

Town of Williston, Vermont

10-Year Review of Growth Center Designation

1. Overview

The Town of Williston was granted Vermont's first Growth Center Designation by the Vermont Expanded Downtown Board as provided by 24 V.S.A. § 2791 on October 22, 2007. In making its determination, the board noted that the town has been working towards developing a land use pattern of compact development within its growth center with an aim of accommodating the majority of the Town's new growth over the next 20 years. The Downtown Board conditioned the approval of the Growth Center Designation on the town accomplishing a number of measured in service of implementing the full intent and goals of the state's growth center program, and required the Town to report on progress in implementing the growth center vision every five years from the date of the Growth Center Designation. It has been 10 years since Williston's Growth Center was approved, making this the second five-year review of Williston's Growth Center designation. The purpose of this report is to document and comment upon the Town's implementation progress over the past five years and show the cumulative progress over the past 10 year as specified under 24 V.S.A. § 2793c(e).

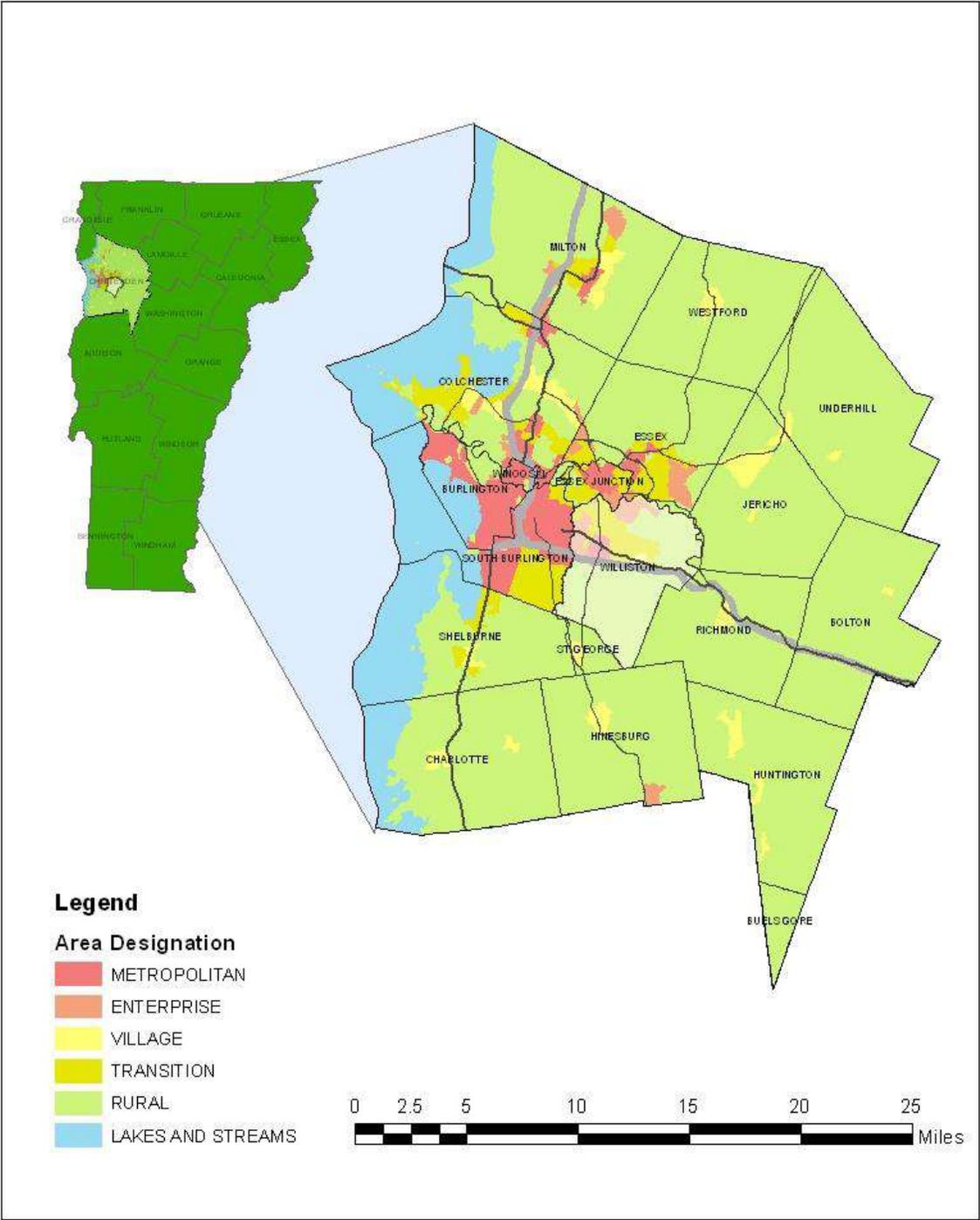
2. Town of Williston in Context

Williston is located in the heart of Chittenden County, in the northwest portion of Vermont. The Town is located approximately 6 miles to the east of the City of Burlington, the state's largest city (see Map 1). Chittenden County contains the Greater Burlington region, and it is the largest and the fastest growing county in the state, and the largest center of economic activity in Vermont. Over the years, Williston has become an increasingly important part of the regional economic activity, and represents an important part of the region's population growth.

Williston is tethered to the region by several important state highways which run through the heart of the Town. These include I-89 with an interchange in Williston (Exit 12), VT 2A and U.S. 2. All of these important state highways run through and intersect in the town's growth center. The Burlington International Airport is located just to the west on the Town's border with the City of South Burlington. The Town's proximity to Burlington, the regional airport, and its location on some of the state's major roadways have all factored into the Town's growth and development, especially over the past 20 years.

Map 1: Williston in the Region

Williston and Chittenden County Planning Regions



- **Growth Trends**

Williston has experienced several decades of significant and persistent growth pressure. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Williston had a population of 8,698 people, representing a four-fold increase in the population of the Town in the past 50 years (see Figure 1). Since 1990, the Town’s population has grown by approximately 72%, compared to the region’s growth of 16% and an increase of 10% for the State of Vermont (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

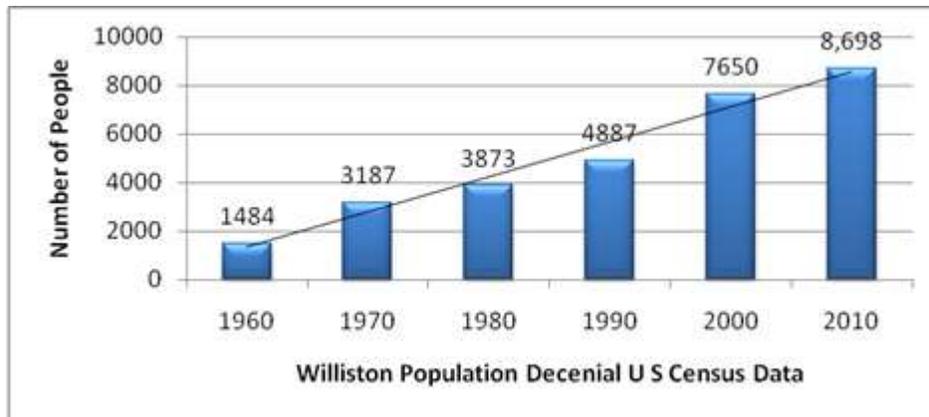


Figure 1: Population of Williston, 1960-2010

Table 1 – Population and Population Growth of Williston 1960 - 2010

	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 Cty.	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.

