

Hartford Planning Commission Workshop

Draft Minutes October 20, 2025

Planning Commission Chair John Reid called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He followed by reading the hybrid meeting script and conducting a roll call.

The following individuals attended the meeting which was held at the Hartford Town Hall in Room 2 at 171 Bridge Street in White River Junction on Monday, October 20, 2025. The meeting was also available remotely and several people joined that way.

Planning Commission: Dillon Bianchi, Colin Butler, Toby Dayman, John Heath, Dylan Kreis, Bruce Riddle and chair John Reid.

Staff: Lori Hirshfield and Matt Osborn of the Hartford Planning and Development Department and Kevin Geiger and Kyle Katz of the Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Commission.

Others: Erik Krauss.

1. **Public Comments:** John Reid asked if there were any public comments. There were none.
2. **Vermont Municipal Planning Grant Application:** Lori Hirshfield reported that staff are recommending applying for a Municipal Planning Grant for a multi-modal and parking feasibility study for Downtown White River Junction related to the redevelopment of the Hotel Coolidge and other downtown properties. She noted that there have been several meetings with the Selectboard and the Hotel Coolidge developer who is seeking a catalyst grant for the Hotel Coolidge redevelopment. The study will determine the feasibility of parking to meet future parking demand. Lori stated that the Selectboard requested an assessment of multi-modal transportation options and opportunities for funding. Multi-modal transportation seeks alternatives to single occupant vehicles such as transit, walking, bicycling, carpooling and car share.

Colin asked about the local match. Lori responded that the grant application is for \$30,000 with a local match requirement of \$3,333. The match would be provided by either the catalyst grant or by the developer. Colin said that he is not supportive of using public funds for private development. Lori responded that it is increasingly clear that we are not going to have enough parking to accommodate redevelopment of the downtown. She noted that the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Program is a structure to use the growth in tax revenue from private development to make needed public infrastructure improvements including parking, and anticipated a similar analysis process would be used for other improvements.

John Heath asked if we know the cost per parking space. Lori responded that this can vary depending on the location and type of parking, and the study would look at these different options. John noted that he is concerned about public/private partnerships. He asked if it will include a market study. Lori responded that the parking and multimodal study is one of the items needed to help the Selectboard and the developer understand and if it is feasible for the Town or the developer to pursue further discussion about the possibility of a public/private partnership. Lori also noted that a market analysis for the proposed housing and commercial uses is something that would be done but not with this municipal planning grant application. John also noted that he is concerned about too much density. Lori responded that zoning regulations set density requirements which must be

compatible with the Town Plan, which the Planning Commission will be reviewing in general townwide in the next 6 months or so.

Dylan asked about parking meters. Lori responded that parking meters will be installed Downtown and on Prospect Street later this fall.

John Reid said that increasing traffic downtown conflicts with the Climate Action Plan and we need to look for solutions. He highlighted the importance of including multi-modal options,

Bruce made a motion to approve the submittal of a Vermont Municipal Planning Grant to conduct a parking and multi-modal feasibility study for Downtown White River Junction and authorize the chair to sign the resolution form on behalf of the Planning Commission. Colin seconded the motion which was approved 7 to 0.

- 3. Presentation and Discussion of the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission Future Land Use Map for Hartford:** Kyle Katz and Kevin Geiger of the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) were present to discuss the new mapping requirements stemming from the housing and Act 250 legislative changes in 2024. Kyle went through a PowerPoint presentation. He noted that TRORC has been doing initial public outreach and meeting with Towns since February. He noted that since Hartford is the largest and most complex town in the region, it came last to give their staff time to figure things out. Their goal is to have the Town review completed by the end of the year so the TRORC Board can begin their review. The Planning Commission expressed concern that not enough time was given for this review.

Kyle noted that the statewide land use categories spelled out in Act 181 created additional categories from the land use categories in the current TRORC land use map for Hartford. Each category has a detailed description. Kyle noted that instead of two rural categories there are three in this required mapping process:

- Rural General;
- Rural Agriculture and Forestry; and
- Rural Conservation.

