

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. Throughout this transformation, the town has used its planning process to address the impacts that have resulted from population growth and land use change on the environment and character of the community, while 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 12 – 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 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; and
- 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 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 five-year updates of the comprehensive plan that are required by Vermont law.

This 2011-2016 plan is no exception. 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 explains how this plan complies with Vermont law and describes the process leading to its adoption.

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

Required Element, per 24 V.S.A. § 4382	Where Found in this Plan
(1) Objectives, Policies, and Programs	Objectives and policies appear in each chapter. Chapter 13 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 7. Recreational facilities are covered in Chapter 8. The schools are covered in Chapter 9. Power generation and distribution are discussed in Chapter 10.
(5) Policies on the preservation of Natural Resources	Chapters 3, 4, 11 and 12.
(6) Educational Facilities Plan	Chapter 9. This chapter also addresses child care, as required by 24 V.S.A. § 4302(C)(13)
(7) Implementation Program	Chapter 13.
(8) Relationship of the plan to trends and plans of adjacent municipalities, and the region.	Williston's efforts to coordinate with other jurisdiction are described in Chapter 13.
(9) Energy Plan	Chapter 10.
(10) Housing Element	Residential land use is covered in Chapter 3. Housing policy, including incentives for low and moderate income housing, is addressed in Chapter 5.

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

The Planning Process

Williston’s 2011 plan update has taken approximately 12 months. It began in earnest during the winter of 2010, with staff’s submission of a work program to the Planning Commission. The people of the town were invited to a “kickoff” meeting on January 20th and 23rd, 2010. The results of that event are summarized in Appendix A.

Following the kickoff meeting, the Planning Commission appointed citizen task forces to address three major plan elements: housing and growth management, land use, transportation, watershed health, energy, recreation, and open space resources. These groups began meeting in March 2010 and continued their discussions through September 2010. Reports from the task forces were forwarded to the planning commission in October.

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 Williston Green Initiatives citizen group took a leading role in revising the energy chapter.

The town also solicited participation from the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, Chittenden County Transportation Authority, 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

2010	
January	Kickoff meeting, involving more than 40 Williston residents
February	Planning commission appoints three citizen task forces
March	Citizen task forces begin meeting
September	Task forces complete their work
October - December	Planning commission meets weekly to complete the first draft
2011	
January-February	Planning Commission reviews draft chapters, as they are completed
February 11	First notice of Planning Commission hearing is published
March 15	Planning Commission Hearing
	Planning Commission transmits draft plan to the Selectboard
March 25, 2011	First Selectboard hearing
May 2, 2011	Second Selectboard hearing
May, June, July 2011	Selectboard Reviews all chapters of the draft plan
June 27, 2011	Selectboard sends proposed changes to the Planning Commission for consideration
July 5 and 19, 2011	Planning Commission discusses proposed changes and recommends modifications to the draft
August 15, 2011	Selectboard considers changes proposed by the Planning Commission, sends a request for refinement of some changes back to the Planning Commission
September 6, 2011	Planning Commission concurs with Selectboard recommended language
October 3, 2011	Public Hearing by the Slectboard

Kickoff Event Summary. Williston's plan update began with a "kickoff" event sponsored by the Planning Commission on January 20th and 23rd, 2010. 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.

After a brief introduction to the planning process, participants were divided into small groups and asked to prepare prioritized lists of issues that should be addressed in the plan update. Each group's list appears 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 are addressed in this plan. The kickoff event was also used a way to recruit members for the citizen task forces appointed by the Planning Commission.