

# Chapter 3: Future Use of Land

## INTRODUCTION

This section is the culmination of the entire *Rutland Regional Plan*. Obstacles and solutions identified in each of the previous sections are brought together to create a broad image of a sustainable future for the Region. It is hoped that users of this *Plan* apply the ideas towards cohesive future land development.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

The Rutland Region's settlement patterns are diverse. Rutland City is the prime urban area, centrally located in the Region, nestled in a valley between tight mountain ranges. It is bordered by several communities that contain both urban and rural elements. Elsewhere in the Region – 10-20 miles outside of the urban area, are a series of five sub-regional centers.

Outside of these centers, and in several other communities in the Region, smaller villages and hamlets are present thanks in large part to historic settlement patterns. Working rural landscapes, large tracts of open or forested land, and National Forest Land dominate the remainder of the Region.

Over the past 50 years, land use has changed dramatically. Land that was once in pasture and agriculture has grown into forests, while traditional compact settlement patterns, and distinctions between rural and village areas have become less clear as development has spread outwards.

## FUTURE TRENDS

The slow transformation of the landscape will likely continue. Uses of agricultural lands will evolve to meet changing demands. Development of land will continue to take place, though, according to population forecasts, not at a rapid pace.

Current trends that are likely to continue into the future include:

- Commercial uses are becoming larger and creating impacts. "Big box" stores have entered the local retail market over the past decade and affected the way in which people shop and travel to shop. They generate significant traffic flows, require large parking areas, and make a greater visual impact than their predecessors. Stormwater run-off has also become a concern.
- Residential development is spreading outward, with the majority of new homes



## DEFINITIONS

**Future Use of Land** – the patterns by which development of land is projected to take place in a given area.

## SCOTT'S MAP OF RUTLAND COUNTY, 1854



Scott's Map of Rutland County, prepared by J. Chase, Jr., 1854



## DEFINITIONS

**DENSITY:** The range, scale magnitude or concentration of activity affecting the land use, impacting traffic flow, commercialism, and overall land use.



The Future Land Use Chapter is the culmination of the entire Regional Plan. For background, look at the regional Profile.

being built on rural sites outside of traditional village or hamlet areas.

- Suburban type development, with less vernacular architecture, is also becoming more prevalent. Prime agricultural land is being subdivided and used for residential purposes.

Some towns have also been instrumental in promoting new development and redevelopment within their center, through private initiatives and public incentives, like grant programs such as the village/town designation, transportation enhancement grants, and municipal planning grants.

At the heart of the land use issue is a concern that development patterns in the form of low density, auto-dependent, discontinuous strip development is eroding the character of the area.

It is expected, based on current development practices in the Rutland

Region and across the country, that this trend will continue.

## MEETING CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS

The challenges presented by current development are complex.

There is a link between land use and towns' regulatory and nonregulatory controls. The quality of these regulations and plans, consistency with the adjacent towns' plans and that of the *Regional Plan* provide the framework for future land use.

Broad goals and specific actions presented throughout the *Regional Plan* provide the Regional Planning Commission and all users of this document with tools to address the issues highlighted above from a variety of perspectives.

The goals for future land use are the



National Agricultural Imagery Program, 2003, printed from the RRPC's GIS system

This aerial photograph of Fair Haven's village illustrates a compact village surrounded by working farm and forestland

foundation of the Region’s planning and development program. They are intended to be applied throughout the Region along with the *Plan’s* goals for housing, economic development—in several forms, transportation, public facilities, natural and cultural resources, and energy, among others .

## FUTURE USE OF LAND GOALS

The following broad goals for the future use of land in the Rutland Region are presented with the intent that they be read and considered together, as whole, and not as a series of individual statements:

- To maintain and improve the accessibility, livability and viability of existing built-up areas.
- To protect the character of rural areas and resource areas by discouraging scattered development and incompatible land uses.
- To promote competitive and sustainable agricultural, forestry, mineral extraction, and other practices that make use of the Region’s natural resources.
- To encourage and facilitate development in existing and future growth centers appropriate to the scale of the centers.
- To promote intensive land uses and development only in areas where adequate public services, facilities, and employment centers are available.
- To protect the natural environment and its economic, ecological, sociological, psychological and aesthetic benefits.

## RUTLAND RPC ACTIONS

In addition to supporting activities and developments that contribute to individual communities and the Region, and which help meet the needs identified in this *Plan*, the Rutland Regional Planning

Commission will strive to accomplish the following actions in the coming years:

- Work with communities to develop municipal plans and regulations that promote compact development, mixed use villages and town centers, and productive working landscapes.
- Work with towns to implement their plans through regulatory and non-regulatory controls
- Provide towns with GIS data so when development proposals are presented, towns have the most up-to-date information to make informed decisions.
- Work with communities to retain vibrant village centers.
- Work with interested communities to successfully tie commercial and industrial uses into existing land use patterns.
- Provide ongoing education to local officials and boards on best practices for the review of development proposals.



### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“Density is an emotional thing masquerading as a scientific ratio.

“We always hear from people that they want a cafe, a bakery, and a bookstore. But all these businesses depend on a certain amount of street traffic. They're a function of density... you need a certain amount of density at a certain household income within a certain radius to support a grocery store.”

– architect Alex Seidel



### FAST FACT

Between 1997 and 2002, the Rutland Region lost 7,000 acres of agricultural land (roughly half the size of Sudbury or Wells) to development.

– *US Census of Agriculture*



Villages such as East Poultney are important features of the Region’s landscape.

RRPC Staff

# THE FUTURE USE OF LAND MAP

The *Regional Plan's* Future Use of Land Map is a general guide for the forthcoming growth of the Region. It is based upon analyses from throughout the *Plan* and attempts to balance competing and complementary goals into a single image.

