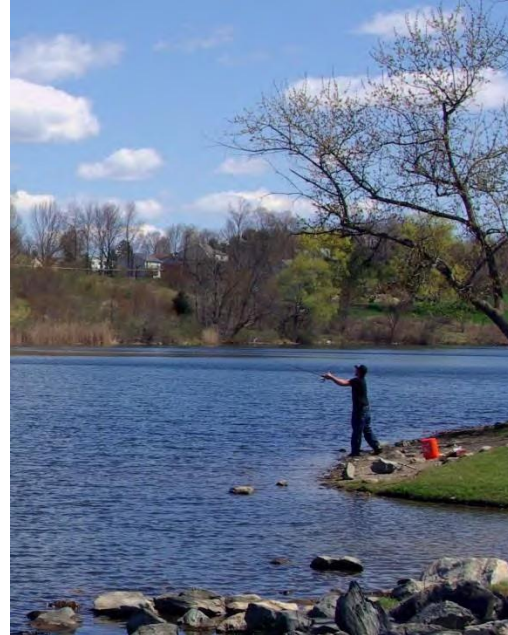
stream, ponds, and cascades. A public use pathway extends along the east side of Paran Creek from the end of Scarey Lane and along the western side of the Bennington College campus; public access along this pathway and protection of the wooded landscape it passes through, should be pursued.

### Lake Paran Reservoir

Lake Paran Reservoir occupies a natural basin at the northern edge of the Village of North Bennington. The Reservoir'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 Reservoir and adjacent lands include swimming, fishing, non-motorized boating, ice skating, hiking, and aesthetic appreciation.

Protection of the Reservoir'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 Reservoir 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 Reservoir 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.



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



The Walloomsac River at the Henry Covered Bridge.



### 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 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.

### Wetlands

Wetlands are transitional areas 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 Reservoir, 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 Flood Resilience**

The Village, like many historic settlements, is adjacent to several water elements that have shaped the development of the municipality through time. The Village's proximity to water bodies and streams provides dynamism and aesthetic appeal to the area but also creates the potential for flood and erosion hazards. With changing climate conditions bringing more extreme weather events to the region, flooding is likely to occur with much greater frequency. To minimize future flood risk and ensure capacity for post-flood recovery, the Village must mitigate risks and prepare for emergency response. Effective flood resilience requires several steps, including: assessing hazards, reducing risks, preparing for an emergency, and insuring residual risk.

North Bennington has identified local flood hazard areas by mapping both federally-designated Special Flood Hazard Areas and state-identified River Corridors throughout the community (Map 3.1). Special Flood Hazard Areas include areas that have been determined to have a one percent or greater chance of inundation from



flooding in any given year, and River Corridors are the paths within which rivers are likely to meander over time to find their most stable path while efficiently moving and storing sediment loads. The North Bennington Hazard Mitigation Plan (2022) provides detailed descriptions of flood and erosion hazard areas, the history of flood events and their impacts, and vulnerable road and bridge infrastructure in the town.

According to GIS analysis, there are currently 8 structures located in the Special Flood Hazard Area in North Bennington, and there are 42 structures located in the River Corridor (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Structures by type in the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) and River Corridor areas in North Bennington. Sources: Vermont Center for Geographic Information ( <a href="http://www.vcgi.org">www.vcgi.org</a> ).		
Type	SFHA	River Corridor
Single Family	1	22
Multi-Family	3	4
Mobile Home		1
Commercial with Residential		2
Fire Station	1	1
Commercial	1	8
Industrial	1	1
Utility	1	1
Other		2
Totals	8	42

To limit risk from flooding, North Bennington has adopted land use regulations to control development in hazard-prone areas. The Hazard Mitigation Plan further reduces risk by prioritizing specific risk mitigation actions for the town and by expanding access to FEMA risk mitigation funds. The Village has undertaken some conceptual planning for relocation of the Fire Station to Village-owned property, specifically the land occupied by the Village Highway Department, and determined that while the site offers promise for relocation, the costs are well outside the debt capacity of the Village. Additionally, in discussion with VLCT grant specialists, neither grant nor loan funding are realistic options given the Village's financial profile and the costs associated with a modern OSHA-compliant fire station. Alternative measures to ensure adequate fire department response during an emergency should be formulated.

Even the most aggressive hazard mitigation strategies cannot eliminate all risk, so communities must prepare to respond to emergencies and to insure properties vulnerable to flood damage. The town maintains a Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) and a Hazard Mitigation Plan to coordinate local response and facilitate contact with other towns and agencies before an emergency occurs. Through participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), the town makes federal flood insurance available to all residents.

Following a flood event, a municipality can be burdened with several million

dollars in repairs to vital infrastructure. In federally declared disasters, qualified losses may be reimbursed through the federal public assistance program and the Vermont Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF), whose funding depends on local compliance with a set of requirements. The Village of North Bennington is currently eligible for the largest amount of state (ERAF) funding because it is a member of the NFIP, has adopted the Town Road and Bridge Standards, maintains a current LEMP, has an up-to-date Hazard Mitigation Plan. The Village could consider incorporating explicit river corridor protection measures into Village zoning regulations to secure the highest possible ERAF coverage in the future.

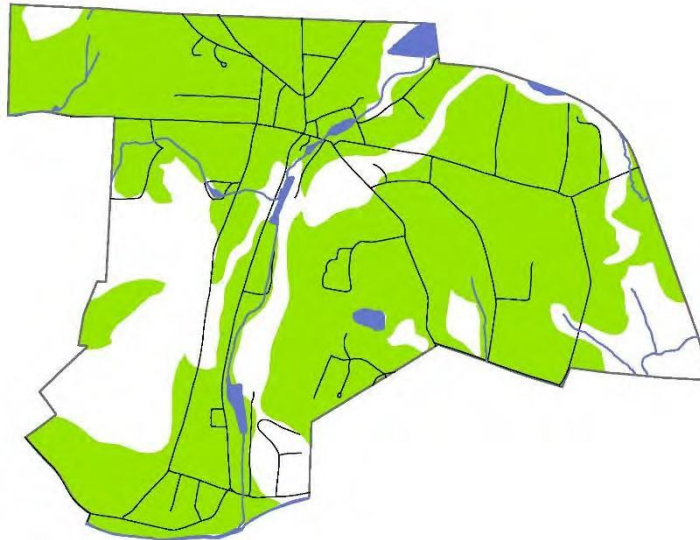
### **3.4 Soils and Agricultural Resources**

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.

Map 3.2. – Prime Agricultural Soils. Shaded areas represent prime agricultural soils as mapped by the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

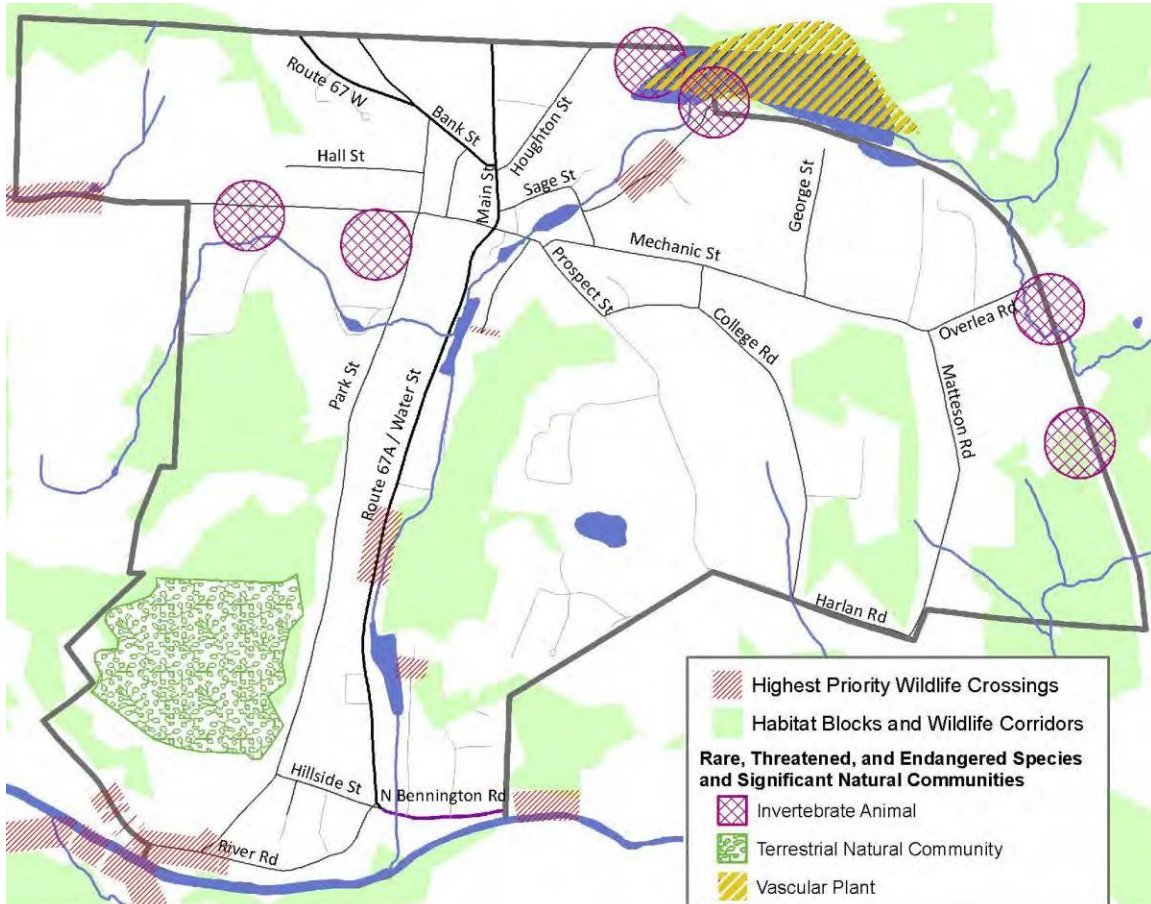


### **3.5 Natural Areas**

The Village covers a modest total land area compared to neighboring municipalities, and yet it contains numerous areas with unique natural qualities that serve

to connect wildlife habitats in the region. Protection of these areas and associated wildlife crossings is a priority in the Village. Development in the vicinity of these areas must be carefully planned to avoid adverse impacts on the resources they provide. Of particular note is one significant natural community in the southern part of the Village (Map 3.3), containing a unique stand of old growth oak trees that has been recognized by the Vermont Natural Heritage Program for its ecological value.

Map 3.3 – Significant Natural Areas in North Bennington



### 3.6 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 create 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 to 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 Reservoir. 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.



### **3.7 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 3.4). 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 contribute 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 Reservoir 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. McWaters park, located adjacent to the Henry Covered Bridge on the east side of the Walloomsac, has been developed into a permaculture garden and a 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.

