

**Hartford Planning Commission Workshop
Agenda**

Monday, October 20, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.

Hartford Town Hall, Room 2, 171 Bridge Street, White River Junction

This will be a hybrid meeting (in-person with remote access available).

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1. Model Hybrid Public Meeting Script & Roll Call
2. Request to Approve Submittal of a Vermont Municipal Planning Grant Application
3. Presentation and Discussion of the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission Future Land Use Map for Hartford: Guest – TRORC Planner Kyle Katz
4. Adjournment

Future Land Use Areas for Regional Plans Prescribed in Act 181 as set forth in Title 24 section 4348a(a)(12)

(A) **Downtown or village centers.** These areas are the mixed-use centers bringing together community economic activity and civic assets. They include downtowns, villages, and new town centers previously designated under chapter 76A and downtowns and village centers seeking benefits under the Community Investment Program under section 5804 of this title. The downtown or village centers are the traditional and historic central business and civic centers within planned growth areas, village areas, or may stand alone. Village centers are not required to have public water, wastewater, zoning, or subdivision bylaws.

(B) **Planned growth areas.** These areas include the high-density existing settlement and future growth areas with high concentrations of population, housing, and employment in each region and town, as appropriate. They include a mix of historic and nonhistoric commercial, residential, and civic or cultural sites with active streetscapes, supported by land development regulations; public water or wastewater, or both; and multimodal transportation systems. These areas include new town centers, downtowns, village centers, growth centers, and neighborhood development areas previously designated under chapter 76A of this title. These areas should generally meet the smart growth principles definition in chapter 139 of this title and the following criteria:

(i) The municipality has a duly adopted and approved plan and a planning process that is confirmed in accordance with section 4350 of this title and has adopted bylaws and regulations in accordance with sections 4414, 4418, and 4442 of this title.

(ii) This area is served by public water or wastewater infrastructure.

(iii) The area is generally within walking distance from the municipality's or an adjacent municipality's downtown, village center, new town center, or growth center.

(iv) The area excludes identified flood hazard and river corridor areas, except those areas containing preexisting development in areas suitable for infill development as defined in section 29-201 of the Vermont Flood Hazard Area and River Corridor Rule.

(v) The municipal plan indicates that this area is intended for higher-density residential and mixed-use development.

(vi) The area provides for housing that meets the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in the community.

(vii) The area is served by planned or existing transportation infrastructure that conforms with "complete streets" principles as described under 19 V.S.A. chapter 24 and establishes pedestrian access directly to the downtown, village center, or new town center. Planned transportation infrastructure includes those investments included in the municipality's capital improvement program pursuant to section 4430 of this title.

(C) **Village areas.** These areas include the traditional settlement area or a proposed new settlement area, typically composed of a cohesive mix of residential, civic, religious, commercial, and mixed-use buildings, arranged along a main street and intersecting streets that are within walking distance for residents who live within and surrounding the core. These areas include existing village center designations and similar areas statewide, but this area is larger than the village center designation. Village areas shall meet the following criteria:

(i) The municipality has a duly adopted and approved plan and a planning process that is confirmed in accordance with section 4350 of this title.

(ii) The municipality has adopted bylaws and regulations in accordance with sections 4414, 4418, and 4442 of this title.

(iii) Unless the municipality has adopted flood hazard and river corridor bylaws, applicable to the entire municipality, that are consistent with the standards established pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 755b (flood hazard) and 10 V.S.A. § 1428(b) (river corridor), the area excludes identified flood hazard and river corridors, except those areas containing preexisting development in areas suitable for infill development as defined in 29-201 of the Vermont Flood Hazard Area and River Corridor Rule.

(iv) The municipality has either municipal water or wastewater. If no public wastewater is available, the area must have soils that are adequate for wastewater disposal.

(v) The area has some opportunity for infill development or new development areas where the village can grow and be flood resilient.

(D) **Transition or infill area.** These areas include areas of existing or planned commercial, office, mixed-use development, or residential uses either adjacent to a planned growth or village area or a new stand-alone transition or infill area and served by, or planned for, public water or wastewater, or both. The intent of this land use category is to transform these areas into higher-density, mixed-use settlements, or residential neighborhoods through infill and redevelopment or new development. New commercial linear strip development is not allowed as to prevent it negatively impacting the economic vitality of commercial areas in the adjacent or nearby planned growth or village area. This area could also include adjacent greenfields safer from flooding and planned for future growth.

