

CHAPTER 3 - LAND USE

The rapid growth of the town's population and housing stock is clearly reflected in the landscape we drive through every day. The question is: how do we deal with that change? How do we maintain the town's vision at it was stated in Chapter 2? How do we ensure that new uses will be compatible with the old? How do we protect environmental quality and the rural landscape that remains? How do we meet the growing demand for public facilities? How do we nurture good design?

These questions are what planning is all about. The answers begin here, with land use, with how the town will guide and regulate the initial decision a landowner makes to change from one use to another. This chapter includes the following objectives.

3.1 – Taft Corners and Growth Center – Williston has emerged as a regional center of commerce, business, and employment. The town accounts for more retail sales than any other municipality in Vermont. This objective provides a basis for the town's continuing efforts to build a design-conscious, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use town center in area of Taft Corners.

3.2 – Rural Williston – As Tables 3.A and 3.B show, dramatic changes have occurred in the rural part of Williston. This objective reflects recent changes in the regulation of rural residential development.

3.3 - Industrial Lands –This objective also calls for changes in the standards applied to uses of industrial lands.

3.4 – Residential Neighborhoods – Most of Williston's residents live in the Residential Zoning District.

3.5 – Open Space – This goal reflects the importance of protecting open space, from neighborhood parks to working farms, and it is among Williston's most important goals.

3.6 – Williston Village – This objective continues the policy of maintaining the historic character of the village. It also calls for studying the expansion of the Village Zoning District.

3.7 -- Explore the Creation, Definition, or Modification of other Land Use Areas- This objective identifies several parts of town where changes to land use rules, prevailing uses of land, and other physical realities need to be addressed.

3.1 – Taft Corners and Growth Center. The Town of Williston will encourage and support a design-conscious, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use development and redevelopment pattern in the Taft Corners area. The town has worked toward this objective by successfully obtaining Growth Center Designation in 2008 and revising the *Unified Development Bylaw* in 2009. The town will continue to support this objective by encouraging the construction of planned infrastructure and examining and monitoring the effectiveness of its bylaws.

The appropriate extent of commercial development has been a subject of debate in Williston for nearly 30 years. What has emerged from the controversy is a regional commercial center that employs more than 2,200 people in retail trade and nearly 4,000 in services. As Table 3.C shows, Williston has by far the highest value of retail sales of any Vermont community. This generated more than \$2.7 million in sales tax revenue for the town in Fiscal Year 2009 (FY2009).

Table 3.C – Retail Sales in Top 10 Vermont Municipalities

Municipality	2009 Retail Sales
Williston	\$ 345.7 million
South Burlington	\$ 302.2 million
Rutland City	\$ 224.9 million
Burlington	\$ 210.3 million
Colchester	\$ 200.9 million
Bennington	\$ 124.1 million
Rutland Town	\$ 112.2 million
Essex/Essex Junction	\$ 109.3 million
Montpelier	\$ 106.7 million
Barre City	\$ 98.9 million

Source: Vermont Department of Taxes *Sales and Uses Statistics Report*,
Retail Receipts: 7/01/2009- 6/30/2009

The shopping opportunities, jobs, and tax base generated by Williston's commercial growth must be balanced against traffic congestion and the costs the town incurs in providing services to a large population of workers, commuters, and shoppers. But the policy question addressed in this plan is not whether Williston should become a regional commercial center, the policy question is how best to guide new development in the town's Growth Center.

The question is how the Taft Corners area can be encouraged to evolve into a more cohesive, more diverse, more pedestrian-friendly, and more functional commercial center. A great deal of discussion has been devoted to this topic since the Pyramid Mall was proposed (on the site where Maple Tree Place now stands) in 1977. As a result, the Taft Corners area has more sidewalks and bike paths, more landscaping, and more restrained signs than most similar commercial districts. Maple Tree Place is an important joint effort to create a different model of suburban commercial development. The approved subdivision of the Pecor-Gianarelli property (Finney Crossing) and the subdivision of the driving range property adjacent to Maple Tree Place (Cottonwood Crossing) will result in compact neighborhoods of commercial, residential, and open space uses.

Only two relatively large parcels remain to be developed in the Taft Corners area. They are zoned for mixed use, and their eventual use will be consistent with the town's goals. The challenge is how to encourage the appropriate infill (for which there is considerable potential, as shown by the build-out analysis presented in Appendix B) and redevelopment of existing commercial spaces.