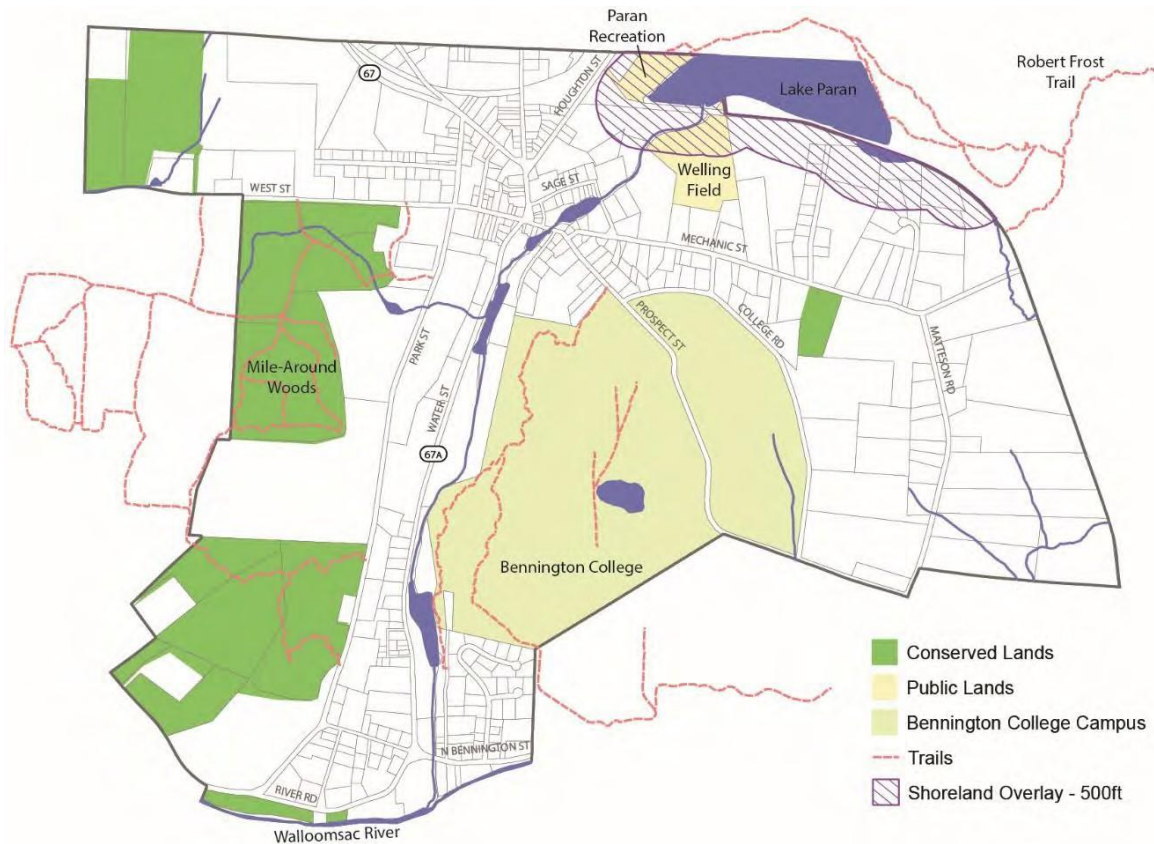


Open spaces available for public use and enjoyment are especially important to residents of the Village. Some prominent open space resources include the small public access areas along Paran Creek, Welling Field, the boating and fishing access at Lake Paran, and the network of trails, including the Short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





Map 3.4 – Open Space and Public Use Areas in North Bennington



### 3.8 **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 Reservoir, 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 Reservoir) 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 pursue a Paran Creek watershed grant to determine the safest conditions to limit flood damage to the Village.
5. Continue to work to control Eurasian milfoil (using new harvesting techniques) and limit waterfowl populations in Lake Paran Reservoir to protect the natural and recreational uses of that small Reservoir.
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. Protect unique habitat areas and wildlife crossings by concentrating new development in the village center and by mitigating habitat loss in outer areas.
9. 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.
10. 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 Reservoir and a trail following the old rail spur toward Bennington. Continue to work with local groups to improve and maintain McWaters Park and other lands along the Walloomsac River.
11. Explore alternative sites for the Fire House outside of flood and erosion-prone areas.
12. Continue to fulfill ERAF requirements, including maintaining a Hazard Mitigation Plan, a Local Emergency Management Plan, participation in the NFIP, and compliance with Town Road and Bridge Standards. Develop an emergency plan for protection and restoration of the Village's natural, as well as economic resources in the event of extreme weather events.



## 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 reflect 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 (Map 4.2).

The North Bennington Historic District (Map 4.1) encompasses much of the village center and includes 179 buildings of architectural or historical significance. Although not included in the original National Register designation, several 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.



Map 4.1 - The North Bennington Historic District.

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.

**Map 4.2 - State-Designated Village Center District**



The Village Center District is completely within the Historic Overlay District.





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 Factory, are still standing, although some are now used for different purposes.

The use 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, now converted into community focused activities, 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 millhouses 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 recently was renovated and converted to several residential units. 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. Though commonly referred to as the Sage Street Mill today, the building was once known as the "Shea Mill," and it 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. Though no longer home to VAE, the building currently provides housing and studio spaces for local artists and represents an ongoing historic preservation project in the village.



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

Dams that once generated waterpower for these old mills remain in place at four sites along Paran Creek. They no longer function to provide power, but they 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 pool. The third dam is not too visible, being part of the northern end of the Water Street complex.

Two of these dams have been professionally inspected in the Spring of 2024. 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 waterways involve safety as well as aesthetic and environmental concerns. The Lake Paran Reservoir Dam, completed in 1980, has been inspected recently, and its

owner, VTrans has been alerted to its hydraulic insufficiency and maintenance issues. Spurred on by the Village and Vermont Emergency Management (VEM), VTrans has recently shown interest in updating their Emergency Action Plan.

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 has been acquired by a Baptist church group that has completed extensive stabilization and repairs to the building.

### 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.



The Stone Church at the south end of Water Street was restored recently.



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 waterpower 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 Reservoir 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. 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 buildings. That complex now houses Sterling Gun Drills as well as a number of residential apartments. Recent environmental and infrastructure work at the site has improved the economic viability of this important mixed-use structure.

The large complex of buildings on the west side of Water Street was home to a growing technology/communications company. While vacant at the moment, a cheese warehouse occupies one of the

buildings in the complex.

An innovative and effective re-use of an historic mill building is the conversion of the Sage Street Mill, which until 2015 was home the Vermont Arts Exchange (VAE), and which currently houses artist studios in its 10,000 square foot space. The arts community is very strong in North Bennington and the mill building has served as one of several important creative hubs in the community for several decades.



The National Hangar Company (left) and The Red Mill Condominiums are conversion business and dwelling units occupying historic mill buildings along Paran Creek. National Hangar has expanded into new industrial buildings as well.

In 2015 the VAE moved to another historic building, the former McGovern Masonry building located just behind the post office on Main Street. The Village should support further development of this organization and other arts initiatives 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 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 Village School of North Bennington is a pre-K through grade six independent academy. The school is also a significant employer. 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, the McCullough Library, and the historic Park-McCullough House, and the Vermont Arts Exchange. These organizations provide vital 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 Center” 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 continues to be a variety of professional offices. 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. Home-based employment and telecommuting are 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 several reasons. First, 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 several 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 Bennington County Regional Commission, 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 (Free WiFi has been added in the Village Center) 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 Sage Street Mill, seen from across a mill pond on Paran Creek, is an example of ongoing 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 the 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 then to 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 Reservoir.

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:

Unfortunately, this logical organization of dwelling unit density has been overruled by State Statute. In an attempt to create higher concentrations of dwelling units in village centers, Act 47 has mandated high dwelling unit densities where water and sewer infrastructure exists or could be extended. While this may be appropriate in certain villages, it eliminates the progression of dwelling unit density decreases as you move away from the Village Center district in our village. That is because the right to receive piped water is provided to all citizens of our Village in a deed of gift. Additionally, because of the proximity of the Town of Bennington's sewage treatment facility, much of the Village is served by sanitary sewer infrastructure. The Village Land Use and Development Regulations have been required to change due to Act 47.

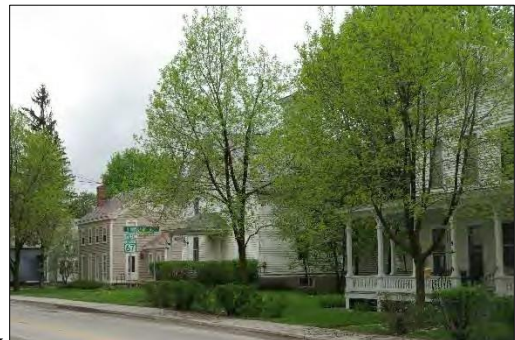
Act 181 has the potential to change the character of the Village further. It is a wide-ranging piece of legislation but in part, manipulates the requirements of Act 250 by numerous means, including various benefits for developers and sanctions for municipalities. The Act excludes Act 250 reviews for several categories of developments. A maximum of 50 dwelling units built in or immediately proximate to the Village Center are excluded from review. Commercial property conversions into less than 29 dwelling units are also excluded. Accessory dwelling units and utility reliability projects are also in this category. Other aspects of the Act are time limited. Act 181's implications will be more fully known as its provisions are implemented.

The non-dwelling-unit developments are less impacted and will continue to follow all current District requirements.

## **6.2 Land Use Districts**

### **Village Residential Districts**

While districts exist still and apply to non-residential uses, the differentiation of those district had been based largely on residential densities. Dwelling unit densities have been overthrown by Act 47 and Act 181. The Village awaits the Bennington Regional Planning Commission's land use mapping to have a full understanding of the impacts of the new legislation.





### Village Center 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 Center” (VC) District. This district allows the greatest variety of residential, commercial, public, and professional uses in North Bennington.

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 attributed to the VC District. It is important that this area retains its historic character while supporting a diversity of uses that draws people to the area to shop, dine, and enjoy public amenities. Residential use intermixed with commercial use will ensure that the area retains this vitality throughout the day and week. There are limited opportunities for infill development and adaptive re-use of buildings in this area. New businesses should provide useful products and services for residents, good employment opportunities, and should contribute to the sense of a distinct and thriving small commercial center.



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

# Municipal Plan of the Village of North Bennington, Vermont

Village Center Benefits Matrix		Village Center	Statutory Authority and Responsibility
Authority			
Statute Section (24 V.S.A. Chapter 76A)	2793a		
Date Established	2002		
Purpose			
Historic Preservation*	√		
Economic Revitalization*	√		
Smart Growth	√		
Economic Development	√		
Benefits			
10% State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit	√	ACCD - 24 V.S.A. §2794 & §2793a and 32 V.S.A. §5930cc	
25% Façade Improvement Tax Credit	√	ACCD - 24 V.S.A. §2794 & §2793a and 32 V.S.A. §5930cc	
50% Code Improvement Tax Credit	√	ACCD - 24 V.S.A. §2794 & §2793a and 32 V.S.A. §5930cc	
50% Technology Tax Credits	√	ACCD - 24 V.S.A. §2794 & §2793a and 32 V.S.A. §5930cc	
Downtown Transportation Fund		ACCD - 24 V.S.A. §2796	
Sprinkler System Rebate		DPS - 24 V.S.A. §2794	
Special Assessment District	√	Municipality - 24 V.S.A. §2794 & Chapter 87	
Reallocation of Sales Tax on Construction Materials		Tax Dept - 24 V.S.A. §2794 and 32 V.S.A. §9819.	
A location criterion for Tax Increment Finance Districts	√	ACCD - 32 V.S.A. § 5404a (H) (3) (B)	
Traffic Calming Options		VTrans/Municipality - 23 V.S.A. §1007(g)	
Signage Options		VTrans/Municipality - 10 V.S.A. § 494 (13) & (17)	
No appeal of decision on character of neighborhood for housing		Environmental Court - 24 V.S.A. §4471 e	
Act 250 Threshold for Priority Housing Projects		NRB - 10 V.S.A. §6001 (3)(A)(iv)(I)	
Act 250 Amendment exemption for Priority Housing Projects		NRB - 10 V.S.A. §6081 (o) and (p)	
Act 250 Limited Review & Criteria - "Downtown Findings"		NRB - 10 V.S.A. 6086b and NRB Rule 22	
Act 250 Findings and Conclusions for Growth Center		NRB - 24 V.S.A. § 2793c(f)	
Act 250 Master Plan Permit Application		NRB - 24 V.S.A. § 2793c(i)(5)(A)	
Act 250 Mitigation for Loss of Primary Agricultural Soils**		NRB - 10 V.S.A. §6093 (a)(1)	
Act 250 fee reduction		NRB - 10 V.S.A. §6083a(d)	
Act 250 Existing Settlement under criterion 9(L)	√	NRB - 10 V.S.A. §6001 (16)(A) & §6086 (a)(9)(L)	
Exemption from land gains tax		Tax Dept - 24 V.S.A. §2793e(f)(3) and 32 V.S.A. § 10002(p)	
ANR Wastewater fee capped at \$50/application		ANR - 24 V.S.A. §2793e(f)(1) & 3 V.S.A. § 2822(j)(4)(D)	
Priority Consideration***			
All State Agencies and Funding Programs - first priority	√	All Agencies - 24 V.S.A. §2790 (d); §2793c(i)(2)(A); §2794(a)(1)	
Specific State Agencies and Funding Programs:			
ACCD Municipal Planning Grants	√	24 V.S.A. §2794(a)(1); §2793a(c)(1); §2793c(d)(5); §2793e(g)(1)	
ACCD Community Development Block Grants	√	24 V.S.A. §2794(a)(1); §2793a(c)(2); §2793c(i)(3)(A)(iii)	
ACCD State Historic Preservation Grants	√		
VTrans Transportation Alternatives Program	√	24 V.S.A. §2794; §2793c(i)(4)(B);	
VTrans Bicycle VTransPedestrian Program	√	24 V.S.A. §2794; §2793c(i)(4)(B);	
VTrans/ACCD Better Connections Program	√		
ANR/ACCD Brownfield Revitalization Fund		24 V.S.A. §2794(a)(3) &(5); §2793c(i)(3)(A)(ii)	
ANR Drinking & Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund		24 V.S.A. §2794(a)(1) & §2793c(i)(3)(i), 10 V.S.A §1628	
State affordable housing funds		24 V.S.A. §2794(a)(1); §2793c(i)(4)(C)	
Locating State Buildings	√	24 V.S.A. §2794(a)(12); §2793a(c)(5); §2793b(c)(2); §2793c(i)(3)(B)	
*May not apply to all growth centers.			
**Agricultural soil mitigation benefits apply to designated neighborhood development areas only when they are associated with a designated downtown and applies only to new town centers created before 1/1/14.			
***Statute establishes that designated downtowns and village centers should have greater priority for state funding and programs than new town centers and growth centers. (24 V.S.A. §2790(d) and 24 V.S.A. §2793c(i)(2)(A))			

### 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.



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

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.

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

### Industrial Districts

Existing industrial buildings are sited on lands with an “Industrial” (I) land use classification. The National Hangar Company buildings and the historic H.C. White complex (now containing a mix of uses) along Water Street are found within this land use designation.

The purpose of the Industrial District 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 District, subject to specific performance standards specified in the Land Use and Development Regulations. 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 historic industrial buildings and in new construction as specifically provided for in the Regulations.

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



This modern building on Water Street represents a major opportunity for expansion of clean industry in the area.



### 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 shall be maintained in the Village Offices and shall provide 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 150 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 new building may exceed 45 feet in height.

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 Land Use and Development Regulations.

### Conservation District

The “Conservation” (CONS) District includes several 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-, two-, or more family dwelling units, and related uses, are permitted.

#### Resource Protection Districts

North Bennington's Land Use and Development Regulations contain several sections that deal with the protection of specific resources. Three of those regulations cover defined geographic areas and are discussed here.

The Historic District 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 the construction of new homes and substantial additions to residential properties within the Historic District. The design standards apply to both building and site design.

Several 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 Reservoir. 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 reservoir 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 and Paran Creek. 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**

Note: This section may be impacted as decisions are made by the Regional Planning Commission and the LURB.

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 Land Use and Development Regulations. 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 Land Use and Development Regulations. The Water Street corridor 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 also 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 several 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 Center District. Building and site design are particularly important in this historic area and strict adherence to the design guidelines included in the Land Use and Development Regulations 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 and sidewalks are well maintained and that roadways and intersections are safe and attractively designed.

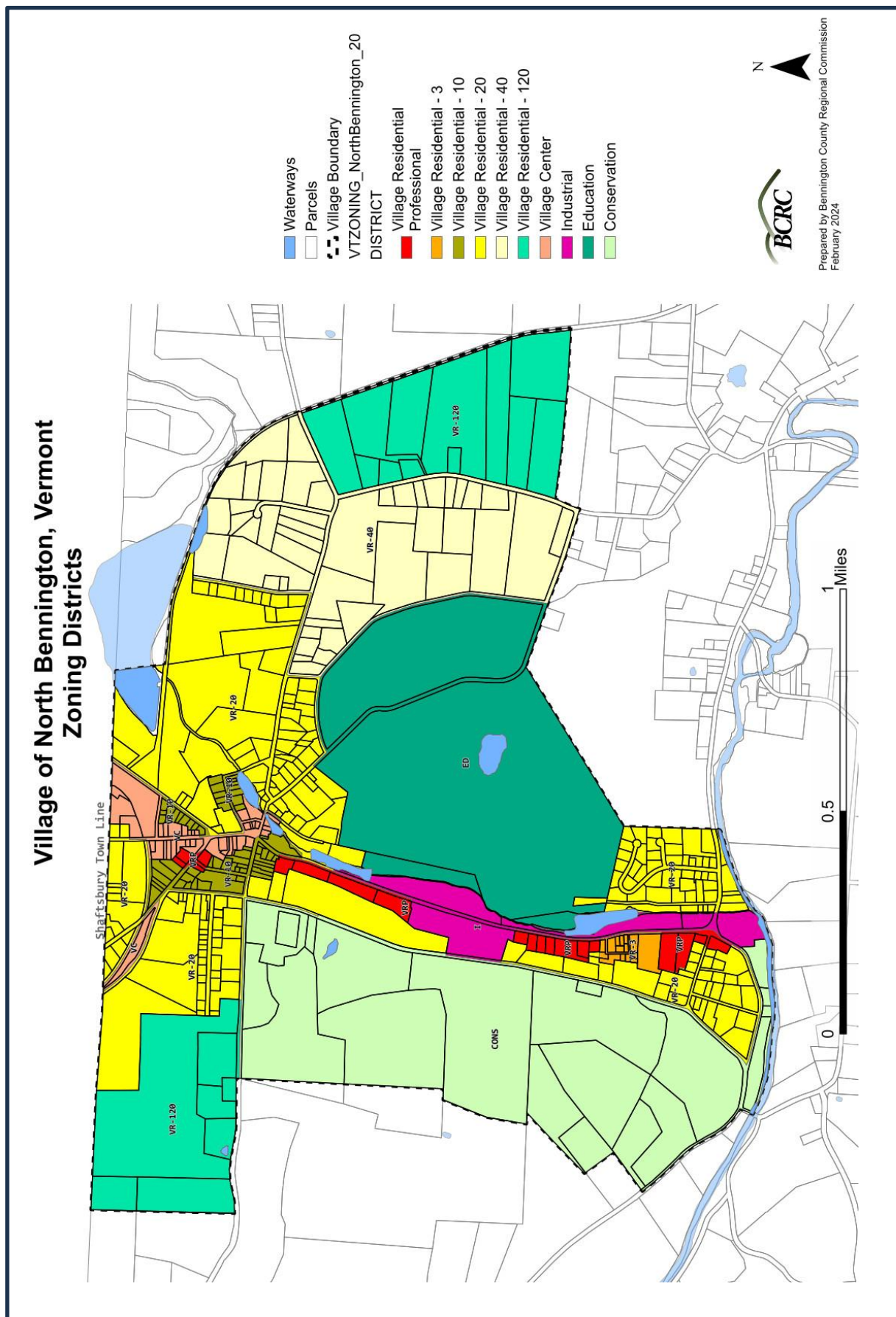
4. The Education Campus District includes the campus of Bennington College. The College must plan future development in conformance with its master plan and any proposed changes to that master plan must be presented to the Village for consideration as provided for in the Land Use and Development Regulations. 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 Land Use and Development Regulations must be strictly enforced.
  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 Land Use and Development Regulations.



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



## **Chapter 7: Housing**

### **7.1 Existing Conditions**

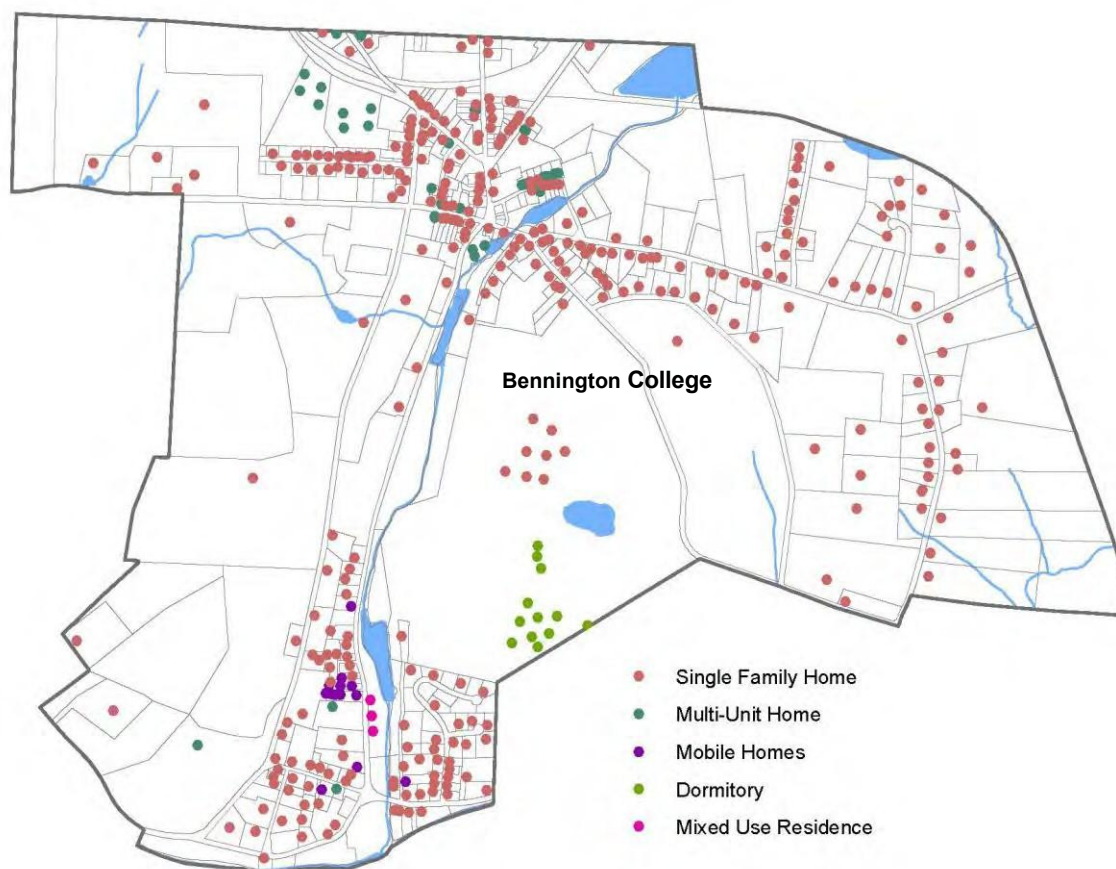
Vermont is in a housing crisis of significant scale. The Vermont Housing Finance Agency predicted in April of 2023 that the State would require 30,000 to 40,000 new homes by 2030 and therefore require construction of 5,000 to 6,700 homes per year between now and then. This is against a backdrop of home sale prices continuing to rise by approximately 5.5% from the prior year throughout the State. This bleak picture is despite there being a first-generation homebuyer program making available \$15,000 grants.

Following the Statewide trend, the rate of change in occupied housing in North Bennington has been decreasing: .91% from 1990 to 2000 and .22% from 2000 to 2010, and most recently to -.04%, from 2010 to 2020. In Bennington County the median price of a home was \$300,000, a condominium \$286,000, and a manufactured house \$130,000. In part, the situation in Vermont is due to an increase in the population: 17,336 more people (15,448 more households) than in 2010. For homeowners with a median income (\$62,125) purchasing a new home of the median price would require an unrealistic downpayment of \$100,000 to bring the mortgage into a range of 30% of income.

As of 2020, North Bennington contained 421 housing units, of which 274 were owner-occupied, 121 were renter-occupied, and 74 were vacant (U.S. Census of Population and Housing). There are 253 single household dwellings or 60.1% of all housing units. The average number of people living in the 421 households was 4.07, a number possibly reflective of the number of dormitory occupants.