(E) **Resource-based recreation areas.** These areas include large-scale resource-based recreational facilities, often concentrated around ski resorts, lakeshores, or concentrated trail networks, that may provide infrastructure, jobs, or housing to support recreational activities.

(F) **Enterprise areas.** These areas include locations of high economic activity and employment that are not adjacent to planned growth areas. These include industrial parks, areas of natural resource extraction, or other commercial uses that involve larger land areas. Enterprise areas typically have ready access to water supply, sewage disposal, electricity, and freight transportation networks.

(G) **Hamlets.** Small historic clusters of homes and may include a school, place of worship, store, or other public buildings not planned for significant growth; no public water supply or wastewater systems; and mostly focused along one or two roads. These may be depicted as points on the future land use map.

(H) **Rural; general.** These areas include areas that promote the preservation of Vermont's traditional working landscape and natural area features. They allow for low-density residential and some limited commercial development that is compatible with productive lands and natural areas. This may also include an area that a municipality is planning to make more rural than it is currently.

(I) **Rural; agricultural and forestry.** These areas include blocks of forest or farmland that sustain resource industries, provide critical wildlife habitat and movement, outdoor recreation, flood storage, aquifer recharge, and scenic beauty, and contribute to economic well-being and quality of life. Development in these areas should be carefully managed to promote the working landscape and rural economy, and address regional goals, while protecting the agricultural and forest resource value.

(J) **Rural; conservation.** These are areas of significant natural resources, identified by regional planning commissions or municipalities based upon existing Agency of Natural Resources mapping that require special consideration for aquifer protection; for wetland protection; for the maintenance of forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and habitat connectors; or for other conservation purposes. The mapping of these areas and accompanying policies are intended to help meet requirements of 10 V.S.A. chapter 89. Any portion of this area that is approved by the LURB as having Tier 3 area status shall be identified on the future land use map as an overlay upon approval.

New Land Use Tiers and the Regional Plan

[Act 181](#) was enacted into law in Vermont in 2024 and creates a new program of the State's [Land Use Review Board](#) that will designate certain lands as being in 'tiers'. Three of these tiers will alter the [Act 250 process](#) that would otherwise occur at that location. Four tiers are under development – 1A, 1B, 2 and 3.

Development in Tier 1A areas will be exempt from Act 250 review. This will likely start in 2027 in the TRORC region. Development of 50 or fewer units of housing on a lot no bigger than 10 acres will be exempt from Act 250 review in Tier 1B areas. This will also likely start in 2027. Tier 2 areas will simply be all lands not in the other tiers. The Land Use Review Board will look at how the current Act 250 process might change in Tier 2 areas, with a report on that due in early 2026. Tier 3 lands will likely have additional Act 250 requirements than they have now, and the Board is just beginning to draft how it will create Tier 3 areas and what they will mean. There are two public meetings scheduled for that process on May 22, 2025 at 6 PM and July 24, 2025 at 6 PM. You can follow their Tier 3 process [here](#), including details on meetings.

Tier 1A areas will be approved by the Land Use Review Board only after a municipality requests such approval, and only when the Board finds that the area meets certain requirements. The Board is in the process of creating how they will approve such requests, but as a minimum Tier 1A areas will have to meet the requirements in [10 VSA section 6034](#). The second of these requirements ties into the Regional Plan, as it depends on TRORC showing these areas (as a Downtown Center, Village Center, or Planned Growth Area) in its updated Future Land Use Map. That drafting is going on through 2025 with the new map expected to be adopted in late 2026. You can find out more about that process [here](#).

Similarly, Tier 1B areas will be approved by the Land Use Review Board only after a municipality requests such approval, and only when the Board finds that the area meets certain requirements. The Board is in the process of creating how they will approve such requests, but as a minimum Tier 1B areas will have to meet the requirements in part (b)(12)(C) of [24 VSA section 4348a](#) and be shown on the regional Future Land Use Map.

Regional Plan Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Does TRORC have to prepare and adopt a Regional Plan?

[Yes](#). TRORC has had a Regional Plan in place for several decades.

Q: What is the purpose of a Regional Plan

Regional Plans have several statutory [purposes](#) and must further the [state planning goals](#).

Q: What are the parts of a Regional Plan?

