

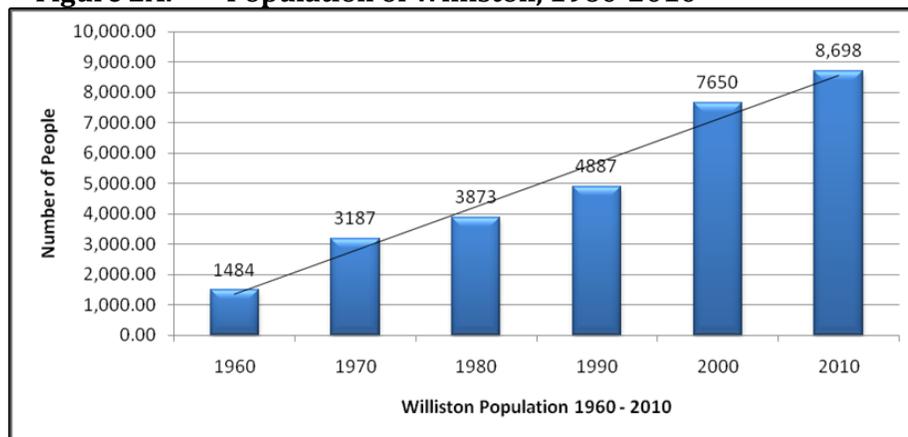
## CHAPTER 2 – 50 + YEARS OF PLANNING: WILLISTON’S EVOLVING VISION

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 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.

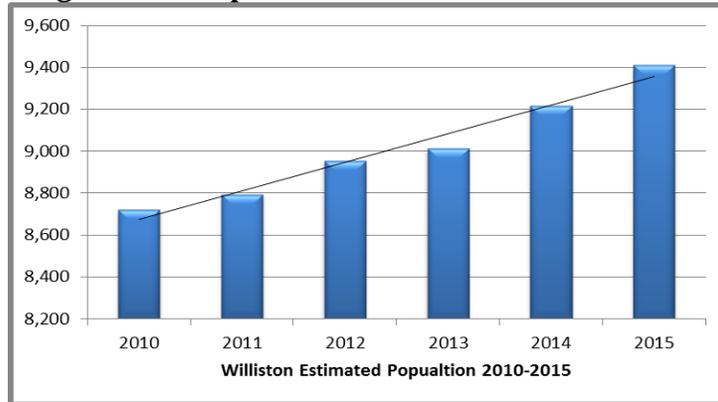
**Table 2.A - Population and Population Growth of Williston Since 1960**

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

Source: Bureau of the Census.

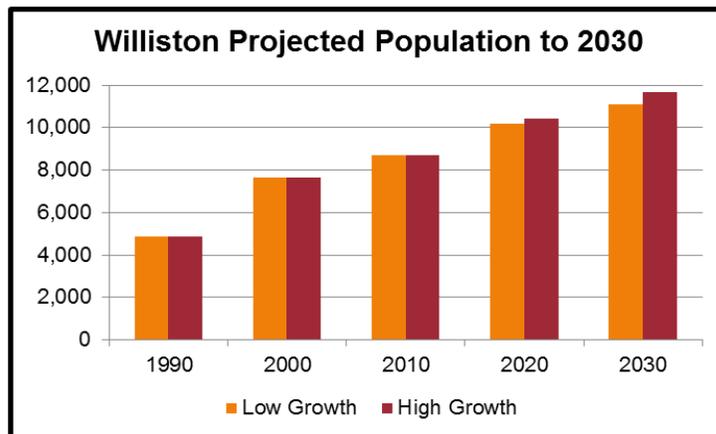
Population estimates between 2010 and 2015 show a continuation of this trend. The population of Williston increased by approximately 700 people in the first half of this decade (Figure 2.B).