The majority of North Bennington's housing is located in and around the center of the Village, in the Village Center 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).





Map 7.1 - Existing Residential Units in North Bennington (from E-911 GIS database). It is clear that development is concentrated in residential neighborhoods at the north and south nodes of the Village.



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 value of a home in the Village is \$251,400. Total housing costs exceed 30 percent of household income for a sizeable portion of owner-occupied households in the community. Unaffordability rates are even higher for renters than owners, indicating a need for lower-cost housing in the village. 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 2015 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 Local Issues and Design Considerations**

A residential build-out model (Community Viz - ArcGIS) employed in 2012 showed potential for the addition of as many as 280 housing units capable of accommodating approximately 645 additional residents in the Village. Most new residential development would occur in the VR-40 and VR-120 land use districts and would take several decades. The model demonstrated 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 model was not predicated upon smart growth approaches. Of course, an allowance in regulation **does not** create housing; it simply permits it. Since 2012, about 80 units have been added to the Village housing stock, mostly through a multifamily rental housing project in a redeveloped Water Street building.

Prior to Act 47 the Village was 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 is already built to near capacity, but a considerable amount of future residential growth can be accommodated in select parcels within walking distance of the village center. Additional parcels exist in the eastern and western areas of the Village

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, and the College leases housing units about 100 students in the converted industrial building on Water Street. 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.

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 make 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 was recently amended to better 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 Cornerstone Housing Partners to obtain special grants and funding that will allow for construction of affordable housing units and, potentially, restoration of historic structures.

The Land Use and Development Regulations include a new subsection to the Planned Unit Development regulations. This subsection is called Cottage Court Developments. This unique type of PUD is designed to promote the type of development that will support the existing character of the Village by numerous means. This type of development fosters community, guarantees open space, creates workforce housing while preserving developer's profit motive, separates pedestrian and vehicular circulation, integrates well with neighborhoods, and promotes the use of mass transit. This type of development is incentivized in the Regulations by shorter review times and, should the Trustees agree, to property tax adjustments.

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.



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

- 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 dwelling unit density has changed due to Act 47.

In compliance with recent legislation, the Bennington County Regional Commission is establishing new dwelling unit targets values for each of its seventeen municipalities. While these are targets not mandates, the State is directing municipalities to find ways to address the housing crisis. Positive measures will be required to satisfy these challenging, and possibly excessively optimistic, values without more than the ‘carrots’ provided by Acts 47 and 181.

### **7.3 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 and electrification and use of renewable onsite power.
7. Consider an outreach to developers to introduce them to Cottage Court Developments.

## 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.

<b>Table 8.1. Miles of Village and State Highways in North Bennington.</b> 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. <i>Mileage according to Village highway map, 2016.</i>	
<u>Highways</u>	<u>Mileage</u>
<b>Village Highways</b>	<b>9.654</b>
Class 1: Bank Street, Water Street, Main Street, Lincoln Square	1.604
Class 2: White Creek Road	0.080
Class 3: All other local roadways	7.970
<b>State Highways</b> (Route 67 and 67A)	<b>0.465</b>

North Bennington contains 10.119 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.

### **8.3 Roadway Improvement Projects and Needs**

Road improvement studies are ongoing to reduce traffic speeds in the village. Permanent speed signs to one or more of the main access roads into the village and as well as revisions to the intersection of West Street and Route 67A are being studied. A speed table is a possible option for ensuring vehicles travel at save speeds entering the high pedestrian-use area at Lincoln Square. Discussions are ongoing with VTrans concerning this and the addition of a crosswalk across Route 67 near the Variety Store. An additional traffic calming approach is being considered: decorative and/or identifying arches over the road signifying to drivers that they are entering the Village's center.

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. Additional efforts are needed to provide better access control near the mixed use residential/industrial buildings on Water Street.



This older study shows a possible solution to needed improvements to the intersection of West St. with 67A.

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 cyclists 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.



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.

## 8.4 **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 viable and 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 was improved in recent years. 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.

## **8.5 Access Management**

Access management deals with the relationship between the roadway network and adjacent land uses. The highway system needs to facilitate 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.
- Improved site lines at intersections where visibility of oncoming traffic is compromised by foliage and other non-building related obstructions (Dense foliage at the intersection of College Road and Harlan as one example).

Several 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 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.

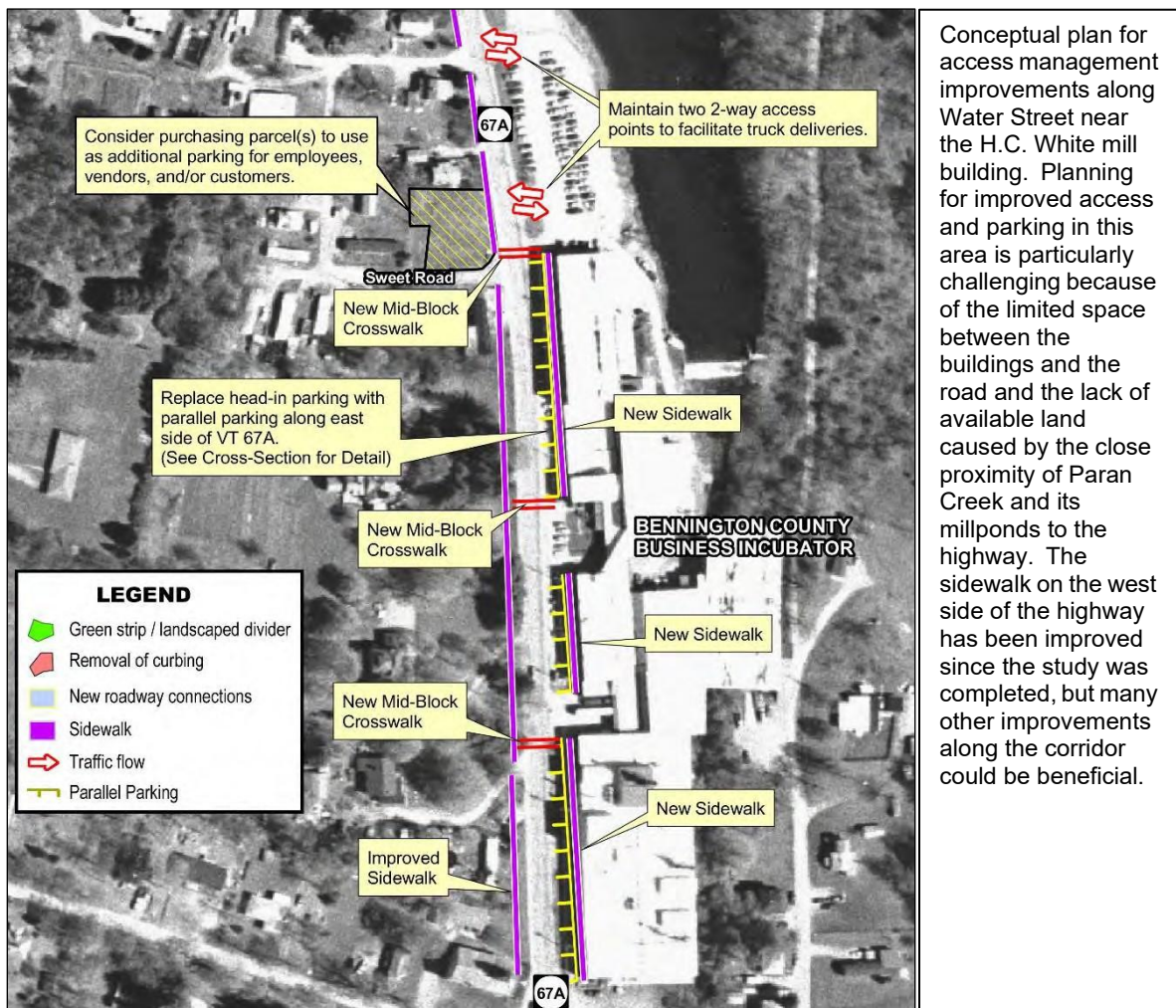
General recommendations that should be incorporated in all transportation and land use planning activities include:

- 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;



- Unobstructed sightlines;
- 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 historic H.C. White factory complex. 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 H.C. White property along Water Street.





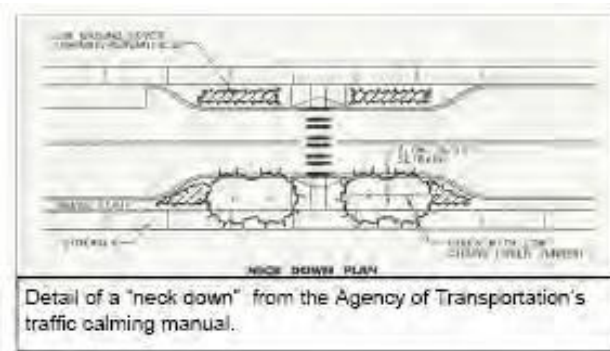
## 8.6 Traffic Calming and Aesthetic Considerations

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;
- Signage that welcomes vehicular traffic as they approach the Village and additional electronic signage that advises vehicles to reduce speed (see Shaftsbury and Arlington on Rte. 7A) as they approach their more densely populated 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;
- Permanent or temporary speed signs;
- Landscaping, planting of street trees along roadways, and ceremonial arches to promote a feeling of entering and driving through a human-scale village center.
- Proper signage at all intersections that indicate side road and T intersections, as well as blind driveways.

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 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.

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

## 8.7 **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 Mews, gas station, and in front of the Maple Brook Farm Cheese company. It may be appropriate to consider an additional stop at Lincoln Square (or replacing the gas station stop with a stop at Lincoln Square) to serve the Library and businesses in the center of the Village.

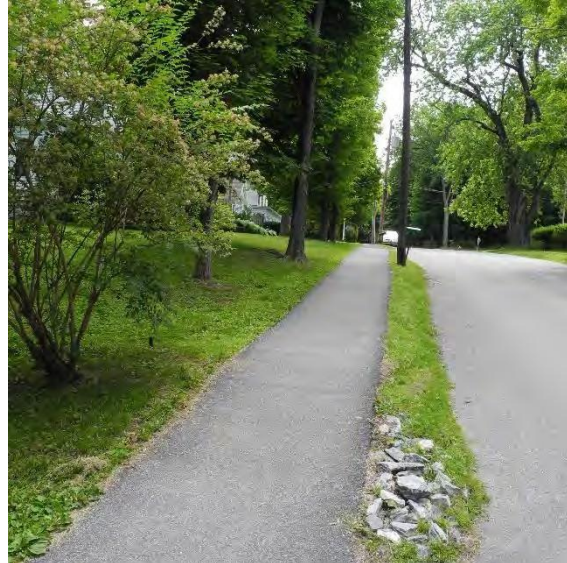
The Green Mountain Community Network also provides door-to-door transportation to and from medical appointments, as well as special trips for elders, nursing home residents, and persons with disabilities. Several other human service agencies in Bennington also provide similar van-based services for their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

## **8.8 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.

Electric bikes should be encouraged but classification should be provided to riders as to their use of sidewalks and bike lanes.



This popular walking route along Prospect Street was improved recently by the Village.

## **8.9 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 areas. Several sidewalk projects have been completed along the Main Street - Water Street corridor. The 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.

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 that 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.



## 8.10 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 Reservoir recreation area and adjacent conserved lands toward the historic Robert Frost property; 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 expand 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. Planning for creating a pathway connection between the Lake Paran Reservoir trails and the South Shaftsbury pedestrian system should be supported.

The Town of Bennington recently secured an agreement with Vermont Railway,



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



The 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.



who leases the rail spur east of the North Bennington Depot, to establish a multi-use paved path along the unused rail spur from downtown to the Molly Stark School. This agreement resulted from strategic bargaining with Vermont Railway, who required that a costly runaround track be built by the Town in order to establish the multi-use ‘rail-trail’ system along the dormant rail line.