He also noted the other categories including:

- Downtown Center
- Village Center
- Village Area
- Planned Growth Area
- Enterprise
- Transition
- Resource-based recreation

Kyle provided an introduction to the Regional Plan update.

- Planning is neither all local control up, nor top down.
 - * Regional planning extends beyond town boundaries.
 - * “Consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development for the region and the State, as well as the community in which it takes place.”
- A regional plan shall be consistent with State planning goals.
 - * Plans “maintain the historic settlement pattern of *compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside*.”
 - * “Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural and forestlands should be encouraged and should include maintaining low overall density.”

These State-required changes will result in:

- Expanded village areas; and
- Smaller Rural Conservation Areas; and
- Three rural areas, rather than the two in our current regional plan.

The mapping of the new rural areas will not impact single-family dwellings or home occupations in Act 250.

Kyle said TRORC is looking for a memo from the Planning Commission regarding feedback on the map by the end of 2025. Kyle will provide pdf files of the map. Kevin encouraged marking up the printed maps. Kyle noted that the Hartford map will be available on the TRORC website shortly, and the public is welcome to provide comments. Kyle encouraged the Planning Commission to share this information with the larger community.

Kyle stated that the map identifies the predominant use in the area and does not isolate individual properties. As an example, Matt noted the Quechee Lakes golf course and ski hill are identified as Resource-based Recreation and the areas include adjacent condominiums.

Kyle noted that there are state housing targets for 2030 and 2050 that are higher in communities with Town water and sewer and access to an interstate highway. Since Hartford has both, the Town was projected to have 21.4% of the region’s share; 780 units out of 3,600 by 2030. Sixty-five percent of the units are expected in village centers and downtowns.

Lori commented that this is a lot for the Planning Commission to absorb in a short period. She anticipates that the Planning Commission will need additional meetings to review and discuss. Kyle noted that he could come back for one of the meetings to answer questions. Lori suggested that the Planning Commission look at developing questions.

Dylan commented that the land use maps seem like zoning. Kyle responded that zoning is a separate process. Dylan asked why the Zoning Board of Adjustment is not participating in this review. Kevin responded that this is a Planning Commission responsibility and that the Zoning Board of Adjustment doesn’t have a planning function.

Kyle noted that there have been changes to Act 250 and there are different tiers that will affect the level of local review. Lori noted that some land is developed without Act 250 review and only requires local review. Kevin said that Act 250 review occurs when there are ten or more housing units. Lori noted that there is an exception if a property is in the state-designated Growth Center

which is the case for Hartford . Kyle added that the Planned Growth Area is different from the Growth Center. Lori expressed concern that some areas now in the state-designed Growth Center are not in the proposed new Planned Growth area, which would be a loss for Hartford. She also suggested that TRORC take into consideration that areas in the Town’s current Growth Center that are not in the proposed new Growth Areas Center because they do not have continuous walkability (one of the criteria for the new Growth Area designation) are in a development phase, and expanding walkability is a Town requirement as development occurs.

Bruce requested that contour intervals be added to the map to easily identify steep slopes. He also suggested clearer definition of the rivers.

Kyle concluded the discussion by noting the following schedule:

December, 2025	Map comments due to TRORC
January-June, 2026	TRORC Board review
June, 2026	Map drafts ready for TRORC public hearing
September, 2026	1 st TRORC public hearing
December, 2026	TRORC Board Adoption

Adjournment: Colin Butler made a motion to adjourn. John Heath seconded the motion which was approved. The meeting adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Planning Commission Member Terms: Dillon Bianchi, 9/1/28, Colin Butler, 6/24/27, Toby Dayman, 6/24/27, John Heath, 3/11/27, Dylan Kreis, 6/26/26, Bruce Riddle, 2/3/28 and Chair John Reid, 2/5/27.