The map is intended to be conceptual; boundaries between area are imprecise. Specific sites and their prescribed uses are addressed locally.

The map is divided based on preferred densities of development intensity of activity. These include four generalized land use areas, a series of labels for the Region's town centers and villages. Together, these designations promote a cohesive pattern of growth and conservation that advances the intent of the *Rutland Regional Plan*.

## *Why the Labels and Land Use Areas Exist*

The map is based on an analysis of the location, magnitude, and potential of multiple features that make different areas more or less suitable, with a goal of making efficient use of limited infrastructure and maintaining the unique qualities of the Region.

For example, business and industry rely on the presence of public water and sewer, close proximity of major transportation networks, and, in some cases, access to markets for selling their goods.

By the same token, due to physical site limitations (steep slopes and wetlands, among others) and relatively high costs incidental to land development in certain areas, much of the Region is not readily available for development. These areas are suited for less dense and intense development, in keeping with the Region's rural environment.

Additionally, deep, well drained soils, proximity to good roads, and access to markets as key elements of a successful agricultural future for the Region. The *Plan* is also intended to provide for the long-term sustainability of resources, open space and scenic lands.

Finally, the *Plan* seeks to promote housing and small business development within and adjacent to villages that is in keeping with their unique histories.

The attached map depicts both an efficient use of land and a shared vision for the future based on public input. It should be used as a guide for future development of the Region. Planned growth and development is directed to those areas most suitable for such development and away from areas in which the proposed growth would be incompatible, due to the availability of services or protection of resources.

## *Why the Map is Blended*

Boundaries between the four land use areas are intentionally blended to underscore the regional nature of the map and to promote growth and development that is within and contiguous to existing villages, hamlets, town centers, and sub-regional centers.

## *Using the Map's Legend*

### HIGH DENSITY DEVELOPMENT AREAS



Areas shown as "high density" on the map are those most suitable for large-scale activity, within and in areas contiguous to the Region's downtowns, sub-regional centers, and industrial centers. They share a number of common features which make them attractive and suitable for these types of activities:

- Ease of access to major transportation routes
- Availability of utilities, including public water and sewer and high speed telecommunications
- Historic and current areas of concentrated population, business, and education
- Less critical natural resource and wildlife areas

These areas include the following designations within the Region:



**URBAN CENTER**– The Region's economic, population, education, and service focus areas. Businesses and services in this area draw their employees and clients from throughout the Region. Many of the Region's largest employers are located in area, making use of the conglomeration of people and services.



**SUB-REGIONAL CENTERS**– Areas where central public utilities for water and sewer are available and where there exists a central location or locations for commercial activities, schools, and civic activities for the town and surrounding towns.



**INDUSTRIAL / BUSINESS PARKS**– Areas designated by towns

around the Region and by the Rutland Economic Development Corporation as concentrated locations for business and industrial development. Parks have been designated in Clarendon, Brandon, Rutland City, Rutland Town, West Rutland, and Fair Haven.



**RUTLAND STATE AIRPORT**– The Region’s principal airport offers commercial air travel and general aviation services. It is closely linked to adjacent industrial parks.

***For the future:***

Development in high density areas, including downtowns, sub-regional centers, and industrial / business parks should be concentrated to make efficient use of the Region’s most concentrated infrastructure.

**MEDIUM DENSITY DEVELOPMENT AREAS**



Areas shown as “medium density” on the map include land in or adjacent to town centers, villages, and areas concentrated immediate around the Region’s major lakes and ponds—Lake Bomoseen, Lake St. Catherine, Lake Hortonia, Chipman Lake, and Lake Sunrise. These areas serve a number of purposes and are likely to face the most change in the coming years. These areas are, as a general rule served by some but not all of the features common to “high density ” areas.

These areas include the following designations within the Region:



**TOWN CENTERS**– Areas where central public utilities for water and sewer are generally available and where there exists a central location or locations for commercial activities, schools, and cultural and civic activities for the town.



**VILLAGE CENTERS**– Areas that have developed into small community centers and normally consist of mixed land uses at medium densities. They also generally have consolidated groups of structures located on or near a major highway.

***For the future:***

Development in medium density areas should serve to reinforce neighborhood-scale town centers and villages and make efficient use of limited infrastructure and space. Where medium density activities already exist

outside these centers, future growth and development should seek to create more efficient use of land and infrastructure.

**LOW DENSITY DEVELOPMENT AREAS**



Areas shown as “low density” on the map are Rutland County’s working landscapes. They include areas with small, historic hamlets as well as actively farmed or logged terrain. Features they share:

- Limited public utilities
- Productive agricultural soils in lowlands
- Little concentration of population and business
- Greater critical natural resources

These areas include the following designations within the Region:



**HAMLETS**– Areas that contain small groupings of homes and locally supported stores and businesses. Generally, hamlets are not trade centers, nor do they contain community water supply or sewer systems.

***For the future:***

Agricultural and silvicultural activities should continue to dominate the Region’s low density areas. Development in low density areas should be unobtrusive and maintain the rural character and scale of the locale.

**DEVELOPMENT-CONSTRAINED AREAS**



Areas shown as “development-constrained” have significant limitations upon current or future development because of conservation easements, public ownership, or severe natural limitations. These include lands owned or overseen by the National Forest Service, the State of Vermont, or land trusts, as well as large tracts of land that are on slopes over 25% grade or are wetlands.

***For the future***

Conservation of the natural landscape and careful management of lands is sought for these areas. Development should remain extremely limited.

**THIS PAGE HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY**