

Underhill VT Planning Commission Report on Proposed 2010 Town Plan Amendments

This report is in accordance with 24 VSA §4384(c) which states:

"When considering an amendment to a plan, the planning commission shall prepare a written report on the proposal. The report shall address the extent to which the plan, as amended, is consistent with the goals established in § 4302 of this title."

In General

This 2010 Town Plan amendment uses a new format for Underhill this year. At the beginning of each chapter is relevant background information reflecting the current situation, any studies done in the relevant area, Town Survey responses, and an explanation of why certain goals are set. Then there are a series of policies, goals and strategies. The policy states the overarching conclusion that is drawn based on the aforementioned information. The goals further refine the policy by identifying specific achievements necessary to implement the policy. The strategies define specific acts that should be taken, and by whom, to achieve the goal. The end result is a five-year workplan for Town boards, commissions and committees. The following sections outlines the policies and, in some instances for clarity, the goals that are delineated in the Plan. For more detail, refer to the relevant section in the Plan

How the 2009 Underhill Town Plan achieves the Specific Goals of 24 VSA §4302:

Chapter 1: Natural Resources: The policy for the Natural Resources Chapter is: "The Town should make a commitment to the responsible stewardship and sustainable use of Underhill's natural resources in a manner that protects and enhances the Town's environmental well-being for the benefit of future generations; the preservation of natural features that contribute to Underhill's ecological health and biological diversity; and the preservation of Underhill's rural character, cultural heritage, scenic landscape, working farms and managed forestlands. " Goals include:

- To better assess the value of land for forest and agricultural uses;
- To ensure that growth and development doesn't negatively impact the viability of forest and agricultural uses;
- To support the working forest and agricultural landscape in Underhill and provide incentives for uses that keep lands open and viable;
- To develop an open space plan for the Town;
- To protect, enhance and restore Underhill's surface water resources;
- To control impacts from stormwater;
- To protect Underhill's groundwater resources;
- To preserve wetlands within Underhill;
- To protect with the help of landowners: important natural areas; rare, threatened and endangered species; and critical wildlife habitat and overall biodiversity;
- To provide connectivity among natural areas and critical wildlife habitat;

- To protect ridgelines and hillsides from improperly planned development;
- To ensure that known areas of quality sand, gravel, and stone are protected for current or future use.

Chapter 2 Land Use: The Land Use chapter of the 2009 Town Plan does not alter the designation of any land area, but does propose to have a public process to discuss re-naming and re-defining the purpose of and boundaries of certain districts; exploring the use of overlay districts to achieve the purposes of the zoning districts; the creation of new districts if that is preferred by the community rather than overlay districts; the designation of village centers in Underhill Flats and Underhill Center; the updating and adoption of new regulations to be compliant with state and federal law; and the continued use of Town land contracts to preserve open space. Policies for this chapter include:

- Zoning District Name and Purpose: The zoning district name and purpose definition should reflect both the traditional use within the zoning district and provide guidance for future development within the zoning district.
- Underhill Flats Village Center Planning: The Underhill Flats Zoning District regulations should reflect traditional development pattern, uses, and lot sizes that maintain the historic settlement pattern of the compact village center and encourages future development within the village center.
- Land Uses: Land uses allowed within a zoning district should conform to the defined purpose of the zoning district and be approved by the community.
- Underhill Center Village Center Planning: The town should establish either a village center overlay district or separate district in Underhill Center that: reflects traditional development pattern; has permitted and conditional uses and lot sizes that maintain the historic settlement pattern of the compact village center; and encourages future development within the village center.
- Protect Animal Migration Routes
- Lands to which District Requirements Apply: Land use zoning districts are in themselves a restriction on land development. As such, lands designated within a zoning district must meet the definition of the district purpose.
- Floodplain Regulations: The Town's floodplain regulation shall be compliant with federal requirements so compliance with the NFIP is assured and our regulation is enforceable.
- Fluvial Erosion Hazard Area: A fluvial erosion hazard area should be considered if it provides a higher level of environmental protection than currently afforded by zoning set-backs from streambanks.
- Land Use Regulations: Underhill land use regulations should be user-friendly, enforceable, compliant with state law, internally consistent, and externally consistent with other town ordinances and regulations
- Land Use Contracts: Underhill shall continue to use the open land contracts to preserve undeveloped, productive space.