The most recent population estimates from U.S. Census indicates that Williston’s population continues to grow. As shown in Table 2, between 2010 and 2015, the town’s population increased by approximately 690 people. This was significantly less than the pace of growth observed during the 1980s and 1990s, but consistent with the growth rate observed between 2000 and 2010. The population growth in Williston continues to outpace the growth rates of Vermont as a whole and Chittenden County, which is the fastest growing county in Vermont consistently over the past 50 + years.

Figure 2: Population of Williston, 2010-2015

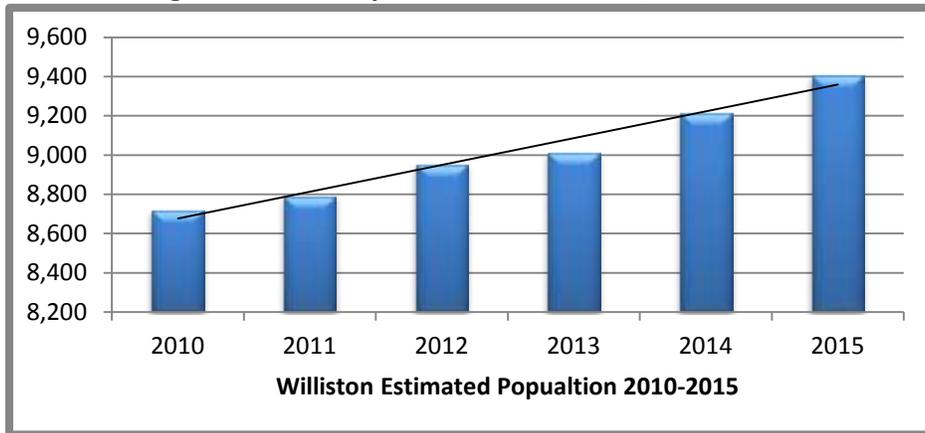


Table 2 – Population and Population Growth of Williston 2010 - 2015

							2010-2015	
NAME	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Number	Percent
Williston	8,719	8,793	8,955	9,014	9,215	9,409	690	7.91%
Chittenden Cty.	156,762	157,679	158,641	159,818	160,531	161,382	4,620	2.95%
Vermont	625,792	626,450	626,138	626,855	626,562	626,042	250	0.04%

Source: U.S. Census Annual Estimates of Population

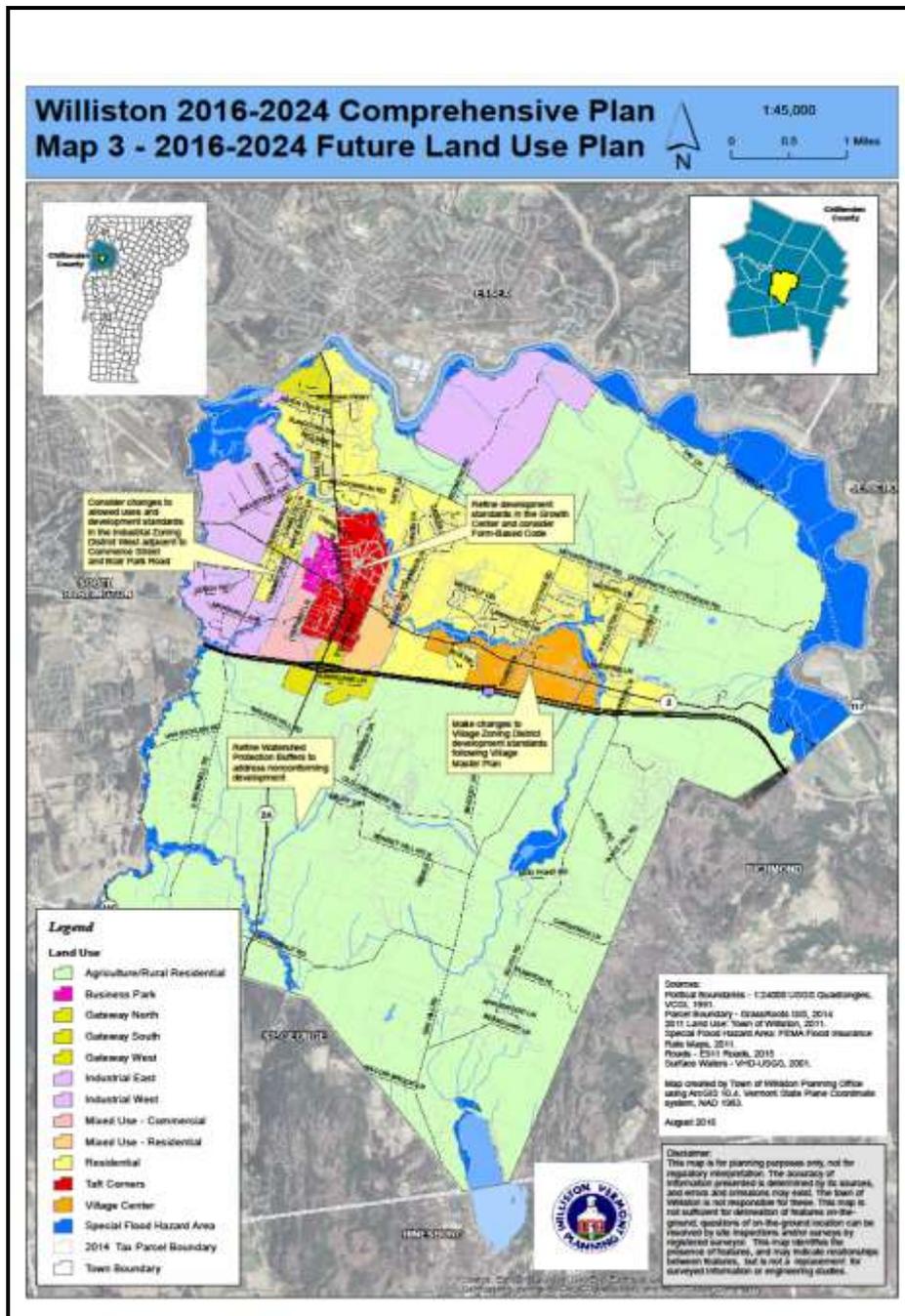
3. Williston Growth Center and the Williston Planning Effort

Williston has a land area of approximately 19,862 acres, of which approximately 63% has been designated for agricultural and rural residential uses (see Map 2). The Town’s designated growth center is located in what is known as the Taft Corners area, centered on the intersection of VT 2A and U.S. 2, and extending northward from I-89 and Exit 12. The Town’s growth center comprises 987 acres, representing approximately 5% of the Town’s land area. This area contains a number of large retail commercial developments, including a regional shopping center (Maple Tree Place) and several “big box” national retail stores. While the growth center makes up only a small portion of the Town’s land area, it is the hub of commercial and new residential development activity in Williston, and it is the focus of much of the town’s planning emphasis.

