

APPENDIX

- A. Community Survey Report
- B. Public Meeting Notes
- C. List of Reports and Studies
- D. Vermont Conservation Design Report

A - COMMUNITY SURVEY



TOWN PLAN SURVEY 2024 SURVEY RESULTS

TOWN OF GEORGIA, VT

February 26, 2024

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Introduction. In 2023, the Town of Georgia, VT began the process of updating its Town Plan, led by the Town of Georgia Planning Commission. Regrowth Planning LLC was contracted by the town to assist the Planning Commission with this Town Plan update effort, including facilitating public outreach, public meetings, and drafting a new plan document.

As an initial stage of this work, a town-wide survey was conducted to solicit public input on a variety of issues which would help inform the updated plan, and identify important topics which should be discussed in more detail. This document, prepared by Regrowth Planning, provides the background, details and final results of that survey effort.

OPEN HOUSE

Open House and Presentation. In preparation for the design of the survey, a public “open house” style meeting was held on October 24, 2023 at the Georgia Fire & Rescue building, followed by a presentation and discussion. The purpose of this event was to inform locals that the Town Plan was being updated, provide information on the process, and invite them to consider what topics and issues were important to them which they would like to see addressed in the new Town Plan. Specifically, the event

and discussion was used to identify what types of questions and topics should be included in the wider community survey.

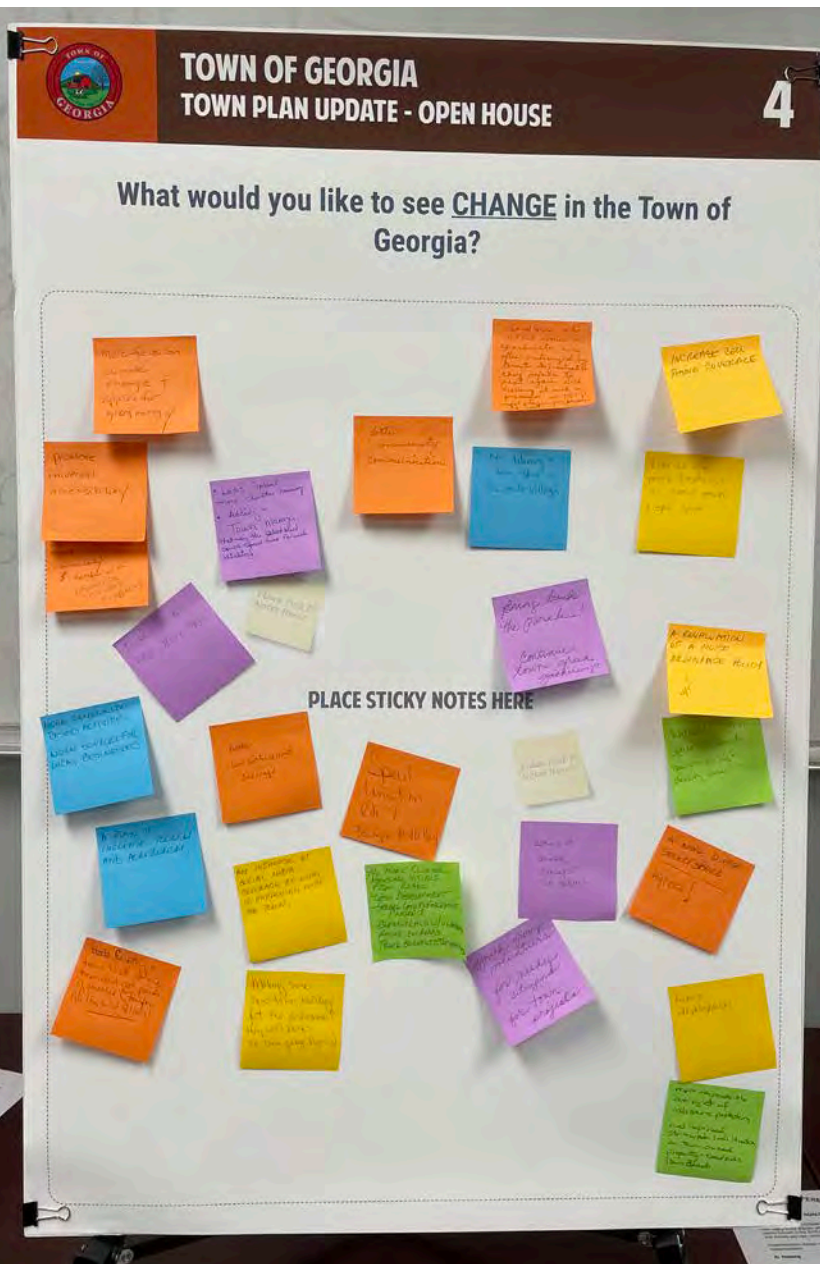
The meeting was attended by approximately 35 people who participated in the discussion and provided comments on a series of interactive display boards. A copy of the public comments and meeting notes from this event, as well as a video of the presentation and meeting, were provided online.

SURVEY DESIGN

The resulting public comments from the October 24th event were used to help develop the initial questions for the community-wide survey. Regrowth Planning drafted the initial survey questions, which were then reviewed and discussed with the Planning Commission. Over the course of several weeks the survey text was revised, new questions were added, and some questions removed or consolidated until a final survey was ready. The survey was designed to inquire on people’s thoughts on almost all of the topics identified in the open house event, gather additional input about those topics, and then ask people to rank the relative importance of those topics.



Attendees participate in the Open House event on October 24th, 2023.



DISTRIBUTION

Paper Vs. Online. In early discussions with the Planning Commission, the prevailing goal of the survey was to encourage widespread public participation to collect as much input as possible while keeping costs reasonably low. While an online survey would be easily accessible and inexpensive, it was noted that some people would simply prefer a paper copy or may not have access to online resources. For this reason, it was decided that the survey should be made available online, and printed paper copies should also be made readily available. For

the purpose of consistency, the paper and online surveys were designed with identical questions, without randomization.

Mailing a copy of the survey to every household was considered, however this would have resulted in much higher printing and postage costs to the town, as well as the cost to manually tabulate the results of every paper copy. For these reasons, it was decided that a hybrid approach of an online survey, while also making printed copies available for pick up at various locations, would be the best approach in terms of maximizing participation while reducing costs.

Printed copies of the survey were provided at the Town Offices, the Library, and at GEMS. In addition, the option to download and print a PDF copy of the survey at home was provided through the Town Plan Update project page at www.regrowthplanning.com/georgia. A locked drop box was provided at the Town Offices to collect completed paper surveys.

SURVEY ADVERTISEMENT

Over the course of the survey duration, it was locally advertised in a number of locations to increase awareness and participation. An 11x17 poster inviting people to take the survey was posted at the Georgia Elementary School, Town Offices, Georgia Public Library, Georgia Auto, Ascension Church, Bone Builders workout group and the Georgia Market. An email invitation was directly sent on December 15th to the participants of the Open House event, and an email invitation blast was sent on two dates to all people who had signed up for town email announcements. Small business card-sized handouts were produced inviting people to participate in the survey, which were distributed at various locations. Information about the survey was posted on the project webpage, and the Town's website.

The survey was also advertised in the local **Georgia Vermont Facebook Group** (4,600 members) on December 15th, 18th, 23rd, 29th, January 4th, 9th, and 16th. It was advertised in the local **Georgia Vermont Community Forum (Uncensored) Facebook Group** (3,000 members) on December 15th, 21st, 27th, January 1st, 6th, 11th, and 16th. It was announced in the **Georgia VT Front Porch Forum** on January 9th, 10th and 14th. Finally, it was also advertised as part of a paid promotional **Instagram** post targeted to all users within a 5 mile radius of Georgia Center for 8 days between January 9th and January 17th. Similar advertising efforts were attempted utilizing the relatively new **Threads (by Instagram)** platform, however localized or targeted social media

posts to a certain geographic area were not effectively workable without established user groups or paid advertising options.

SURVEY DURATION

The online survey was officially opened on December 15th, 2023 and the online link was kept open for 34 days until the morning of February 18th. Paper copies of the survey were accepted until January 18th.

RESPONSES

During the survey duration, a total of 407 online survey results were collected, and 15 paper copies were returned, for a total of 422 responses.


Online Surveys Completed: 407
Paper Surveys Completed: 15

TOTAL SURVEYS COMPLETED: 422

Paper copies returned to the Town Offices were scanned and sent to Regrowth Planning for manual tabulation of the results so that they could be combined together with the online data to compile the final results. Any written (text) comments provided on the paper copies were inputted exactly as written, including spelling or grammatical errors and capitalization of words, in order to preserve them as public comments. In cases where the text responses included *emphasis* of words with the use of underlined text or ALL CAPS, the text was transcribed in ALL CAPS to preserve this emphasis since it was not possible to input underlined text in the digital record. In cases where any written comments were unclear or the writing was hard to decipher, a [?] was provided immediately after the word in question.

Some of the paper copy respondents provided extra/unsolicited comments or questions, often scribbled in the margins of the survey with circled words, arrows, exclamations or similar notations. Attempts were made to accurately record these additional comments by transcribing them in the comment field for that section/subject with an editorial comment provided in brackets to provide context, for example: "[Re: paving dirt roads] NO WAY!!!"

TAKE THE SURVEY!



Town of Georgia
Town Plan Update


The Town of Georgia Planning Commission is conducting a survey to get public input for our Town Plan Update. All residents, property and business owners in the town are encouraged to participate!

3 OPTIONS TO PARTICIPATE:

TAKE SURVEY ONLINE

EASIEST OPTION

Go online! Visit this address:
www.tinyurl.com/GeorgiaVTSurvey



- OR -


DOWNLOAD & PRINT

Download and print the survey at home, then return it to the Town Office.
PDF here > www.tinyurl.com/Georgiatownplan


- OR -

PICK UP A COPY

Pick up a printed copy at the Town Office, Library or GEMS front office, then return it to the Town Office.




For more information about this survey and the Town Plan update, please visit our webpage, located at:
www.tinyurl.com/Georgiatownplan



Town of Georgia
Town Plan Survey

You are invited to participate in a survey to get public input for our Town Plan Update. Please respond by January 17th!



Take the survey online at this address:
www.tinyurl.com/GeorgiaVTSurvey


Printed copies of the survey are also available to pick up at the Town Office, Library or GEMS front office.

SURVEY VALIDATION

IP Addresses. Each of the online survey responses recorded the IP Address of the computer or device used to complete the survey. By using a formula to search for duplicate entries, it is possible to visually see if the same IP address was used to make multiple submissions to detect if there was any apparent effort to “ballot stuff” or skew the results.

A review of the IP Addresses used showed that a large majority of the responses all came from unique addresses. The highest number of responses originating from the same IP Address was 4, which occurred only twice. The second highest number of responses from the same IP Address was 3, which occurred 7 times. It is believed that the multiple responses recorded are likely the result of different members of the same family/ household participating in the survey, and not the result of any malicious efforts.

TOWN SURVEY!




Town of Georgia
Town Plan Update

The Town of Georgia Planning Commission is conducting a survey to get public input for our Town Plan Update. All residents, property and business owners in the town are encouraged to participate!


TAKE
SURVEY
ONLINE

Go online! Visit this address:
www.tinyurl.com/GeorgiaVTSurvey



- OR -

Printed copies of the survey are also available to pick up at the Town Office, Library or GEMS front office, or you can visit www.tinyurl.com/Georgiatownplan to download and print a copy at home. Please return to Town Offices by January 17th!




Town Plan Survey

Town of Georgia Vermont

The Town of Georgia Vermont Planning Commission is conducting this survey to collect public input for the **Georgia Town Plan**. The confidential and anonymous public input collected as part of this survey will be used to identify issues of importance to the community and ideas for future improvement and discussion. The results of this survey will be used to identify topics for additional public meetings in the Spring of 2024 and will help inform the language of the updated Town Plan. Please take a moment to fill out this survey and return by mail addressed to: **Town of Georgia Survey, 47 Town Common Road, St. Albans, VT 05478** or leave at the dropbox located at the same address **no later than January 17th**. Thank you!

Prefer to take this survey online? Do other people in your household want to fill it out? No problem! Take the online version of this survey by using the QR Code at right with your smartphone camera, or by visiting the following webpage:

<https://tinyurl.com/GeorgiaVTSurvey>



GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

1

What is your opinion on the overall amount of growth and development in the Town of Georgia over the past several years? (Select one)

☐ We could use a lot more growth

☐ We could use a little more growth

☐ It has been just about right

☐ We have seen a little too much growth

☐ We have seen way too much growth

☐ Unsure / No opinion

2

In managing future growth and development within the town, how important are each of the following factors to you?

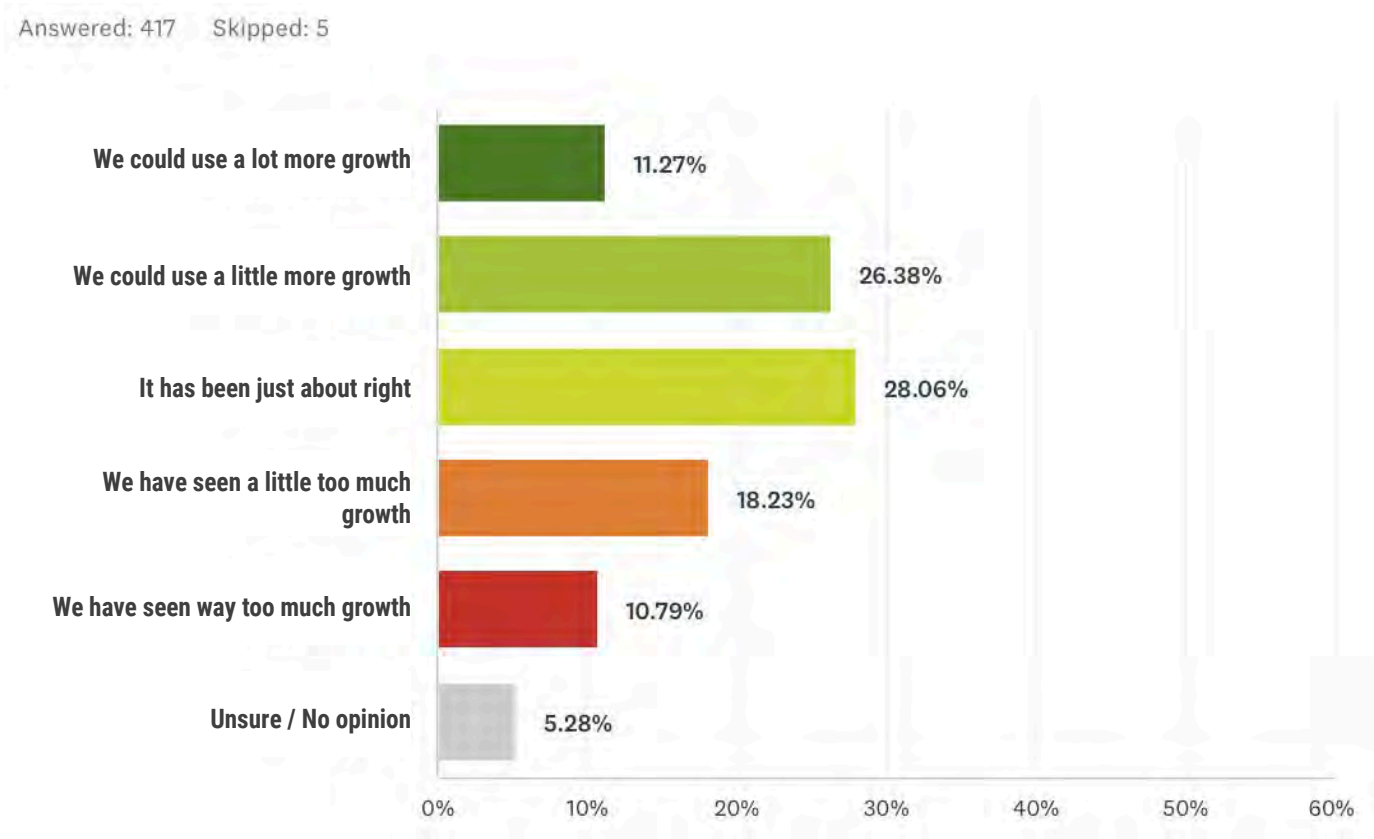
	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important	Top Priority	Unsure
Increasing revenue to support a healthy tax base	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Protecting our small town, rural character and scenic views	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Protecting our water quality and natural resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PART ONE

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

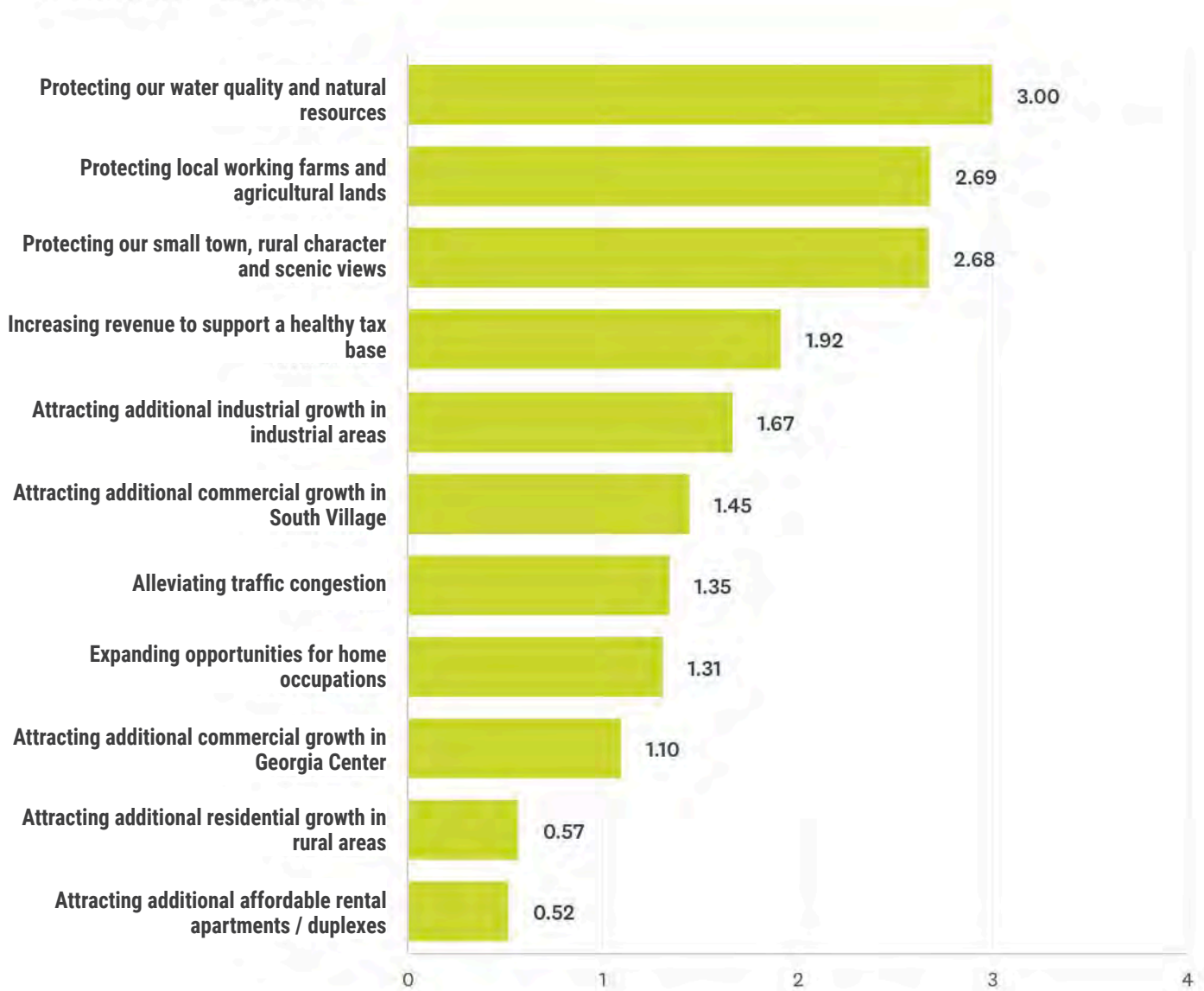
The purpose of Part One of the survey was to measure people's thoughts on growth and development in the Town of Georgia. At the Open House event, many people expressed interest or concern about this topic in general. Questions were developed to collect input on the amount of growth which the town has been experiencing, what factors were important to them in managing growth, what areas of town were more (or less) appropriate for additional growth, the potential for a focused growth center in South Village, what natural resources or scenic views they would like to see protected, and the potential local impact of short-term rentals.