To extend the future rail trail path from Molly Stark into North Bennington, another such runaround track designed for rail yard storage would need to be built close to the rail junction point by the North Bennington Rail Depot. Given that space and funds required for such an installation are not currently available, the rail trail expansion to the village is not considered possible at the moment. The idea has gained support, however, and should continue to be explored. 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.

### **8.11 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 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).

### **8.12 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.



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.

### Freight Rail

The rail traffic that currently flows through the Village is limited to occasional freight shipments, with one local business, Whitman Feeds, receiving a considerable amount of material by rail. 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.



North Bennington was once a busy center of railroad activity and may be again. Fortunately, modern trains produce far fewer emissions today than trains have in the past.

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 though, no significant efforts are ongoing to restore passenger rail to North Bennington.

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 might 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.

In recent winters, Vermont Rail System has stored tanker cars filled with liquefied propane gas on the rail line running through the Village and along the edge of Paran Lake Reservoir. This short-term rail car storage helps the rail system deliver heating fuel as-needed in winter months, but it also places thousands of gallons of combustible hazardous materials adjacent to homes and the Village core for extended periods of time. Technically, federal rules regulating the rail system allow this storage, but serious safety concerns have been raised by North Bennington residents and business owners. The Village does not approve of this storage practice and is pursuing dialogue with VTrans and the Vermont Rail System to identify safety measures or alternative storage locations. The Federal Railway Administration has identified the North Bennington spur as private track that allows local and State governments to draft legislation limiting its use for hazardous materials storage.

The spur rail line between North Bennington and Bennington is not active track, but it may be appropriate to preserve for future use – either for rail service to industrial sites in Bennington or as a multi-use pathway – through continued public ownership. It may be 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 could make sense to put this valuable public asset to good use.

### Passenger 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 in recent 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. Currently the nearest passenger rail stations are in Brattleboro and Rensselaer, New York. The Amtrak service through Brattleboro provides connections northward along the Connecticut River corridor to White River Junction and then across the state to Essex Junction, and southward through Massachusetts and Connecticut to New York City. Amtrak service from Rensselaer is much more direct to New York City and also offers options north and west.

A thruway bus service between the Albany/Rensselaer Amtrak Station and Bennington began operation in the fall of 2017. Two or more round trip shuttles are made daily, making timed connections with Amtrak train service to Penn Station in New York City. The service greatly expands access to the Southwestern Vermont area for both vacationers and potential residents who could live in Vermont while maintaining a business connection in nearby metro areas. Vermont residents also benefit from improved access to passenger rail service.

## **8.13 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.

## **8.14 Transportation Grants**

The Village has been very successful in funding important local projects through

utilization of the Transportation Alternatives and Bike-Ped Grant programs. The Vermont Agency of Transportation oversees these federal programs and awards grants annually. In North Bennington, grant funds have been used to effect improvements to the Depot building and grounds, to design and construct improvements at the Bank/Main Street intersection, to build and repair sidewalks, 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).

### **8.15 Environmental**

Gasoline and diesel vehicles are a major source of emissions that cause greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to build up with the result being global warming. Electrification of vehicles is the major opportunity for the Village to reduce the emissions from this sector from both municipal vehicles and the vehicles of businesses and residents in the Village. This is particularly the case given the small size of the Village footprint and the low number of miles driven between charging.

The Village should make electrification of its municipal fleet a rebuttable presumption, so that the fleet becomes carbon-free at the earliest date possible. The Village has already provided two electricity stations on municipal property outside of the Town Offices. Most residents and businesses will likely wish to have their own charger attached to their building (It is worth noting that some Vermont utilities at the time of this writing provide charging equipment free to their customers. The Village could facilitate the adoption by residents of electric vehicles by holding information workshops for Villagers.

### **8.16 Policies and Recommendations**

1. The Village should continue to maintain a twenty-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 by specific road signs.
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.

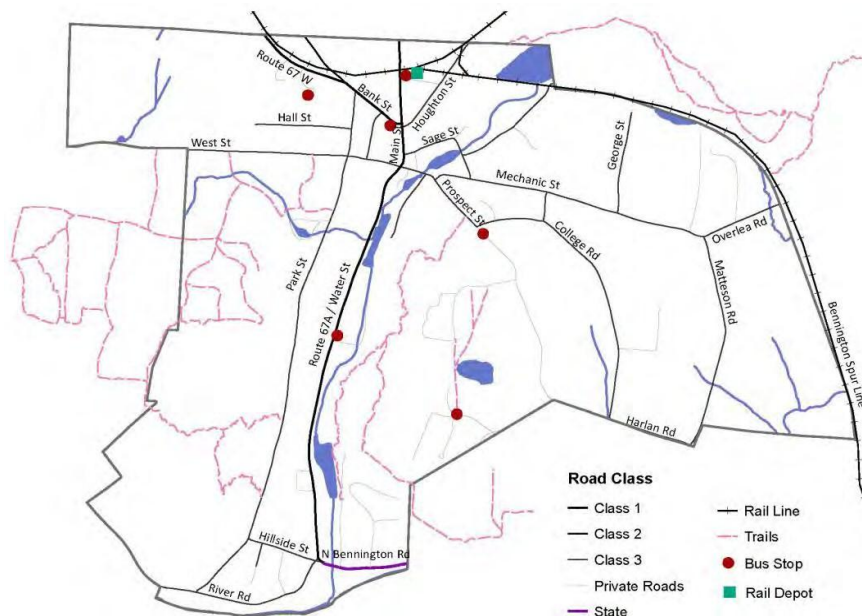


4. Potential locations for additional public off-street parking should be found and existing parking areas clearly marked and well-maintained. Parking for private developments should be provided as required by the Land Use and Development Regulations.

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. Develop federally compliant regulations for the storage of hazardous materials on private railway track. The Village does not support the storage of hazardous materials on rail lines. Explore safety measures and alternative freight storage options with VTrans and Vermont Rail System.

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. Consider adding additional electrical vehicle charging stations.
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 private track being used for railway car storage.

## **Chapter 9: Energy**

### **9.1 Overview**

Energy is a basic need of our society and economy and that fact holds true in the Village. It should continually assess its energy consumption, energy costs, and environmental impact of its energy use, and undertake appropriate and feasible steps to encourage the efficient, cost effective and environmentally benign use of energy.

In 2018, the Town of Bennington adopted an energy chapter consistent with Act 174 planning standards, which establish a pathway for municipalities to enhance energy planning and apply local land conservation measures to the siting of renewable energy facilities. The Village supports the Town's energy plan and will cooperate in pursuing the implementation actions it outlines to improve energy efficiency, transform the heating and transportation sectors to rely on renewable energy sources, including via electrification of homes and vehicles, and encourage appropriate scales of renewable energy development in the Village.

As of the time of this writing, the State of Vermont is attempting to finalize the implementation of major energy legislation (known as a Clean Heat Standard) passed in the last session (2024). The intent of the legislation is to create a cost differential between carbon-based energy (oil, coal, natural gas) and non-carbon sources such as wind and solar. The implementation method ultimately chosen and deployed may require new consideration of energy procurement by the Village and its residents.

### **9.2 Energy Efficiency Measures**

An Energy Committee established by the Town of Bennington identified a number of positive local energy efficiency efforts to reduce its energy use and improve its environmental profile. The municipal wastewater treatment plant uses the methane it generates for powering its own operation, efficient traffic and street lights are being installed, and efficiency 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 Village School of North Bennington has considered 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. These plans and considerations, if not yet implemented, should be updated to consider on-site solar and heat pumps.

A carefully developed land use plan and transportation system 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 efficient development 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 efficiency 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.



The Heat Squad provides affordable comprehensive energy audits and provides follow-up support to fund and manage improvements.

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. This should also be the case with monetary incentives available from the Federal and State governments related to decarbonization.

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.

Educational efforts can contribute a great deal to energy efficiency by making residents and businesses aware of the value of using energy efficient appliances, construction techniques, and other practices. Educational programs on home and small business weatherization and energy efficiency could be shown on CAT-TV and workshops held.

### **9.3 Renewable Energy Resources**

Generation and uses of energy from carbon-free renewable resources. There are three identifiable sources of renewable energy that appear to have potential for development and use:

- Hydroelectric energy from Paran
- Solar energy captured by panel deployment on buildings and open land.
- Geothermal energy to supplement heating and cooling systems in residential and commercial buildings.

Of these three, only solar has been demonstrated to be viable for deployment in the



Village, with many residents having undertaken installation of solar panels. Solar projects greater than 150 kW in capacity must comply with these siting criteria, which reflect the Village's goal to preserve scenic, environmental, and historic resources:

- Solar facilities shall only be sited in locations where screening will suffice to mitigate the visual impact of the facility on the following scenic attributes: views wherein fields form an important foreground; historic buildings and gateways to the village area; and scenes with important contrasting elements such as water.
- Solar facilities shall not be located in the following areas: (1) A location that would significantly diminish the economic viability or potential economic viability of the working landscape, including productive forest land and primary agricultural soils; (2) Steep slopes (>25%); (3) Surface waters and riparian buffer areas (except for stream crossings); and (4) A site that causes adverse impacts to historical or cultural resources.

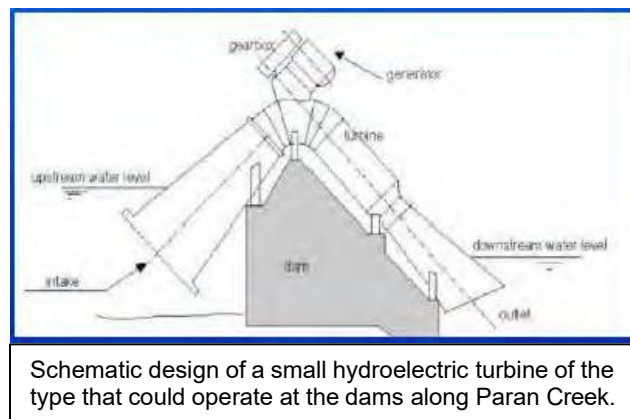
Most of these renewable energy schemes involve relatively small-scale systems that would be installed and used by individual home or commercial/institutional building owners. The series of dams, millponds, and waterfalls along Paran Creek appears to present an opportunity for small-scale electricity 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 waterpower 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.

An initial feasibility study was undertaken in 2016 by the Parak Creek Watershed Project group. The study concluded that Village-sponsored hydro development at the



Firehouse and Lake Paran dams could be viable. The group recommended that the Village secure development rights for the two dams along Paran Creek in the near future and that Village residents vote on proceeding with further feasibility studies for the sites. In June 2017, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued preliminary permits for 58 kW hydro turbine at dam on Lake Paran Reservoir and for a 36 kW facility on the Parak Creek next to the Firehouse. Both these proposals are supported by the Village.



A 2016 feasibility study completed by *The Paran Creek Watershed Project* group proposes hydropower development at two existing dam sites: Paran Lake and the Firehouse. In the study scenario, the Village would sponsor these facilities and provide funding for a staff person to manage operations and maintenance. The mock-up above shows a proposed operating station for the Firehouse dam that incorporates community education by allowing some public access and informational signs for visitors.

#### 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. Cooperate with the Town of Bennington in implementing the Town's enhanced energy plan.
6. 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: Climate Change**

### **10.1 Introduction**

Climate change stands alone as an overarching issue which Local Governments must address and incorporate in their planning in the coming decades. This Chapter represents the first of its kind in a Village Annual Plan. In making this Chapter a part of the Plan, the Village adopts the assessment of the scientific community which has demonstrated that emissions of so-called “greenhouse gases” (such as Carbon Dioxide) over the past decades have increased the amount of heat which is trapped in the atmosphere. The distribution of this heat in the earth’s air, water and land resources, known as global warming, in turn has already led to climate change, with more change to come. We accept the warnings of scientists that if carbon emissions are not stopped, the global warming and climate change impacts that will happen will result in serious impacts, including on the Village and its Citizens.

### **10.2 Emissions of Greenhouse Gases**

The primary emissions of greenhouse gases within the Village come from heating and cooling, and vehicles, but the amount of carbon in the of emissions in any of those situations depends on what energy source is used. If Coal, Oil (Home Heating Oil, Gasoline, etc) or Natural Gas is used, then greenhouse gases are emitted.