The growth center concept is an integral component of the Town’ overall planning program, and has been for many years. As stated most recently in the *Williston 2016-2024 Comprehensive Plan* approved by the Selectboard on August 22, 2017, the Town envisions “...a

design-conscious, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use development and redevelopment pattern...” within the growth center. The Town’s development standards for the growth center call for compact, mixed use development tied together by an emerging network of pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit systems. At the same time, only low density development and agricultural uses are allowed in the vast majority of the Town’s land area.”

Map 2: Williston Future Land Use Plan



4. Managing Growth in Williston

As a town which has wrestled with the demands of dealing with rapid growth and development pressure, Williston has developed and employed a number of measures over the years aimed at helping the town regulate the type, intensity, and pace of new development. These include the following:

- **Paying for Growth**
 - Development Impact Fees
 - Local Option Sales Tax
 - Capital Improvement Plan and Budget

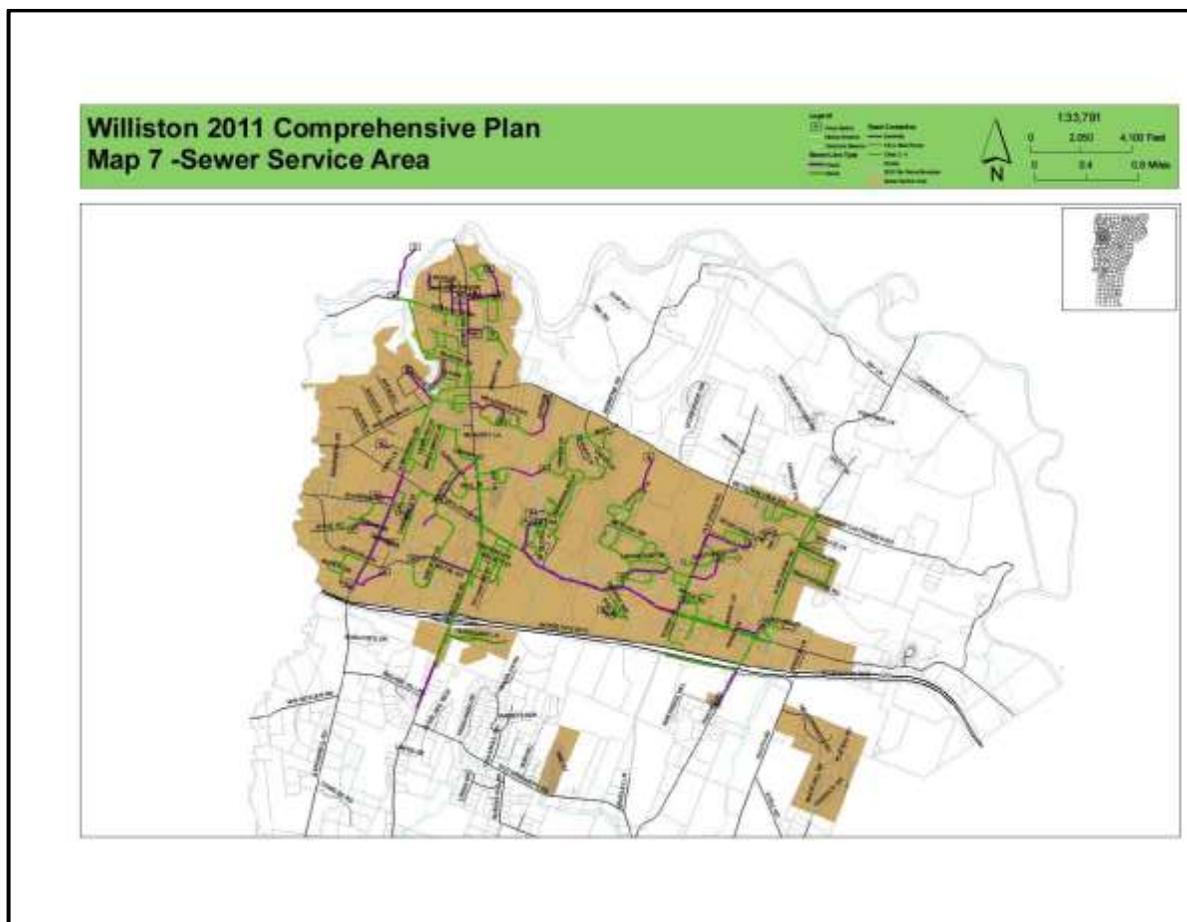
- **Regulating Development**
 - Zoning and Subdivision Regulations
 - Design Review
 - Caps or limits on the construction of new dwellings
 - Limiting where municipal water and sewer service will be provided
 - Residential Growth Management
 - Purchasing land and/or development rights

The first group of techniques is most directly related to the funding and provision of municipal services and infrastructure. The second group, however, is tied directly to shaping how and where new development occurs.

- **Municipal Sewer Service**

One technique the town has employed in shaping the location and intensity of new development is by limiting in which portions of town municipal water and sewer service will be available. A component of the Town's *Comprehensive Plan*, is a map that defined where municipal sewer service will be available, identified as Map 7 from the *Williston 2016-2024 Comprehensive Plan*. The area included in the Town's sewer service area corresponds to zoning districts where higher intensity development is allowed. Areas zoned as Agricultural rural Residential are not generally included in the sewer service area with only a few exceptions granted for pollution abatement purposes.

Limiting the availability of municipal sewer service has also been a practical necessity for Williston; the Town has a limited amount of sewer capacity available. The town shares the wastewater treatment capacity of the Essex Junction Wastewater Treatment Facility with Essex Junction and the Town of Essex, and capacity at the plant is limited.



In the mid-2000s when growth pressures in Williston were intense, it was apparent to the Town that allocating the capacity of the plant available to the town was imperative in order to insure that some capacity would continue to be available for future needs. In 2007 when the Town received its growth center designation, the Town had approximately 980,000 gallons per day (GPD) of wastewater treatment capacity reserved at the Essex Junction treatment plant. During the previous calendar year (2006), the average daily flow of waste water from Williston into the plant was over 700,000 GPD, or 72% of available capacity, with no end to the rate of utilization in sight (see Figure 3 and Table 3).