Q1 - What is your opinion on the overall amount of growth and development in the Town of Georgia over the past several years? *(Select one)*



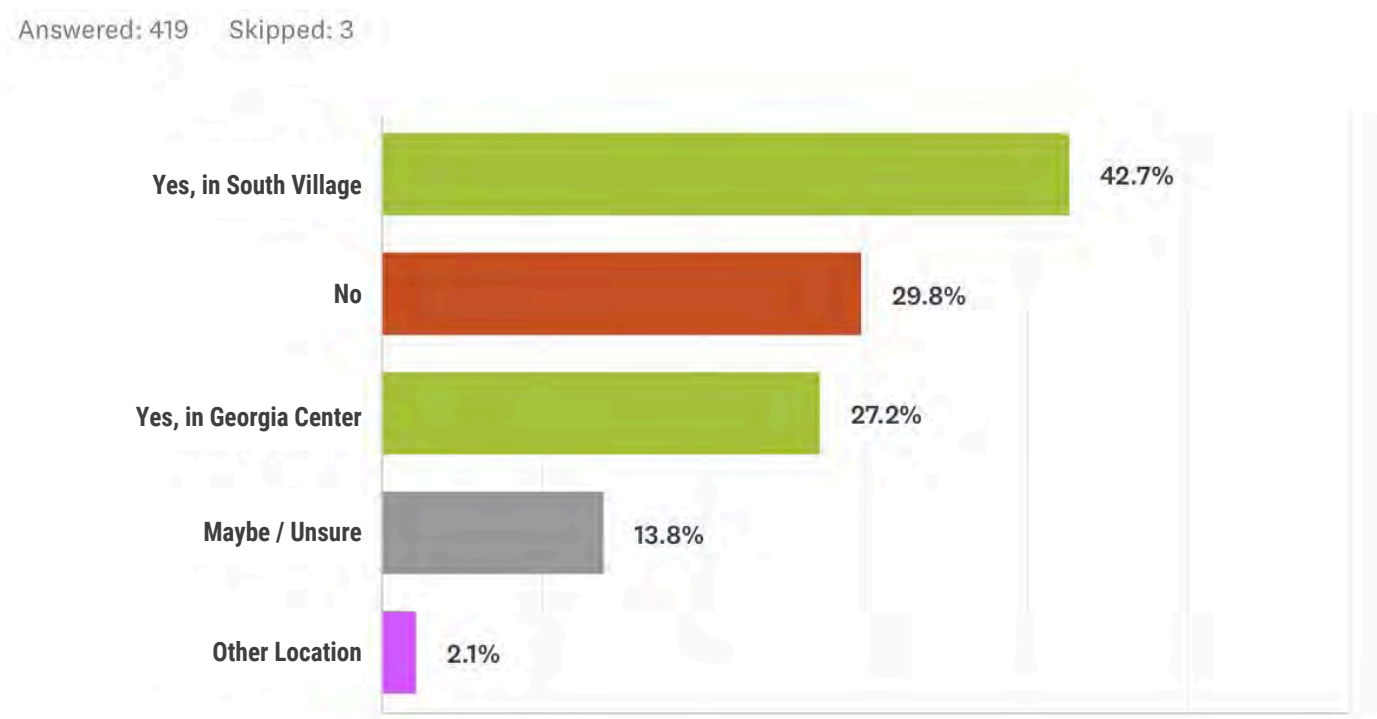
Q2 - In managing future growth and development within the town, how important are each of the following factors to you?

Answered: 420 Skipped: 2



AVERAGE WEIGHTED SCORING. Weighted scores were developed to summarize and compare each of the topics relative to each other. Points were assigned as follows: Not Important = -1.0; Somewhat Important = 1.0; Important = 2.0; Very Important = 3.0; Top Priority = 4.0; Unsure = 0.0.

Q3 - **Would you want to see the Town of Georgia work toward the development of a compact, pedestrian-friendly mixed-use commercial growth center, similar to a traditional downtown, in South Village or Georgia Center?** *(Select any that apply)*



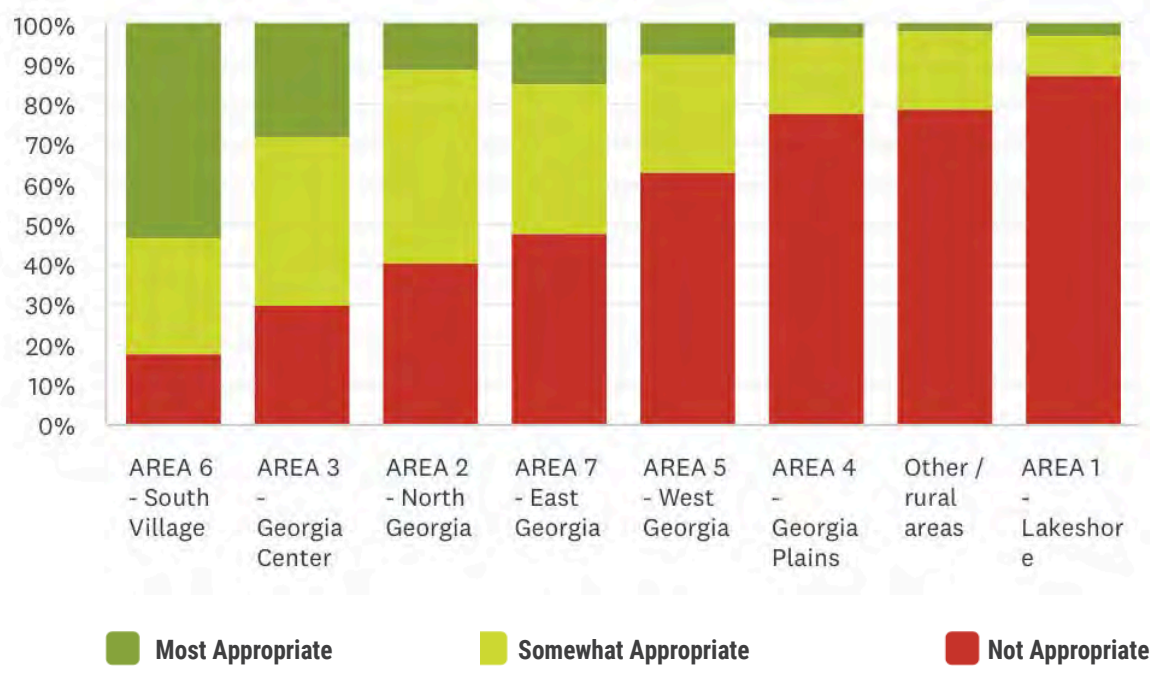
Q3 - **Write-in responses to “Other Location”** are provided below:

- 1. *Would love more safe walking areas*
- 2. *West Georgia*
- 3. *Not from info being leaked out so far*
- 4. *No more commercial*
- 5. *no*
- 6. *Hi*
- 7. *develop this slowly*
- 8. *Definitely NOT in Georgia Center!*
- 9. *Both areas could be utilized, especially with the new housing happening in Georgia Center and the proximity of the school.*

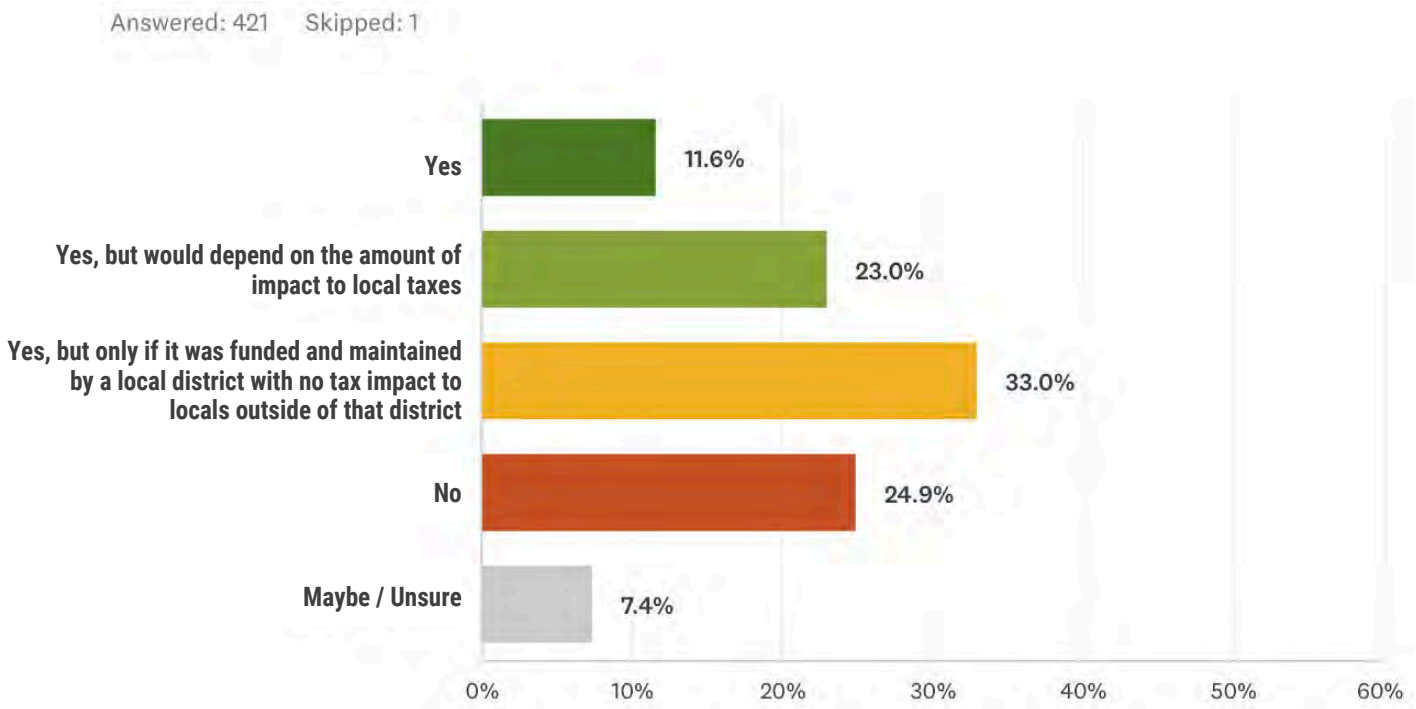
Q4 - Using the map below, how appropriate do you think each of the following areas of town are for new commercial growth? (Refer to map)



Answered: 420 Skipped: 2



Q5 - **Would you support the Town of Georgia providing water and/or sewer service to the South Village area to support new commercial and residential growth there?** *(Select one)*



Q6 - Are there areas of town or natural resources you would like to see protected? (Write in)

1. Yes! The lake shore and rural farm areas
2. Yes, stop cutting down trees. We don't need more development.
3. Yes, maintaining public access to Lake Champlain via Georgia Beach and maintaining and improving the Russell Greene area, access to Silver lake, and other public spaces would be important.
4. yes, fields and grasslands, the lake shore, and all wetlands. I am concerned the ZA is not well enough informed about the environmental impact of building, and we have to plan for flooding.
5. Yes, Arrowhead Mountain Lake and the Lamoille River leading up to it.
6. Yes not letting Boves build
7. Yes agricultural areas, lake area.
8. Wetlands. We do not need "improved" wetlands. They need to be left per state requirements
9. Wetlands, rivers, streams, lakes, wildlife habitat
10. Wetlands between Russell Greene Natural area and 104A. Deer Brook upstream of Russell Greene Natural Area.
11. Wetlands and their buffers, same with streams and their buffers.
12. West village should be protected from commercial development and kept residential
13. Unsure
14. unknown at this time
15. Top of Bovat Road around the town forest
16. There are many areas (wetlands) on the west side of Route 7 in the Georgia Village and north to St. Albans area that appear to be encroached upon.
17. The valley extending northward from Sodom Road following Route 7 to Reynolds Road. 2) The West facing hillside that follows Bovat Road 3) Mill River, Stone Brook, Lamoille River watersheds
18. The small town area feel. The old campground- no massive building that we can't sustain with emergency services and school enrollment. The Camisa project proposing development that forces the town to provide sewer. The Camisa / Fairbanks wetland area - deny it. Stop trying to build a city in a town that can't handle it.
19. The school as it is over crowded now
20. The same areas that are currently
21. The old mill on Stone Bridge Creek would be nice to actually see the nature trail that was rumored to be coming many years ago.
22. The lakeshore and Georgia Plains
23. The lakei
24. The lake!!!
25. The lake shores both Arrowhead and Champlain
26. The hiking areas - cannot recall their names, off 104A, off Georgia Beach road, the Georgia beach.
27. The Bechard farm and surrounding areas of Bradley Hill
28. Streams and rivers adjoining farmland's
29. Stop development with long drives- disrupting the forest ecosystem-there is a Vermont Statue addressing this issue
30. South village
31. Silverlake
32. Silver Lake, Arrowhead Lake, Lamoille River, Lakeshore
33. Silver lake area
34. Silver Lake and other trail systems
35. Silver lake
36. Silver Lake
37. Shoreline
38. Riparian areas, water quality for lake, keep forested areas
39. Protected spaces and no Boves!
40. Protect the entire lake shore. Let's not have the area around exit 18 to turn into storage units.
41. protect existing open land, like Georgia Town Forest. Need public places to walk and public access to the lake.
42. Protect agricultural areas and scenic views.
43. Pretty much everywhere. The South Village is essentially all private property; respect owners' rights and don't assume it can be turned into a town center unless the town is willing to buy out all the property owners at market price. Same goes for the rest of the town.
44. Please stop allowing the clear cutting of large swaths of forest to put in sprawling houses, e.g. on Sandy Birch rd
45. Please keep Georgia as scenic and rural as it is, with very focused areas of growth if the population agrees
46. Park at t intersection of Mill River road and Georgia Shore road.
47. Our school as it is full now
48. Our lake shore
49. Open and wooded areas outside of the South Georgia Area.
50. Oakland Station Road corridor and east. Lakefront generally.
51. No- Act 250 works for this question
52. No more growth.
53. No more development along our major water basins, including Lake Champlain and Arrowhead Lake/Lamoille River
54. No - by protecting land you are reducing the tax base.
55. no
56. no
57. no
58. No
59. No
60. No
61. No
62. N/A
63. n

Q6 - Are there areas of town or natural resources you would like to see protected? (Continued)

64. *Mill falls Park. Public access to the waterfront.*
65. *Make a recreational park with walking path on site of old campgrounds.*
66. *Library, beach area, food shelf*
67. *large contiguous blocks, with connectivity*
68. *Lamoille River*
69. *Lakeshore. Gordon Pond. All wetlands. Russell Greene protected natural area. Silver Lake Woods*
70. *Lakeshore, Town Forests and All trails, Lake Arrowhead,*
71. *Lakeshore, farm areas left as farms*
72. *Lakeshore, Eagle Mtn*
73. *Lakeshore needs more protection Farmland/field vistas need more protection Georgia Center needs beautification and more historical focus*
74. *Lakeshore area*
75. *Lakeshore area*
76. *Lakeshore and North Georgia*
77. *Lakeshore*
78. *Lakeshore*
79. *Lakeshore*
80. *Lakeshore*
81. *Lakeshore*
82. *Lakeshore*
83. *Lakeshore*
84. *Lakeshore*
85. *Lakes, wooded areas, rural roads*
86. *Lakes*
87. *Lakefront, forested areas, farmland*
88. *Lake water quality*
89. *Lake shore should be allowed to build higher than 16 feet. but only as high as 2 stories.*
90. *Lake shore & Natural Preserves*
91. *Lake shore*
92. *Lake Champlain waterfront Arrowhead Lake*
93. *Lake Champlain is most important for a variety of reasons*
94. *Lake Champlain Georgia beach Shoreline*
95. *Lake Arrowhead, Deer Brook, Lake Champlain, Mill River, Silver Lake Forest*
96. *Lake area, areas with historic structures, farmlands, Deadman curve*
97. *Keep Lake access.*
98. *Keep existing park areas (Silver Lake, Russell Green, Mill River falls area, and others (?)) protected. If there are other natural resources they should be protected.*
99. *it's ok now*
100. *It would be nice to have the lake protected and have a member of the community involved with an active organization.*
101. *Individual properties*
102. *I'm not certain what the town natural resources are.*
103. *I've travelled extensively throughout the State and I don't think Georgia has any viewsheds that are worthy of protection.*
104. *I'm new to the area, but always side with protecting as many natural resources as possible.*
105. *I'd like to see less traffic on our secondary roads. The views of the mountains ... Mt. Mansfield and Georgia Mountain should be protected.*
106. *I would like to see the waterways, lake shore and wetlands protected. Also would like to protect/ keep the combination of open field and forested areas protected from developing into subdivisions.*
107. *I would like to see the town owned lands to include maintained hiking paths.*
108. *I would like to see the south village remain the same and not become a residential hub.*
109. *I think the lake should be protected or any impacts considered if things were to be built around there (such as how a commercial property would dispose of toxic waste without disturbing the lake or surrounding wildlife)*
110. *Homes and land in neighborhoods around South Village need to be protected. There is a lot of discussion about South Village and its development that I am against due to the impact on neighborhoods nearby and to the overall makeup of Georgia and our rural nature. Many don't want a downtown feel here. We moved to Georgia to avoid this.*
111. *Ground water*
112. *Gordon Pond Lakeshore areas*
113. *Georgia Shore, lake Arrowhead, Mill River, natural areas that Georgia already owns. Georgia Beach and the park.*
114. *Georgia Shore Rd is covered in garbage. Litter along Lake Champlain is awful. We should be promoting this road as a bike route and it's shameful.*
115. *Georgia shore in st albans bay water quality is toxic in summer. Health hazard!*
116. *Georgia Beach, Mill River Park, Russel Greene Natural Area, Silver Lake, and GEMS rec properties*
117. *Georgia beach*
118. *Forest areas!*
119. *Farmland to the greatest extent reasonable, lakeshore*
120. *farmland*
121. *Farmers have been spreading manure as late as last week - concerned about water quality of lake*
122. *Farm land should not be "crowded out" by housing development around the fields. Protect Lake Shore (open) - perhaps conserve or purchase more lake shore on Champlain & Arrowhead. Wildlife connectivity - open land & forest connections betw. developments & across roadways.*
123. *Existing open land and wetlands*
124. *Eagle Mountain*

Q6 - Are there areas of town or natural resources you would like to see protected? *(Continued)*

125. *Do not block the views of Mt Mansfield. That gives Georgia unique perspective and that VT look.*

126. *definitely the Georgia Beach Area. Our forests and natural trails must be preserved, as well as our lakes and riverways*

127. *Bovat & Skunk Hill roads*

128. *Boat launch/ town park Mill river*

129. *Arrowhead Mountain Lake and its water table*

130. *Arrowhead Mountain Lake Lakeshore*

131. *Arrowhead Lake, Russel Greene trails, Silver Lake*

132. *Arrowhead Lake, Areas with river access and lakeshore*

133. *Arrowhead Lake where it borders 104A*

134. *Arrowhead lake area and surrounding.*

135. *Arrowhead lake*

136. *Arrowhead lake*

137. Arrowhead

138. *Arrow head lake*

139. *Areas with extensive plant and animal life especially if it's endangered.*

140. *Areas around Arrowhead lake, Russell Green Area, The beach, Silver Lake*

141. *Anywhere that the Bove brothers want to put up additional housing where they can neglect their properties and tenants.*

142. *Any residents along the Georgia Shore Road must have a functional*

septic system to protect the lake water quality.