The use of electricity (i.e. electrification) is a special case. If electricity is produced from local solar or wind deployments, then that electricity is essential carbon-free. If the electricity is drawn from a utility or otherwise from the electricity grid, it is partially free of carbon due to the amount of carbon-free resources that are already on the grid and part of the mix making electricity. But it is likely, at least at this time, that some carbon-based fuels, particularly natural gas, are used to generate some of the electricity.

Solar and wind are at present the cheapest resource to add to the grid, and thus more is being added every year. That means electricity drawn from the grid is cleaner every year than the year before. Thus, any device, appliance, vehicle, etc that uses electricity becomes cleaner every year without any modifications. The electricity is what is getting cleaner.

All individuals, companies, governments, and other entities must make an effort to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. The Village is no exception. It can reduce its emissions by the following:

- Improve efficiency of Village energy use so that less energy is used.
- Avoid any new purchases of equipment or vehicles that use oil or natural gas

- Utilize government and utility incentives to the extent applicable
- Pursue electrification
- Pursue purchasing of carbon-free energy under utility tariffs or via purchases directly from suppliers.
- Assess the possibility of deploying a community solar project, whereby municipal land would be used for solar panels, which would provide the Village with carbon-free electricity, but also allow Village residents to opt in and make purchases from the project.

In pursuit of these goals, the Village has secured a substantial grant from the State of Vermont to replace the current fossil fuel heating systems in the Village's three municipal buildings, the Train Depot, the Fire Station, and the Highway Department Garage. The new systems will use heat pumps for heating and cooling. The systems will be sized only after thorough weatherization has occurred. At the time of this writing, weatherization efforts should begin soon. Additionally, the Village has installed electrical vehicle charging stations at the Train Depot parking lot with funds derived from a grant.

### **10.3 Impacts of Climate Change**

Scientists have verified that many impacts from Climate Change have already begun to appear. One impact, that is becoming apparent to any observer, is the increase in extreme weather events, including in Vermont. It has become common for extreme weather events to arise quickly and suddenly, dropping record of amounts of rain in a very short period of time.

Scientists are careful to point out that an insufficient amount of understanding exists as climate change initiating extreme weather but they are clear that the frequency and severity of such weather events is due to climate change.

As a Village that is very much defined by its relationship with a waterway, the impact of severe weather must be taken seriously.

### **10.4 Resiliency**

The Village must have a Plan in place to contend with the threat of extreme storms and rainfall events. It may be that that Plan requires action to be taken now to increase the Villages resistance to such events. But it should also deal with how to deal with the event as it happens and in its aftermath.



## **10.5 Adaptation**

Adaptation to the threat and occurrence of extreme weather events is one step that must be taken. But there may be other steps needed to deal with climate impacts. Examples include:

- Changes in municipal budgets based on changes in requirements related to heat and cold, as well as weather-related restoration.
- Changes in plans related to tree planting and maintenance
- Changes in pest management.

## **Chapter 11: Community Facilities and Services**

### **11.1 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).

Since 2016, revelations of toxic perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) contamination in the vicinity of the former ChemFab plant on Water Street have rocked the Village community. Many residents have private water wells contaminated with the chemical, thus requiring an expansion of the Village public water supply to affected households. The PFOA issue will be documented in this chapter along with general information about existing facilities and services available in the Village, identified future needs, and opportunities for improving coordination with other municipalities and nongovernmental organizations.

### **11.2 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 use in 2023 was 274,079 gallons per day, serving 740 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 200,000 gallons per day in uncommitted capacity. The water system does have an equivalent back-up supply as required by federal regulations. Total expenditures for 2023 were approximately \$509,505, offset by usage fees of \$6.50 per 1000 gallons.

There were several projects that the Water Department worked on including:

1. Completed an Asset Management Plan (AMP) working with Otter Creek Engineering and the State of Vermont. The AMP focuses on:
  - Better planning for emergencies
  - Future replacement of lines and system management
  - Identifying future issues with the system and how to address them
  - Located and recorded the location of all pipes and valves within the system
2. Installed a Stand-by Generator at the plant which ensures that the plant will be able to

function 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

3. Completed a lead line inventory to identify the location of all lead lines for future replacement
4. In the planning stages to replace the oldest piping in the system – the Overlea/Jennings line.
5. Are in the planning stages to replace a portion of the main transmission line.

All these projects, including the planning and engineering, were paid for through State and Federal grants with no additional cost to the users. The water system has effectively provided a vital service to the community with uninterrupted access to a clean supply of water and the Board of Water Commissioners is dedicated to continuing that service.

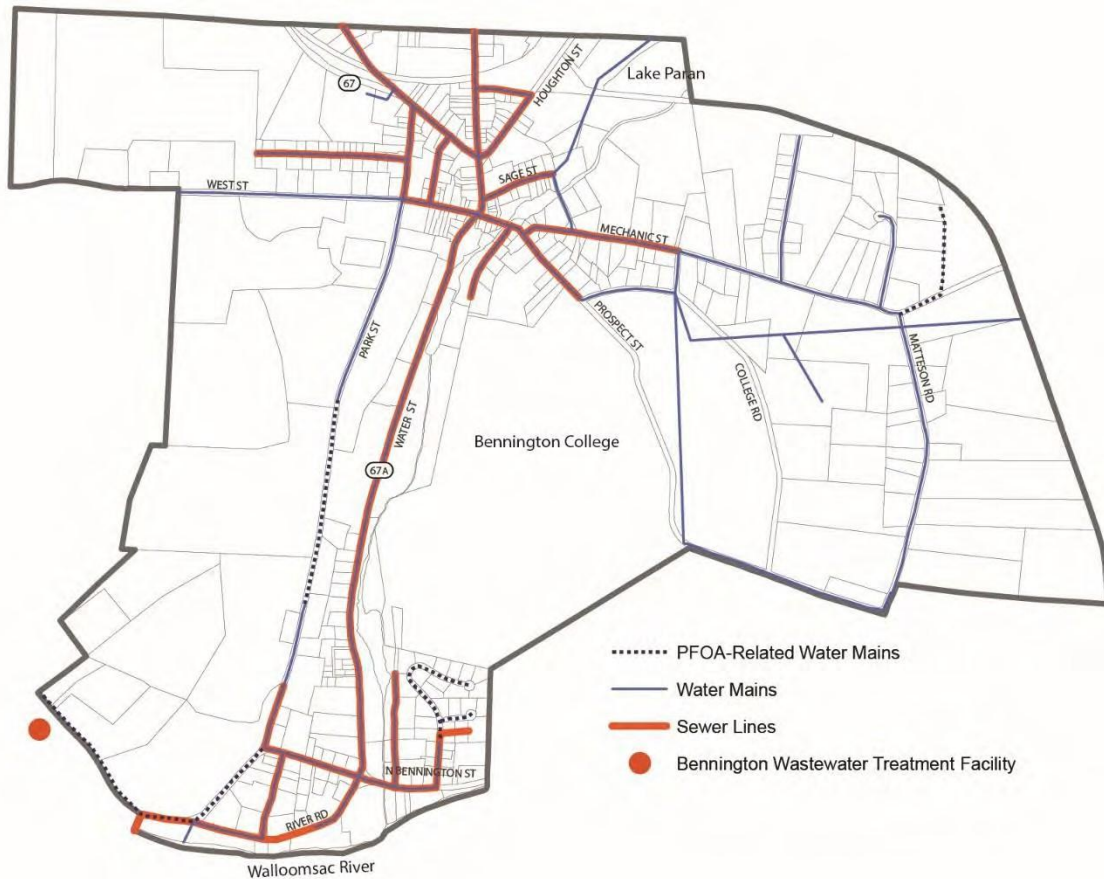
### **11.3 Sewage and Stormwater Disposal Systems**

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.

Map 11.1 - Public Water and Sewer Lines



#### 11.4 Fire Department and Emergency Management

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 2024-2025 annual budget for the Fire Department, paid for with Village tax revenues, is nearly \$108,000.



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



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 expenditure.

The Planning Commission has been active in addressing issues of emergency planning. While these efforts have been partially effective, more work will be required. The Planning Commission recognizes that with the adoption of this Village Plan, implementation of recommendations will be their focus. While the Village has an emergency plan, updating it with specific annexes is necessary. Several threats need to be highlighted and addressed with some urgency. The Village is supported in these efforts by BCRC and the Town of Bennington's experienced emergency management personnel.

While flooding is addressed above, the Planning Commission recognizes that one additional significant threat to the Village is the use of the railroad track of the North Bennington spur for the storage of highly hazardous materials under dangerous circumstances. The storage of liquefied petroleum gas (propane) in tanker cars on that section of track has been a common practice of the Vermont Railway for portions of the year. A serious incident could cause loss of life and destruction of property. The track is not well maintained. The track passes over Lake Paran Reservoir Dam (high hazard potential) and a bridge (not recently inspected) over the dam's spillway. Much of the track cannot be reached by emergency personnel in the event of an incident. A failure of the dam or bridge would isolate the hazardous material in the Village with no dedicated, safe, or approved off-loading facility.

The Planning Commission has confirmed with the Federal Railway Administration that the track should be considered private and therefore is subject to State and local regulation. The Commission recommends that the Trustees draft legislation for that portion of the track that is within North Bennington, controlling the use of the track for hazardous materials.

### **11.5 Emergency Medical and Health Care**

Primary emergency medical care services are provided by the Bennington Rescue Squad, a non-profit corporation staffed by over 40 members. The Rescue Squad provides paramedic level care and operates six ambulances equipped for advanced levels of patient care. The Rescue Squad also provides inter-facility transport and 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.

### **11.6 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 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.

### **11.7 Education**

All village children are offered choices in pre-K through 6<sup>th</sup> grade education because of the North Bennington Graded School District (NBGS) voters. With approval by the State Board of Education, the North Bennington Graded School was closed, thus allowing parents and students choice of their elementary school. The Village School of North Bennington (VSNB) was formed, leasing the existing school building under a tuition agreement which specifies tuition costs and stipulates that VSNB provides all services NBGS provided on a non-discriminatory, no admission bar basis to NBGSD resident students. About 60% of district students live in the village and approximately 40% live in Shaftsbury District 1. Most district K-6 students attend VSNB.

VSNB educators use the whole of the village as a campus for education. VSNB practices a place-based education that incorporates, among other locations, the Hiland Hall garden where students learn about growing food, the McCullough Mile Around Woods for outdoor education, the Four Winds Center for natural science, and the Park McCullough Governor's Mansion for North Bennington history. Students use the public McCullough library as well as the school's collection. They tap trees during maple sap season, and with the help of a local syrup maker, distill and bottle syrup for parents. Visits are arranged at the North Bennington post office. Bennington College students serve as foreign language tutors and in other educational roles. For Veterans' Day, students assist in decorating the Village Veterans Park. On occasion, volunteers

read to students. The Vermont Arts Exchange docents assist with their art education and place student work in the annual North Bennington Outdoor Sculpture Show (NBOSS). Holiday concerts and a strings recital are staged for the community. Volunteer firemen from the oldest fire department in the state of Vermont chaperone the First Day Parade when students parade around the village, and they also teach fire safety to the students. With this approach to the curriculum, the Village School clearly provides a vibrant educational experience that embraces the community and is popular.

VSNB provides breakfast and lunch without charge. A nurse and counselor provide services to students. The gymnasium/lunchroom/performance space is used after the school day for aftercare and for basketball practices of several student league teams.

The governing spirit can be summarized as in the community, for the community, and by the community. This spirit has resulted in community support for numerous initiatives:

- the modernization of the building beginning with the 1997-98 renovation and addition - entry foyer; elevator for ADA compliance, fire stairs to replace external fire escapes, upgrades of windows, new adult bathrooms, refurbishing all classrooms;
- soundproofing between the gymnasium and music rooms (ground floor) and the library and 1<sup>st</sup> floor classrooms,
- followed by upgrade of heating system, replacement of the oil tank,
- replacing a parking area with a ball field,
- a turnout drive for drop off,
- an accessible entry for the gymnasium in 2011,
- and of late the rebuilding of children's bathrooms (3<sup>rd</sup> floor, pre-k, 2018- 2024).