Chapter 3: Services: Policies in the Services chapter include:

- Public Transportation: The Town shall explore available public transportation options to serve Underhill

- Telephone Service: The telephone service in Underhill, with special emphasis on cellular telephone service, shall be made comparable to that in urban centers in Vermont.
- High Speed Internet: High-speed internet access is a necessity that shall be provided in Underhill.
- Emergency Operations: Underhill shall have an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) for use in an emergency or incident in accord with state and federal regulations.
- Emergency Volunteers: To train local volunteers and officials in required emergency response roles and responsibilities.

Chapter 4: Infrastructure: The following policies and goals are included in the Infrastructure chapter:

- Financing Infrastructure Projects: The Town should create mechanisms to guarantee that capital improvement projects can be accomplished without borrowing for each project. (Goal): Creation of Reserve Funds: The Town should establish two reserve funds, a capital improvement fund and a “rainy day” fund.
- Capital Improvement Plan: To plan for, finance, provide and maintain infrastructure that is adequate to meet the needs of Underhill town residents and government. (Goal) Since Underhill’s infrastructure has grown over the years and will continue to evolve, a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) should be developed by the Selectboard.
- Town Buildings: Town buildings shall be well maintained and provide a safe and efficient environment for town employees.
- Town Lands and Natural Resources: To maintain town-owned land and natural resources in a manner that is compliant with state and local environmental rules and regulations while maximizing the Town-approved uses of these areas.
- Town Roads: The Town shall strive to provide a safe, convenient and economic transportation system that respects the integrity of the natural environment. (Goal): To look for all possible efficiencies while maintaining town residents’ high level of satisfaction with current maintenance
- Other Town Assets: The Town shall maintain and replace its highway equipment and maintain other Town assets such as Casey's Hill, the Town Pond, and the tennis courts in accord with the CIP.
- Village Center Planning: As part of Village Center planning, the Town shall assure that existing or potential infrastructure could meet the needs of more densely populated village centers.

Chapter 5: Transportation: The following policies are included in the Transportation Chapter:

- Town Roads: The Town shall strive to provide a safe, convenient, and economic transportation system that respects the integrity of the natural environment.
- Town Roads: The Town shall preserve and enhance the rural character and livability of Underhill's roads while at the same time promoting safety.
- Public Transportation: The Town shall explore available public transportation options to serve Underhill.
- Alternative Modes of Transportation: To provide facilities for alternative modes of transportation such as bicycling, walking, and carpooling.

Chapter 6: Housing: The following policies and goals are in the Housing chapter:

- Housing and Income: The Town should strive to make residence in the Town available to all income levels. (Goal): Increase the affordable housing stock for those of low and moderate incomes.
- Housing and Age: The Town should strive to make housing affordable for all residents. (Goal): To increase housing stock that allows for young families and individuals and older community members to remain in the community.
- Housing Targets: The Town of Underhill should have achievable housing targets. (Goal): To work with the Regional Planning Commission to modify the housing target identified in the 2006 Regional Plan for Underhill and then to propose regulation changes that will make it possible to achieve those goals.

Chapter 7: Economic Development: The following policies and goals are included in the Economic development chapter:

- Underhill shall strive to be an affordable community for the full socio-economic range its population, and shall encourage the development of small-scale local services and employment opportunities. (Goals): To increase local economic activity (home-based employment as well as local businesses); to expand availability of affordable housing; and to maintain and increase working landscape.

Chapter 8: Energy: The following policies are discussed in the Energy Chapter:

- Reduce Town Energy Consumption: The Town shall work to reduce energy consumption of Town equipment and Town properties and also encourage Town residents to do the same.
- Alternative Renewable Energy Sources: Encourage the development of alternative renewable energy sources in Underhill.

Chapter 9: Recreation: The following recreation policies are discussed in this chapter:

- Trail Maintenance and Development: It is a benefit to Underhill residents to have access to traditional trail systems. Those trail systems should protect the flora and fauna of the trail area, should respect the rights of private landowners and be maintained in an environmentally responsible manner.
- The Town shall encourage recreational trail development throughout Town, particularly along the River Road corridor to connect Underhill Flats and Underhill Center.
- The Town shall maintain its entire recreational infrastructure.
- The Town should know where their ancient roads lie and make decisions as to continuance based on public input.

*Note: The 2009 Town Plan did not include sections on Education and Child Care. The purpose of the 2010 Town Plan Hearings is to incorporate those sections under Chapter 3: Services. Likewise, a required map depicting services and facilities, and an updated road map are included in the 2010 Town Plan. No other changes have been made.