143. *any large bodies of water, and streams/rivers*

144. *Any body of water. The Lake and river.*

145. *Any areas where it is classified as wetlands.*

146. *Already protected*

147. *All! We have a beautiful lake shore, great open land and we should keep them as us. They are what make Georgia special. If we keep building we will just become North Milton and South St Albans....*

148. *All wetlands, streams and waterbodies.*

149. *All rural areas*

150. *All of it. No more growth!*

151. *all of it.*

152. *All of it! Stop trying to make Georgia into something it's not!*

153. *All of it, stop developing.*

154. *All of it*

155. *All natural resources should be protected, but the lake water quality is most concerning. Something drastic needs to be done before it's too late, if it's not already.*

156. *All current rural areas*

157. *All*

158. $1,3,3,4,5,6,7$

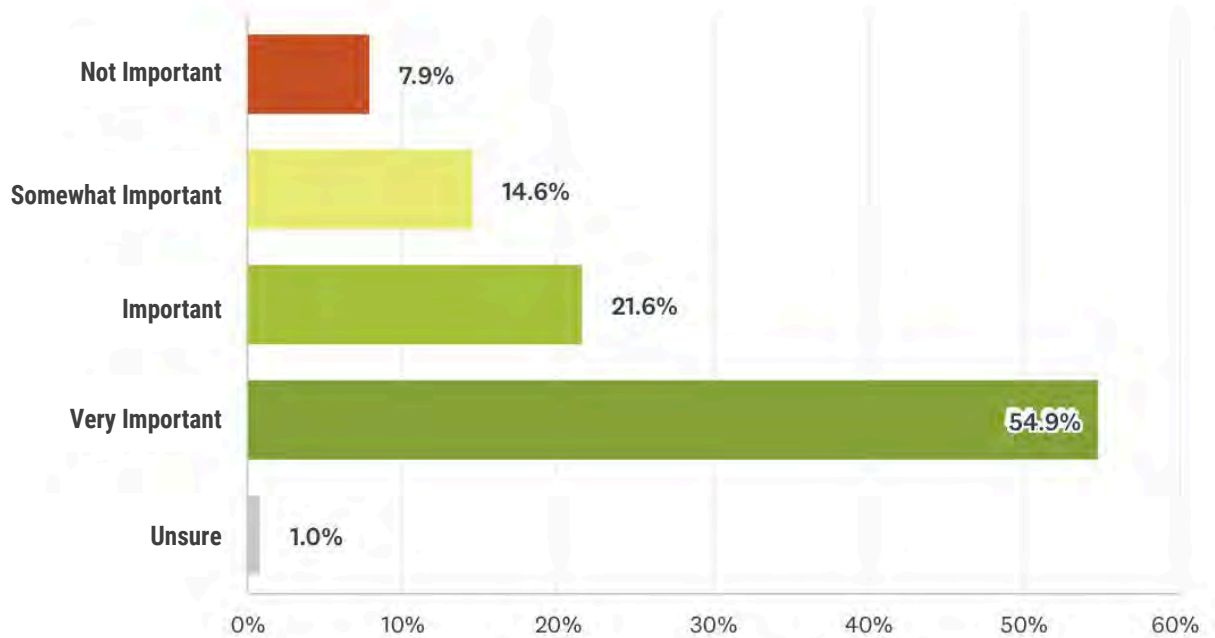


Q7 - Are there scenic views or viewsheds you would like to see protected? (Write in)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. 104a from Rt 7 intersection to Fairfax | 40. N/A |
| 2. 7 to Mt. Mansfield | 41. No |
| 3. All of it | 42. no |
| 4. All of the shore | 43. no |
| 5. All views | 44. No |
| 6. Along Georgia shore | 45. Open spaces, agricultural lands and lake views in central and north Georgia. |
| 7. Any lakeview | 46. Polly Hubbard / lake |
| 8. Anything viewing Arrowhead Mountain Lake | 47. Route 7 in Georgia center across the farms into the little valley. |
| 9. Arrowhead Mountain | 48. Route 7 of Mt Mansfield |
| 10. as many as possible | 49. route 7 to Mt Mansfield |
| 11. don't tell a property owner what they can do | 50. Rt 7 looking west across from school. Hayfield across from interstate. |
| 12. down by the lake there's a walking trail thru woods and a small wet-land area | 51. Rt 7 to Mt. Mansfield |
| 13. East Georgia to Mt. Mansfield | 52. Rt104A |
| 14. Exit 18 on I 89 to Milton Line | 53. Rte 7 |
| 15. From Mountain View Drive | 54. Sea |
| 16. From Route 7 to the west (Adirondacks) at Acessension Church | 55. Shoreland to Lake Champlain |
| 17. Georgia beach across lake Champlain | 56. Silver lake area to Georgia mtn |
| 18. Georgia shore | 57. Silver lake area to Georgia mtn |
| 19. Georgia Shore | 58. Silver Lake Rd toward Mt Mansfield |
| 20. Georgia Shore Rd and surrounding/Lake Champlain | 59. Silver Lake. Why is there a cabin on the west shore? |
| 21. Georgia Shore Road | 60. South Village to Mt. Mansfield |
| 22. Georgia Shore to the lake | 61. The area around exit 18 |
| 23. Georgia south village | 62. The few ridges we have would not be negatively impacted by a few houses. |
| 24. Lake | 63. The lake shore |
| 25. Lake Champlain | 64. The mountain |
| 26. Lake Champlain all | 65. Unsure |
| 27. Lake shore | 66. View from the Library to Georgia Mountain |
| 28. Lake views | 67. Views from Oakland Station Road and the railroad tracks |
| 29. Lake Views champlain | 68. Would like to keep the fields undeveloped on the west side of interstate |
| 30. Lakefront | 89. Keep the view from the library area open to Mount Mansfield |
| 31. Lakeview | 69. Yes, the route 7 area to lake shore and mountains. |
| 32. Land on lakeshore side of Georgia shore road just north of town beach. | |
| 33. Library | |
| 34. Mansfield | |
| 35. Mountain View, So. Village along 104A / Fairfax town line | |
| 36. Mt Mansfield along Rt 7 & 104A | |
| 37. mt mansfield from Rt 7 by library/interstate | |
| 38. Municipal beach | |
| 39. n | |

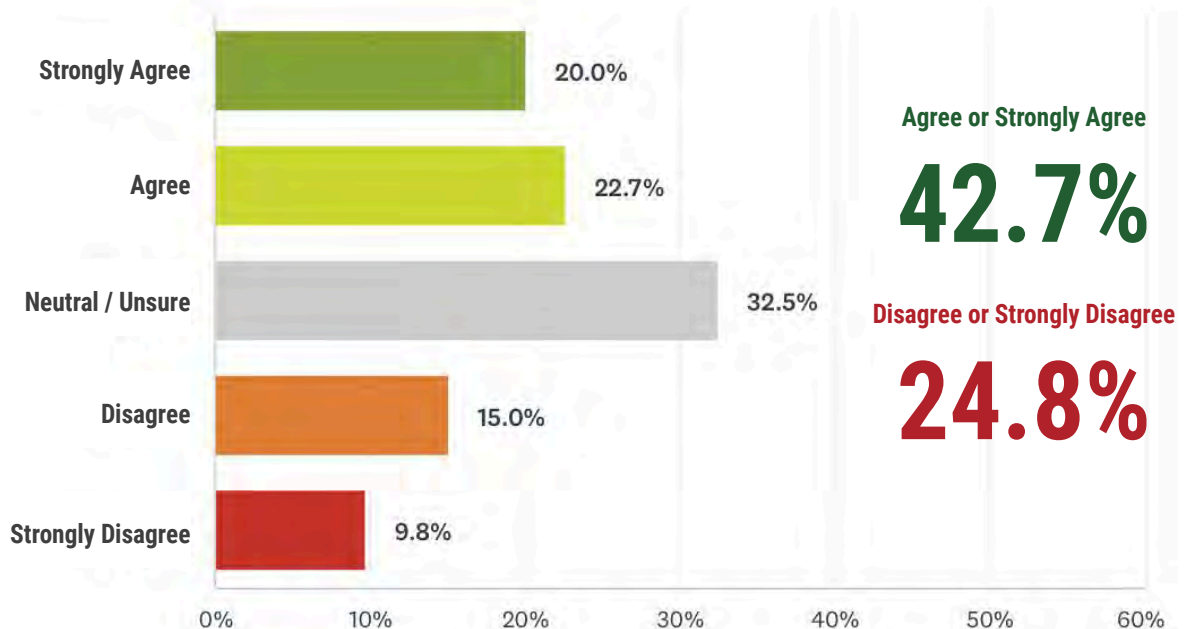
Q8 - How important is it to protect the view of the lake along Georgia Shore Road? (Select one)

Answered: 417 Skipped: 5



Q9 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (Select one) **"I am concerned about the potential impacts of short term rentals (e.g. Airbnb, VRBO, etc.) on our neighborhood."**

Answered: 419 Skipped: 3



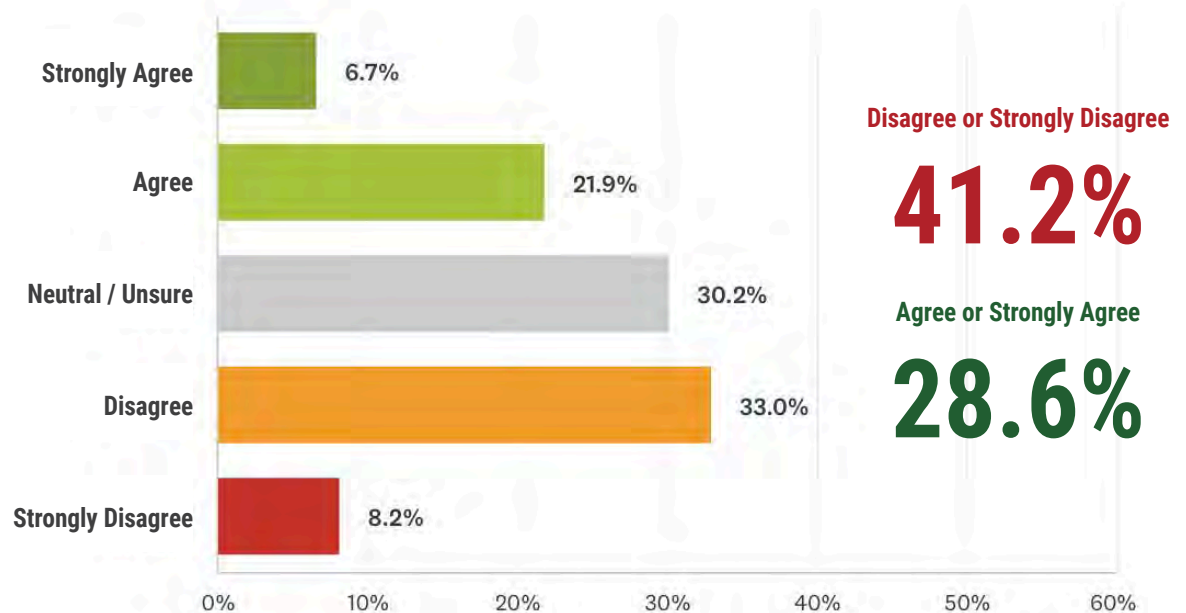
PART TWO

HOUSING

The purpose of Part Two was to solicit input on the current state of housing in the area. With many communities throughout the state and the country experiencing increased housing costs, it was important to assess how this may be impacting the community. Questions were developed to measure availability of housing, affordability of housing, what types of housing may be lacking, and what areas of town people felt were most appropriate for any new housing growth.

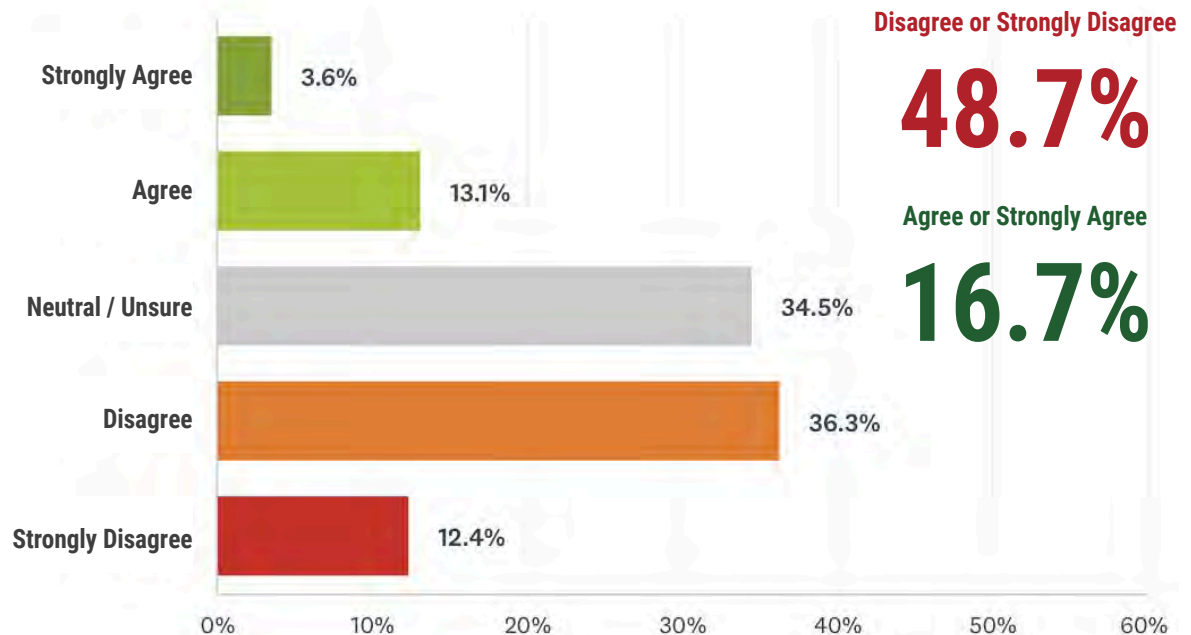
Q10 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (Select one) **"The needed housing types in the area are available in the Town of Georgia."**

Answered: 388 Skipped: 34



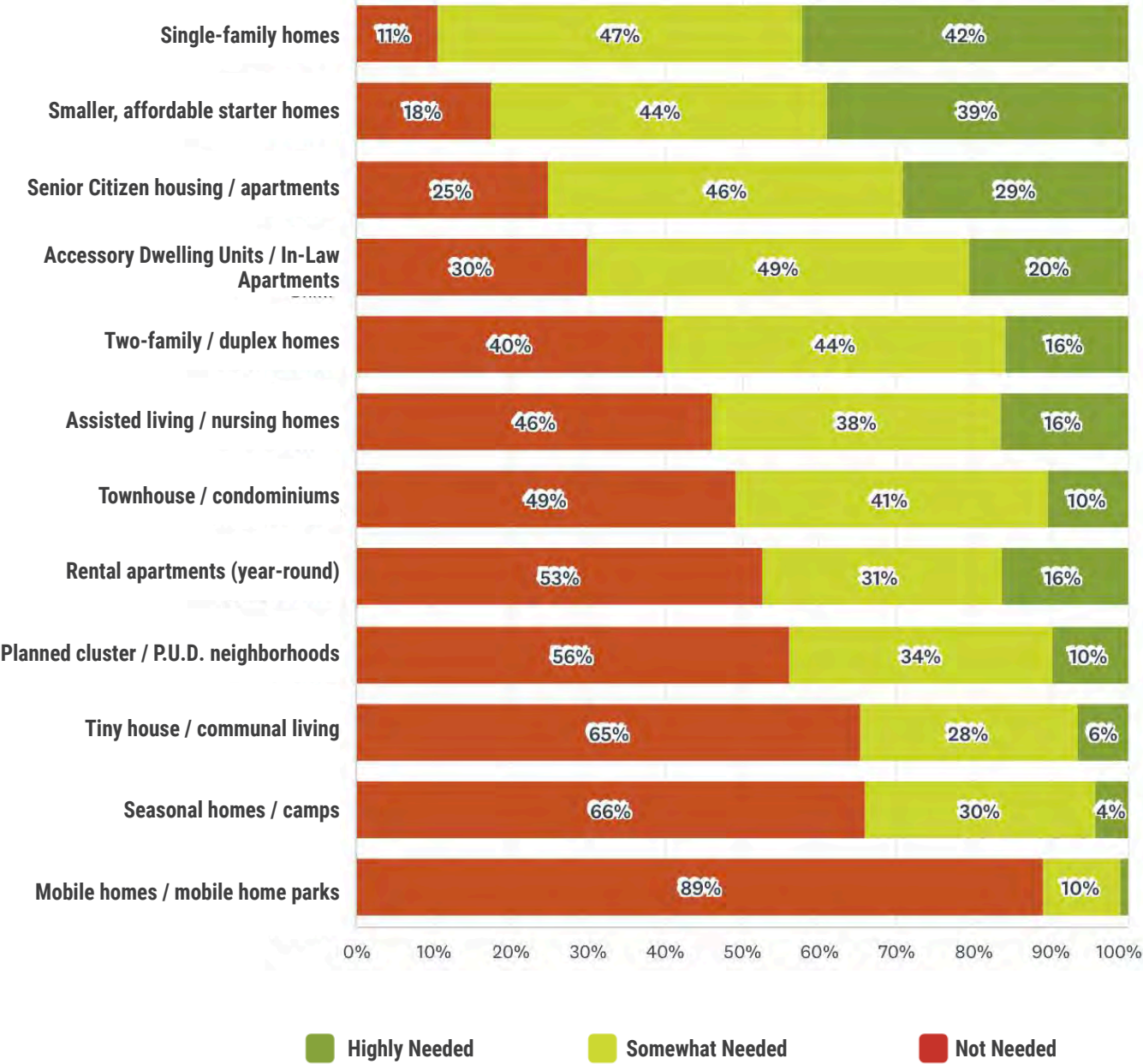
Q11 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (Select one) **"The needed housing types in the area are affordable in the Town of Georgia."**

Answered: 388 Skipped: 34

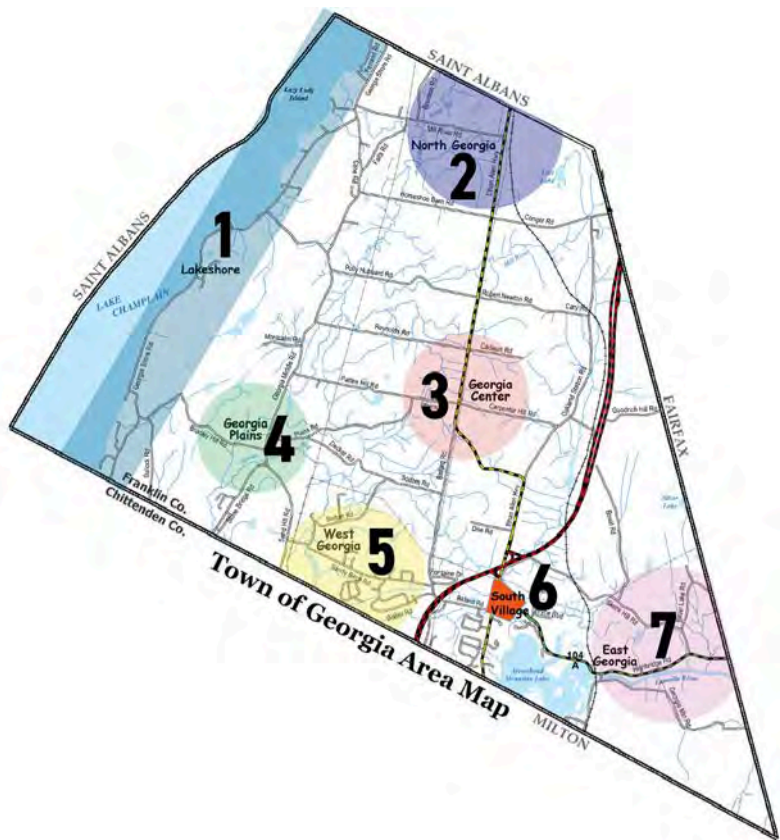


Q12 - What types of housing do you feel are needed in the town?

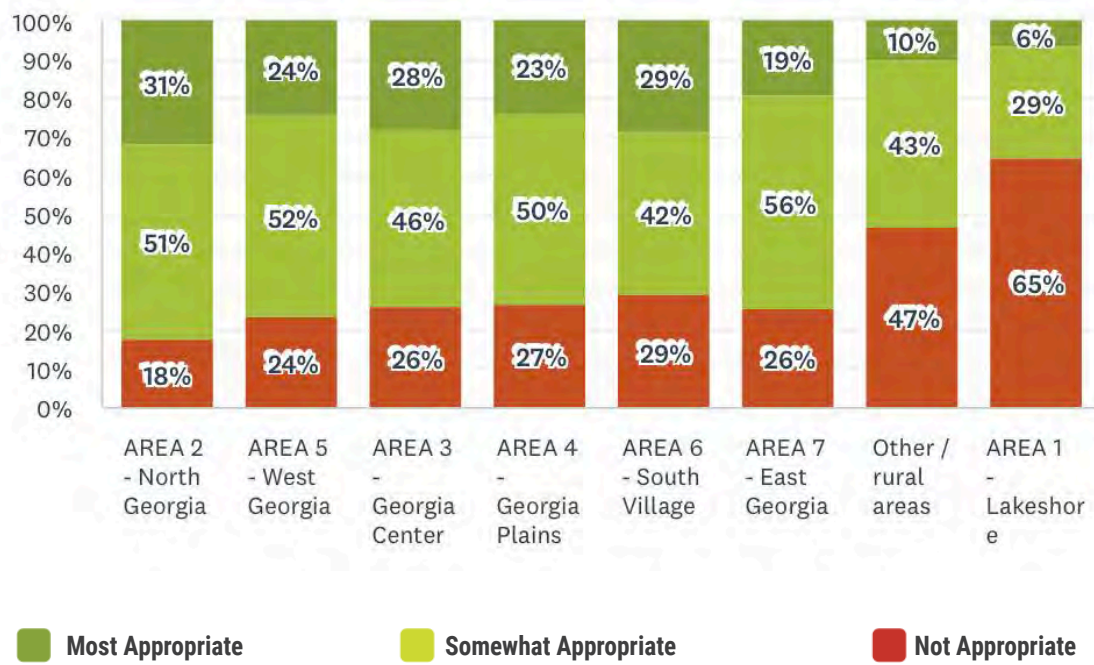
Answered: 386 Skipped: 36



Q13 - Using the map below, how appropriate do you think each of the following areas of town are for new housing growth? (Refer to map)



Answered: 384 Skipped: 38



PART THREE

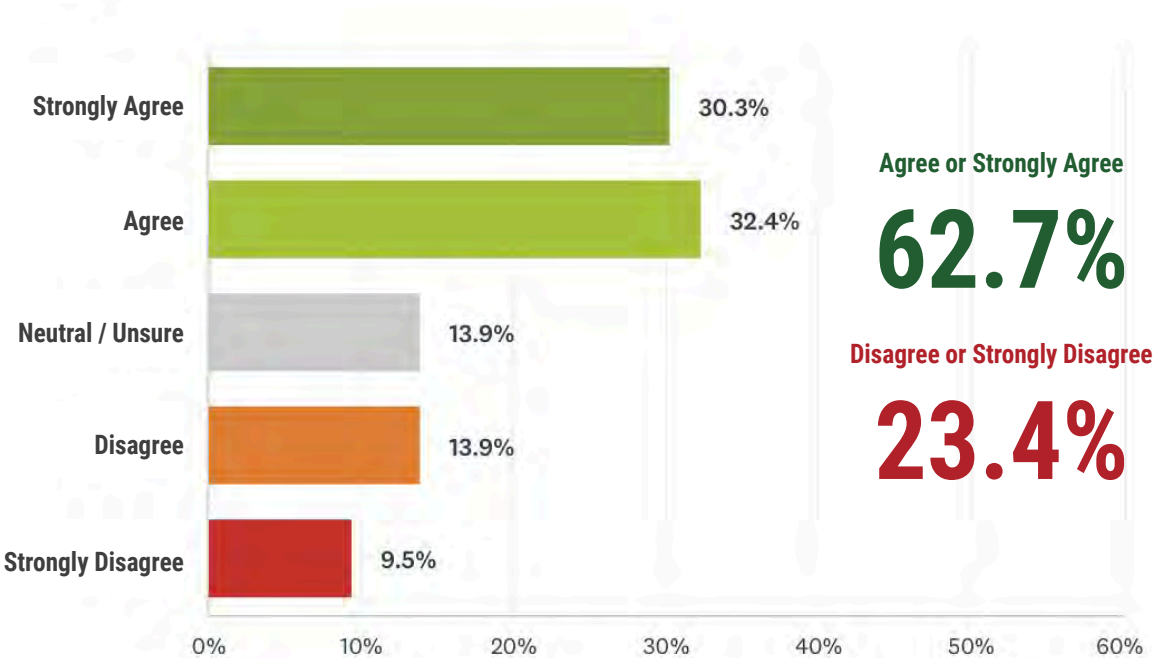
LOCAL SHOPS & SERVICES

The purpose of Part Three was to conduct an assessment of the availability of local shops and services in the community. This issue was raised during the Open House, and some people noted that they need to drive out of town to often get many things which they need, and the neighboring town's are benefiting from this commercial activity more than Georgia. Questions were developed to measure if this is an issue to local residents, and what shops or services they might prefer to have locally.

While the town is not generally in control of what businesses chose to locate in Georgia, this information may be helpful in identifying what zoning changes may be helpful in attracting new business to the area, and soliciting specific businesses who may be in high demand.

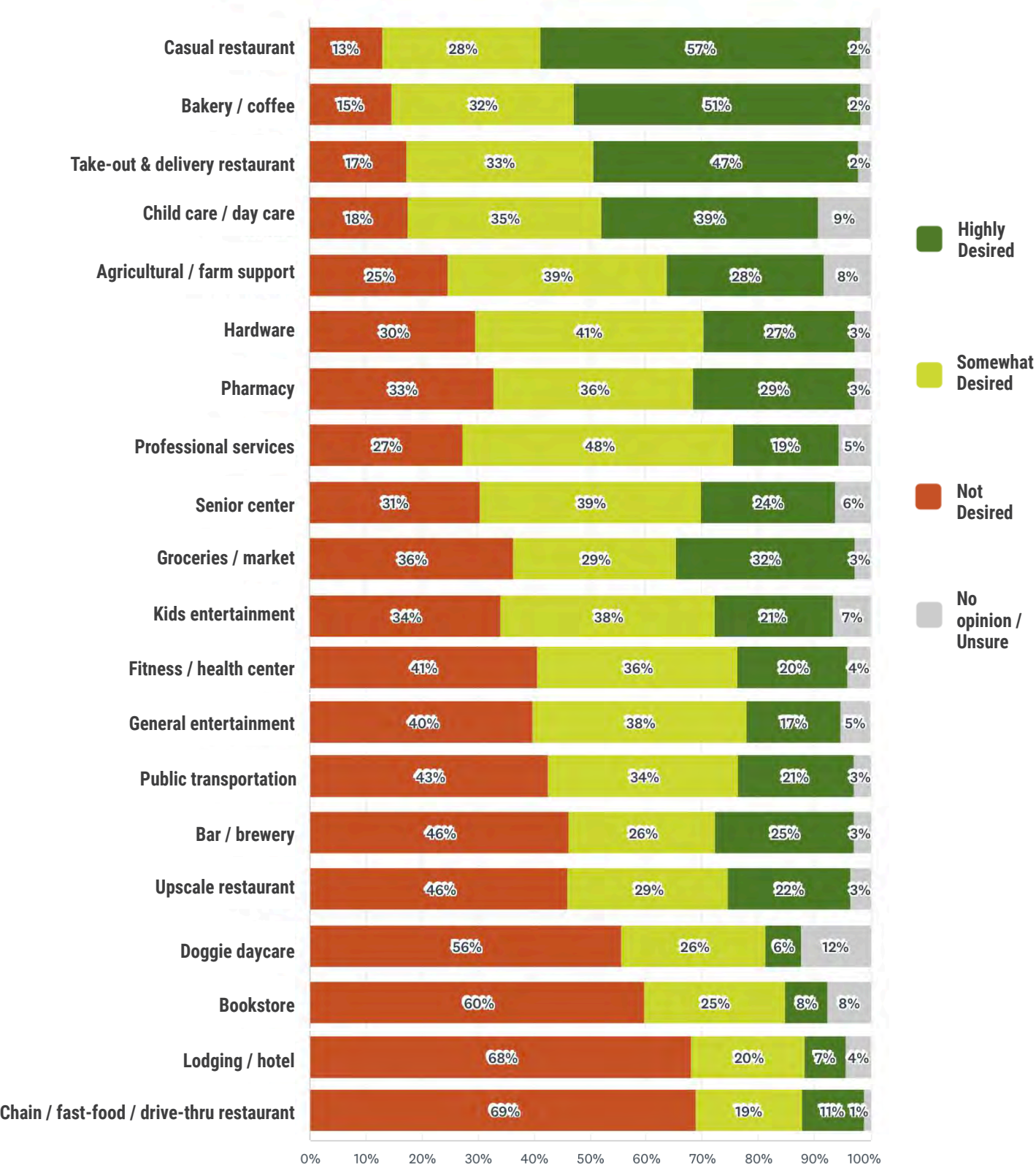
Q14 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *(Select one)* **“New commercial shops and services are desired within the town to serve locals, instead of having to drive outside of town.”**

Answered: 389 Skipped: 33



Q15 - What types of shops and services do you feel are desired within the Town of Georgia?

Ar Answered: 388 Skipped: 34



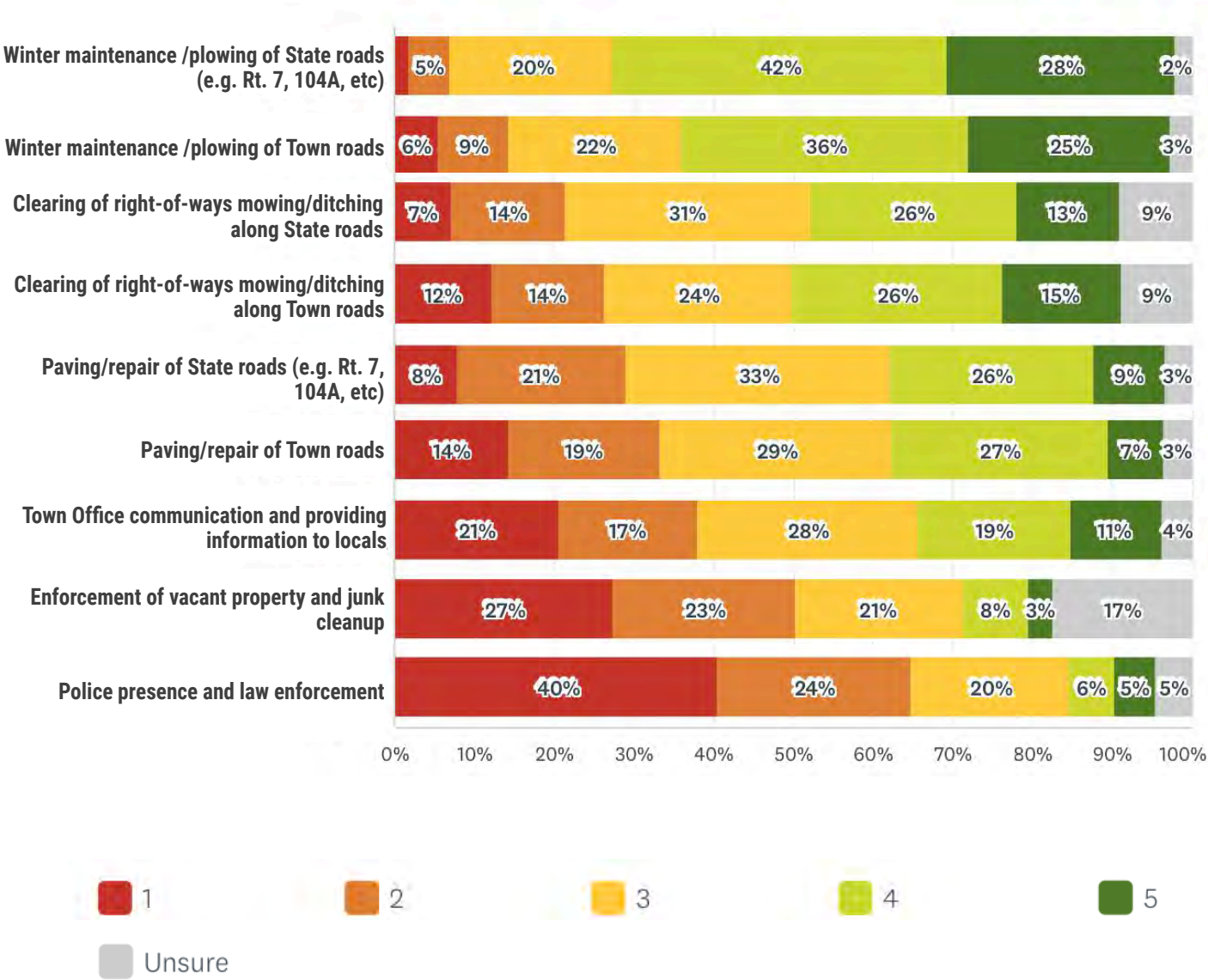
PART FOUR

COMMUNITY AMENITIES & SERVICES

The purpose of Part Four was to make an assessment of municipal services, including the parks, recreation, community events and other amenities available to residents, and what if any improvements may be needed. Questions were developed to cover topics of town maintenance and enforcement, parks and recreational facilities, potential shared community services, energy use and infrastructure.

Q16 - On a scale of 1-5 (where 1 = Poor / 5 = Great) how would you rate each of the following services?

Answered: 378 Skipped: 44



NOTE: The original SurveyMonkey results showed "Enforcement of vacant property and junk cleanup" scoring lower in these results than "Police presence and law enforcement", despite police presence having a noticeably lower rating. This appears to be due to the high number of "Unsure" responses to this item, which were given a score of zero points, which seems to artificially lower the weighted average score. A similar effect occurred with "Clearing of right-of-ways". The above results have been recalculated to omit scoring the "Unsure" responses.

Q17 - In what ways do you think municipal services or communication could be improved? (Write in)

1. *Why is the current board creating so much division in the town folks. The board seems to ignore the financial impact to the tax payer. Financial control is totally absent. The current treasurer is fighting an uphill battle, she is a bright spot in a dismal task. Why is the dept budget 3 to 5 times higher than other towns in our area, obseene.. "DEI" is being pushed the the select chair and said it will be put in regardless of the general voter view. Not good.*
2. *Why are we no longer voting on fire truck purchases ??? Two tone paint is a significant cost and waste of tax payer money.*
3. *When mowing & ditching the sides of the rural roads it would be nice if it didn't take 2 years for the shredded material to be cleaned up and not look like a mutilated mess.*
4. *Well I tried to find this survey on the town website and it wasn't there. Only saw it when someone posted on FB.*
5. *Weekly newsletter, Facebook page communication*
6. *We need police presence before bringing in more apartments and public housing/public stores and restaurants*
7. *We need more police presence. And there are roads that should be paved but are not fully - such as carpenter hill road.*
8. *We do not use Facebook and do not get all town communications. Info on web sites is not readily available when posted on Facebook. Ridiculous that town will not pay to post job openings in the local Messenger is where many people would actually see to be able to also tell others! Seems staff wants to limit access and not even to pay like other local towns do? Always seeing other towns post in the Messenger. Very frustrating to watch the select board meetings on Comcast. Mostly feels very dysfunctional! The special meeting held for voting for fiscal calendar change seemed underhanded and should have gone to town meeting timeframe and placed on Australian ballot. New town employees and selectboard should learn functional responsibilities and not recreate the wheel without first finding out why things historically have been done for considering why to change or not change the process. Zoning administrator situation was underhanded in many ways in staffing and financial areas!*
9. *We didn't even hear about this survey until we went by the library, think that more work could be done to hear from all the residents on all issues.*
10. *Vermont Gas*
11. *Use the Town website and social media sites to better keep residence informed.*
12. *Use something outside of social media*
13. *Use of internet....local websites people can go to like a newspaper...with sections, advertisements, editorials, community notices and an EDITOR.*
14. *Unsure*
15. *Unsure*
16. *Town highway needs more manpower and more equipment. Fire Department needs more support from the town. The Town-hall needs to be moved to the current library location and the library should be defunded.*
17. *Town Clerk communicates via Facebook. How about sending top priority items to residents in the mail instead. I do not subscribe to Facebook and so miss out on all things related to Georgia VT*
18. *Total transparency and historical knowledge pertaining to decisions made by both the select board and other boards. Many times things appear to be done without understanding how certain rules came about. Governing is a process and as the boards change some of the previous decisions are not fully understood. Many of the recent changes seem to be self-serving which is never beneficial. There needs to be accountability in ALL of the hiring and job descriptions. Not everyone can be responsible for their own job. Checks and balances need to be in place.*
19. *Timeliness of notices. Also notices and announcements should be repeated. When the Town cuts trees along the road, they often do damage to trees with the methods used and leave the trees vulnerable. And the tree guys leave debris on property. I only agree with #18 if there is a succession plan for the old buildings.*
20. *They need more money in their budget so they can complete their projects and afford newer equipment.*
21. *The town will never get the commercial/retail/housing/restaurant/pharmacy needed with no municipal sewer and very limited municipal water.*
22. *The town clerk's office communications is a joke. The act first and ask permission later. Too much cronyism. Jobs to friends and raises to unqualified staff*
23. *The perception is that 2 or 3 people hold all of the positions. No oversight. No checks and balances. No repercussions.*
24. *Tech outside of Facebook*
25. *South Georgia currently looks bad and is not appealing.*
26. *Sidewalks.*
27. *Sending out a newsletter by mail.*
28. *Road maintenance and winter plowing on secondary/development roads. Traffic flow around interstate exit/on ramps and Rte 104a, Rte 7 exchange*
29. *Reynolds Rd is a shit show. Grading it doesn't do anything. The sub base has to be fixed or just pave it*
30. *Return communication could be better. Town office employees need to be friendly as they are dealing with people*
31. *Require clean up of yards*
32. *Replace the town administrator with a qualified town manager.*
33. *Replace everyone in the town office with competent employees who have actual experience in their positions.*
34. *Regular updates/postings to FPF or Facebook*
35. *Post a calendar residents can subscribe to and keep it current*
36. *Please plow Ballard Road*
37. *Perhaps the Town could announce in the Messenger what their paving/work schedule is so folks could plan. Not everyone is on social media. Also, whoever trims the roadside brush needs some assistance. Vegetation is terribly mangled. Perhaps advisement from a landscaping company on how best to trim back trees, and a sharper implement to avoid the shredding.*
38. *Pave Reynolds road!*
39. *Official Facebook page for communication of important dates, votes or issues.*
40. *Newsletter*