Currently, exploration of the building for an emergency gathering space is underway with the NB Planning Commission and the NB Village Trustees, assisted by the Bennington County Regional Council.

VSNB operates on a graded school platform, follows Vermont state standards and, therefore, tests students under the Vermont educational quality standards annually. The results of these tests show that our students perform above state and local averages and that they are successful at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

The VSNB teaching staff is certified, some have years of experience with students from North Bennington Graded School days, all provide exceptional learning experiences for their students. They cooperate with the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union student services and early childhood education to provide services with students with Special needs and to early learners. The school's certification is in all categories of special education, and the pre-K staff is experienced with and trained for early learners. VSNB's website with annual report and audit, staff bios, activities, and calendar are accessible at this address: [www.vsnb.org](http://www.vsnb.org).

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 700.

Located nearby in Bennington are the Community College of Vermont and Vermont Technical College. Other prominent colleges, including Williams College and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, are within an hours' drive of the Village.

### **11.8 Child Care**

The availability of safe and affordable child care services is important to local residents and to the area's economy. The State of Vermont has initiated a program of subsidies for the enriched early education of 3- and 4-year-olds which are provided through licensed centers that are approved by state regulators. Parents receive subsidies for 10 hours/week instruction. A list of approved providers is available on the SVSU website <https://earlyed.svsu.org/>, use the "Family" tab to access applications and a list of partners who provide services within the program.

The VSNB operates an early education program under which families may receive the subsidies that the program provides. Other licensed providers are listed on the SVSU early education/families tab and information about them can be found by connecting to the Early Education office located at Molly Stark School in Bennington or find additional information on these facilities as well as information on services for families, providers, employers, and people interested in opening a new facility may be found through the Child Development Division of the Vermont Agency of Human Services and the Bennington County Child Care Association.

A new service center for infants and toddlers was recently opened by the Myers-Prouty organization at the corner of River Road and RTE 67A (aka Water Street) in North Bennington.

### **11.9 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 and fiber optic 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.

### 11.10 **Library**



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.

The John G. McCullough Free Library is located in the two-story brick building at 2 Main Street, on the corner of Main and West streets, in the center of the Village. The Library opened to the public in 1921, a gift to the community by Eliza Hall Park McCullough, in memory of her husband, John G. McCullough, a former governor of Vermont and businessman.

The Library's mission is "[to be] ...an essential community center: a comfortable and welcoming place where people of all ages can satisfy their curiosity, stimulate their imaginations, become better informed, and connect to the online world. Our library cultivates a stable, vital and dynamic community by facilitating lifelong learning and literacy at all levels."

Library membership is free, and all are welcome to visit and take advantage of all the Library offers. Caregivers are encouraged to activate memberships for the young people in their care. The Library is open Tuesdays from 10:00 AM, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 10:00 AM- 6:00 PM, and Saturdays from 10:00 AM- 2:00 PM. For the most up-to-date information about the Library, its strategic plan, collections,

services, and, please visit its website: <https://www.mcculloughlibrary.org> The Library's monthly e-newsletter is a great way to keep up with new developments, resources, and services.

The Library offers a wide variety of print materials for all ages and interests, interlibrary loan, reference, and tech help services, museum passes, and digital resources, including online databases, ebooks, digital audiobooks, digital magazines, and video streaming. The Library's online catalog can be found here: <https://mccullough.aspendiscovery.org>

The Library offers free high-speed WiFi, and the signal is strong enough to extend beyond the building, so visitors have 24/7 Internet access from the picnic table and benches on the lawn. Public access computer terminals and Chromebooks are also available when the library is open. The community herb and pollinator gardens surrounding the Library are maintained by a local chapter of the UVM Extension Master Gardeners. The Laura Nowak Memorial Meeting Room is available for individuals and groups, and can be reserved in advance. This room is located on the library's second floor and seats up to six people. This room also boasts a small art gallery.

The Library hosts free community events for neighbors of all ages, including concerts, lectures, craft activities, author visits, writing workshops, often through partnerships with other area organizations. Our popular Summer Reading Program for young people, a series of events and reading incentives, supports students' retention of reading and social skills when school is not in session. Volunteer and library advocacy opportunities are available through Friends of the McCullough Library. In recent years, the Library has seen a dramatic increase in the number of visitors it hosts, use of the physical and digital collections, and event attendance. To help meet the community's needs, the Library has increased its hours of operation, and staffing.

Recognizing the need to improve access to materials and services for all, the Library building underwent an intense round of accessibility and safety improvements and repairs in 2022, including the installation of a complete HVAC system, which improved air quality and reduced the library's reliance on fossil fuels, the installation of accessible restrooms on both floors, a water fountain, a hardwired fire alarm system, critical repairs to the library's iconic portico along Main Street, the construction of an accessible door at the library's rear entry, and the renovation of a large closet on the library's second floor to create the Laura Nowak Memorial Meeting Room. Through a grant from the Association of Rural and Small Libraries and donations, chairs on the library's first floor were also replaced.

These building improvements were the first phase of a more comprehensive accessibility plan. The second phase will consist of a two-story addition to the building's West Street exposure. This addition will contain an elevator to the library's second floor, an enclosed, fire safe staircase to replace the current fire escape, and an improved,

accessible rear entry. It is hoped that this addition will also enable the Library to construct a space for area teens to enjoy. Library staff are pursuing Federal and State funds to complete this project.

Through a generous donation from the family of former Children's Librarian Bonnie Dundas and with input from young people and caregivers, the Youth Room on the library's second floor will be refurnished and critical repairs will be addressed. Similarly, in adult services, the collection is being paired down to fit accessible shelving purchased through a grant from the American Library Association.

As the community's relationship with media formats such as CDs and DVDs and desktop computers changes, the building will likely be able to repurpose areas housing these collections into a comfortable and welcoming reading room and new book display area. These changes are anticipated to occur within the next three years.

The McCullough Library is also participating in the American Library Association's Sustainable Libraries Certification Program, a tested, structured path forward to increase your library's commitment to environmental stewardship, economic feasibility, and social equity. This certification should be completed by the end of 2026.

#### **11.11 Solid Waste**

The Village supports Bennington's solid waste management efforts through its contribution to the Town's general fund. 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.

#### **11.12 Recreational Facilities**

North Bennington residents enjoy a variety of recreational opportunities within the Village. Lake Paran Reservoir was described in Chapter 3, and the importance of this local water body to residents cannot be overstated. The reservoir 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 reservoir. 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 in the area provides further recreational opportunities. The infestation of Eurasian water milfoil in Lake Paran Reservoir 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. Norshaft Park also provides a skate park, playground, and basketball court. A small playground also is located at the North Bennington Village School. Historically, there has been no public park in the southern part of the Village, but the land along the Walloomsac on River Road has been 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.



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



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 with seasonal programs highlighted. All interested organizations – the Village, Paran Recreations, the Fund for North Bennington, Lions Park, Vermont Arts Exchange, schools, and bicycle/pedestrian advocates should participate in the preparation of the plan.

### **11.13 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.

The Vermont Arts Exchange (VAE), located in the former McGovern Masonry building on Main Street, provides 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 coordinated popular music and performance series, held in downtown Bennington. Another 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.

Other important venues for music and other arts events include Lake Paran Reservoir (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, the Park-McCullough House, which holds concerts, readings, community theater events, and even hosts a summer croquet league, and the Left Bank, an historic bank building that hosts local art and music

events. 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.

Village residents are currently participating in the development of a regional Cultural Plan for Bennington County. The plan aims to better coordinate and support the 'creative economy' that attracts many visitors and residents to this region of Vermont. Due to the concentration of arts-based activities and cultural assets in the Village, several residents serve on the project's steering committee.

Consideration should be given to creating a searchable data base of local artists (writers, dancers, visual artists, musicians, actors, etc.) that would both generate more interactions among artists, while also celebrating and making known the wealth of local talent residing here in our Village.

#### **11.14 Cemetery**

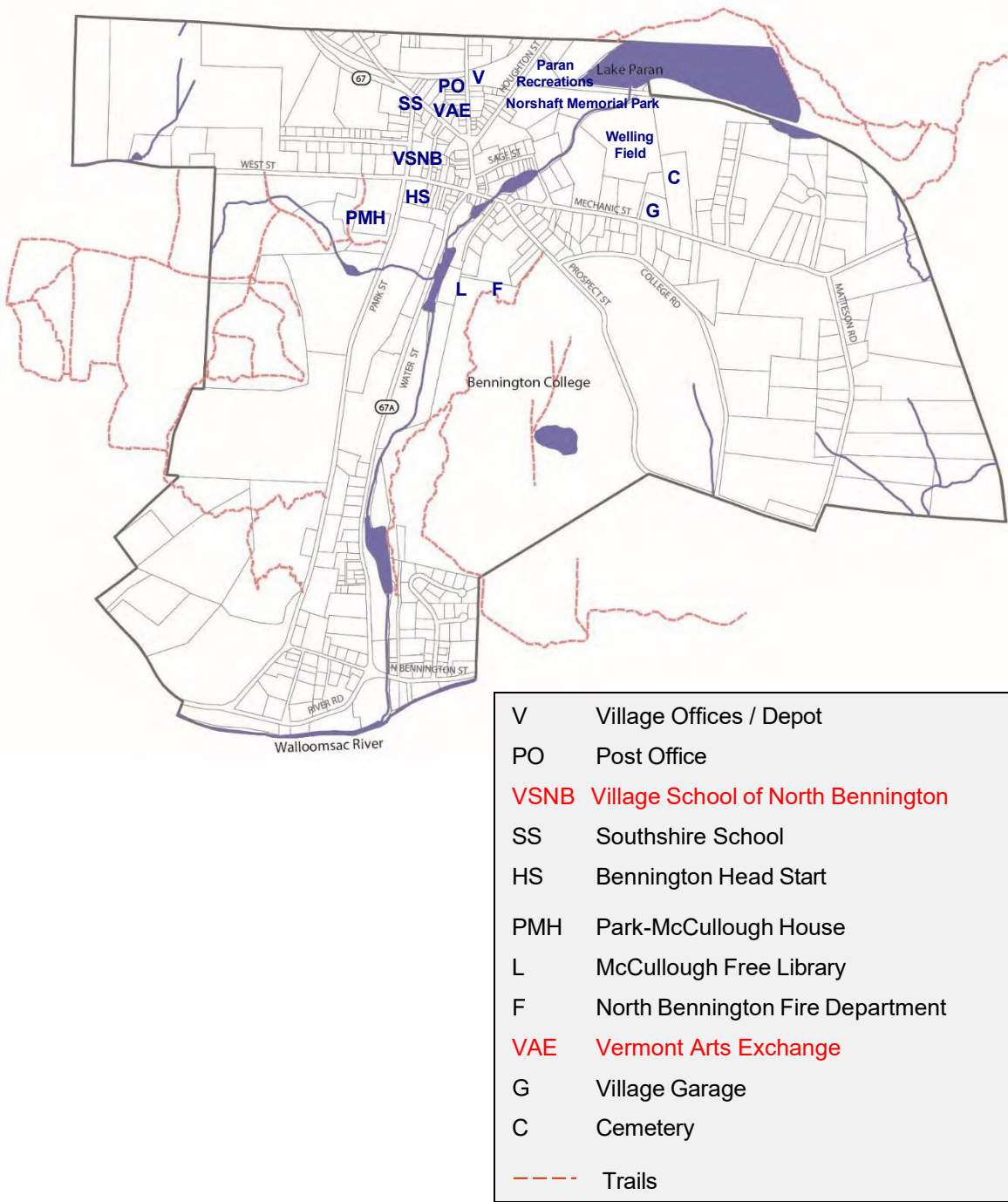
The North Bennington Cemetery Association maintains the Grandview Cemetery, and the Village has supported its efforts to complete recent projects including upgraded roads, removal of brush, and a new enclosure for the rules and regulations sign. The Catholic Church located in North Bennington owns and maintains a private Catholic cemetery on Mechanic Street.

