



**Town of Underhill
Planning Commission**

P.O. Box 32
Underhill Center, VT 05490

2012 REDISTRICTING PROJECT

Project Origins

In late fall 2011 the Planning Commission applied for and was awarded a Municipal Planning Grant to undertake a **District Rezoning Study/Project**. The grant was from the State Municipal and Regional Planning Fund, which was established in 1988 to help Vermont municipalities guide future growth and development and improve their quality of life. Underhill was one of 42 towns and cities throughout the state to receive the award through the competitive grant process.

Background & Purpose

Underhill's zoning districts were originally drawn to follow the soils maps from the 1970s. Each district's purpose statement was largely based on the soils maps, referring vaguely to soil cover and aquifer recharge area protection. Additionally, the Residential district was to encourage denser development "where a public water supply exists," and the Scenic Preservation district was to "protect scenic vistas along Pleasant Valley Road."

The district boundaries have not been updated since a minor "squaring-off" during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The last revision was prompted by the 1984 Town Plan.

Advances in septic system technology have changed what was once thought of as unbuildable land; however the zoning districts remained unchanged. Likewise, the expansion of the capacity and service capabilities of the Jericho-Underhill Water District occurred independently of zoning district delineations, yet the requirement for additional acreage within the district but outside of the original Water District boundaries remained until the regulation update in 2011.

While the district purpose statements were revised during the most recent Town Plan update (2010), it is becoming apparent that the district boundaries themselves do not necessarily follow the historic settlement patterns nor do they lend themselves to anticipated or desired future development. Application of the Unified Land Use and Development Regulations is adding to the discovery of the tension between "what is" and "what is intended and desired."

Examples of the tension can be seen in the comparison of the historic development of the town and district minimum acreage requirements. Much of the denser development has occurred in two specific locations: the Underhill Flats Village Center district (formerly the Residential district) and what is referred to as Underhill Center, which is mostly within the Water Conservation district. The Underhill Flats Village Center district purpose statement now allows for the continuation of the historic development pattern while simultaneously encouraging dense, compact village development. Despite this new focus, the minimum acreage requirement of one acre has not changed and is larger than many of the existing parcels in the district. Adding to the acreage dichotomy is the fact that the Village is shared with Jericho, whose minimum parcel size requirement is $\frac{1}{4}$ acre right across the Town line and essentially right across the street (Park Street). A cohesive Village Center with complementary uses and requirements is not only good planning but also beneficial for the residents and business owners, and makes common sense.

Underhill Center has also developed in a historically dense pattern. Many of the parcels are smaller than the minimum 5-acre requirement. A mix of residences, small and home-based businesses, a post office, a church, a school, the Town Hall, and small parks converge at the intersection of the two major through-roads in town: River Road and Pleasant Valley Road. However, a major difference between the Center and the Village is that the Jericho-Underhill Water District does not extend public water service to the Center. Regardless, the historic pattern has led to a situation where many landowners cannot meet district setback requirements for any addition to their property, nor can they subdivide despite being surrounded by non-conforming parcels.

Finally, there are pockets of the Soil and Water Conservation district, primarily surrounded by the Rural Residential zoning district, scattered throughout Town that may or may not be beneficial or logical to retain. An evaluation of these district boundaries will answer many questions that have arisen since the boundaries were first established while shedding light on how the district boundaries may be better configured to encourage desired development.

The project purpose is to implement the goals of the Underhill Town Plan by evaluating the Underhill Flats Village Center, Water Conservation, and outlier Soil & Water Conservation zoning districts to ensure that they reflect the vision for the Town's evolution.

Forums & Adoption Process

To gain public input into the redistricting project, the Planning Commission is hosting two public forums October 17 at the Town Hall and October 24 at the Deborah Rawson Memorial Library. All are welcome and encouraged to participate in the discussion of the proposed changes to the district boundaries and associated standards & uses.

Public comments received at the public forums will be incorporated into the proposed maps and standards. The Planning Commission will then hold two public hearings in November on the drafts of the maps and district standards & uses. Final revisions will be made and forwarded to the Selectboard for two additional public hearings in December and/or January. The final proposed changes will be on the ballot for public vote at Town Meeting in March.

Comments & Questions

You may contact the Zoning & Planning Administrator at 899-4434, x106, by email at underhillzoning@comcast.net, or by mail

Zoning & Planning Administrator
RE: Redistricting
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