Q17 - In what ways do you think municipal services or communication could be improved? (Continued)

41. *New selectboard*
42. *Need to use social media and ADVANCED notice. And update website so can be reliable place to check.*
43. *Natural Gas*
44. *N/A*
45. *N/a*
46. *n*
47. *My taxes are high for what the town provides. I do not have children in the school system and roads and road maintenance is horrible.*
48. *More updated website to let community members know everything going on in the town, not everyone is on Facebook or has children in school.*
49. *More public education for all ages as to how the town is actually legally set up and able to operate.*
50. *More mailings for people not on social media.*
51. *More law enforcement. Don't get carried away with this DEI project. Don't create issues where there aren't any*
52. *More involvement from town residents*
53. *More information should be posted about voting and town events*
54. *More Email communication or town group page*
55. *more detail in meeting agendas & meeting minutes. Go back to selectboard updates monthly (Carolyn used to do this) less secrecy - more public meetings - have public bulletin boards for townspeople to access info. Post regularly updates from all depts/boards. Use Town Clerk FB page to inform people of meetings/town happenings.*
56. *More communication*
57. *More advertising outside Town offices, where many people pass by throughout the day.*
58. *Monthly newsletter, salting in icy conditions.*
59. *Modernize the town website, provide means of signing up to receive regular communications (and then send them).*
60. *Make a regular weekly post about current updates going on. Keep the community engaged*
61. *mailings--expensive but can reach most residents email communication--town email list*
62. *Mailings*
63. *Letters to the residents. I just happened to stumble upon this survey. So how do all the residents no about it.*
64. *Letters to residents*
65. *Let the communities voice be heard and vote on decisions to build*
66. *Last years town report had many errors, proofreading prior to printing would be helpful and eliminate unnecessary special elections to correct those errors. Code of conduct for all town employees would be a step in the right direction*
67. *Junk ordinance / blight enforcement.*
68. *Junk ordinance*
69. *it's fine*
70. *It seems that route 7 is the only corridor of communication*
71. *Invest in law enforcement*
72. *Increased availability of Police options.*
73. *Increase funding to library. Grow the services that are succeeding currently- like the library rather than start new from Scratch.*
74. *If the town office staff worked more for the community than there own needs. Less staff. If the town clerk had enough free time to be the town administrator she wouldn't need two assistants for the clerk position and an additional one for the town administrator. The bookkeeper and treasurer were both part time positions and are now full time with payroll done by a third party. A zoning administrator making more than the previous one and also now has an assistant. Accurate information given other than a smoke show to keep you in the dark. Flush the toilet and start over.*
75. *I would love sidewalks!*
76. *I wish there was an email mailing list I could sign up for. I rent here and barely ever know what is going on unless I peruse the town Facebook page.*
77. *I wish the town clerks office and the maintenance crew were doing their jobs! Plowing and road maintenance is horrible and the town clerks office could step up their game.*
78. *I think they do a very good job.....*
79. *I pay almost \$10,000 in taxes and the amount of pot holes I have to drive around and through to get home on Reynolds Rd is unacceptable.*
80. *I know mailings are expensive, but what if a newsletter went out monthly or bi-monthly. I know it is up to individuals to keep up on what's going on in town. But most people don't. Some of my neighbors didn't know about this survey or the last vote on changing the date of it's fiscal year. Didn't get a mailing. Also, how about either starting a welcome wagon committee for newcomers, or perhaps a handout with information on services in and around town. This would show we are a welcoming community better than a DEI statement. [Re: Town offices and Library question 18: Why can't you consolidate the town library with the school library, would save money and resources.] [Re: Diversity question 19: We already have many laws in our State + Nation that cover this --> we have the constitution the Bill of Rights Civil Rights Act of 1964. I believe in the golden rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The words sound great but I have seen what trying to implement this DEI statement has done to our town. It has only divided it not brought it together.*
81. *I just came upon this survey. If I didn't happen to be on Facebook, I probably would have missed it. If there are important issues, they should be more clearly notified. Mailers are helpful. Relying on social media is an issue. I know that I stay off of the Georgia Facebook pages. They do not seem to bring out the best in people and I usually leave disappointed.*
82. *I have heard that people do not like the town administrator*
83. *I believe improvements are needed on the timeline to which community members are notified about upcoming meetings, votes, discussions, and decisions being made.*
84. *Hire a Town Administrator with the skills and focus to drive improvement initiatives, focus on grant opportunities and manage communication. Combining the Town Clerk position with the Town Administrator was unwise (penny smart and dollar foolish). The town should benchmark our labor*

Q17 - In what ways do you think municipal services or communication could be improved? (Continued)

expenditures for planning & zoning as compared to like size towns in our region. Other towns are getting the job done with far fewer paid staff.

85. *Hire a part-time trash collector to pick up litter along the lake shore... before it ends up in the lake*

86. *Highly desire more police presence in the town.*

87. *Get the message out sooner, less secrets, more open communication*

88. *get the current select board out!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

89. *Georgia zip code*

90. *For the love of god, the ditches on the middle portion Stone Bridge rarely get touched, which means homes across the street from ditches that fill up end up with flooded basements. Even with sump pumps, there's no ditch we can pump to as a ditch is only on the opposite side of the road. It would be so nice to see ditches cleaned out and the crushed/collapsing culvert pipes get replaced.*

91. *For people who don't use the internet I'd like to see one of those digital message boards put in. That way you can share events, town meetings, voting info, etc... Nothing big like for example the Milton High School has as you enter the parking lot. Another example BFA Saint Albans.*

92. *Finding this survey on the town website was difficult. Four clicks to get to the survey isn't user friendly. The town also needs an independent HR manager.*

93. *Facebook is a dysfunctional nightmare. If used, should not have public ability to comment on informational posts. Maybe post a phone number where people can call with questions.*

94. *Encourage bicycle safety by signage and education to drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. This is particularly important in areas that are part of the Champlain Valley Bikeway and where the roads are in need of repair. Cyclists swerve to avoid potholes and risk being hit. Drivers are irritated because this is interpreted as cyclists think they own the roads.*

95. *Email list serv, don't rely on social media*

96. *Electronic signage to announce meetings & events in Georgia center and the South Village. An email directory that the Town could send announcements through. A Full-time Town Manager is needed.*

97. *Efforts that are official in nature (not facebook posts!) that are thoughtful and concise. They should live on an official website/listserv, but could be shared via social media.*

98. *e-newsletter, clearer zoning rules, voting option explanations, walking path maps*

99. *E mail automated phone call*

100. *Drainage ditch maintenance along Sandy Birch Road.*

101. *Digital banner sign, Facebook updates*

102. *Difficult in a splintered communications environment. Direct email, Front Porch Forum, and social media. We appreciate your efforts!*

103. *Consistent outgoing e-mail updates of town events / meetings.*

104. *communication is adequate*

105. *Clearly, communication.*

106. *Clarity on programs and updates on town progress*

107. *Carpenter hill pavement to connect what is there now.*

108. *By letting the voters decide on issues at the town meeting instead of having special meetings where only a small amount of voters are represented.*

109. *Better use of the Town of Georgia social media sites*

110. *better town road snow plowing for sure and getting a better salting truck, the one now, only spills salt in the middle of the road as he plows.*

111. *Better police presence*

112. *Animal control issues - cattle, dogs*

113. *Adequate written notice by mail.p*

114. *Actually communicate any information. Use modern forms of communication like social media or a weekly news letter. The news letter would not to be extensive. See other towns for examples.*

115. *A sign board or two by major intersections or near the town garage would be helpful.*

116. *A monthly newsletter or something via an email? Include reminders of how to sign up for absentee ballots and due dates? Open town positions, who is running, and bios? Maybe these exist and I haven't seen them.*

117. *A better town website would be a start, maybe an email newsletter that goes out to town residents on a regular basis.*

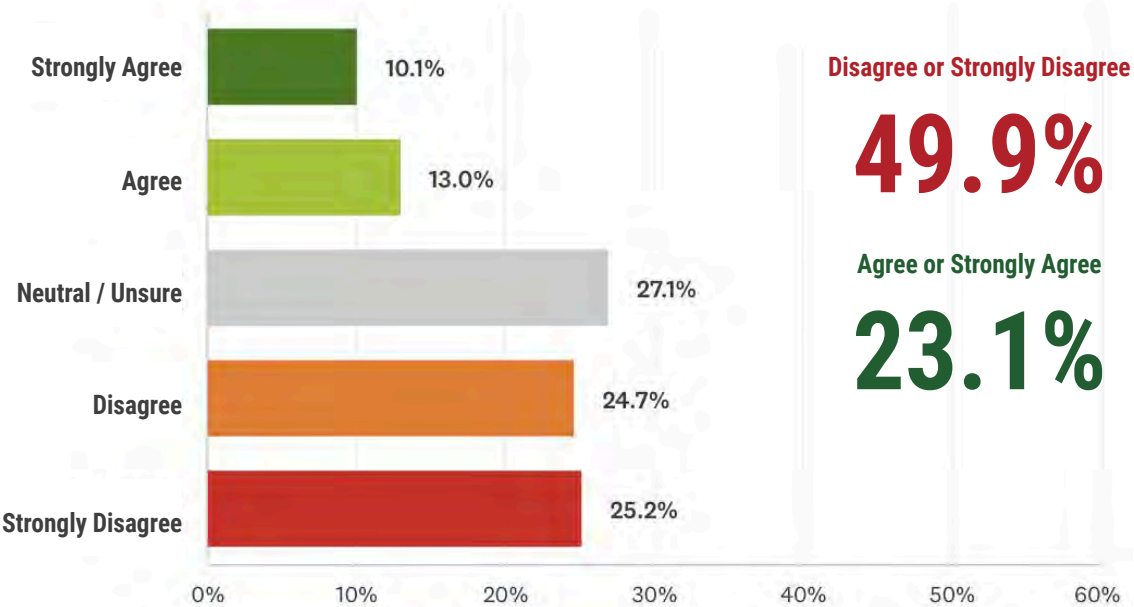
118. *.*

119. *Not enough space in this box...b*

120. *Better communication*

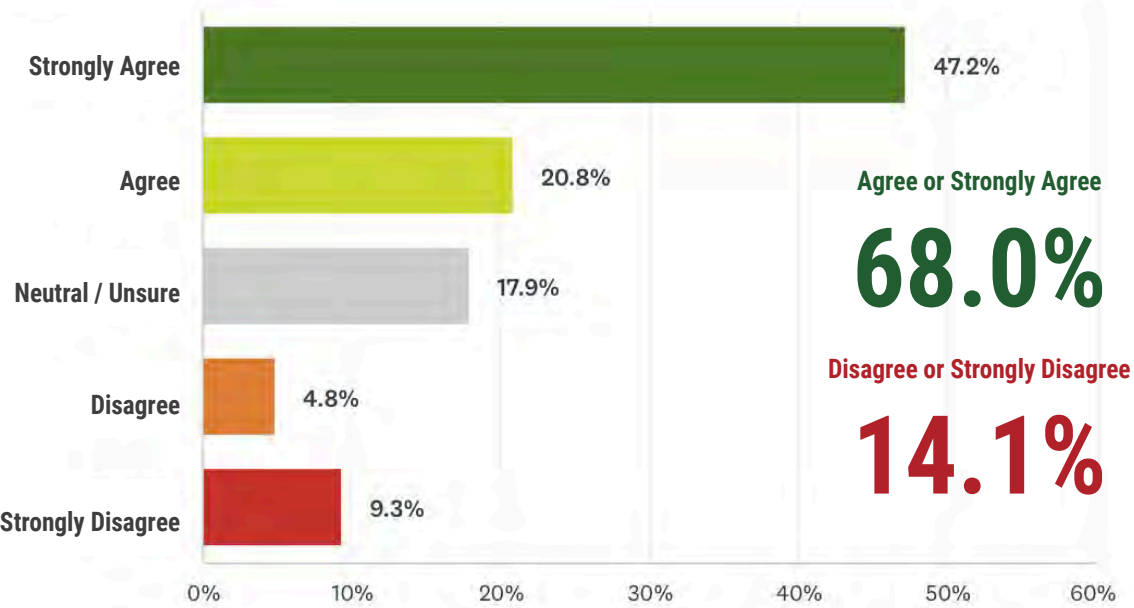
Q18 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (Select one) **“The Town Offices and Library services would serve locals better if they were located in new facilit(ies) in South Village as it is being developed.”**

Answered: 377 Skipped: 45



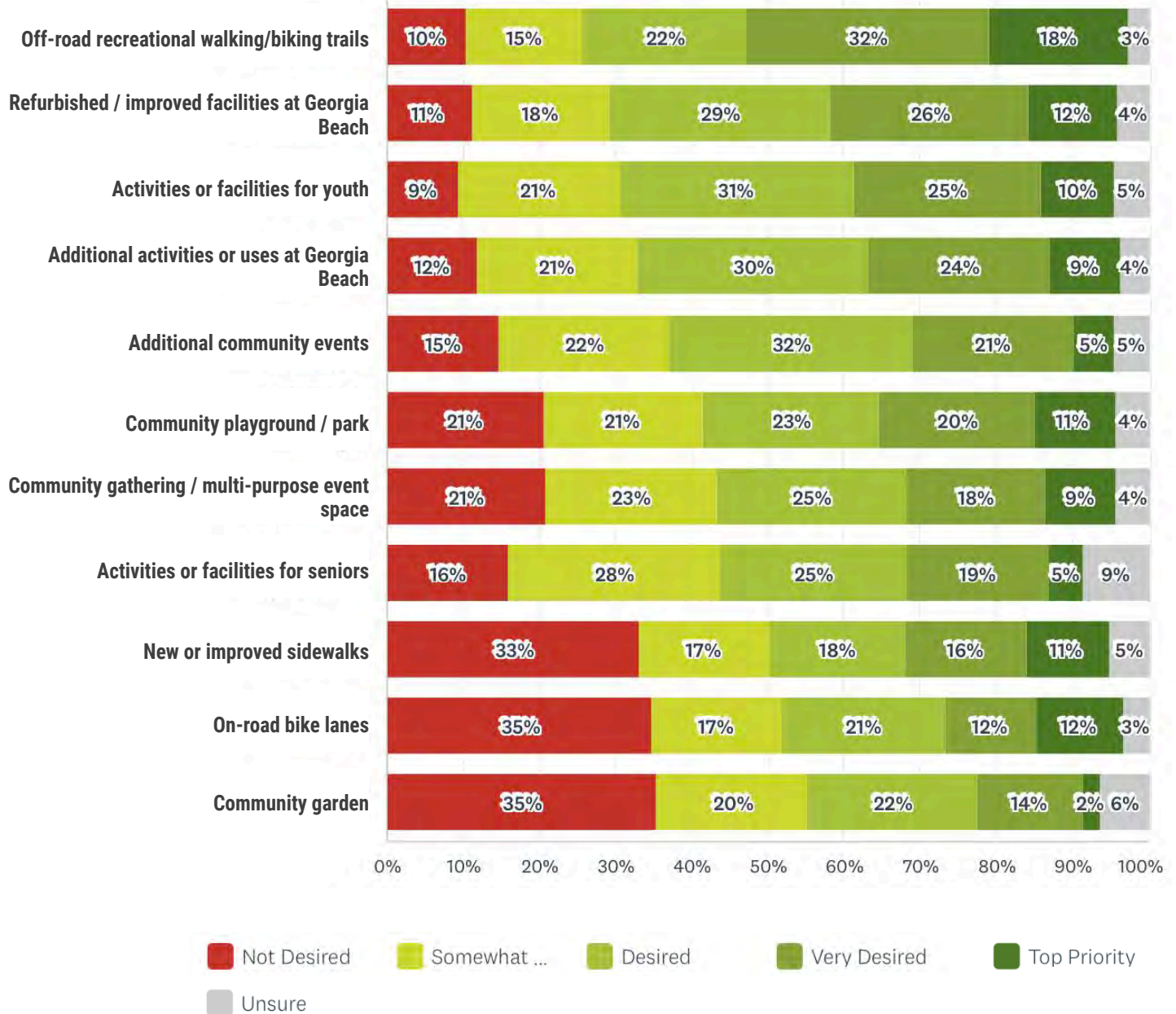
Q19 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (Select one) **“A community is improved by celebrating diversity and welcoming all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, or disability.”**

Answered: 375 Skipped: 47



Q20 - What types of community amenities or activities do you feel are desired within the Town of Georgia?