Since 2007 three notable things have happened affecting the amount of wastewater capacity available for future use in Williston:

1. The Town purchased an additional 50,000 GPD of the plant's capacity from the Village of Essex Junction (Table 2),
2. The Town is in the process of acquiring an additional 50,000 GPD of treatment capacity which will boost Williston's portion of the plant's capacity to 1,080,000 GPD by 2022.
3. The pace of capacity utilization has decreased even as the town has added new users (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Average Daily Flow of Wastewater 1996-2006

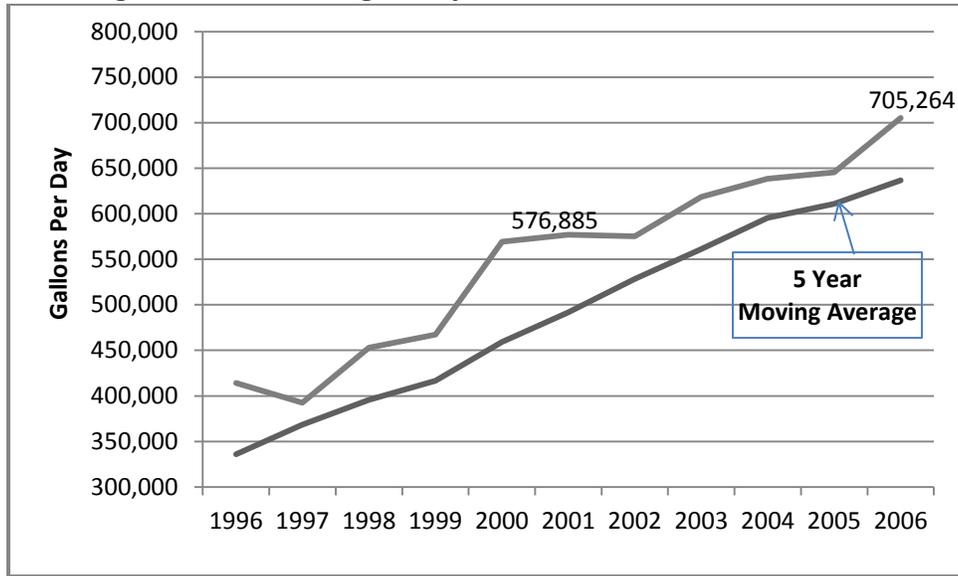


Figure 4: Average Daily Flow of Wastewater 2006-2016

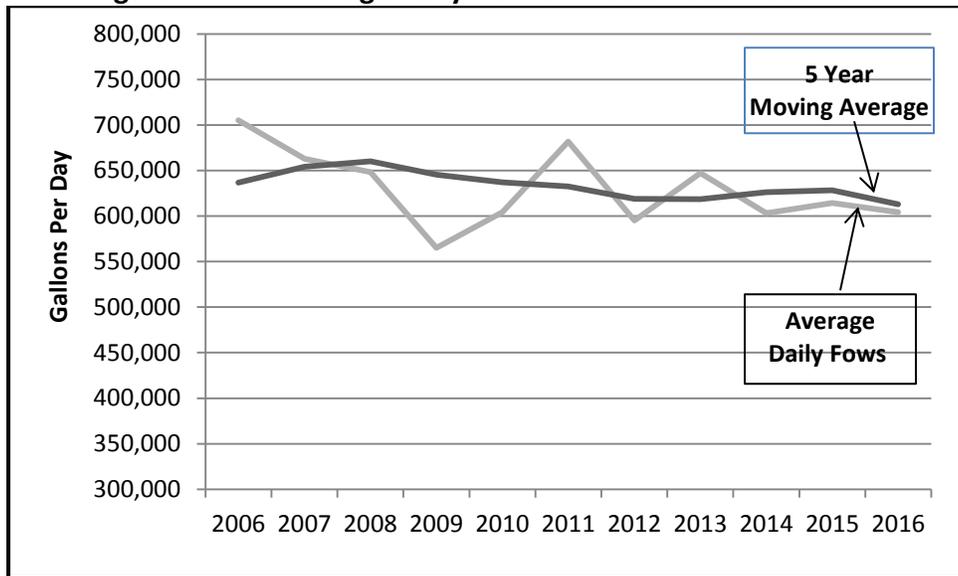


Table 3: Wastewater Treatment Capacity Utilization, 2007 and 2016

	2006		2016	
	Capacity	Percent	Capacity	Percent
Total Capacity	980,000	100	1,040,000	100
Average Flows	705,264	72	604,208	58
Remaining Capacity	274,736	28	348,218	42

- **Open Space Preservation**

The preservation of open space is an important part of the town's approach to land use management and helping the town to preserve the town's rural character and promote a compact development form. The Town's Land Use Plan calls for most new development to take the form of compact, design conscious form and a mixed use pattern dominating the Town's growth center. Higher intensity development in other parts of the Town is highly limited and discouraged through zoning and the lack of availability of public infrastructure, such as municipal water and sewer service. In the rural parts of Williston, land parcels of 10.5 acres or greater seeking subdivision approval for residential development must designate a minimum of 75% of parcel as permanently protected open space. In addition, the town also purchases land and/or the development rights of land when appropriate. The town also has an ongoing Environmental Reserve Fund that it utilizes to purchase conservation easements and in some cases outright land purchase in concert with the Vermont Land Trust and other similar non-profit conservation groups.

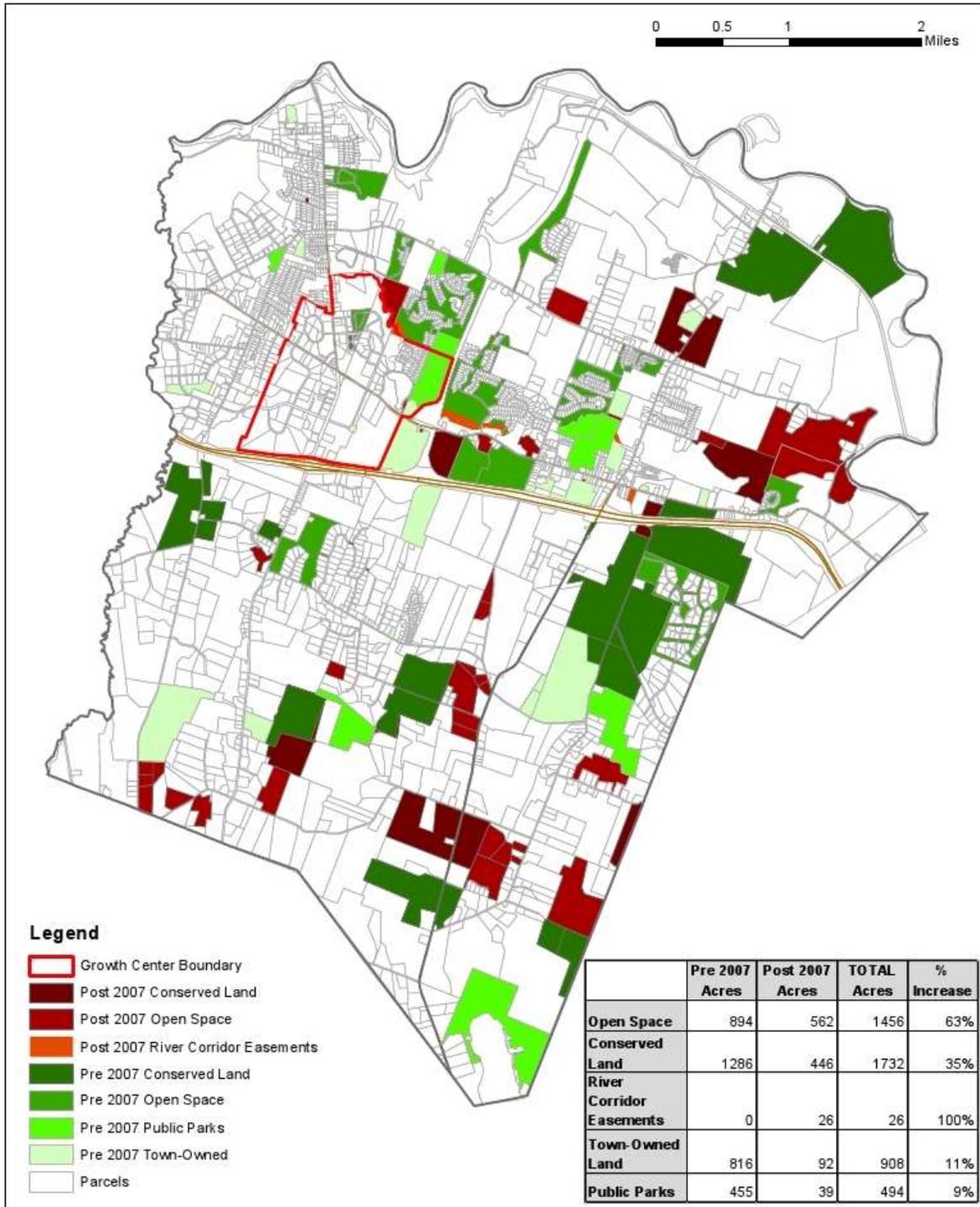
Limiting the future development of land through the purchase of the land itself or its development rights in Williston has been an ongoing effort for some time, and these efforts continued over the past 10 years. Several parcels of land were acquired by the town over the past five years through purchase, conservation easement or dedication. The town is also in the process of preserving the Catamount Family Outdoor Center as a town forest. If successful, the purchase of this 350 + acre property would represent the largest single land conservation purchase for the town to date. Map 4 displays parcels of land that have some form of development restriction, either because of town ownership and designation as park land or some other open space designation, conservation easement, or regulated open space designation. Those land areas that have been protected since 2007 are displayed in the red-orange color shades. Over 1,100 additional acres of land have been permanently protected in various ways since 2007, all outside of the Town's designated growth center.