The policies adopted here will make infill and redevelopment that is consistent with the town's vision possible.

3.1.1 Work with Developers to Build Grid Streets. Williston will support and encourage landowners to build the grid streets that have been planned for the Taft Corners area west of route 2A between Marshall Avenue and Williston Road. Williston should consider adding proposed grid streets to the list of approved projects in the Traffic Impact Fee Ordinance. These streets will provide the access needed for a more intense, pedestrian-friendly development pattern. They should also help relieve congestion on Route 2A and Marshall Avenue. A study of the potential benefits of the grid streets was completed in 2006.

3.1.2 Work with VTrans on Other Circulation Improvements. The long anticipated Circumferential Highway (Circ), which had been planned to link I-89 in Williston to VT-289 in Essex, has been opened up for discussion and possible reconsideration by the state. The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) has been given the task of working with Williston and other affected communities in considering possible alternatives to the build out of the Circ as proposed as recently as 2010. Construction of the grid streets will be coordinated with efforts to open a park-and-ride in the Taft Corners area and improve major intersections as called for in Objective 6.4. The town will work with the state and the CCRPC to construct these improvements in a manner that is consistent with Williston's town goals.

3.1.3 Commercial Zoning Districts. Williston currently has five districts that allow commercial uses, and these are shown on Map 3. Each of these districts serves a particular function.

- **Business Park** – The existing Business Park Zoning District consists of Blair Park, which is largely built-out, and six parcels south of Blair Park across Route 2, only one of which is vacant. This district will continue to be the town's tool to regulate the spacious, suburban commercial development pattern of Blair Park and adjoining parcels. The town will consider adjusting setback rules for parcels in the Business Park Zone so that a consistent development pattern can emerge along Route 2.
- **Gateway** – There are two of these Gateway Districts. One is located around Exit 12 of I-89, and replaced the former Interstate Commercial Zoning District. The second is located west of Rt. 2A between River Cove Road and the Winooski River and contains the mixed commercial-office-industrial area developed during the 1980s. Both of these areas look different from each other because they were developed at different times, but both are auto-oriented and have a mix of retail, office, and industrial uses that can appropriately be subject to the same regulations.

Development Agreements and Zoning. Most development in Maple Tree Place and Taft Corners Park – which comprise most of the TCZD and Mixed Use Commercial Zoning District – is subject to agreements between the landowner and the town. These agreements will continue in force (as they have done through past changes in the town's bylaws).

- **Taft Corners** – The Taft Corners Zoning District (TCZD) is the core of Williston's commercial area – the place where the town's goal of creating a pedestrian-friendly, design conscious, mixed use commercial center can best be realized. Coupled with the construction of the grid streets, this will allow diverse, smaller-scale retail, office, and residential uses to be intermingled with the large retail stores and extensive parking areas that now dominate the area.
- **Mixed Use Residential** – This district lies east of Maple Tree Place, and includes Tafts Farm, the driving range, and adjoining parcels. It is intended to permit higher density residential development mixed with limited retail and office uses. The town's vision for its commercial center can only be realized if a substantial number of people live here, within walking distance of the theater, shops, cafes, and other businesses in the TCZD. All significant development and redevelopment in this and the Mixed Use Commercial zoning district could be reviewed according to the specific plan process in Chapter 9 of the *Unified Development Bylaw*.
- **Mixed Use Commercial** – This zoning district lies between Williston's industrial and commercial areas, west of Harvest Lane. It is currently occupied by a mix of large retail stores

and industrial uses, and four vacant lots. The revised bylaws will guide most retail uses into the TCZD, leaving this area available for development that supports the functions of the adjoining retail center, including lodging with conference space and offices housing educational, financial, management, personal, and professional services. Dwellings and a limited number of shops will be allowed in mixed-use buildings. New retail buildings will be permitted only for uses that generate very little traffic per square foot, and thus do not fit into the more intensive, or active, pattern of the TCZD.

Development in each of these districts will be guided by a checklist of performance standards that addresses both basics like access and stormwater management, and the site planning and architectural design considerations that implement the district's intent. Objectives 4.2 and 4.3 build on this policy with more specific direction for commercial and mixed use design review.

3.1.4 Review and Refine Development Standards in the Zoning Districts within the Town's Growth Center. In 2009, the town approved a set of sweeping revisions to the town's zoning and subdivision regulations contained in the Williston *Unified Development Bylaw*. The development standards for the zoning districts within the town's growth center provide developers with a number of options for how they can meet the town's development standards when developing their properties. These standards reflect a desire on the part of the town to see the Taft Corners area develop into a vibrant, mixed use downtown area with a strong pedestrian orientation. The town should evaluate the effectiveness of these standards thus far based on current experience and consider refining these standards further if necessary.

