

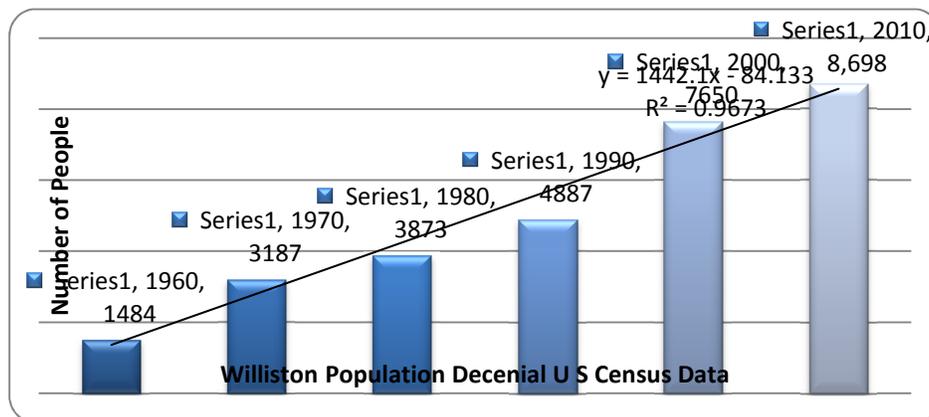
CHAPTER 2 – 50 YEARS OF PLANNING: WILLISTON’S EVOLVING VISION

Your Town continues to grow at an ever-increasing rate. Although the growth is primarily in residential dwellings, there have been several small businesses started in Williston. There is a great amount of industrial and commercial potential here and it is urged that anyone who has an occasion to boost Williston for such purposes accept the opportunity to do so.

1964 Annual Report, Town of Williston

Williston adopted its first zoning bylaw in 1963, when the town’s had a population of less than 1,500 people. The first significant residential subdivisions were platted the following year, prompting the adoption of subdivision regulations in 1965. Growth slowed in the early 1970’s, but controversy erupted in 1977 when a shopping mall was proposed on the present site of Maple Tree Place. Fifteen years later, a proposal to open a Wal-Mart in Williston led to Vermont (the whole state!) being declared “endangered” by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. By the year 2000, the town’s population had grown more than four times since 1960, and Williston was absorbing nearly one-fifth of Chittenden County’s growth.

Figure 2A: Population of Williston, 1960-2010



The most recent data from the U.S. Census indicates that Williston’s population continues to grow. As shown in Table 2.A, between 2000 and 2010, the town’s population increased by more than 1,000 people. This was significantly less than the pace of growth observed during the 1980s and 1990s, however population growth in Williston outpaces the growth rates of Vermont as a whole and Chittenden County, which is the fastest growing county in Vermont between 2000 and 2010.

Table 2.A – Population and Population Growth of Williston Since 1960

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	1990-2010
Williston	1,484	3,187	3,873	4,887	7,650	8,698	
10 year rate of change		115%	22%	26%	57%	13.7%	72%
Chittenden County	74,425	99,121	115,534	131,761	146,571	156,545	
10 year rate of change		33%	17%	14%	11%	6.8%	16%
Vermont	389,811	444,732	511,456	562,758	608,827	625,741	
10 year rate of change		14%	15%	10%	8%	2.8%	10%

Source: Bureau of the Census.

Williston's emergence as a center of employment has been even more dramatic than the growth of its population. Table 2.B shows the change in covered employment since 1984. These data do not include business proprietors or the self-employed, but are the only employment data available at the town level.

Table 2.B – Covered Employment in Williston Since 1984

	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	1984-2009
Williston	1,607	4,389	5,858	9,469	10,650	10,303	541%
<i>annual rate of change</i>		34.6	6.7%	12.3%	3.1%	-3.3%	
<i>share of county</i>	2.6%	5.6%	7.3%	10.4%	11.2%	11.2%	
Chittenden County	61,460	78,119	79,960	91,165	94,881	92,078	50%
<i>annual rate of change</i>		5.4%	0.5%	2.8%	1.0%	-3.0%	
Vermont	208,386	255,931	259,373	288,202	298,491	292,370	40%
<i>annual rate of change</i>		4.6%	0.3%	2.2%	0.9%	-2.1%	

Source: Vermont Department of Labor

And More to Come

Other indicators could be offered (see for example Table 3.A), but Tables 2.A and 2.B effectively document Williston's growth. The potential for continuing change is explored in a build-out analysis conducted for the town by the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission in 2005. That study is presented as Appendix B, but its results can be easily summarized. Given the current regulations and accounting for both the natural constraints on development and conserved lands:

- the number of housing units in Williston could double, growing from around 3,200 to almost 7,000, and
- the amount of commercial and industrial space could expand by roughly 25%, resulting in another 1.8 million square feet of development.

