

Chapter 11: REGIONAL PLANNING

A. Relationship to Municipal Plans

This ~~Plan~~-plan focuses primarily on development and policy within Pomfret's boundaries; however, it is important to recognize that how a community grows and changes can be directly impacted by development that takes place outside of the community.

Pomfret shares boundaries with Sharon, Royalton, Barnard, Bridgewater, Woodstock, and Hartford. Without exception, the goals expressed in the town plans of Pomfret's neighbors address the need to maintain the existing pattern of compact villages and hamlets surrounded by rural countryside while allowing for appropriate growth and development in ways that protect natural resources.

As Pomfret's Plan has done, those of some of Pomfret's neighbors specifically include objectives and policies that encourage diversified farming activity. This presents an opportunity for a regional approach to preserve prime agricultural and forest land and to diminish and control the effects of development on open space.

There are regional variations in the approach to development. Pomfret's primary concern is to discourage development on land with agricultural and highly productive forestry potential, and to limit development in open space. Open space should remain available for agriculture, preserve natural resources, and maintain the rural character and scenic beauty of the Town.

Pomfret shares ~~the majority of~~most of its western border with Barnard. Barnard's Town Plan was adopted in March 2010. The purpose of the Barnard Town Plan is to maintain and to enhance the existing pattern of settlement. The Town wishes to continue moderate development that favors expansion in the villages and discourages inappropriately sited development in open areas. Barnard has adopted Zoning Regulations.

Woodstock is located along the majority of Pomfret's southern border and is in the process of adopting a new 2014 Master Plan. The plan emphasizes encouraging a rational and convenient pattern of development by balancing natural resources and agricultural land protection with residential, recreational, commercial, and light industrial uses. It also encourages affordable housing, public safety, economic growth, and protection of the historic settlement pattern. Both the town of Woodstock and Woodstock Village have Zoning Regulation.

Sharon is along the majority of Pomfret's northern border and adopted a Town Plan in February 2010 that sets out several major land use goals including preservation of the community's history, remaining adaptable to vital changes, and allowing access to the natural environment while protecting it from degradation. The plan defines six separate geographical areas in town, defines a purpose and several policies in each to help determine compatible types of development, intensity of use, and the conservation of natural resources. The Town has flood hazard area bylaws and subdivision regulations.

Bridgewater's Town Plan was adopted in September 2013. There is a limited amount of land area between Bridgewater and Pomfret and that portion of land in Bridgewater where the town

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1 borders meet, is designated as rural low density on their future land use map. Although the town
2 has no zoning regulations, land use in town is guided by the plan's goal to maintain established
3 compact village and hamlet areas with medium density growth areas adjacent to them.
4 Commercial and light industrial development is planned for existing Village and hamlet areas
5 only with no planned pattern of "strip development" along roadsides outside these Village and
6 hamlet areas. Rural, low-density development is located outside conservation areas or critical
7 areas, while avoiding existing agricultural lands.

8
9 The Royalton Town Plan was adopted in March 2010. Like Bridgewater, there is a limited
10 amount of land area between Royalton and Pomfret and that portion of land in Royalton where
11 the town borders meet, is designated as conserved and agricultural/residential lands. Royalton
12 has Flood Hazard Area Regulation, but no zoning regulations. The Plan has a land use goal of
13 maintaining its rural village character, preserving scenic beauty, natural resources and the
14 cultural assets of the Town, while allowing for an acceptable rate of growth.

15
16 Pomfret shares its full eastern border with Hartford. Hartford, in many respects, is the most
17 developed town in the region and hosts the largest population. Hartford's land use
18 recommendations in its adopted May 2012 Master Plan encourage appropriate use of the town's
19 manmade and natural resources. Given the steady growth the town has experienced, the plan
20 presents the community's vision to increase density in already developed areas with
21 infrastructure, manage density of future development, protect scenic areas, open space and
22 wildlife corridors, and preserve the historic settlement pattern of compact villages surrounded by
23 rural countryside, while supporting agriculture, forestry and recreation. Hartford has Flood
24 Regulations, Subdivision Regulations and Zoning Ordinances.

25
26 None of these variations is so drastic that mutual concern for protection of this regional rural and
27 residential environment is threatened.

28 **B. Relationship to the Regional Plan**

29
30 Regional consideration of other topics in addition to land use would serve common interests.
31 These include regional solutions to transportation plans covering not only road networks, but
32 also public transportation; fire and police protection; economic development; recreational paths
33 and trails and special wildlife habitats that cross town lines; and prevention of contamination of
34 the water table that recognizes no surface boundaries.

35
36 Study in the area of transportation is proceeding under the direction of the Two Rivers-
37 Ottauquechee Regional Commission. The Vermont Agency of Transportation has made major
38 changes in how Vermont's future transportation planning will be done. This effectively places
39 much of the responsibility for transportation planning and decision-making at the regional level.
40 Current transportation activities for the Town of Pomfret include:

- 41
42 ~~• A safety improvement study for the Teago intersection (which includes recommended~~
43 ~~sign and striping improvement from VTTrans)~~
- 44 ~~• An updated culvert inventory completed in fall 2013 which identified out of 668 culverts,~~
45 ~~56 were in poor/bad shape (all others were fair or better)~~

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- 1 ~~• Assisting the Town on the VTrans Structures grant for replacement of a town bridge; and,~~
2 ~~• Providing the Town with a new Highway Timesheet Program to help track activity hours,~~
3 ~~materials and equipment time.~~

4
5 Three following examples illustrate the benefits of regional cooperation to Pomfret.