3.2 Rural Williston - The Town of Williston will maintain a rural character outside the sewer service area, and protect open space resources, including productive agricultural lands, open meadows, ridgelines, riparian corridors and wetlands, view corridors, and wildlife habitat.

Preserving the rural landscape that still occupies some three-quarters of Williston is an important goal of this plan. In 2009, the town adopted the *Unified Development Bylaw*, which included a set of regulations designed to foster an open space development pattern on parcels of 10.5 acres or more.

3.2.1 Continue to Protect Rural Character and Open Space Resources by Requiring Open Space Development Patterns. Since the adoption of the September 2004 interim regulations set the standard for promoting open space in the ARZD, approximately 256 acres of open space have been protected by Williston's 75% open space requirement. An additional 358 acres of open space has been protected in all of the other zoning districts.

3.2.2 Continue to Permit Larger Open Space Developments in Highly Suitable Locations. There are numerous constraints on large-scale residential development in rural Williston. As Map 4 – Suitability for On-Site Sewage Disposal shows large areas are not well-suited for on-site sewage disposal. Rural residential development may also conflict with agricultural production on neighboring farms, scenic and wildlife values, and the limited infrastructure available in rural Williston. There are, however, a few sites with suitable soils and safe access, where development will have little or no visual impact, and will result in the permanent protection of open space resources identified in Chapter 12 - *Open Space and Working Landscapes*. The town has revised its bylaws to permit larger open space developments in these highly suitable locations.

3.2.3 Develop a Mechanism for Transferring Development Rights to help Preserve Williston's Rural Character and Important Open Space Areas. Transferring the development rights from one piece of land to another can be an effective tool for preserving important agricultural lands and other environmentally sensitive landscapes. The town has used this mechanism to a limited degree but the process for doing this has been defined only in outline form. The town should consider developing a more robust set of standards for transferring development rights from land areas that the town wishes to preserve, such as those stated in Policy 12.1.11, to those portions of town where the town wishes to encourage development, such as the Growth Center.

3.2.4 Continue to Encourage Adaptive Re-Use of Historic Barns. The permitted uses in the ARZD generally include only one and two family dwellings. An exception is permitted for historic barns that might be conserved by being reused for appropriate commercial and residential use. Historic Barns will generally be ones that were constructed prior to 1900 and/or appear on the state or national lists of historic places.

3.3 – Industrial Lands - The Town of Williston will continue in its role as an industrial center and the site of the proposed regional landfill. The policies adopted here facilitate continuing industrial use with bylaw amendments and permitting of the landfill.

Williston has a diversified industrial economy. In 2008, there were roughly 1,100 employees working in construction, about 700 in manufacturing, roughly 800 in wholesale trade, and roughly 800 in transportation and warehousing. Overall, activities permitted primarily in the town's industrial zoning districts generated nearly 3,500 jobs (33% of the town's total) and contributed more than \$147.3 million in property value (12.7% of the town's total). The 3,500 jobs in these categories represent a decrease from the 3,700 jobs in these categories in 2004.

In the last five years, the mix of uses in the industrial lands has changed and diversified. Buildings that were formerly used for manufacturing or warehousing have been converted to lighter industrial, office, and personal service uses. Particularly, space in large buildings along Industrial Avenue has changed. Offices, a gym, and several day care operations now exist along Industrial Avenue. These types of uses are allowed by zoning in this area, especially when existing buildings are converted.

For more information about CSWD and the proposed landfill, see Chapter 7 - Public Facilities or visit CSWD's web site <http://www.cswd.net/>.

3.3.1 Make Transportation Improvements that Support Industrial Activity, While Directing Truck Traffic Away from Taft Corners. A number of the improvements proposed in Chapter 6 are intended to provide better access for Williston's industrial areas. Those include intersection improvements at Rt. 2 and Industrial Avenue (Policy 6.4.6).

3.3.2 Study the need for Transportation Improvements along Industrial Avenue. The range of uses along Industrial Avenue and the areas accessed from Industrial Avenue has been changing in recent years. Bus service now extends along Industrial Avenue. The combination of the change in uses and the addition of bus service have highlighted the absence of sidewalks and crosswalks for pedestrians and other potential transportation improvements. The town shall develop a plan for meeting the increasing needs of transit, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities along the Industrial Avenue Corridor.