**Figure 2.B – Population Estimates 2010-2015**



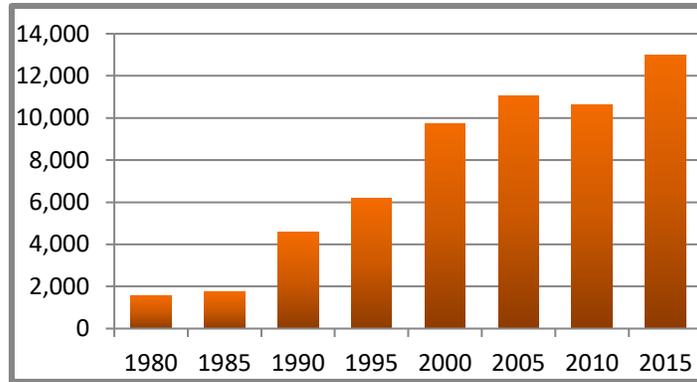
Recent population projections prepared by the Vermont Department of Labor show Williston continuing to grow through 2030 to between 11,000 and 12,000 people depending on different growth rate scenarios, with the town containing to be one of the fastest growing communities in the state (Figure 2.B)

**Figure 2.C – Williston Population Projection 1990 to 2030**



Williston’s emergence as a center of employment has been even more dramatic than the growth of its population. Table 2.c shows the change in covered employment since 1980. These data do not include business proprietors or the self-employed, but are the only employment data available at the town level.

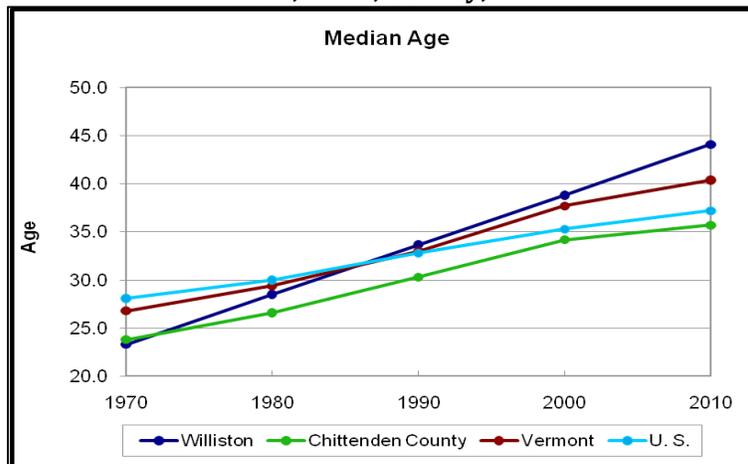
**Figure 2.D – Employment Growth, 1980-2015**



### An Aging Population

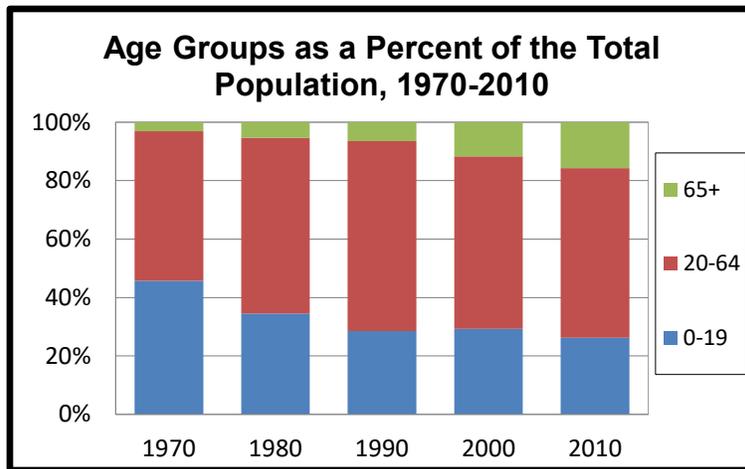
Managing the challenges of growth and development have been the primary themes in the town’s planning efforts for the past 20 years. Keeping pace with providing the infrastructure and services necessary to meet the needs of an expanding community into the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the task at hand. This has included basic infrastructure such as roads, water and sewer services, public safety such as police, fire and EMT services, and providing schools for the education of the town’s children. Williston now, however, find itself with some different challenges as it prepares to meet the needs of an older and aging population (Figures 2.E and 2.F). The share of the town’s population that is school aged is shrinking, while the portion of residents in or entering the retirement years is growing. At the same time, household size continues a long-range decrease in size, currently averaging 2 ½ people per household (Figure 2.F). These changes in the make-up of the town’s population will no doubt affect the way in which the town plans for its future.