A Regional Plan is required to cover several topic areas, referred to as [elements](#), but may have different formats. Our Plan begins with an [Introduction](#) that explains the Plan's layout and uses. This is an excellent place to begin to understand Regional Plans.

Q: What subjects does a Regional Plan have to cover?

A Regional Plan is required to cover several [elements](#), including ones on natural resources and working lands, energy, transportation, utilities and facilities, housing, economic development, flood resilience, and future land use.

Q: Does the Plan have to have a future land use map?

Yes, the Plan is required to have [several maps](#), often as part of each element. The Regional Plan has had a future land use map for decades. This is our current [future land use map](#) that has been in place since 2020.

Q: What is a future land use map?

It is a map of the entire region with lands placed into 'future land use areas'. Lands are placed into these areas largely based on their current or desired usage, their physical characteristics, the functions they perform, and the infrastructure that is serving them. The Plan then has goals and policies for each area.

Q: What does the Regional Plan mean to me?

The Plan is a great place to find out about many issues and the Region. It supports many actions beneficial to individuals, from building park and rides to increasing childcare. The Plan has no regulatory powers of its own. Its policies primarily affect development that trigger Act 250, or that build cell towers or electrical generation. If you are not doing one of these developments, the plan is only advisory. See our handout – [The Regional Plan and You](#).

Q: Is the Regional Plan used in Act 250?

Yes. For decades [projects regulated under Act 250](#) have been required by the [District Environmental Commission](#) to conform to regional and town plans where these plans have mandatory and clear policies.

Q: What projects are regulated by Act 250?

That is a long answer, since it depends on what town it is in and where in that town, but this [page](#) is where to start. As a general rule, building up to 5 housing units or creating up to five lots never triggers Act 250. Agriculture and forestry are also exempt from Act 250.

Q: How can I tell if the Regional Plan is mandatory?

Most of the Plan is advisory and uses words like ‘encourage’ or ‘should’. Even mandatory policies are only mandatory in Act 250. Mandatory policies use words like ‘shall’ and ‘must’.

Q: What does the Regional Plan mean for my town?

Towns can use the maps, data, and policies of the Regional Plan for much of what is needed for their town plan. The Plan also recommends ways that TRORC can help towns, and it raises some municipal concerns, such as the need for more funding for sewer systems, to state and federal agencies. Having certain areas called out on the future land use map creates the ability for those local areas to get or keep some grant funding and tax credits under a revised state designation program.

Q: Is the Regional Plan zoning?

No. The Plan has no regulatory effect on its own.

Q: If a town’s zoning is different than the Regional Plan, what happens?

Nothing, zoning and plans are different things. Local zoning is a local matter, though state statute lays out what towns can and can’t do, and all zoning has to further the state’s land use goals.

Q: Is the Regional Plan eminent domain?

No, the Plan does not take any land.

Q: Can TRORC veto local zoning through the Regional Plan?

No, that is not possible or even logical.

Q: Can TRORC veto town plans through the Regional Plan?

No. Towns can seek [regional approval](#) of their plans, but are not required to. After a town adopts a plan, seeking regional approval it must be found to be consistent with the Regional Plan. A plan that does not have regional approval is still a valid plan.

Q: Can the Regional Plan ban logging?

No, that is not possible.

Q: Can the Regional Plan ban farming?

No, that is not possible.

Q: How is the Plan made?

The Plan is drafted by regional commission [staff](#) and then discussed at Board meetings as well as meetings with the general public before having a set of formal hearings.

Q: Where can I find the current Regional Plan adopted in February, 2025?

You can find the current Plan [here](#). There are links to the entire Plan, as well as each part. There is also a map viewer of the future land use map so you can see that in more detail.

Q: Where can I follow the 2026 Regional Plan drafting process?

TRORC maintains a web page that shows any drafts, meetings, and hearings [here](#).

Q: How is the Plan adopted?

The Plan is regionally adopted by the [TRORC Board](#) after a [required public process](#). And then the Plan must go through an [approval process](#) with the [Land Use Review Board](#) for a ‘determination of regional plan compliance’. After this approval the Plan is fully adopted.

Q: What is the TRORC Board?

The Board is made up of representatives appointed by each member town’s Selectboard, plus several at-large members.

Q: Are TRORC’s Board meetings public?

Yes. TRORC is covered under Vermont’s [open meeting law](#), just like towns, and our Board is considered a non-advisory body. You can find our agendas and schedule of upcoming meetings [here](#) and minutes of past meetings [here](#).

