

## CHAPTER 1- 50 + YEARS OF CHANGE

Since the 1960's Williston has grown from a small New England village surrounded by working farms that defined its economy to a suburban hub containing a broad mix of residential, commercial, and industrial activity. This has resulted in a 21<sup>st</sup> century community that is one of the fastest growing towns in the state's faster growing region. Williston has become a growing and thriving community with a bustling and diverse economy. Throughout this transformation, the town has used its planning process to address the impacts that have resulted from population growth, economic transformation, and land use change, on the environment and character of the community, and the well-being of residents. It has strived to provide the necessary public facilities and services needed as the town has changed and grown.

These planning efforts have resulted in ...

- substantial open space conservation, including the purchase of development rights on working farms and acquisition of the conservation lands described in Chapter 13 – Open Space and Working landscapes.
- significant investments in the infrastructure needed to support growth, including the early '80's construction of a sewerage system, improvements to town highways, an expanding system of pedestrian ways, the recent construction of new fire and police stations and public works facility, and the creation of Williston's first ambulance service;
- a growth management system that confines suburban infrastructure to approximately one-quarter of the town's area, matches the pace of growth to infrastructure capabilities, and strives to protect the rural character of the rest of the community;
- a design review process that protects the historic character of Williston Village;
- a long-range plan to create a functional, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use commercial center around Taft Corners including the approval by the State of Vermont as a designated Growth Center; and
- the adoption of an entirely new *Unified Development Bylaw* in 2009 and subsequently amended, that supports many of the goals and objectives presented here.

These efforts are a work in progress. Some have been more successful than others. Some have been controversial. Williston has been learning how to grow, and those lessons have been reflected in the previous five-year updates of the comprehensive plan that are required by Vermont law.

This 2016-2024 comprehensive plan is no exception. The plan now spans eight years instead of five because of recent state legislative changes, it continues many long-standing policies, but also features new or revised approaches to important issues. The fun begins in Chapter 2, which states the purpose of this plan and adopts a vision for continuing growth management in Williston. Before moving on, however, some housekeeping is in order. The remainder of this introductory chapter (Chapter 1) explains how this plan complies with Vermont law and describes the process leading to its adoption. In 2020 the Energy Plan (Chapter 11) is being amended while simultaneously bringing focus to bear on healthy community design and its impact on the wellbeing of our residents and visitors.

### Authority

Vermont state law provides the statutory authority for municipalities to develop a comprehensive plan under V.S.A. 24 § 4381, 4382 and 4384(a) consistent with state established goals in V.S.A. 24 § 4302. That statute establishes the procedures Williston’s planning commission followed in preparing a draft plan for consideration by the Selectboard. V.S.A. 24 § 4385 sets forth the process the Selectboard followed in adopting this plan.

### Required Elements

Comprehensive plans developed by municipalities in Vermont are required to include a number of specific elements or sections in order to encourage the appropriate development of land. These elements are specified within V.S.A. 24 § 4382. Table 1.A shows which chapters of this document address which required elements.

**Table 1.A – Statutory Plan Elements in this Plan**

<b>Required Element, per 24 V.S.A. § 4382</b>	<b>Where Found in this Plan</b>
(1) Objectives, Policies, and Programs	Objectives and policies appear in each chapter. Chapter 14 presents an implementation program.
(2) Land Use Plan	Land use is addressed in every chapter, but principally in Chapter 3.
(3) Transportation Plan	Chapter 6.
(4) Utility and Facility Plan	Most utilities and facilities are addressed in Chapter 8. Recreational facilities are in Chapter 9. The schools are in Chapter 10. Power generation and distribution are discussed in Chapter 11.
(5) Policies on the preservation of Natural Resources	Chapters 3, 4, 12 and 13.
(6) Educational Facilities Plan	Chapter 10. This chapter also addresses child care, as required by 24 V.S.A. § 4302(C)(13)
(7) Implementation Program	Chapter 14.
(8) Relationship of the plan to trends and plans of adjacent municipalities, and the region.	Williston’s efforts to coordinate with another jurisdiction are described in Chapter 14.
(9) Energy Plan	Chapter 11.