Answered: 378 Skipped: 44



Q21 - Regarding the question above, do you have any specific ideas or recommendations? (Write in)

1. *You don't need to move the library. The library needs more books. There are no good books at that library. That's why no one goes there. Bestsellers. New releases. Woodworking books. Anything.*
2. *You can improve the beach area to be inclusive of the other community needs: senior and youth activities, event space, dog park area. It would be easier to maintain and staff in one location. Now it's mostly a boat launch and baseball field.*
3. *Would love to see more options available for walking with dogs/young children. It's too dangerous to walk on our road (Sandy Birch) and most hiking trails aren't stroller friendly.*
4. *Whether there is more development or not there HAS to be sidewalks, bike path installed on Ballard Road between Rt. 7 and at least the underpass. Someone is going to be killed walking there.*
5. *what about a "round a bout " off of 104a & route #7 ??*
6. *We have playgrounds at both the schools & beach which could always be upgraded. Activities at the beach for our youth in the summer would be great. I don't think renting the beach out to events where the towns people cannot use the facilities is ok though. A walking path incorporated into the Beach property and upgrading the beach itself would be helpful for its use.*
7. *We had a brand new building all ready to go at the beach and because of a few loud busy bodies we lost a wonderful FREE building. Now you want tax payers to pay for one! Something wrong with this whole thing!*
8. *We don't need sidewalks.*
9. *We desperately need sidewalks in South Village! So many people walk along route 7 and it is dangerous!*
10. *We could have had a nice facility at the beach, gifted by a local businessman. We could have added to it easily. A few people decided the best way to receive a gift was to get arrogant. I do not want my property taxes to increase because these same people are active in this survey, and want a facility at the beach.*
11. *We are a rural community and I believe that is why most people moved here. Also having school choice for highschool. All these amenities sound nice but are available 10 to 15 miles away. I don't think our town can support all of this.*
12. *Unless they will be placed everywhere, insisting the sidewalk to nowhere on Sandy Birch is a waste of effort.*
13. *Turn campground into community rec center with a coffee/bake shop maybe senior center*
14. *There would have been a new beach facility if not for a few people with an agenda.*
15. *There should be a sidewalk from Laura's woods to the corner of Rt 7 & Ballard road. Lots of kids riding bikes and people walking*
16. *The town office help and select board need to do their jobs properly and never mind filling their pockets with money and stop worrying about new growth because they can't maintain what they have now*
17. *The total impact monetarily should be a priority. Many of the above suggestions come at a cost that would be prohibitively negative for the average taxpayer. Ideas that sound wonderful should be explored carefully. Needs vs Wants!*
18. *The snack bar at Georgia Beach is not up to health code and so cannot legally be used for Little League or other events. The bathrooms at Georgia Beach really should be open once Little League begins.*
19. *The sidewalk needs to go somewhere, not just in front of the building or development being built.*
20. *The only reason I'm saying not desired for bike lanes on roads is that speed limits are not followed, very very low enforcement, my road is supposedly 40 mph I see folks zipping down going at least 50 +, people pass me all the time when I follow the limit, even with limited line of site, weight limit on the bridge is not being honored even by local trucking companies, cement and loaded water tankers are definitely over the limit.*
21. *The library needs more funding.*
22. *The Georgia Beach is a wonderful asset for the town and should be used more. This space could be transformed into a year round facility and used for everything pretty much listed up above!*
23. *The bike way for cyclists is not used. They cut through cline road versus using the directed scenic route along the lake. The edges of the roads are narrow and very dangerous for pedestrians and motorists.*
24. *The beach recreational area has opportunity for addition events that can be planned. This may include a tennis tournament, upgrade the volleyball courts to allow for competitions, basketball tournaments, encourage a soft ball team. In the winter finding a place for public sledding or a skating rink!*
25. *The Georgia Beach pavilion and restrooms need to be upgraded. Also a permanent Pickleball court should be installed in one of the basketball court areas, reducing one basketball net and supporting the growing Pickleball community in town.*
26. *Support for facilities for community activities in addition to GEMS are desirable.*
27. *Stop asking property owners to pay to subsidize a small number of people to use the St Albans pool. It is crazy that someone on a fixed income should be asked to pay for this unless it is "needs" based.*
28. *Stone Bridge is part of the Champlain Valley Bike Path, and traffic is unforgiving to them and pedestrians. It would be nice to have safer spaces, especially on the corners and up the hill/curve near the bridge.*
29. *Statements like "A community is improved by celebrating diversity and welcoming all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, or disability." need to be changed. Using the word 'celebrate' refers to putting one group of people above others, when all should be treated the same: fairly. When we 'celebrate' groups, we are putting that group above all others, causing the rift between residents we are currently seeing. We don't feel the 'all people are created equal'.*
30. *South Village*
31. *Some sort of building that could be rented for gatherings or other events that residents could use.*
32. *Sidewalks longer than 6 feet would be nice, especially along rt 7*
33. *Sidewalks leading along Ballard towards South Village and along corridor near school and town offices*
34. *Sidewalks ideally should only be implemented once there are actually places to walk to, putting in sidewalks in neighborhoods that don't lead anywhere else doesn't make a whole lot of sense in my opinion.*

Q21 - Regarding the question above, do you have any specific ideas or recommendations? Continued

35. Sidewalks from south village to connect Russell Greene/lake arrowhead on 104a would be amazing
36. Sidewalks - not necessary. Do not development into a traditional downtown, keep us rural. Do not make your improvements at the expense of existing businesses/homeowners.
37. Sidewalk to school
38. Sidewalk from South Village to Arrowhead Industrial Park would be very beneficial to many Georgia residents and those employed in Georgia. This would also link South Village to Russell Greene Natural Area via Town Trail #4.
39. Sidewalk from Milton to Saint Albans
40. Sidewalk along Ballard and Sandy Birch would be incredibly welcome.
41. Seems a lot of this questions asked here already are in the beach area park to play ball, Activities the town host things now, getting some folks to slow down on our roads is to me an issue that needs attention.....
42. seek out more walking paths or sidewalks or central areas to shop/ gather- town is too auto reliant
43. Sandy Birch Rd has the most residents and yet your plan is to build a sidewalk someday on Ballard Rd. That doesn't make a lot of sense to me.
44. Round-about us needed where 104A meets rte 7!!
45. Roads are poorly maintained. Please expand paved roads.
46. Refurbish or build a new pavilion at the beach. Remove the basketball hoop on the north side of the basketball court and create a permanent Pickleball court at the beach in it's place. This would allow people to play tennis and Pickleball at the same time.
47. Reduce town budget, fix problems don't make new ones.
48. paved wide shoulder down part of Ballard and Sandy Birch
49. Open-Ended Response
50. Ongoing attempts to put these networks in place should continued through Planning, DRB, and Grant writing
51. NOT a hockey rink. The town doesn't understand how expensive it is to maintain. It would be an astronomical waste of money. Sell the Zamboni and rink boards to fund improving the bathrooms at the beach. Don't expand the beach because it's unusable for most of the year with algae.
52. Nope
53. No more growth!
54. No
55. N/A
56. N/A
57. n
58. More pickleball courts at Georgia beach if not new courts, paint court lines on basketball court to create more courts. Courts also need resurfacing.
59. More native plants in areas that need town-mowing; improves pollinator population and reduces invasive species.
60. More direct route to Georgia Beach from Rte 7. Beautiful place but hard to get to/locate
61. More connectivity via sidewalks/bike path from South Village up and down Rte 7 and off nearby spurs (Ballard, 104A)
62. Mapped bike trail for visitors.
63. Many people use 104A for touring/biking. It hardly has any shoulders much room for bikers and it's windy. It needs to be widened and made more accommodating for bikers. Also, the speeds on that windy road, especially for the trucks and 18 wheelers, is crazy. We need to recognize it as a feeder road to the Interstate. It is also now one of the major thoroughfares from Maine across New England. Those issues need to be addressed from a state/ regional point of view.
64. Make access for ATV trails.
65. Lines on road for biking and walking
66. limit the spending by the current board
67. Let's finally add sidewalks to Ballard Rd. Lot's of people walk along there but it's not safe. Would get a lot of use.
68. It would be great if there could be a bike lane from Georgia to Milton and to St. Albans
69. It is really frustrating that we could have had new facilitators at the beach for free, but some people ruined that opportunity. If we could get grants to help pay for new facilities that would be great.
70. Is there any way to make driving safer around dead man's curve? A clean and safe community park closer to the town center, south village would be fabulous. More clearly marked and available hiking/walking trails
71. Is there an old railroad right of way through town? Can that connect with existing trails?
72. Instead of trying to grow our small town just for the sake of money so that we can buy more unnecessary things, why don't we clean it up and protect the remaining wildlife and nature? Does the aim of every town have to be to get bigger and have more people and things?
73. Indoor spaces would be great so they could be available year-round. It would be cool to have something like a walking trail too but we would also need parking available nearby.
74. Increasing library funding would allow for many of these options to be realized (i.e., events, activities and facilities for all age groups, gathering/ event space).
75. Improve bathroom facilities at beach.
76. If the South Village is further developed there needs to be sidewalks and improved traffic flow. It should not be developed further until there is such a plan. For running/bike paths, if there are paths that need help maintaining, that information needs to be shared more widely to find willing volunteers.
77. ice rink, pickleball courts
78. I would love to see our community make it easier to use alternative forms of transportation (biking, walking, bus, etc.)
79. I would love to have a network of walking/biking trails around town.
80. I don't want to see traffic lights
81. I don't know what land Georgia Town owns, but if they could make a trail network similar to what Milton has at Bombardier park, i think it would see a lot of use by residents.
82. Having a community/activity center would give children and adults the opportunity to gather together and socialize.
83. Government needs to provide safe roads, fire protection and education

Q21 - Regarding the question above, do you have any specific ideas or recommendations? *Continued*

and that is all

84. Government makes a mess of what ever they run
85. Finish the side walk that starts at dollar general have it go right down to the Mobil.
86. Director of Recreations is NOT needed for the money that has been discussed to staff this position!
87. Develop town beach and utilize town commons to provide them
88. Dedicated pedestrian path along Route 7 near the school please. And an identified multi-modal path along Georgia Shore for bikes, pedestrians, baby carriages and those with mobility challenges.
89. Community playground/park is already at the beach and school.
90. Can we please designate a green way to bike or run and connect up to all they are putting in place in the town and city of st Albans!
91. Build sidewalks & unpaved[?] "walking paths" along our heavily traveled roads. Too many people run/walk at dusk and it is dangerous!
92. Build more sidewalks BEFORE someone gets hit!!! [Re: Refurbished/improved facilities at Georgia Beach: LESS FENCE]
93. Bring businesses such as stores, bars, restaurants, and music venues to town for locals to enjoy something in town for a change.
94. Bike path along route 7 between South Georgia and GEMS
95. Bike lanes would be great.
96. Bike lane on Rte 7 to the school or connecting to rec area that is safe to cross lanes of busy speeding traffic
97. Better dock for launching boats and area for individuals to fish from. "I" shaped and wide. Change gate location to allow launch to be accessed later into the night.
98. Being a diverse community is a good thing. I'm not sure why we need to

celebrate it? Just let people live. If we are going to expand, we need basic services and steady law enforcement is one of those needs.

99. *Ballard Road needs a shoulder for cyclists. The tunnel on Murray Ave needs a simple solar powered traffic light to indicate when a pedestrian or cyclist is crossing. Improving safety for cyclists (and pedestrians?) on Rt7 along Arrowhead Lake from Lake Rd to Main St. is needed.*
100. *Ballard Rd near the church.*
101. *Awknowledge areas with high bike and walking traffic (Georgia Shore, Lake Champlain Byway) and make improvements there first. Wider and better pavement*
102. *As traffic increases sidewalks and bike lanes become more and more necessary for safety*
103. *Allow leashed dogs at the Georgia beach area*
104. *Allocate sufficient funds to subsidize St Albans recreational activities is the most economical option for residents at this time*
105. *Added shoulder lanes on all roads needed for cars driving at night as well to give space for walking and bikes safely*
106. *access to or creation of rec trails, for walking, biking, XC skiing, etc.*
107. *A walking trail would be fabulous*
108. *A rec center for community would be great. Georgia has some of the most talented student athletes in the state. They are limited in gym time due to the demand of not only school sports but adult wellness activities.*
109. *A community is improved by welcoming and treating all of its citizens equally regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age or disability as guaranteed under the law.*
110. *A bike/rec lane on Rt 7. While a pipe dream if the state could widen the entire length of Rt 7 for a bike/Rec lane, it would bring a lot of bikers.*
111. *goverment is not meant to solve these type of problems*



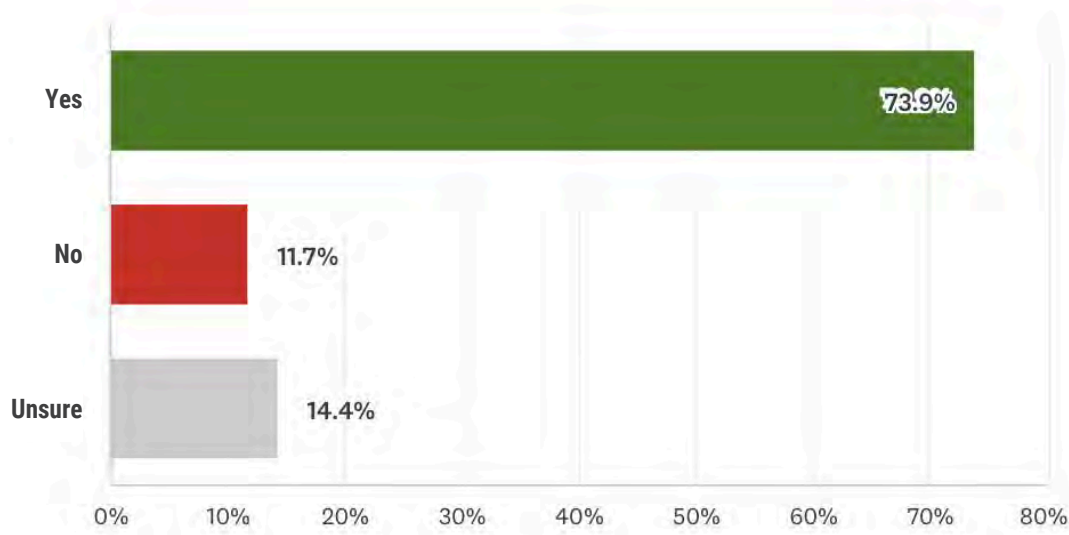
Q22 - How much would you desire to see bike lanes or wider road shoulders added to the following roads?

Answered: 373 Skipped: 49



Q23 - Should the town try to coordinate with adjacent municipalities to plan for shared community and recreation amenities, so that each municipality doesn't need to construct their own? (Select one)

Answered: 376 Skipped: 46



Q24 - What shared community and recreation amenities might you suggest? (Write in)

1. Youth programs. I think the St albans community pool is great.

2. We should continue to support resident rates with St. Albans.

3. Walking path similar to the rail trail in St.Albans/Swanton

4. Use of exercise facilities, pools, and rental of event rooms.

5. Unsure

6. Trails, bike paths, event space

7. Town pool, walking paths

8. Town parks, hiking trails, sporting facilities

9. This town seems to cater to a very small populate of the town to provide them with services and enmities. This town cannot support new endeavors; we don't have the population to support it or compete with neighboring towns.

10. that should be an individual choise

11. Swimming,hiking,boating

12. Swimming, indoor exercise like Collins Perley.

13. Swimming pool, skating rink, courts.

14. Swimming pool, indoor track, rental/reservable room for small medium sized events.

15. Swimming pool

16. Swimming lessons, group bike rides, tennis and pickle ball lessons, a designated pickle ball court, biking and running events (Tour de Georgia, Ballard Hill Mile, Election Day 5K, Maquam/ Georgia Shore Half Marathon
17. Summer camps for children

18. St. Albans Hardact

19. St. Albans and Milton

20. St. Albans

21. St. Albans

22. St Albans used to allow Georgia residents to use their recreational passes for resident price, last I checked that had ended. A community meeting space would be great for folks just looking to meet or play games in a quiet space without having to spend money. The library is great when it's open, but schedules don't always match up.

23. St albans rec is incredibly pricey and should have lower rates.

24. St Albans pool and sports activity's through the rec dept.

25. St Albans

26. Sports programs for kids, adult enrichment

27. Small concert venue

28. Skating rink and gym facilities.

29. Shared use of pool, fitness facilities, indoor rec space.

30. Shared park program. Trail activity program akin to earning a patch if walked hiked each in each season. We don't need a pool. We need to embrace the outdoors for recreation in Georgia. Not put up more buildings. Any new town buildings should give homage to the history of the town and not be an eyesore

Q24 - What shared community and recreation amenities might you suggest? Continued

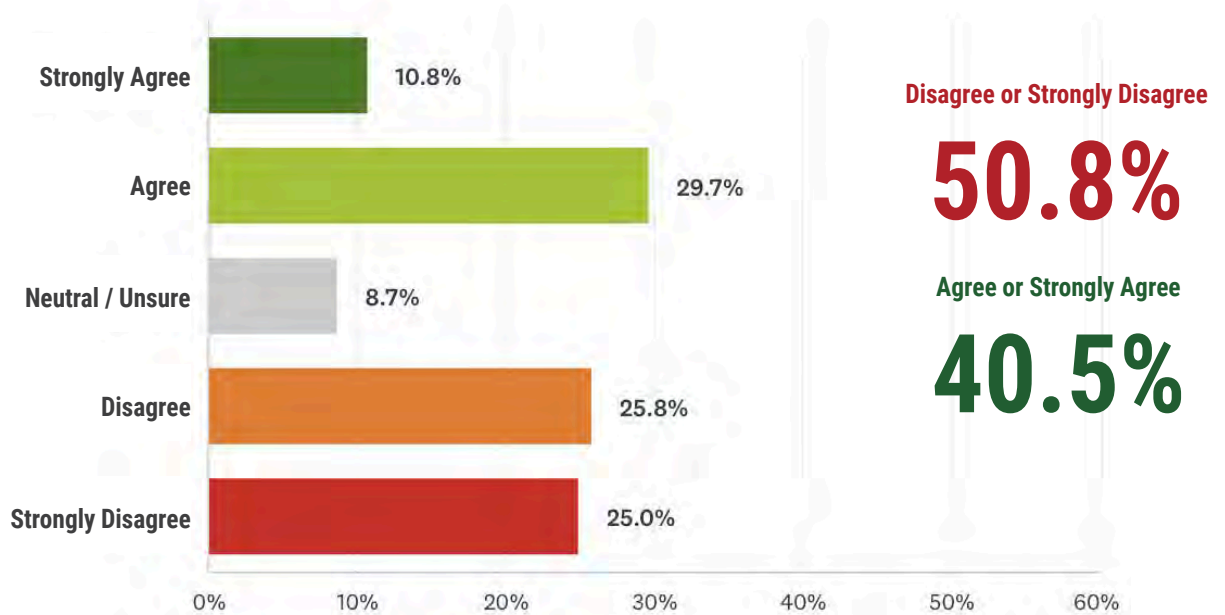
31. *Share pool with St. Albans. Possibly construct an outdoor skating rink to share with Milton and St. Albans. Perhaps a skate park. Or a put in for kayaks and canoes.*
32. *Saint Albans.*
33. *rink/ pool*
34. *Rest rooms and beach's grounds cleaning.....*
35. *Resident rate for st albans pool*
36. *Regional Recreation department*
37. *Rec programs Police services*
38. *Rec dept program costs should be county based, va town*
39. *Rec camp for summer vacations Athletics Fine and performing art*
40. *Pool, Rink, Theatre, Fields*
41. *Pool, kids programs*
42. *Pool, ice rink, gym*
43. *Pool useage, summer camps for kids, shared library, police.*
44. *Pool use, recreational activities*
45. *Pool at St Albans*
46. *Pool at Hardak*
47. *Pool access Gym membership Senior activities*
48. *Pool*
49. *Pool*
50. *Pool*
51. *Pickleball courts, indoor and outdoor*
52. *Pickleball courts*
53. *Pickleball coirts*
54. *Pickleball Bike paths*
55. *Pickle ball, tennis, horseshoes etc*
56. *Paved roads*
57. *Parks, Dog parks, walking / running trails, forest trails*
58. *Parks and rec with St Albans and Fairfax*
59. *parades, pool, sports teams, etc*
60. *none*
61. *None*
62. *none*
63. *Nature paths*
64. *N/A*
65. *Multi-use space/event hall. Hiking/biking trails.*
66. *More sports/exercise opportunities for adults and youth.*
67. *Milton/Fairfax*
68. *Milton and St. Albans both have great existing programs - help us pay "resident" rates.*
69. *Local access to hardack pool*
70. *Kids activities/ camp/ child care*
71. *It would depend on funding and ideas. All surrounding towns cover our current needs.*
72. *Investigate activities(sports,classes,camps) with nearby towns that by joining forces would assist economies of scale would help reduce Georgia residents cost to participate.*
73. *Instead of creating our own recreation Dept., we should work with St.Albans and Milton to participate in their recreation offerings at a reduced rate for Georgia residents.*
74. *Indoor skating and other indoor recreation (soccer, roller skating, fitness, etc) facility with room for meetings/event space*
75. *Indoor pool/rec center*
76. *indoor pool/exercise/recreation for all ages. A community center and combined library/media space. Fairfax/Georgia? Milton/Georgia? Georgia location shared with Franklin County in General?*
77. *Ice skating rink, pool(s), Park & Ride (north end of town)*
78. *ice rink, pickleball courts*
79. *Ice rink for winter time, roller skating for spring/summer/fall.*
80. *I love the coordination with St Albans for the pool. We should also look into coordinating efforts for things we don't offer. If we have basketball, baseball, soccer no need to work with another town.*
81. *I have found no issue with access to recreational amenities as I pay for this access.*
82. *Hockey rink, Indoor recreation*
83. *Hiking trails, off-road biking trails, tennis/basektball courts, kayak rentals*
84. *Hardack.*
85. *Hardack*
86. *Hard'ack, st Albans city pool, town mountain bike trails, Franklin county trails, Welden movie theater.*
87. *Hard'ack area; pool & trails*
88. *Gym, indoor recreation*
89. *Georgia being able to use pool and facilities at Hardack in St. Albans.*
90. *Gas*
91. *food forest/ park!*
92. *fire / ambulance / police / senior programs / youth sports / adult sports / parades / pickleball courts / boat dock / etc.*
93. *Fairfax*
94. *expand town forest?*
95. *Exercise or skills (crafts, other topics, etc) classes for adults. Shared ice rink, pool, other rec facilities. Seems to be plenty of activities for children/ youth, then seniors, but absolutely lacking for the adults in the middle that may or may not have children.*
96. *Dog park Better fishing/boat access at Georgia shore (same for arrowhead)*