Conserving land in these ways accomplishes several goals for the town:

1. It helps the town to preserve the rural landscape that is an import part of the town's heritage and history
2. It helps preserve and conserve important agricultural land resources
3. It reduces the amount of land available for low-density sprawl type development
4. It focuses development attention and activity to areas where it is desired
5. It provides recreational opportunities for the town

Map 4

Conserved & Protected Open Space Lands, Williston, VT
Pre and Post October, 2007



- **Residential Growth Management**

The Town has developed and utilized a growth management system regulating the number of dwellings that may be issued permits on an annual basis. While the growth management allocation process has evolved over the years, the origins of growth management in Williston date back to 1990. The current version designed to run from FY 2005-FY 2015 places limits on the number of new dwellings that may be authorized through the subdivision approval process based on designated allocation areas. The Town’s growth management system is integrated into the subdivision approval process. Under the current system, the limits are as follows:

Table 3: Residential Growth Management Allocation of Dwelling Units

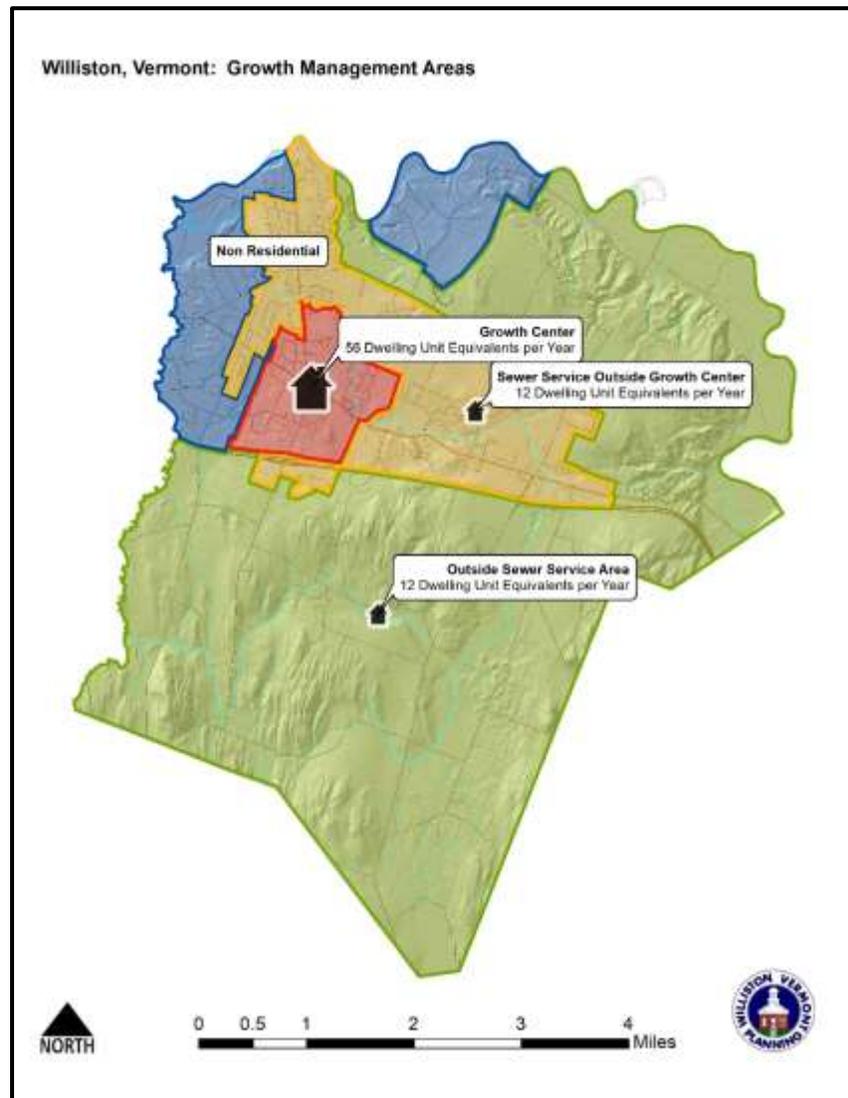
Allocation Area	Number of Dwellings	Percent of Total
Growth Center	56	70
Other Sewer Service Area	12	15
Outside Sewer Service Area	12	15
Total	80	100

As can be seen from the table above, the Town’s designated growth center in a central aspect of how the town regulates the pace and number of new residential units. New residential development is clearly limited, both by zoning as well as by growth management. All new residential developments and subdivisions in Williston must receive allocation for any newly proposed dwelling units. The allocation process is competitive, with newly proposed developments evaluated and compared against other developments from the same growth management allocation area.

The steps in the subdivision approval process are as follows:

- **Pre-Application.** Similar to sketch plan in other municipalities. The project is reviewed in concept, and development options are explored and discussed. Projects may be allowed to proceed to growth management review or repeat pre-application.
- **Growth Management.** All proposed residential development determined to move forward by the DRB from Pre-application are reviewed and scored in comparison to other developments within the same growth management allocation area.
- **Discretionary Permit.** Proposed developments receiving growth management allocation are reviewed in detail against bylaw requirements and standards. Projects are approved (or denied) with conditions of approval defined.
- **Final Plans.** Plans reviewed for compliance with conditions of Discretionary Permit approval

Map 5:



5. Permit Activity, 2007-2017

In the ten-year period since the approval of Williston’s growth center designation, the town has issued permits for 565 new dwelling units. These 565 new units do not include permits issued for dwellings replacing an already existing dwelling on a property; rather this only represents the number of new additional dwellings built in Williston between October 2007 and July 2017. Of the 565 new dwellings issued permits, 412 or 73 percent were in the designated growth center, and 16 or 9 percent were in the Town’s Village Zoning District (VZD). Permit activity is summarized in Table 4, and depicted visually in Map 6.