**Figure 2.E - Median Age Comparison, Williston, State, County, and U.S.**



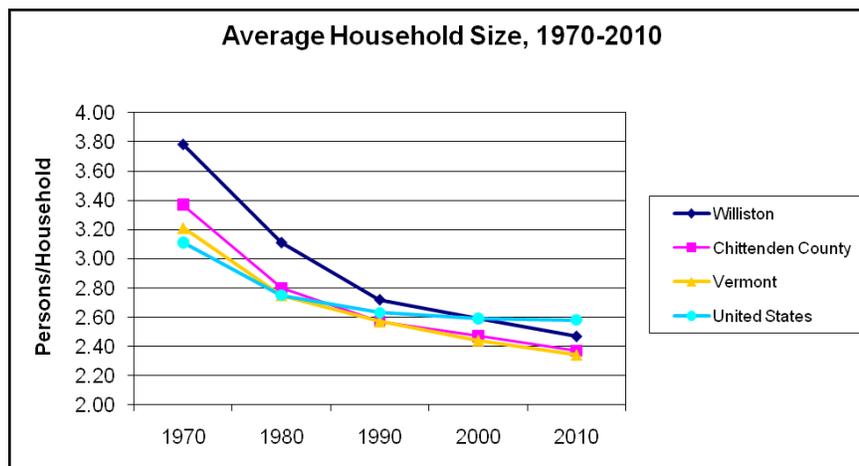
Source: U.S. Census

**Figure 2.F - Age Cohorts in Williston, 1970-2010**



Source: U.S. Census

**Figure 2.G - Average Household Size**



Source: U.S. Census

### And More to Come

Other indicators could be offered (see for example Table 3.A), but Table 2.A and Figures 2.A and 2.B effectively document Williston’s long-term growth picture. Population projections prepared by the State of Vermont suggest that Williston will continue to grow and grow faster than the rest of the state and perhaps the region as a whole. 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.

Appendix 7 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 Table 2.A and Figures 2.B and 2.C 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. Williston is no longer a sleepy rural community; it has become an important part of a modern and multi-faceted metropolitan region. Secondly, the more recent pace of growth has moderated considerably to a pace that might be described as more incremental and manageable. The town has to some extent managed to "catch up" and has built many of the facilities it will need to provide the services necessary to serve this community. 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 to 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.

Williston has a vision to support active living, healthy eating, access to services and recreational opportunities within the town. Healthy community design is a way of planning and designing communities that improves well-being and makes it easier for people to live healthy lives. Williston can help reduce disease rates by using healthy community design principles that help people be physically active, prevent tobacco use, and eat a healthier diet. These three behaviors lower our risk for the four diseases which cause the deaths of over half of Vermonters (see Figure 2.H below).

**Figure 2.H – Behaviors, Disease, and Death in Vermont**



Source: Vermont Department of Health

People have a better opportunity to stay healthy when they live in communities that encourage biking and walking, conserve natural places, ensure access to healthy foods, and provide safe, affordable housing. Building a positive town culture, where people feel connected to their community and supported in healthy choices, also significantly reduces risky behaviors such as substance misuse. Williston recognizes the role of community planning to improve the health of residents where they live, work, learn, worship, and play.

This plan addresses community well-being in the following ways:

- Enhance concentrated mixed-use development and smart growth
- Create a bicycle and pedestrian friendly community
- Improve access to parks, recreation, and open spaces
- Increase access to fresh and healthy food
- Decrease use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs

### **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 14 – 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, Complete Street applications and transportation facilities planning;
- sustain rural landscapes by requiring usable, on-site open space for subdivisions and other multi-family developments, conserving lands identified in Chapter 13 - 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. Housing will be constructed in a manner that supports the health and safety of the occupant. and include homes that are affordable to working people and their families;
- attend to the details of site planning with human-scale 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, community gardens, 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
- consider a resolution to establish a food policy council, park and recreation agreements, and other local government policies supporting community gardens and a year-round farmers market.
- engage all citizens who are interested and willing to participate in the town's planning process. Provide accessible opportunities for residents from all backgrounds, ages and abilities to participate in the town's planning process. (Note: this could mean varying the times of the engagement events, providing childcare, ensuring reasonable transit options to lower the attendance barriers as much as possible.)