3.3.3. Consider revising the range of allowed uses and development standards in the Industrial Zoning District West. The Town's industrial area lies within the IZDW, which is in the

westernmost part of town and is served primarily by Industrial Avenue in its northern portion and Marshall Avenue to the south. Recent activity in these areas has seen a move away from heavy industrial uses toward uses better described as warehousing, distribution and office uses. The town should examine the existing development standards to evaluate their appropriateness for meeting the needs of the uses now seeking to locate in this zoning district.

3.4 Residential Neighborhoods – The Town of Williston will continue to protect the character of its residential neighborhoods. It will also encourage better neighborhood design in the Residential Zoning District.

The Residential Zoning District provides a regulatory framework for residential development that is, in most cases, served by central water and sewerage. It encompasses some 2,391 acres and includes most of Williston’s dwellings. The town’s subdivision evaluation criteria were recently amended to favor site plans that protect open space resources, provide landscaped buffers, and promote walking.

3.5 Open Space – The Town of Williston will continue to protect open space resources, and provide outdoor recreation opportunities for its residents, as directed by Chapter 12 - Open Space and Working Landscapes.

Williston adopted its first Open Space Plan in 1989. In 2005 the Open Space Plan was broadened and became Appendix C to the 2006 Comprehensive Plan. Since it was decided that Williston’s Open Space Plan is in no way ancillary to the way that Williston is managed, Appendix C was divided into two chapters, Chapter 8 - Parks & Recreation and Chapter 12 - Open Space & Working Landscapes, and incorporated into the main body of this Plan. Williston’s open space rules have guided the town in development review and successful land conservation efforts for 22 years.

3.6 – Williston Village - The Town of Williston will continue to maintain and protect the historic character of its village center.

The Village Zoning District (VZD) encompasses one of the two focal points of Williston’s settlement (the other was in North Williston, at the railroad). A portion of the VZD is included in the Williston Village Historic District, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. A larger portion of the VZD includes a mix of historic and more recent development. Development in both areas must comply with the *Williston Village Historic District Design Review Guide*, as incorporated into the town’s zoning bylaw. For more on the design review process please see Chapter 4 – Community Design.

3.6.1 Develop and Adopt a Village Master Plan. The village planning process should aim to preserve the historic character and pedestrian friendliness of the village and consider the present town green, the possibility of connecting streets within the village to enhance traffic and pedestrian circulation, and appropriate improvements at the intersection of North Williston, Oak Hill, and Rt. 2, as well as limitations on development imposed by the wetlands and streams that are found throughout the Village.

3.6.2 Examine the Density Standards for Mixed-Use Development in the VZD. The existing development standards for the VZD allow properties to have a mix of residential and some non-residential uses on the same property. The current standards do not address how the maximum allowable residential density might be affected by the location of non-residential uses on the same property. The town should consider developing standards for mixed use developments in the VZD.

3.7 Explore the Creation and Definition of other Land Use Areas. There are three areas in Williston where changes to land use rules should be considered. Each is listed below:

3.7.1 Porterwood Area. The Porterwood mobile home park, located off Old Creamery Road, was developed many years ago at a density and land use pattern that would not be permissible under the town's current regulations. This has created difficulties in administering requests for permits from the town for improvements to many of the properties within the mobile home park. The town should consider developing a special overlay district that can more effectively deal with the issues present within Porterwood.

3.7.2 Lake Iroquois. A large portion of the area surrounding Lake Iroquois lies within the town of Williston. Policy 11.4.2 recognizes that many of the properties along the lake have been developed with camps and seasonal homes that do not conform to the town's current zoning regulations. Lake Iroquois lies within the Source Protection Area managed by the Champlain Water District. In addition, some properties along the lake lie within Special Flood Hazard Areas. For these reasons, the town should consider creating a special overlay district to address the special land use issues present near the lake.

3.7.3 Williston Road (US2)/ South Brownell Road Area. This area south of the intersection of Williston Road and South Brownell Road is one of Williston's oldest neighborhoods. Land use and transportation patterns around this area have changed since this neighborhood was originally developed. In addition a plume of underground pollution centered along Commerce Street nearby has affected the use potential of many properties in this area. As also called for in Policy 11.7.2 of this plan, the town should consider changing the existing land use regulations and designation for this area to deal with these realities.