Map 6: Residential Permitting Activity

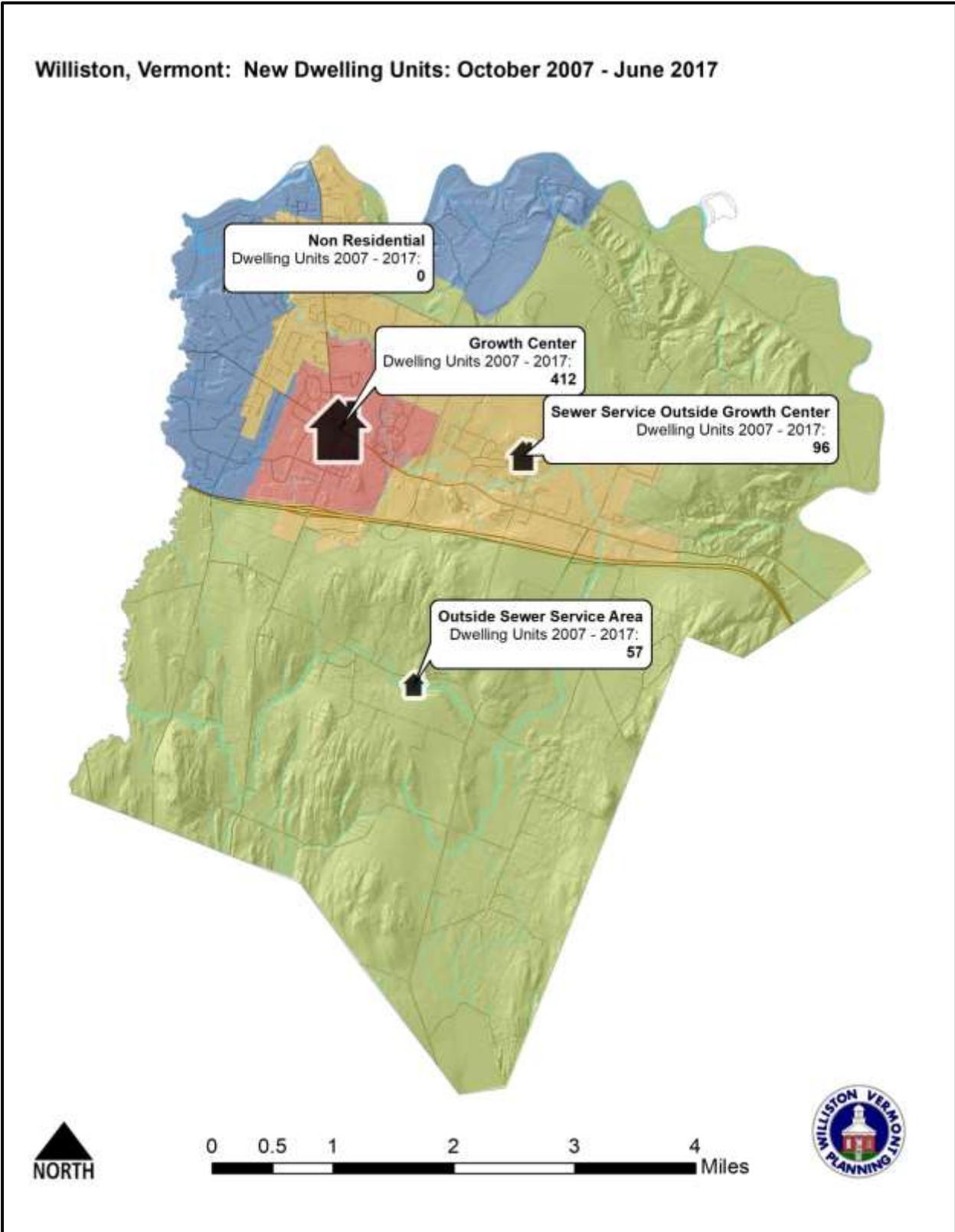


Table 4: Permits for New Dwellings, 2007 - 2017

	Number of Dwellings	% of Total
Growth Center	412	73
Other Sewer Service Area	96	17
Rural	57	10
Total	565	100

- **Commercial Development**

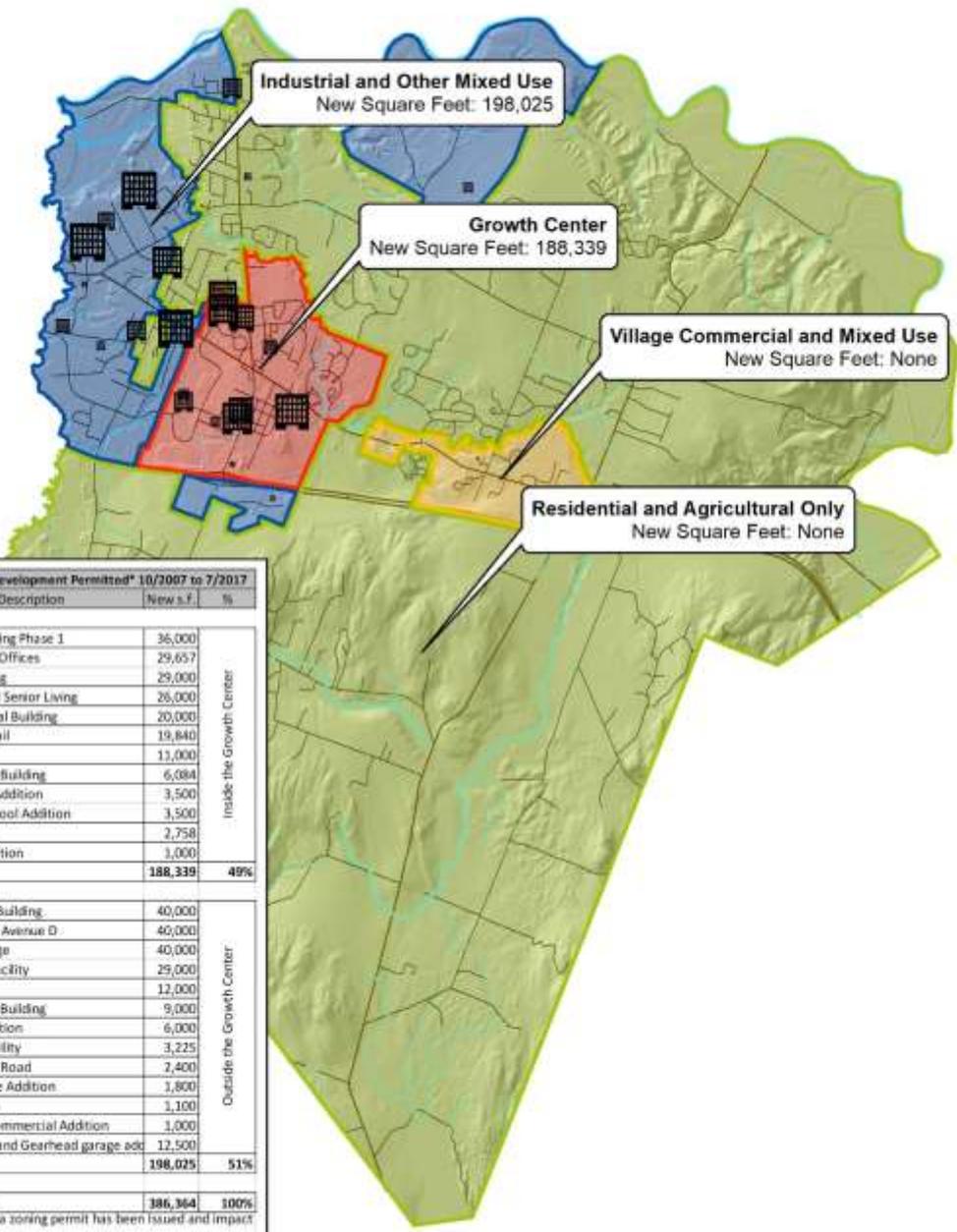
Describing the extent and nature of commercial and industrial development over the past five years is more difficult than describing residential development – new residential development has followed a very clear defined pattern. New commercial and industrial development, on the other hand is a much more varied picture, since this category contains two often different development types with different locational needs and drivers. Since October 2007, Williston has issued permits for the construction of approximately 386,000 sq. ft. of commercial and industrial development. This is an average of over 38,000 sq. ft. per year over a 10 year time span. Of this total, 188,339 sq. ft., or 49% was located in the town’s growth center.