(10) Housing Element	Residential land use is covered in Chapter 3. Housing policy, including incentives for affordable housing, is addressed in Chapter 5.
(11) Economic Development Element	Chapter 7 Economic Development
(12) Flood Resilience Plan	Chapter 12 Watershed Health

**Vermont Statutes** – State laws are on-line at: <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/statutes/statutes2.htm>.

### The Planning Process

Williston’s 2016 plan update has taken approximately 18 months. It began in earnest during the fall of 2015, with staff’s submission of a work program to the Planning Commission. The people of the town were invited to a “kickoff” meeting on May 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>rd</sup>, 2015. The results of that event are summarized in Appendix A.

The Planning Commission also utilized the expertise and resources of its citizen volunteers, the people who sit on one of the various town boards and committees that help the town develop and shape the town’s policies. These include the Development Review Board who provided help in understanding development and permitting issues, the Conservation Commission who commented about natural resource conservation and protection, the Historic and Architectural Advisory Committee who provide guidance with issues pertaining to the historic village and design review, and the Recreation Committee who commented on recreation facilities and programming. The heads of various town departments were also consulted for their guidance and recommendations on each of their own special needs.

The Planning Commission involved many other residents in finalizing its draft. The Conservation Commission reviewed and commented on open space, watershed, and energy elements. The ad-hoc Sustainable Williston Initiatives citizen group took a leading role in revising the energy chapter.

The town also solicited participation from the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, the Green Mountain Transit Agency, and other agencies, all of whom provided information that appears later in this plan. A chronology of the plan update effort appears in Table 1.B.

**Table 1.B – Plan Update Chronology**

<b>November and December 2014</b>	Discuss outline of the plan update with the Planning commission and Selectboard
<b>2015</b>	
May 2015	Kickoff meetings, involving more than 40 Williston residents
September	CCRPC Completes Initial Technical Review of 2011-2016 Plan
October – December	Planning commission meets work on chapters
<b>2016</b>	
January-September	Planning Commission reviews draft chapters, Planning staff meets with other town departments and other Community Boards

August 30, 2016	Selectboard Retreat – Joint Meeting with Planning Commission to Discuss the Plan
October 2016	Planning Commission Reviews Draft Document
October 12, 2016	CCRPC Planning Advisory Committee holds Public Hearing
November 15 2016 December 6, 2016	Planning Commission holds Public Hearings
<b>2017</b>	
February 21, 2017	Planning Commission transmits draft plan to the Selectboard
April 11, 2017	Selectboard Public Hearing
July 17, 2017	Selectboard Reviews Draft, sends possible changes to the Planning Commission for consideration
August 1, 2017	Planning Commission Comments to Selectboard on Proposed Changes
August 22, 2017	Selectboard Public Hearing, Adopted by the Selectboard
2017	Approved by Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

**Kickoff Event Summary.** Williston’s plan update began with a “kickoff” event sponsored by the Planning Commission on May 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015. More than 40 residents came to talk about the future of their town and enjoy refreshments. The report from that event is reproduced in Appendix A. This sidebar provides a summary.

Staff from the planning office provided some information about the town, the town’s planning history and focus, and an introduction and overview of the plan. After a brief introduction to the planning process, participants were divided into small groups and asked to discuss what they like or valued most in Williston, and what issues they would like to see addressed in the town plan. Each group prepared a list of their ideas, and these were summarized for each session. There was a high degree of similarity and overlap between the ideas from each of the groups at both sessions. These are listed in Appendix A.

As those lists show, there was virtually unanimous agreement on the major issues the town should tackle in its plan update, including maintaining open space; addressing the cost of housing; improving the transportation system, including bike and pedestrian ways and transit; addressing stormwater and other water quality issues; energy efficiency and conservation; and continuing to manage growth in a fair and practical way.

These top priorities, as well as the other issues and needs listed at the kickoff event were incorporated into this plan.