Q24 - What shared community and recreation amenities might you suggest? *Continued*

- 97. *Discounted Memberships as a Georgia resident to gyms, pools etc.*
- 98. *Continue the arrangement with St Albans for access to recreation programs at their in town rate.*
- 99. *Cont to work with St Albans rec for pool use and summer camp*
- 100. *Community gardens, more public gathering places both indoor and outdoor, more opportunities to connect with people, employers, businesses, service providers, in more interactive events,*
- 101. *Community Center, sports fields*
- 102. *Collins Perley. Bike path connected to Collins Perley or bike path. Big ask though.*
- 103. *children's activities, camps, dog parks, tennis courts, senior services and seminars*
- 104. *Bowling alley, recreational center; use of Hard'ack, Mt. Bike trails, snow shoeing/x-country skiing trails.*
- 105. *Athletics and rec dept.*
- 106. *Appreciate the support for Georgia residents use of Hardack pool and other recreational facilities.*
- 107. *Any that require construction*
- 108. *All.*
- 109. *All available rec amenities offered in the share.*
- 110. *All*
- 111. *Again...ideas should be researched carefully to balance cost with the taxpayer in mind!*
- 112. *A walking trail network would be great*
- 113. *A venue that hosts community events and concerts. If I had my say I would want walking trail, places for food trucks, and an all-ages arcade.*
- 114. *A park on Arrowhead Lake.*

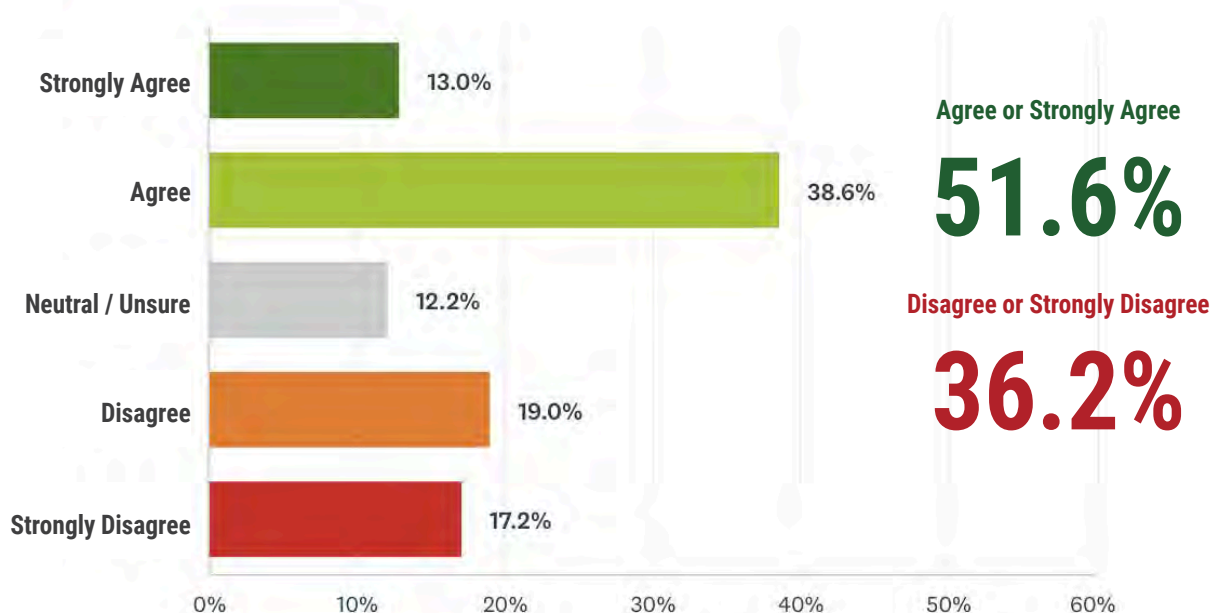
Q25 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (Select one) **“Cellular phone service within the town is adequate for my daily needs.”**

Answered: 380 Skipped: 42



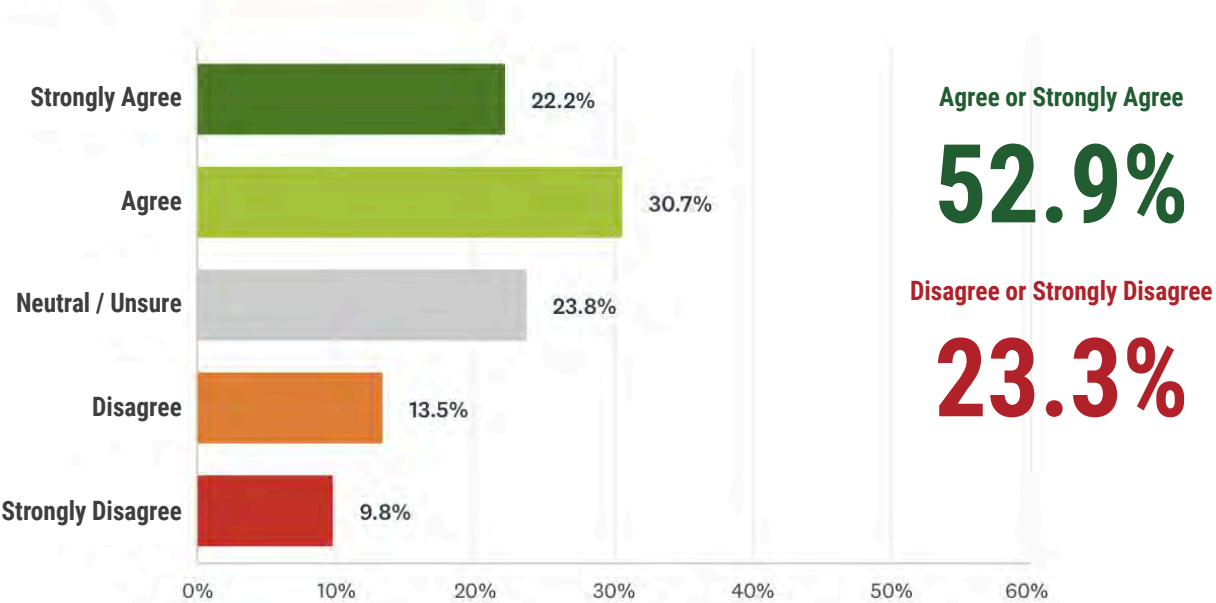
Q26 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (Select one) **“High-speed internet service within the town is adequate for my daily needs.”**

Answered: 378 Skipped: 44



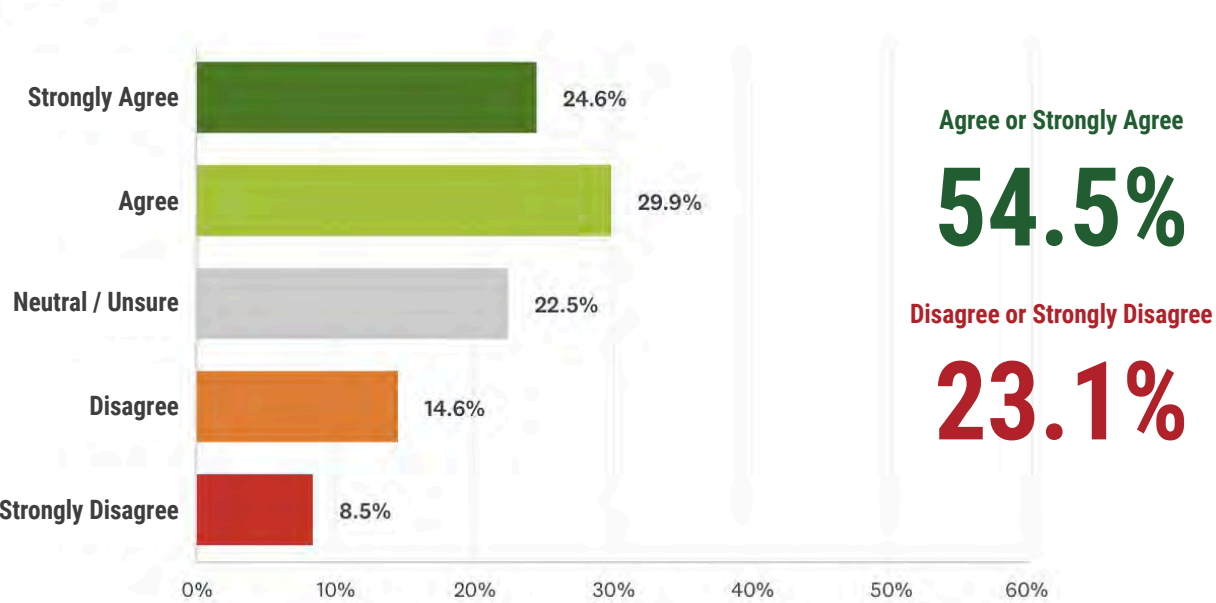
Q27 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *(Select one)* “The Town of Georgia municipality should work to pursue sustainable energy solutions for its operations, such as geothermal, heat exchangers, solar or wind energy sources, reduced energy use, and fossil fuel reductions.”

Answered: 378 Skipped: 44



Q28 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *(Select one)* “The Town of Georgia municipality should work to encourage and support ways in which homeowners and businesses can pursue sustainable energy solutions, such as geothermal, heat exchangers, solar or wind energy sources, reduced energy use, and fossil fuel reductions.”

Answered: 378 Skipped: 44



PART FIVE

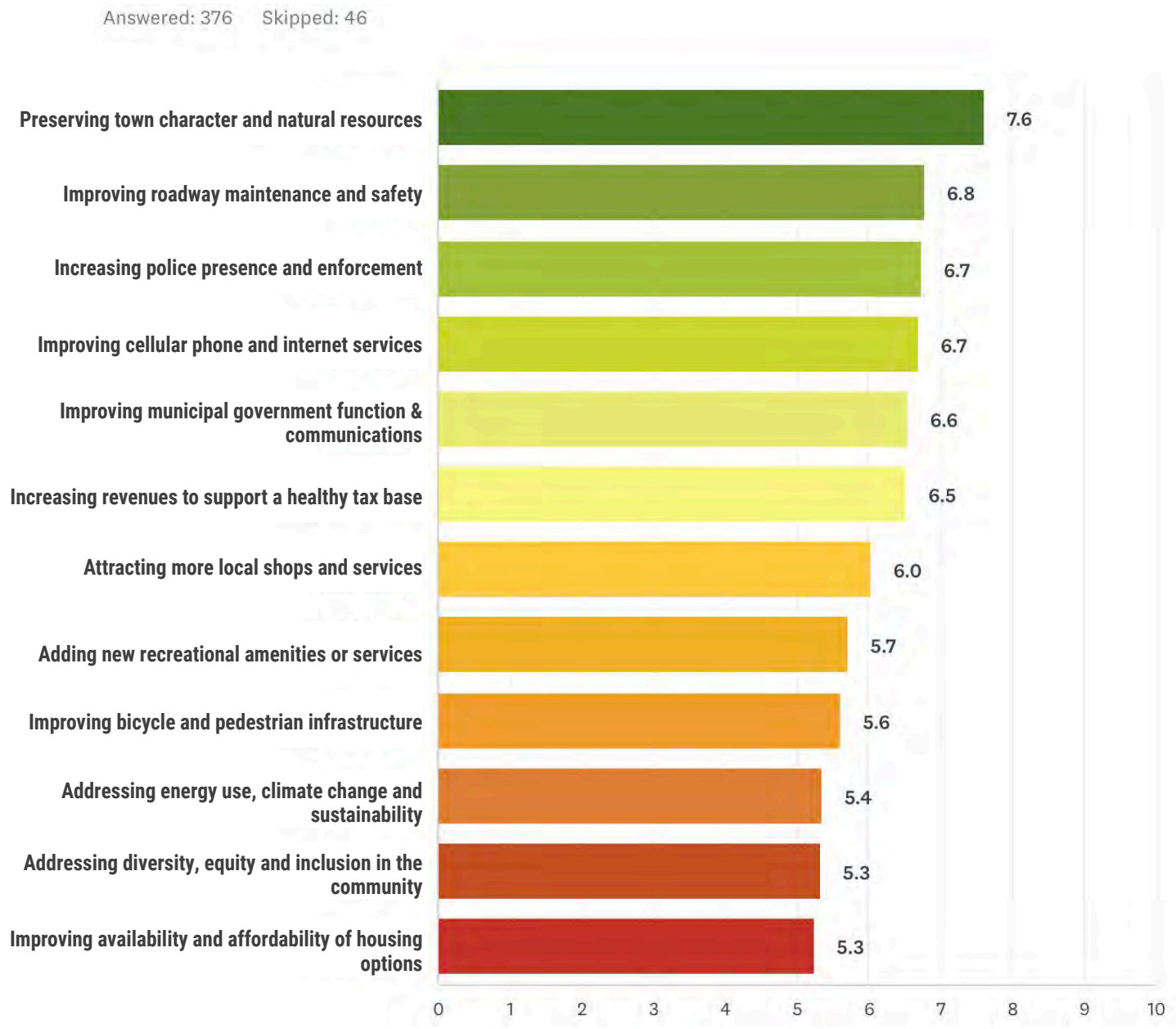
OVERALL PRIORITIES

The purpose of Part Five was to measure the public's overall assessment of town priorities over the next several years going forward. This question was saved for last so that respondents would be more likely to consider their thoughts and answers to the previous questions in thinking about bigger picture priorities.

An option was provided for people to write-in any additional comments or suggestions they may have, in case there was a topic of interest to them which had not been covered in the survey.

Lastly, a question was provided asking if they would have any interest in volunteering to help on local committees or community groups. Respondents were given the option of providing contact info for this question. Because this survey is anonymous, all contact info provided has been omitted from this report and has been separated from the survey results by Regrowth Planning. The volunteer contact info will be provided to the Town Offices as a separate document unlinked from any survey data.

Q29 - **Considering your answers to the previous questions, please rank each of the following topics/ issues on a scale of 1-10 in terms of their importance for the Town of Georgia to address over the next several years: (1 = Not Important, 5 = Average, 10 = Top Priority)**



Q29 - [Write-in responses to “Other” in Question 29]

1. *you need to find better ways to increase revenue than increasing my taxes*
2. *We need to stop taxing the heck out of Vermonters so they won't leave the state.*
3. *The monopoly that Comcast has in our area needs to be challenged. Cable/cell/internet charges are ridiculous.*
4. *the key is to reduce spending that is the same as more revenue*
5. *The diversity issue although important should be addressed AFTER more pressing concerns have been mitigated.*
6. *SAFETY should be more important than recreation*
7. *Reduce budget*
8. *Please don't raise taxes. I pay enough and what I get for my money isn't worth it. Taxes are high enough!*
9. *P*
10. *Improving housing base will lend itself to improving equity and inclusion.*
11. *If increasing revenues means raising taxes again, NO. Very dissapointed that the current select board decided to tell all departments to present budgets with 5 percent increases. when budgets get don't get passed, that money has to come from somewhere. There are not sustainable, smart decisions being made.*
12. *If by more revenue it means from new housing and business and not from existing tax payers*
13. *I think we have a healthy stable tax base if you are able to increase the hours, pay rates and salaries of town employees with just a select board vote.*
14. *How are you going to do that?*
15. *Diversity is very important and I believe Georgia is a welcoming community so I don't think this issue requires considerable focus of town government.*
16. *Could just be me , but every time someone gets some extra money they spend it on something not really needed but then they say we have extra money and it wasnt used like a rainy day fund.....*
17. *Control budget*
18. *Communication in Georgia is a never-ending problem. We are a town with 3 sections--Fairfax, St. Albans, Milton. And each section takes its identity from those sections---even though people long to see themselves as part of a United Georgia. It will never happen unless we can find effective ways to communicate.*
19. *Case by case*
20. *Better done with trimming budgets. GFD budget has exploded town highway garage was allowed too much overrun*
21. *Addressing zoning regulations to keep slum lord/incompetent builders out of the housing mix.*
22. *[Re: sustainable energy question 27: not solar or wind energy sources]; [Re: sustainable energy question 28: encourage not mandate, not with tax monies]*
23. *“throwing out the old and buying all new” is NOT the way I operate in my life. I do not encourage the Town of Georgia to operate that way either.*

Q30 - Please feel free to add any additional comments or suggestions you want to share for the Town Plan which were not covered in this survey: (Write in) Note: Responses to this question have been organized by topic where possible. These responses also include written comments submitted via the Online Comment Form on the project website.