The close split between new development in and outside of the town’s growth center is a reflection of several factors.

Frist, most of the new development outside of the growth center is industrial type development. The town has large and significant existing land areas with industrial zoning and industrial uses. Much of this land is also in flight path of the Burlington International Airport, making it a prime location for uses not sensitive to the noise of approaching airplanes and which desire to be close to air transportation. Industrial type buildings also tend to be large boxes, and in Williston just three buildings account for over 60% of the new industrial floor space. Included in this total is a 40,000 sq. ft. public works garage and truck facility.

Second, the nature of retail trade and development has been going through a major shift across the country as the nature of how people shop and purchase goods continue to shift to ecommerce. Quite simply, there are fewer retail stores being built, and heydays of regional shopping malls and big box retail outlets appears to be in the past.

Williston, Vermont: New Commercial Buildings and Additions October 2007- June 2017



New Commercial Development Permitted* 10/2007 to 7/2017		
Project Name and Description	New s.f.	%
Cottonwood Crossing Phase 1	36,000	Inside the Growth Center
TCA Lot 30 Retail/ Offices	29,657	
DEW Office Building	29,000	
Williston Enhanced Senior Living	26,000	
Kismet Gym Medical Building	20,000	
CVS Pharmacy Retail	19,840	
Town Fair Tire	13,000	
Hamlet Mixed Use Building	6,084	
Gardeners Supply Addition	3,500	
Heartworks Preschool Addition	3,500	
Moe's Restaurant	2,758	
Clarks Sunoco Addition	3,000	
TOTAL	188,339	
Weston Industrial Building	40,000	Outside the Growth Center
REM Development Avenue D	40,000	
Public Works Garage	40,000	
SBR Self Storage Facility	29,000	
Eco Car Wash	12,000	
SD Ireland Storage Building	9,000	
P and P Septic Addition	6,000	
VELCO Storage Facility	3,225	
Leo Auto Shunpike Road	2,400	
NETS Church Office Addition	1,800	
ECI Office Addition	1,100	
Hampton Direct Commercial Addition	1,000	
Munson Salt Shed and Gearhead garage add	12,500	
TOTAL	198,025	51%
WILLISTON TOTAL	386,364	100%



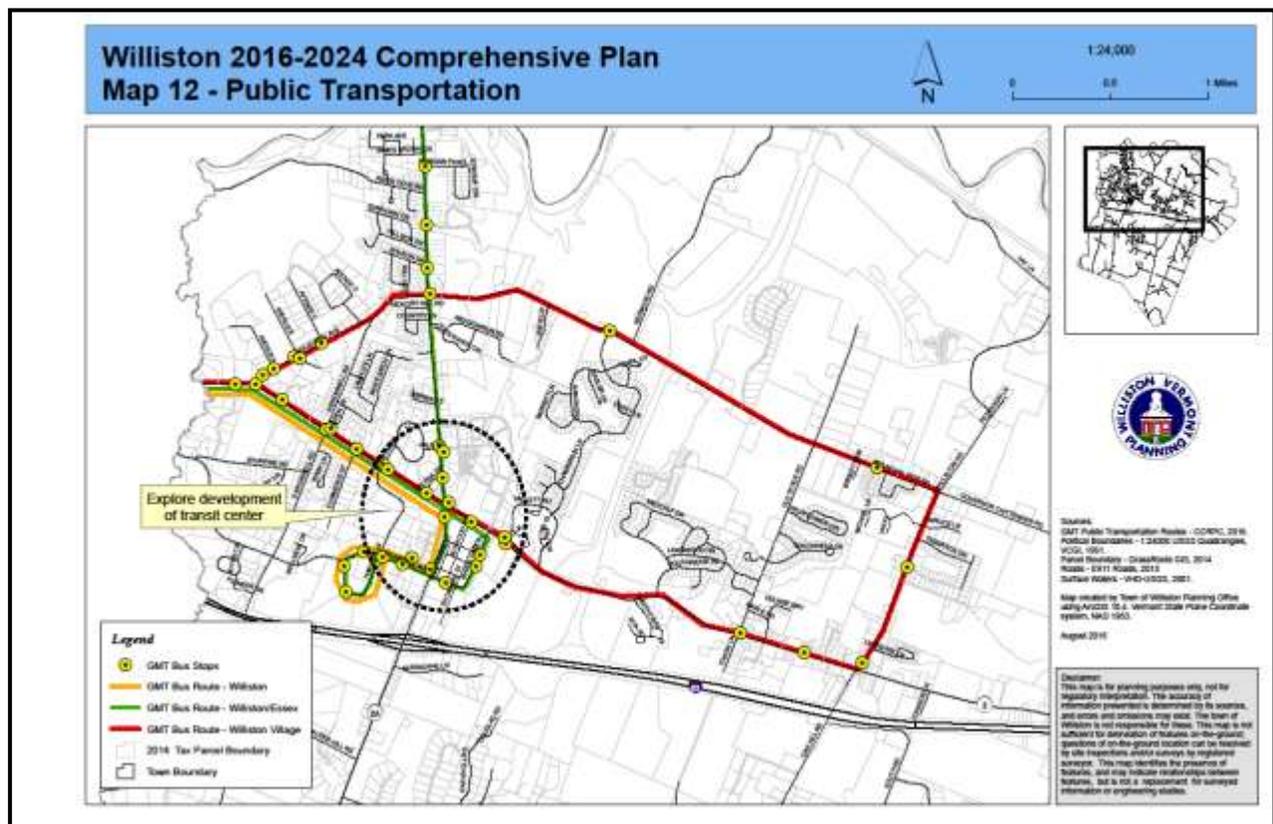
6. Other Developments

There were several transportation issues that were discussed as part of the consideration of Williston's growth center designation. These included a condition that Williston become a member of the Chittenden County Transportation Authority (CCTA), and that the Town work with VTrans to find solutions to some of the traffic congestion problems along the VT 2A corridor.