Q: Does TRORC or the Regional Plan create ‘tiers’?

No. Tiers are a new concept that will remove Act 250 jurisdiction from certain projects in certain places. Tier will be created by the [Land Use Review Board](#).

Q: What are land use ‘tiers’?

‘Tiers’ are neither a state designated area for tax and grant purposes by the [Community Investment Board](#) nor a future land use area by TRORC. Tiers are a third thing that does not exist yet, but will be created by the [Land Use Review Board](#). Tiers are mainly to alter what would otherwise be the Act 250 jurisdiction. Please see our [handout on tiers](#) and follow the development of tiers by the Land Use Review Board [here](#).

Q: Does the Regional Plan ‘designate’ areas?

This is complicated, but the short answer is not directly. ‘Designation’ is neither a tier nor a future land use area, but rather a certain state process that enables financial tax incentives. The Regional Plan describes future land use areas in its text and *delineates* them on its [future land use map](#), and the state

currently *designates* areas through its own process. Two of TRORC's most common core land use areas currently are 'Village Settlement' and 'Town Centers'. Often the central part of these areas is also currently *designated* by the state as a 'Village Center'. This [state designation](#) is separate from the Regional Plan, but the names are similar.

To bring these two processes more into alignment, our next future land use map will delineate areas that will essentially also become the map for the new state designations. Due to [Act 181](#), in our 2026 Plan revision, many of our smaller core areas will be called 'Village Centers', which is *currently* one of five state designations. The [Community Investment Board](#) will review our map and, hopefully, use what we *delineate* as 'Village Centers' as the area they will then *designate* as 'Village Centers'.

Q: Is the Regional Plan used by the Public Utility Commission?

Yes. Projects regulated by the PUC under a 248 (grid-connected electrical generation) or 248a (cell towers) process are looked at with an eye to regional and town plans. Such plans are at least given 'due consideration' when the PUC reviews projects, and may be given more stringent (but not mandatory) 'substantial deference' in certain cases.

Q: What is TRORC

The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) is a regional planning commission. Maintaining a Regional Plan is just one part of its activities. You can see the entire range of its work [here](#).

Q: Is TRORC a state agency?

No, TRORC, like all regional planning commissions, is a 'political subdivision' of the state. That means that we are created by the state.

Q: What area does TRORC cover?

TRORC covers 30 towns and 3 incorporated villages in parts of 4 counties. You can see a map of the Region [here](#).

October 20, 2025 Planning Commission MPG Project Overview

Project Title: Downtown White River Junction Multimodal Transportation and Parking Feasibility Study

Project Subtitle: This project will study the feasibility of increasing multimodal transportation and parking options in downtown White River Junction to meet increasing demand related to the redevelopment of the Hotel Coolidge site and downtown for housing and commercial space.

Project Description: A lack of multimodal transportation and/or parking options can suppress business growth, limit redevelopment opportunities, and threaten to divert investment to other towns with more accessible infrastructure. The Town of Hartford has short and long-term goals of reducing car dependency but also realizes that the availability of more parking in the short-term may be necessary in Downtown to support the development of new housing and economic growth.

The approach to solving the problem is to complete a feasibility study that addresses increased demand for multimodal transportation and parking solutions. The project deliverables will include a report recommending the best multimodal transportation strategies to implement to allow residents to be less car-dependent over time and the best parking expansion strategy to meet present-day needs until most residents can fully rely on multimodal transportation. Intended long-term outcomes of the eventual infrastructure construction project include redevelopment of the Hotel Coolidge and other parcels into housing and commercial space; attraction of new businesses and jobs through ~14,000 SF of new retail, commercial, and restaurant space; expanded foot traffic and non-export sales; and more than \$50M in leveraged private investment. By completing this feasibility work, it helps ensure downtown White River Junction has the infrastructure foundation needed for growth and resilience.