The appendix explains the assumptions - which are tailored to Williston's actual experience - on which these figures are based. It also explains that build-out analysis has no time dimension. It does not say whether, or when, the potential for growth will be realized. Build-out analysis tells us what could happen - as market demand and infrastructure capacity allow - and challenges us to prepare for the future.

The data contained in Tables 2.A and 2.B point out two important observations about the growth of the Town of Williston. First, the town has experienced prolonged periods of growth in population and employment extending across several decades. The influx of new homes and residents and the growth of the town's economy have transformed the town's size and economic make up. Secondly, the more recent pace of growth has moderated considerably to a pace that might be described as more incremental and manageable. Predicting future trends against the backdrop of these two observations poses a challenge. Is the more recent, short range trend a picture of what lies ahead, or is the town experiencing a brief pause before another surge of renewed growth pressure?

Purpose of This Plan

This plan is the latest edition of the town's response to past and potential change. It informs us about growth, land use change, and the town's ability to accommodate development, but it is a statement of policy, not an encyclopedia. Most factual details will be found in other documents, many of which are referred in the plan.

The purpose of this plan is to guide land use and public investment decisions, ensuring that each action contributes to the town's vision of a desirable future. The plan will be consulted in every major development review and in the creation of the capital budget. Any change in the town's bylaws must be consistent with the direction set here (24 V.S.A. § 4401 and 4411 require this), as must decisions about the use of Williston's Environmental Reserve Fund and the allocation of the town's limited sewage treatment plant capacity. This plan also calls for a number of studies that will inform those who prepare the next plan.

Organization of This Plan

There are three layers of guidance for decision-makers in this plan, ranging from the general to the specific.

- ***Vision***
The overall vision statement that appears in this chapter sets the stage for the more specific direction that follows.
- ***Broad Objectives***
Each chapter contains objectives, which are broad statements about how the town will address a particular issue or need.
- ***Policies***
Most objectives are accompanied by policies, which are more specific statements of how the town will achieve that objective.

Chapter 13 – Implementation provides a summary, including a suggested timeframe and, where known, an estimated cost for the implementation of each objective and policy.

Williston's Vision for the Future

Williston will strive to balance responsible, livable suburban growth with rural character and conservation. To do this, the town will ...

- concentrate and limit high intensity development to areas within the town's designated Growth Center in and around Taft Corners;
- permit the flexibility and intensity of use necessary to foster creation of a design-conscious, mixed use, pedestrian-friendly commercial center around Taft Corners;
- encourage and support the use of mass transit and non-motorized modes of transportation through mixed use development policies and transportation facilities planning;
- sustain rural landscapes by requiring an open space pattern for subdivisions, conserving lands identified in Chapter 12 - Open Space and Working Landscapes through acquisitions or easements; and finding ways to help the owners of working lands continue their stewardship;

- use design review and public investment to maintain the character of its historic village center;
- manage the timing of and pace of new development to ensure that necessary public facilities and services are available when development occurs;
- protect residential neighborhoods from incompatible uses and offer incentives for the provision of a diverse housing stock, including homes that are affordable to working people and their families;
- attend to the details of site planning and architectural design, including outdoor lighting, signage, access, and landscaping that give development both market appeal and long-term community value;
- invest in new facilities, including utilities, roads, schools, parks, and trails, as necessary, while managing the location and pace of development to ensure that growth does not outstrip the capacity of public facilities and services, including fire protection and law enforcement;
- conserve energy in its own operations through energy efficiency, and by incentivizing and encouraging builders to meet “green” building standards;
- use regulatory and non-regulatory tools, including funding for the acquisition of development rights or land, to protect water quality, wildlife habitat, scenic views, and other natural and cultural resources; and
- engage all citizens who are interested and willing to participate in the town’s planning process.