- **CCTA**

The Town joined CCTA in 2008, and there are now three separate lines of transit service available in Williston. These include the following:

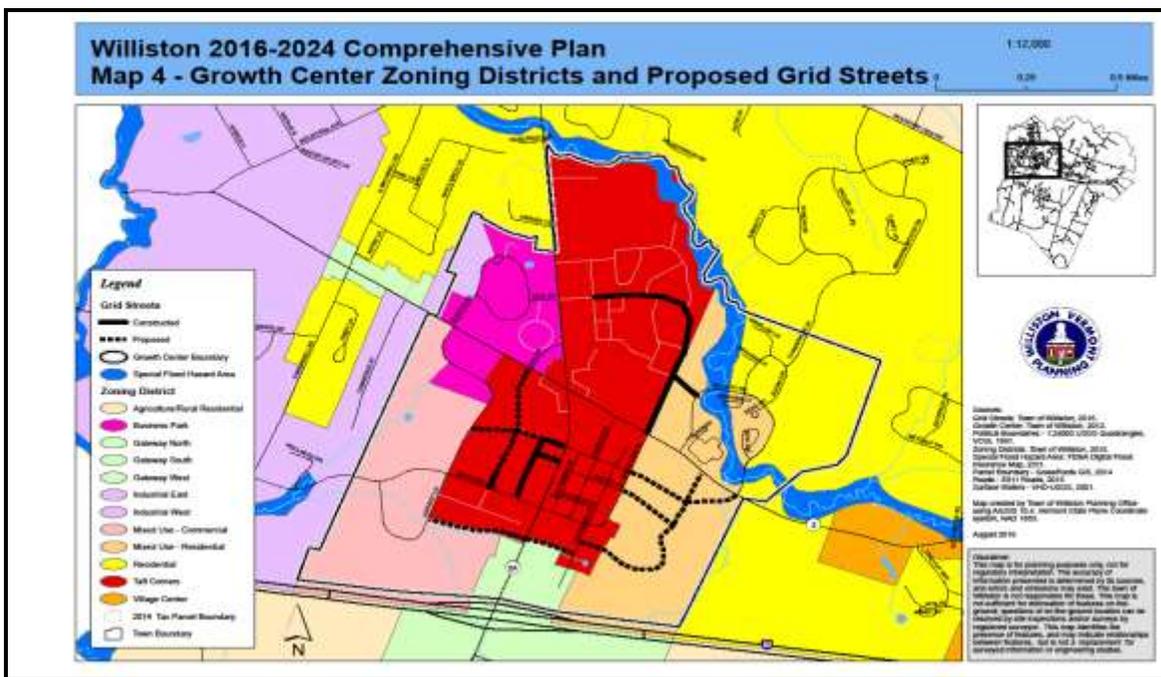
1. Regular service linking the Williston Growth Center to Essex and Burlington
2. Regular service from the Williston growth center and Burlington
3. M-F morning, mid-day, and evening commuter service between the Williston Village and Burlington



- **Grid Streets**

For many years, the Town has been working towards the development of a network of grid streets in the Taft Corners area, which lies in the heart of the Town’s growth center. Some of the congestion that exists in the area can be attributed to the lack of meaningful alternatives for motorists, coupled with the broken up land use development. Together, this network of streets has been envisioned to provide a more complete and robust transportation system in the area by distributing traffic over additional streets, providing important connects, and facilitating a more compact development pattern. The grid street network is an important part of the town’s overall transportation plan, and part of the town’s efforts to deal with traffic congestion along the VT 2A corridor.

The build-out of the grid street network will largely be determined by new development. In some cases, land developers will completely fund and construct portions of this street network as part of their development proposal. The town will also take an active role in completing key sections, such as Trade Lane, using collect transportation impact fees, local funds, and state transportation money when available. In 2012, the town issued permits for the first sections of the grid street network to be built. This includes the grid street running parallel to VT 2A between Marshall Avenue on the south and Wright Avenue on the north, as well as a small portion of Zephyr Road as part of the Finney Crossing development north of Williston Road. The remainder of Zephyr Road was constructed in 2015 and is it carrying traffic daily. Zephyr Road is a complete street, and includes facilities for pedestrians and bicycling traffic. Its completion provides travelers with an alternative route around the Taft Corners intersection of Williston road and VT 2A. A smaller connector street, Stillwater Lane, was also constructed linking Zephyr Road and the Talcott road area on the east.



- **Other Traffic Congestion**

In May 2011, Governor Shumlin announced that the state would no longer be pursuing the completion of the long anticipated Circumferential Highway (the Circ). The Circ as it was envisioned was to link I-89 in Williston northward across the Winooski River to the existing segment of the Circ in Essex that terminates at VT 117. It had been hoped that this new road would provide significant traffic congestion relief to the VT 2A corridor. The Governor instead asked the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) to head up a task force of the affected Circ communities of Williston, Essex, Essex Junction, and Colchester to look for some alternative measures to address some of the transportation and congestion issues along the corridor. Williston has been actively participating on this task force and is hoping that some meaning transportation strategies and improvements will come from this effort.

Williston was an active participant in the Circ Alternative Task Force which culminated in a list of identified priority projects in the four affected communities and documented in the task force's final report (see link below).

http://www.ccrpcvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CIRC_Alternatives_Task_Force_Report_20140114.pdf .

7. Going Forward

The implementation of the town plan and the growth center concept will bring many exciting challenges for Williston over the next five years. Some of the more important areas include the following:

- The Growth Center continues to be a central component and organizing principal of Williston's land use plan and land use development strategy. The town's Selectboard has reaffirmed the Growth Center strategy in the recent update to the town's comprehensive plan approved on August 22, 2017. Along with concentrating new development opportunities in the Taft Corners area, the town also continues to limit the availability of public infrastructure to limited areas, and limits the potential for new development in the rural parts of the town. As discussed in the report, the potential of creating a town forest from the lands of the Catamount Family Outdoor Center presents an exciting opportunity and challenge for the town to consider in the next year.

- The town continues to assess and refine the effectiveness of its regulations and other implementation strategies and tools for implementing the town plan, especially those related to the growth center concept. In the next few years the planning commission in particular will be examining the town's design and development standards in the growth center and will be considering adopting additional form based code provisions. In 2014 the town adopted as set of natural resource standards as part of the town's Unified Development Bylaw. The planning commission is currently in the process of drafting language for inclusion within these

regulations for the assessment and protection of archeological resources. This work is anticipated to be completed in the first half of 2018.

- The town will be examining its growth management system and considering way to streamline the review and allocation process for new residential development to help implement the Chittenden County regional housing goals
- The town is also eagerly anticipating the construction of a regional park and ride facility by the Agency of Transportation (VTrans) near Exit 12 of I-89 in 2018, expansion of bus transit service, and the continued build-out of the town's grid street network over the next five years.