#### **11.15 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.
4. High quality education must be available for residents at local elementary schools and at the middle school, high school, and career development center in Bennington. Continued operation of the Village School of North Bennington is extremely important to the community.
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. An aqua-harvester for weed control in Lake Paran Reservoir has been acquired. 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.

Map 11.2 - North Bennington Community Facilities





## **Chapter 12: Consistency with State Planning Goals**

### **12.1 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 (12.2) will detail this Plan's consistency with those goals and Section 12.3 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.

### **12.2 Consistency with State Goals**

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

- 12.2.1 To establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework;
- 12.2.2 To encourage citizen participation;
- 12.2.3 To consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development;
- 12.2.4 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.

This document, as a whole, is in satisfaction of the 24 VSA 117 municipal plan goals. What follows is the text of Section 4302 and in brackets a brief highlight of how the Planning Commission's process and resulting document have addressed the aims of the Statute. The fullest response to State planning goals is the text of the previous chapters.

(b) It is also the intent of the Legislature that municipalities, regional planning commissions, and State agencies shall engage in a continuing planning process that will further the following goals: [The Planning Commission has met consistently eleven times per year since 2021, and will continue to meet after presenting both the revised Land Use and Development Regulations and Village Plan to the Village Trustees early in 2025.]

(1) To establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework to guide decisions by municipalities, regional planning commissions, and State agencies. [Guided by the goals enumerated by Statute and with the input of the Bennington County Regional Planning Commission, a comprehensive review of planning issues of the Village has been undertaken.]

(2) To encourage citizen participation at all levels of the planning process, and to assure that decisions shall be made at the most local level possible commensurate with their impact. [Scrupulous attention has been given to meeting the requirements of the Open Meeting Law. This has meant that all meetings have been open to the public and have been warned in multiple physical locations in the Village, and on the Village website, and the attendance by the public has been greeted by the Commission with deference to agenda modification to permit discussion of issues raised by public attendees to the meetings. In two public special meetings by the Trustees will discuss these documents, reviewing all substantive changes.]

(3) To consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development for the region and the State, as well as the community in which it takes place.

(4) To encourage and assist municipalities to work creatively together to develop and implement plans. [Members of the Trustees meet regularly with their counterparts in the adjacent municipalities. The Planning Commission members are regularly meeting with adjacent municipalities, especially in developing a common strategy for emergency planning. Bylaw text has been exchanged with other municipalities as revisions have been developed.]

(c) In addition, this chapter shall be used to further the following specific goals:

(1) To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside. [In this regard, we have now to deal with the consequences of Act 47. Prior to that piece of legislation, the Village had carefully considered transects of diminishing density of development radiating out from the Village Center. That has been overthrown by the Act due to the prevalence of water and sewer infrastructure throughout much of the Village. Nevertheless, our prior organization still

**prevails for non-residential development.]**

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in downtown centers, village centers, planned growth areas, and village areas as described in section 4348a of this title, and strip development along highways should be avoided. These areas should be planned so as to accommodate a substantial majority of housing needed to reach the housing targets developed for each region pursuant to subdivision 4348a(a)(9) of this title. [While a worthy goal that we will wish to promote, our Village is two square miles in area that includes a college campus and a significant portion of conserved land which together removes from development a sizeable portion of the total. In the past few years virtually all the old industrial buildings have been renovated for dwelling units. Land in the Village Center is unavailable. The upper levels of retail establishments along the main street are occupied. It is difficult to see the opportunity to develop housing without available parcels. If artificial housing targets are to be satisfied, it will be on land outside the State-designated Village Center where a handful of parcels might be or become available.]

Convincing owners to sell open land that may have been purchased to create privacy or as long-term investments, does not typically fall under the purview of a Planning Commission. Since we have removed zoning barriers with the proposed Land Use and Development Regulations, the most that we may be able to do should land become available is promote a dense type of development that reinforces the character of our community. To that end, the Planning Commission added a new type of planned unit development that has been defined by our Land Use and Development Regulations to support our community's goals. Specifically, it promotes homes that are sized for our workforce population. This missing middle approach is called a **Cottage Court Planned Unit Development**. It is incentivized by shorter review times, easily met specific criteria, and should the Trustees elect them, property tax incentives. (See the Regulations for further details. In addition to this regulatory approach, **developer outreach programs** are intended to follow the release of this Village Plan.]

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally and regionally designated growth areas, employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both. [Chapter five of this plan outlines the assessment and recommendations for economic development. Important in that is the understanding that the single largest impediment to economic growth is the lack of workforce (aka missing middle) housing. See the discussion immediately above.]

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the planned growth patterns of the area. [Realistically, in a Village of 1,700 people (a number inflated by college students) and 400 plus property tax paying parcels, a Village with a volunteer fire department and an efficient two-man highway department, funds for public investments for construction and infrastructure expansion are typically limited to State grants. Those grants have supported infrastructure maintenance. Should State funding become available for public investments, we will continue to enter the competition for those funds.]

(D) Development should be undertaken in accordance with smart growth principles as defined in subdivision 2791(13) of this title. [Per the discussion immediately above, our Village relies on State grants to support infrastructure development. Modest as it may seem, we continue to use funds that are not earmarked for maintenance for sidewalk extension projects and road intersections improvements. Smart growth principles are supported by such projects.]

(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 full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters. [The Plan discusses the importance of the Village School of North Bennington 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. 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 several 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 affect roadway and bridge improvements when funding allows. Culvert and repaving project have been accomplished. Intersection improvements are being planned by our consultant civil engineers. 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, specifically adjacent to the Village School, and road conditions are being improved for bicycles whenever possible.]

(A) Highways, air, rail, and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced, and integrated. [North Bennington is served by the local public transit provider and opportunities for improving routes and services are being considered. North Bennington is not served by passenger rail nor does it have a local commercial airport.]

(5) To identify, protect, and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont

landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands, and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways, and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites, and archaeologically sensitive areas.

[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, forests, and other land resources.

- (A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral, and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).
- (B) Vermont's water quality should be maintained and improved according to the policies and actions developed in the basin plans established by the Secretary of Natural Resources under 10 V.S.A. § 1253.
- (C) Vermont's forestlands should be managed so as to maintain and improve forest blocks and habitat connectors.

[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 Reservoir, 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 wildlife habitat, and outlying areas are included in low-density rural and conservation districts.

We await the State's specific forest block and habitat connector rules.]

(7) To make efficient use of energy, provide for the development of renewable energy resources, and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

- (A) General strategies for achieving these goals include increasing the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings; identifying areas suitable for renewable energy generation; encouraging the use and development of renewable or lower emission energy sources for electricity, heat, and transportation; and reducing transportation energy demand and single occupancy vehicle use.



(B) Specific strategies and recommendations for achieving these goals are identified in the State energy plans prepared under 30 V.S.A. §§ 202 and 202b.

[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 being explored, including a solar collection array on municipal-owned property. The Plan notes that the Town of Bennington has developed an Act 174-compliant enhanced energy chapter, and the Village will cooperate with the Town and the BCRC in implementing the recommended efficiency and renewable energy strategies it identifies.]

(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 Reservoir is a unique recreational resource located partially in North Bennington; recreational opportunities at the Reservoir 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. A major project at Welling Field is ongoing. At its conclusion, the potential utilization of the Field will be doubled.]

(A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities. [See above.]

(B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

(9) To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

(A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural and forestlands should be encouraged and should include maintaining low overall density.

(B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.

(C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.

(D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.

(E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

[A substantial area within the Village's two square miles is conserved land or college campus, each area offering many benefits but limiting the opportunity for agricultural and forest industries. In keeping with State statute, agricultural and silvicultural industries are permitted in all zoning districts. Agronomy is evident in numerous home gardens, of course, but also formally with a large community garden within walking distance of the Village Center.]

- (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. [As with agricultural and silvicultural industries, there is limited potential for a quarrying or mining industry within the bounds of the Village, although it would be addressed as a conditional use should such a use be proposed.]
- (11) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.
- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income, and consistent with housing targets provided for in subdivision 4348a(a)(9) of this title. [A chapter of this report is focused on and in support of this goal.]
  - (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities. [See above.]
  - (C) Sites for multifamily and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family dwellings. [The Land Use and Development Regulations have no regulations imposing greater requirements than those for single-household dwellings upon either multifamily or manufactured homes.]
  - (D) Accessory dwelling units within or attached to single-family residences that provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives, elders, or persons who have a disability should be allowed. [Per the Land Use and Development Regulations, Accessory Dwelling Units are permitted throughout the Village.]
- (12) To plan for, finance, and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.
- (A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply, and sewage and solid waste disposal.
  - (B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.  
[These public services are provided in part by the Town of Bennington and in part by the Village, but all are available.]
- (13) To ensure the availability of safe and affordable childcare and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development. [The Village with its population of 1,716 has a Head Start facility, two licensed childcare centers, and two registered homes.]
- [Subdivision (c)(14) effective until January 1, 2028; see also subdivision (c)(14) effective January 1, 2028 set out below.]
- (14) To encourage flood resilient communities.
- (A) New development in identified flood hazard and river corridor protection areas should be avoided. If new development is to be built in such areas, it should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion. [Our Land Use and Development Regulations explicitly support this goal.]

(B) The protection and restoration of floodplains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be encouraged. [As you will note in this report's maps, the upland area for our river, Paran Creek, is within a different municipality, and similarly, the floodplains are also in a downstream municipality.]

(C) Flood emergency preparedness and response planning should be encouraged. [The Village is actively working with the State's Dam Safety Program staff and VTrans to update their Emergency Action Plan for the Lake Paran Reservoir Dam. A tabletop emergency planning exercise focused upon an intense precipitation event is being discussed with VEM within this year, 2025. The Village Trustees are in the process of negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding with the Village School to create a weather event shelter in the school's gymnasium.]

[Subdivision (c)(14) effective January 1, 2028; see also subdivision (c)(14) effective until January 1, 2028 set out above.]

(14) To encourage flood resilient communities.

(A) New development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas should be avoided. If new development is to be built in such areas, it should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion and should meet or exceed the statewide minimum flood hazard area standards established by rule by the Agency of Natural Resources. [Our Land Use and Development Regulations explicitly support this goal.]

(B) The protection and restoration of floodplains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be encouraged. [As you will note in this report's maps, the upland area for our river, Paran Creek, is within a different municipality, and similarly, the floodplains are also in a downstream municipality.]

(C) Flood emergency preparedness and response planning should be encouraged. [The Village is actively working with the State's Dam Safety Program staff and VTrans to update their Emergency Action Plan for the Lake Paran Reservoir Dam. A tabletop emergency planning exercise focused upon an intense precipitation event is being discussed with VEM within this year, 2025.

The Village Trustees are in the process of negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding with the Village School to create an emergency gathering space and weather-event shelter in the school's gymnasium.]

(15) To equitably distribute environmental benefits and burdens as described in 3 V.S.A. chapter 72.

(d) All plans and regulations prepared under the authority of this chapter shall be based upon surveys of existing conditions and probable future trends, and shall be made in the light of present and future growth and requirements, and with reasonable consideration, for the landowner, to topography, to needs and trends of the municipality, the region and the State, to the character of each area and to its peculiar suitability for particular uses in relationship to surrounding areas, and with a view to conserving the value of buildings. [As authors of this

report, we trust that you will find it a document as comprehensive as the State requires and as our community desires for a path to the future.]

### **12.3 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.

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 Village School live in Shaftsbury (within the North Bennington School District One), and these students are critical to the continued viability of the Village School. Pathways from North Bennington, around Lake Paran in Shaftsbury and connected to the village area of South Shaftsbury exist in part. Cooperation in these and other areas will continue to be important to both communities.

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