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7 The Upper Valley Mutual Aid Association, a mutual aid system for fire protection, has existed in
8 this area for many years, rendering considerable benefits to its member communities. These
9 benefits include coordination of skilled labor and access to millions of dollars of equipment for
10 emergency services. Under this umbrella organization fire departments train together regularly
11 and assist at fire sites when necessary.

12
13 -The Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste Management District provides facilities for the recycling
14 and disposal of many types of solid waste for ten towns in the Ottauquechee, White, and
15 Connecticut River valleys. This cooperative effort offers efficiency of planning, extensive
16 marketing of recyclables, management of household hazardous waste, waste reduction and
17 disposal services for farms and small businesses, and concentrated use of disposal sites that
18 greatly reduces the possibility of widespread contamination of the environment. Towns in the
19 District financed the construction of a bridge across Interstate 91 to provide access to GUV's
20 proposed landfill site in North Hartland. GUV's statutory responsibility is to provide a long-term
21 solution for the disposal of its member communities' municipal solid waste. This landfill has
22 been designed to provide at least 50 years of disposal capacity. No town alone could manage and
23 fund such services.

24
25 The District Board is facing several major issues including:

- 26 • Significant reductions in the amount of solid waste being generated in the District and
27 state-wide.
28 • Major changes in Vermont recycling regulations requiring additional services.
29 • The future economic viability of the landfill site with these changes.

30 Pomfret has four representatives on the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) #12. This
31 group of 27 towns is responsible for planning and implementing a regional program for coping
32 with emergencies that involve hazardous material and natural disasters. In conjunction with this
33 effort a comprehensive emergency response plan has been developed for Pomfret.

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35 These three entities and the TRORC have successfully demonstrated the value of addressing
36 issues of vital interest to us all on a regional basis. Extending the range of these common
37 concerns and seeking regional solutions to them is the most sensible direction in which to
38 proceed.

39 **C. Taxation on the Preservation of Open Space**

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41 There appears to be common concern about the effect of increasing property taxes on the
42 preservation of open space—a higher property tax diminishes the incentive for property owners
43 to hold land as open space and instead drives property owners to shift the land to more profitable

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1 uses, typically development projects. But, property owners have both public and private means
2 available to reduce their respective tax burdens and to assist the town in preserving its rural
3 character.

4
5 **Current Use Program.** Vermont’s so-called “Current Use” Program (technically called the
6 Vermont Use Value Appraisal Program) provides property owners with the ability to reduce their
7 tax burden, so long as the land remains enrolled in a sanctioned use category, e.g., agricultural or
8 timber use. The Program is of vital importance to property owners in Pomfret—69.3% of
9 Pomfret’s land area is included in the Program. As of Tax Year 2016, there are 160 parcels
10 totaling 16,913 acres enrolled in the Program (up from 130 parcels totaling 15,157 acres in
11 2005). As of Tax Year 2013, Pomfret has the third highest aggregate tax savings from the
12 Program, totaling \$1,338,967 (behind Stowe and Woodstock, respectively). However, the
13 Program is under constant threat of change and navigating the choices of reducing the property
14 tax burden is difficult for the average property owner.

15
16 **Transfer of Development Rights.** Property owners may enter into private agreements
17 (generally, conservation easements or leases) to sell or donate development rights to land trusts
18 or other organizations involved in preservation of open space. Sale or donation of development
19 rights typically result in state and federal tax deductions. As of 2016, a total of 5,835 acres of
20 land are conserved of which 1,817 acres are public and 4,123 acres are private land. Because of
21 their perpetual nature, imposing a conservation easement has been a traditional means to
22 preserve land and consequently the rural character of Pomfret. But, an overreliance on the use of
23 conservation easements may have detrimental effects on future land use decisions.

24
25 Residents of Pomfret should take the opportunity to learn from each other to benefit from joint
26 discussions about tax policy and how best to leverage existing and alternative land use planning
27 tools to accomplish the twin goals of preserving Pomfret’s rural character while at the same time
28 minimizing tax burden. Any statewide action involving property taxes will have a serious impact
29 on all of us.

30 D. Goals, Policies and Recommendations

31 Long-Range Goal

- 32
33 1. Work with neighboring towns to address problems related to common goals.

34 ~~Objectives~~ Policies

- 35
36 1. ~~Exchange with neighboring towns~~ The exchange of helpful and mutually beneficial
37 planning information that will have an impact on development trends and conservation
38 efforts is encouraged.
39
40 2. Active participation ~~Continue to participate actively~~ in TRORC to assure that Pomfret’s
41 goals, objectives, and policies are considered in regional plans is encouraged.

42 Recommended Actions

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- 1 —It is in Pomfret’s best interest to become and remain involved in any future transportation
- 2 planning activities. The Selectboard should appoint a representative to serve on the
- 3 Transportation Advisory Committee, as well as other transportation organizations.
- 4 1.
- 5
- 6 —Review the town plans of neighboring towns as they are readopted or rewritten to
- 7 determine their potential impact on Pomfret’s future. (Planning Commission)
- 8 2.
- 9
- 10
- 11 —Continue to participate in studies that look at the need for public transportation in rural
- 12 areas of the region through TRORC. (Pomfret’s representatives to TRORC and the
- 13 Transportation Advisory Committee)
- 14 3.
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- 16 —
- 17 4. Continue to meet with neighboring towns. (Planning Commission)

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