Project Issue & Urgency: White River Junction has reinvented itself into a celebrated hub for small businesses, artists, and cultural organizations. Its success has created a new pressure point and at times there are shortages of parking to meet visitor and business needs. Presently, the developer has actively worked on the redevelopment of Hotel Coolidge into ~95 units of multifamily housing and ~14,000 SF of new retail/commercial space. The demand for parking that goes along with this redevelopment cannot be met with the current downtown parking supply. The 2019 Hartford Town plan reads, “The Downtown White River Junction Parking Study, completed in 2017, concluded that parking occupancy
Page 2 of 3 is likely to continue to increase and the Town will need to make the most of existing capacity, reduce demand for parking, manage parking turnover and develop new

parking capacity. Since parking is an expensive commodity, it is important that the Town explore creative funding options. The Town is currently working toward implementation of the Plans' recommendations." Similarly, the 2023 Housing Chapter Draft offers the following strategies for meeting housing goals: "Provide and maintain the necessary community infrastructure and resources to support and enable desired housing production" and "Facilitate the development of services and amenities that support neighborhoods and villages."

As noted previously, lack of multimodal transportation or parking options can adversely impact business growth, limit adequate redevelopment opportunities, and threaten to divert investment to other towns with more accessible infrastructure. This MPG project addresses these challenges head-on. By preparing short-term and long-term solutions for increased multimodal transportation and parking options, it will help unlock redevelopment of the Hotel Coolidge site and other downtown parcels, enabling the new housing and commercial space while creating an inclusive civic heart for the community. MPG funding is urgent and essential to this project, as the project submitted a full application for the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) Catalyst Feasibility Project Track on October 10, 2025, after submitting a pre-application in August. Funding during this round of the MPG cycle is crucial as the MPG is needed to meet the NBRC grant required 1:1 match.

Funding Need: On behalf of this project, the Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) applied for the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) Catalyst Feasibility Project Track. This is a new initiative from NBRC focusing on feasibility for large economic development projects. If awarded this grant, it has the potential to later unlock over \$3 million in NBRC and other grant funding for this project.

The MPG program is very complementary to the NBRC Feasibility Project Track grant, as the MPG is one of the rare sources for planning grants. This project is a great fit for the MPG program as it will plan for future growth and development, while also improving residents' quality of life. MPG funding for this feasibility study will open multiple opportunities for subsequent implementation funding of the overall larger infrastructure project.

Project Outcomes & Goals: The goal is to complete feasibility work that directly enables a transformational infrastructure project that focuses on increased multimodal transportation in the long-term and increased parking capacity in the short-term. Both are essential for White River Junction's present and future needs, and are consistently cited in the 2009 Revitalization Plan, the 2017 Parking Study, and the 2024 Vibrancy Survey, where Page 3 of 3 residents ranked parking availability as the #1 challenge. Together, these

studies included substantial public engagement and showed that inadequate parking can limit business growth, new housing, and downtown vitality.

Direct outputs of this project will include a report recommending the best multimodal transportation strategies to implement to allow residents to be less car dependent over time and the best parking expansion strategy to meet present-day needs until most residents can fully rely on multimodal transportation. Expected outcomes of the eventual infrastructure construction project that this feasibility project supports include redevelopment of the Hotel Coolidge and other parcels into housing and commercial space; attraction of new businesses and jobs through ~14,000 SF of new retail, commercial, and restaurant space; expanded foot traffic and non-export sales; and more than \$50M in leveraged private investment. We anticipate that the outcomes of the feasibility study will resolve community needs in a way that is also consistent with TRORC's Regional Plan, State planning goals, smart growth principles, and the Town's capital improvement planning. By completing this feasibility work, it helps ensure downtown White River Junction has the infrastructure foundation needed for growth and resilience.

Priority Project Explanation: This project is related to housing development as it is anticipated to provide approximately 95 homes for Hartford. There is a housing shortage within Hartford and many people struggle to find quality rentals, so this project would help bridge that gap. Having more housing in downtown White River Junction closely correlates to having more opportunities for increased economic development.

This project is related to capital programs and plans for municipal improvements as it addresses short-term needs such as needing increased parking capacity downtown but also addresses long-term needs such as providing increased multimodal transportation opportunities. The feasibility study would be considered capital planning and planning for municipal improvements.

This project is an innovative project that would serve as a replicable model for other communities. The Town of Hartford Selectboard approved a "Public-Private Partnership" (PPP) policy on April 15, 2025. This policy breaks down a PPP into three benchmark levels for the Selectboard to consider when evaluating a PPP project. The Coolidge Hotel redevelopment project is the first project to be evaluated using the PPP framework and was approved as meeting benchmark level one on July 22, 2025. PPPs are an effective and efficient way for large projects to be viable and provide benefits for the public good.