ZONING / GROWTH

1. *Zoning should ensure that land appropriate for water and sewer around south village is left open and available, not otherwise blocked, until infrastructure is created.*
2. *We need to grow slowly. I'd like more commercial property in the lower part of Georgia*
3. *We need a base of basic needs before expanding. Our infrastructure is crumbling, no police presence, our lake has such great potential and the bathrooms are embarrassing. We need to fix what we have before we expand and host more people in a public setting.*
4. *Though I believe they've been discontinued, I'm concerned about the potential use of a TIF district or it's like to fund some of these development ideas.*
5. *There will always be folks that want everything wright out there front door , and they lose track of why they wanted to live in Gerogia in the first place , of it being alittle queiter and peacefull than the high traffic area around here.....*
6. *The realization of the need to follow State and Regional Planning recommendations. This same process was done just about 5 years ago with very little of the recommendations being followed by the professionals paid to guide the town efforts as it relates to planning. Again this exercise is worthless if we are not keen enough to follow recommendations given by both citizens and regional planning years ago and now asking same questions 5 years later with no movement since last time you did this. South Village has been the prior leaders desire in the community. Let's get to work, it's been 15 years with that thought and no action still.*
7. *The main focus of town government should be on efficient management of expenses and planning targeted growth in the south village area.*
8. *I would like to see the town plan for positive growth with investing partners, rather than turn large plots of land over to out-of-town, money hungry, slum lords who do not care about our community. I would like to see the town focus more on the capacity of the community to grow before paving the way for large housing units to pop up that will add additional burden to our VOLUNTEER fire department, lacking police enforcement, questionable school capacity, etc. I would like to see the town put forth more effort into long range planning and goal setting, rather than the reactive nature that currently exists - especially the planning commission and select board. I would like to see the town put more effort into supporting the rich history of the town. I would like to see the town put more effort into building a positive community.*
9. *I personally believe Georgia Center should be the future of development in Georgia, specifically in terms of housing because of its proximity to the school. South Village should be utilized more for shops and services and not housing.*

10. *Ever since I was a child there has been a drive to develop the town into something other than a bedroom community. Especially in the "south district". This money on research etc could be better spent on basic needs of the town not an unobtainable dream.*
11. *The Lakeshore height restriction for building has in my option created less visibility of the lake shore, it has increased the sprawl of the buildings themselves on the lots, where as a taller height might limit the building envelope in a better way.*
12. *Would like to see PUDs allowed in the L1 District.*
13. *The South Village needs to be rezoned. People on 104A are subject to ridiculous regulations where we can add livable space to our homes to grow with our family. Selling and building a larger home to stay in the school system is impossible now. There is no reason for 104A to be included in this vision of the South Village. Its only hurting the families that live here and driving them out. The campground and house in front needs to be cleaned up badly. Its an eye sore and reflects poorly on this town. If they are talking about waiving regulations for Bove then maybe its time to take a harder look at this envisioned "south village" and truly figure out how it will impact the town negatively INCLUDING the school that is already full. I don't feel that this had been looked into and people are using area schools to make judgment calls. My kids can't have friends come home on the bus with them because they are full.*
14. *I moved to our town as it is a small rural farming community. I don't want sidewalks and businesses and big buildings. I don't want apartment complexes. Let's keep Georgia the prize it is and stop the added homes.*
15. *Please stop making unilateral decisions, stop trying to make Georgia into an urban city. Stop turning people's property in commercial property! We chose to live in a rural town.*

- our town clerk should not be split in two directions. So many people trying to do the job of one is creating inconsistency and confusion. The town administrator position should not be simply absorbed by internal employees due to previous agendas.*
5. *The collusion in the town offices with brokers, builders, developers has led to significant mistrust of the leadership. Not showing all sides of the picture is a disservice to residents. Coming up with secret ways to get sewer approved in south village is dirty. Share the facts without pushing your agenda.*
6. *Suggest going back to two positions for Town Administrator or Town Manager to separate from Town Clerk to return to accountability at the highest level of Town government. Total disfunction in town government for town office and select board for huge turnover with no benefit to taxpayers.*
7. *Stop letting a single person view run the structure*
8. *Start "living within our means", TOO MANY Town employees @ TOO HIGH salaries compared to similar sized rural towns in Vt. we are way over staffed!*
9. *Newspaper coverage of town meetings, select board meetings, school board meetings etc.*
10. *Many of the items mentioned in this survey will depend on a sliding scale in regards to cost. I truly believe that most of the ideas have merit but we have pressing issues that need immediate attention. Georgia seems to be focused on WANTS rather than NEEDS. Communication will be paramount. Transparency and efficiency in our town government NEED to be addressed first! Can we streamline the workings of the town rather than creating a larger government? Should we be looking independently at every part of the inner workings of our town to assess what IS actually working or where there needs to be improvement, mitigation, restructuring or deletion!*
11. *If you want to make a change to support the community, one person one position. Pay one person 80 paychecks for not working 80 hours is very disturbing. If the Town Clerk actually did their job, we would not need 2 part time clerk assistants.*

TOWN OFFICE / GOVT MANAGEMENT

1. *Town permits that are reviewed for correctness and then enforcement that they are carried out correctly.*
2. *Town employee ethics and an appropriate policy should be addressed. Confidence in the new, and current, town office employees (not highway) is at an all time low due to, what I perceive, as highly questionable decisions and practices (at best). The daily town office is one big clique that appears to be operating their own agenda which generally comes across as the opposite of what the rest of the town desires. Additionally, the spending on unnecessary equipment and extremely bloated salaries is disgusting. Residents are told there is no money for X, Y, and Z but then it seems every month some new (bigger) purchase was made by employees, or PT positions are changed to FT. The list goes on. I think an audit of jobs and what they actually do on the daily could be incredibly enlightening and potentially reduce redundancy.*
3. *Town direction should be an ongoing process. I would like to see more forums for public input and discussion that might diffuse some of the "us vs. them" situations and the often crisis management decisions made, and lack of forward thinking tools available to DRB, Select board, and Planning. More need for education of the state legislature on how "hands tying" and disastrous the actual results of their "good intentions" are.*
4. *The positions at the town offices have been added at an alarming rate. One person should not be holding two full time positions. The attention of*

TAXES

1. *Taxes are already high and will likely have to go up again this year, be mindful of adding things that increase taxes*
2. *No more taxes*
3. *Please no more growth and no more taxes. It's getting harder to afford to live here.*
4. *Need to consider effects on residential taxes when reviewing adding services, as my taxes have increased considerably over the past 4-5 years.*
5. *The town needs to bring in businesses, fix/maintain roads (especially in winter months), and most importantly- reduce taxes!!! Especially the out of control cost of the school overspending!!!*
6. *I think it would help to understand why Georgia is sort of 'middle of the pack' with taxes, but we don't have much for amenities. As a resident, its easy to always feel like taxes are high, and always going up, without seeing anything noticeable back.*
7. *I believe several areas can be more affordable if the expenses are properly handled - we do not need to raise our taxes to make up the difference.*
8. *Have you thought of adding a 1% sales tax for businesses. St. Albans and St. Albans town receive quite a bit from theres. I realize they have more*

shops and such but since you want to become more like them and Williston, something to consider. The town has a new garage and a new municipal building plus the roads are better. The city built they're swimming complex with help from that plus taxes are higher. I don't wish to see my taxes to go for things we can get 10 miles away.

9. Do t raise taxes!

10. "Increasing revenues to support a healthy/stable tax base"? I am not in

DEI

1. There is no DEI issue to address in Georgia. Trying to do something about it will only have the opposite impact and segregate our lovely town. Everybody is already welcomed here, but trying to force a political agenda by pushing DEI will only create resentment and division in our community.

2. The way DEI is being pushed in this town is having the exact opposite effect that it is claiming to champion. Citizens are being bullied into complying with this because of the color of their skin (white), their religion (Christian), and their sexual identity (straight/cis). We are being told we have no say in the issue because of our race, religion, and sexual orientation. This is the opposite of inclusive. The citizens of the town of Georgia are being bullied by a radical few into buying into this mind virus of CRT and DEI. This is a political ideology that is already wreaking havoc across our state. There has only been bad fruit from this ideology and the lawsuits are coming. The town of Georgia cannot afford to be one of the casualties of this divisive ideology.

3. The DEI committee has a brain infection and should not be considered in any fashion

4. the current board has brought more division to the town with the drive to put DEI. This is wrong.....

5. Stop focusing on DEI and focus on running the town and keeping scum like the Boves out.

6. I had the good fortune to attend the DEI Q&A hosted at the school library a few months back. In it a select few individuals pushed to amend our town charter with DEI language. In their words to 'put our town on the map' which would in turn attract more DEI advocates to our community. Since then I have also witnessed numerous interactions on our town's Facebook page regarding this topic from the small minority of individuals advocating for it. It was notable that in their interactions with community members both in person and especially online, they practice none of what they preach. But rather this DEI initiative appears to be a barrier to hide behind which absolves them of criticism for mistreating their fellow townspeople. The rudeness, hatred, divisiveness, and anger directed at neighbors, strangers and colleagues alike by each of the individuals pushing this agenda was shocking to me. It begs the question that if the stated goal in adopting DEI ideology as a town is to signal a welcome for more people of similar social malevolence, is the virtue signal worth the sacrifice of the freedom, safety, and peace of mind of our community? On the basis of what I and many others in our community have seen it most certainly is not. Our town would do well to dismiss this agenda as the distraction it is so we can refocus on the real issues in our town that actually need solving.

7. I feel we are already a very welcoming community!

8. Don't get to engrossed with DEI!

HOUSING

1. We do not want low income Apts or houses that will end up be slums and will not be maintained or upkept by the owners. Where people will be moving into over crowding the school.

2. Some of the questions are not only about should we have this, but how will it happen. Affordable living is necessary, but not to the cost of the community. Don't have a private citizen build affordable housing; someone who can ignore the problems that it may bring to the community and ignore any requests from the Town, neighbors or even the tenants. Discuss it with the state if they have interest in building a small apartment building here that fits the community needs and its landscape.

3. Residential growth is a net negative to the tax base. Need transfer of development regs. Relaxing development regulations just makes developers rich off the town with little to no gain to the existing residents.

4. No slumlords

5. More housing means more students at our school. There needs to be a plan for absorbing new students in the already full school.

6. I love our little "no stop light town". Responsible growth is important. Duplexes, apartments and condos will bring in the growth that I feel we don't need. Let the surrounding towns carry that load. They seem willing to. We don't need to keep up with them. It will overload our school even more than it is.

7. Please regulate Short Term Rentals, coordinate confirmation of adequate water/sewer capacity and function, and conduct public hearings to include neighbor notifications .

8. The ban on first floor housing within the South Village does not make housing more affordable, yet this is a stated goal of the Town Plan.

ROADS / TRAFFIC

1. Traffic lights at the interstate exits.

2. The roads are so poorly maintained that they become almost undrivable. I worry about the access to emergency vehicles when the roads are so poor. I wonder if paving maybe a better, long-term solution.

3. Slow down traffic on rt 7 in Georgia center.

4. please pave Carpenter Hill Rd soon...

5. I have a particular peeve about road naming in Georgia. I look around me and see this unique, beautiful place with its unique landscape, views, natural history and human history. The historical society was supposed to help people get together and come up with appropriate road names or if they couldn't, to do it for them. They did a so-so job, usually not doing much research other than naming a road after someone who lived there. Somewhere along the line the selectmen decided to take that back over and, in addition, to allow builders or developers to name the roads themselves. Roads are given names that often remain the same for literally HUNDREDS of years. They stand as historical markers and reminders of a place and a place in time. Do we REALLY want to mark Georgia's uniqueness with such silliness as (Milton's) "Chrisemily Drive?" (And MANY other inappropriate and/or self aggrandizing names chosen by whom? In Milton?) Did you know that in East Georgia on the Lamoille River there was at one time a large Abnaki Indian village that was there for OVER 200 (!) years? Yet there is not one name,

not one road or marker or reminder in all of Georgia that commemorates that. How many people have commented on how bad the name of "Sodom" Road is? Somewhere along the line someone cut its name from Sodom SALTWORKS Road. The Sodom SALTWORKS was a well respected and necessary industry that graced a Georgia for many years and was known all over the state. Peter Mallet was a force for good in countless community projects. Yet there is not one thing in Georgia that commemorates his considerable contribution to our community. Women, like some of the one-room school teachers who faithfully fulfilled their roles have never been named on anything. And unique phenomena like the ridge just east of the lake that extends through Georgia and into Milton and in the spring is abloom with thousands of white trilliums is known only to the people who live there. The name "Trillium Ridge Road" was turned down because it sounded "too much like Massachusetts." My sense is that road naming has an important part to play in the development, history and community consciousness of this unique place. We need to respect its power and the process we bring to it.

- 6. More money is needed for paving. [Partial comment separated from whole]*
- 7. Build the sidewalks that have been in the town plan for years. (Ballard Rd, Rte 7) It's probably the cheapest thing we could do to increase activity in the town.*

SCHOOL & LIBRARY

- 1. Attention to library funding. Understaffed, underfunded!!!!!!!!!!!!*
- 2. Add onto the school. Georgia has a big enough population put our tax dollars into adding a high school. Over time it will Pay itself off.*
- 3. I think that the library sees limited use and should be shared with other towns to save on costs that most taxpayers don't use. [Partial comment separated from whole]*

WATER / SEWER / ENERGY / INFRASTRUCTURE

- 1. I think that the town water supply should be investigated. Every where people have hard water. It's so bad as a renter I have to replace my shower head at least twice a year. There are calcium deposits in every faucet despite using a softener. Since moving here from Saint Albans my hair and skin have suffered so much because of the water problem. We can't drink it even from a filtered tap. It's the worst I've ever had to live with as a lifetime Franklin County resident.*
- 2. Natural gas would be nice In other parts of the town.*
- 3. [Re: sustainability] solar panels @ town garage, energy committee*
- 4. Cell phone and internet for me isn't that there isn't a usable option that is usually adequate. The issue is that there is only one option and it is comparatively expensive to what is available in other areas.*
- 5. State designation program for south village district (and municipal water and sewer)*

GENERAL / UNCATEGORIZED

- 1. Making the town an affordable place to live with an outstanding education system, while allowing aging residents and veterans the ability to afford to stay in town, should be a priority. Not the hoopla of new community event spaces - ignoring existing spaces - or diversity inclusion arguments that divide people.*
- 2. I am in agreement with the goals of the 2017 Town Plan. Here are some of the things that are particular values to me: 1. More gathering spaces. This can include restaurants, cafes, parks, or community centers. Without any physical center of gravity, Georgia suffers from fragmentation. Loneliness and isolation are big problems, especially for seniors or families without kids in the school system. 2. Development of mixed-use trails. Someone mentioned at the meeting that this would add a lot of value to Georgia, and it would be much easier to do before other development happens. 3. Affordable housing. It is already difficult for lower-income people or even middle class families with a single income to afford to live here. We don't want to price them out as development continues.*
- 3. Respect property owners*
- 4. Housing, climate change, and DEI are all top priorities. In terms of community building, this town really needs a coffee shop/casual restaurant—but absolutely not fast food!*
- 5. Zip code!!*
- 6. Residents with dogs need to be more respectful of their neighbors; control the barking!*
- 7. I would like our own post office for our own zip code*
- 8. Whoever came up with this survey is completely out of touch with residents.*
- 9. Nice job putting together this questionnaire.*

Q31 - Are there any issues covered in this survey which you would be willing to donate or volunteer time on to help improve the community?

(Write in)

1. *Yes. Building, lands, community space*
2. *Water Quality Improvement and Stormwater Management*
3. *Town budget, spending controls*
4. *Sustainability and combating sprawl*
5. *Several*
6. *Road naming and research, development of an online community newspaper*
7. *Recreation, Library, History*
8. *Recreation*
9. *Preserving town character and natural resources*
10. *Please ask this again separate if this survey; perhaps in a follow up questionnaire.*
11. *not at this time*
12. *no*
13. *no*
14. *nature preservation and amenities*
15. *N/A*
16. *n*
17. *Library location in Georgia Center would improve access and allow sharing facility with school.*
18. *Killing any DEI initiatives*
19. *If the conservancy committee is seeking members I could potentially volunteer*
20. *I keep myself quite busy with my young family, but would volunteer my time if my schedule allowed.*
21. *I am willing to help if I can see a list of needs*
22. *Georgia Beach, a community center*
23. *DEI, infrastructure*
24. *Creation of the public forum/education opportunities eluded to above.*
25. *Cleaning up the lake and roadsides from litter*
26. *Biking or walking lanes initiatives!*
27. *be aware of the increased number of air & b because more strangers are coming inn*
28. *Absolutely*

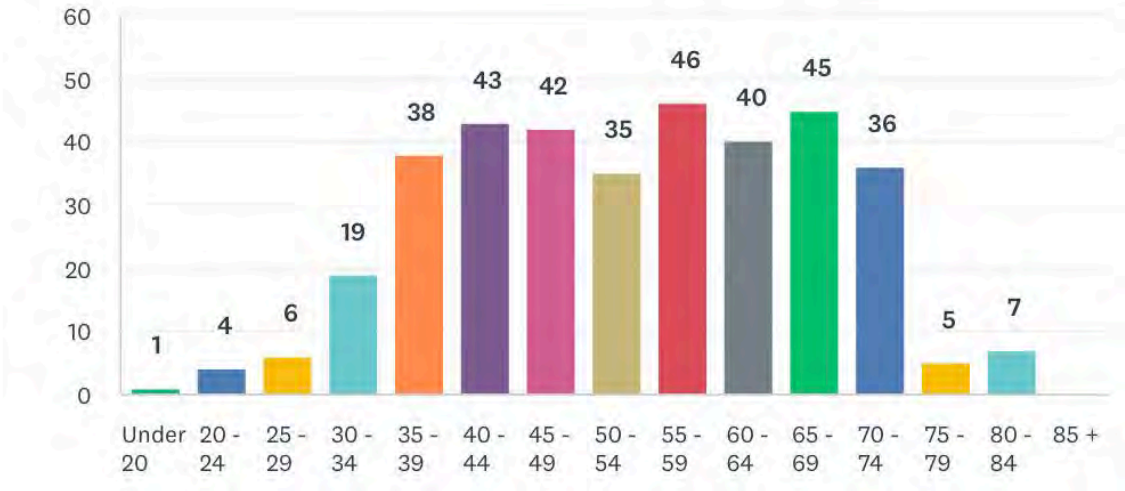
PART SIX

ABOUT YOU

The purpose of Part Six was to help gather general demographic data of the survey responses to help understand the community, and the perspective of those taking the survey.

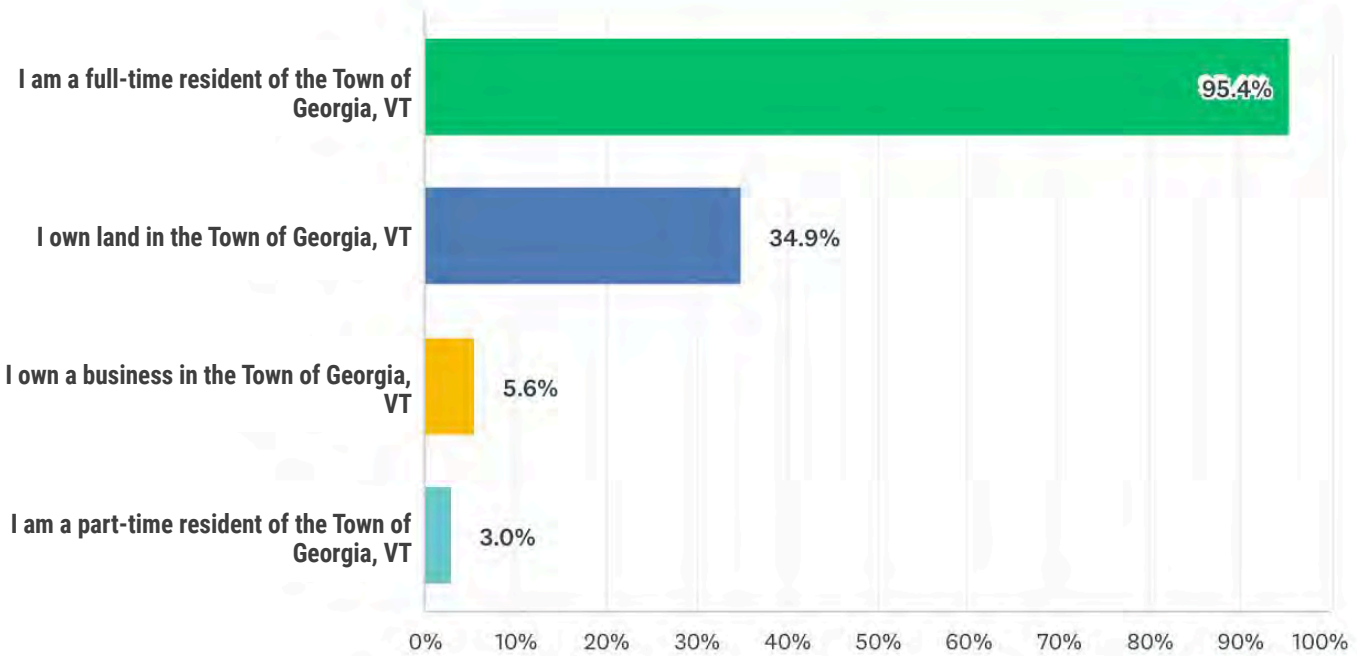
Q32 - **What is your age?** *(Select One)*

Answered: 367 Skipped: 55

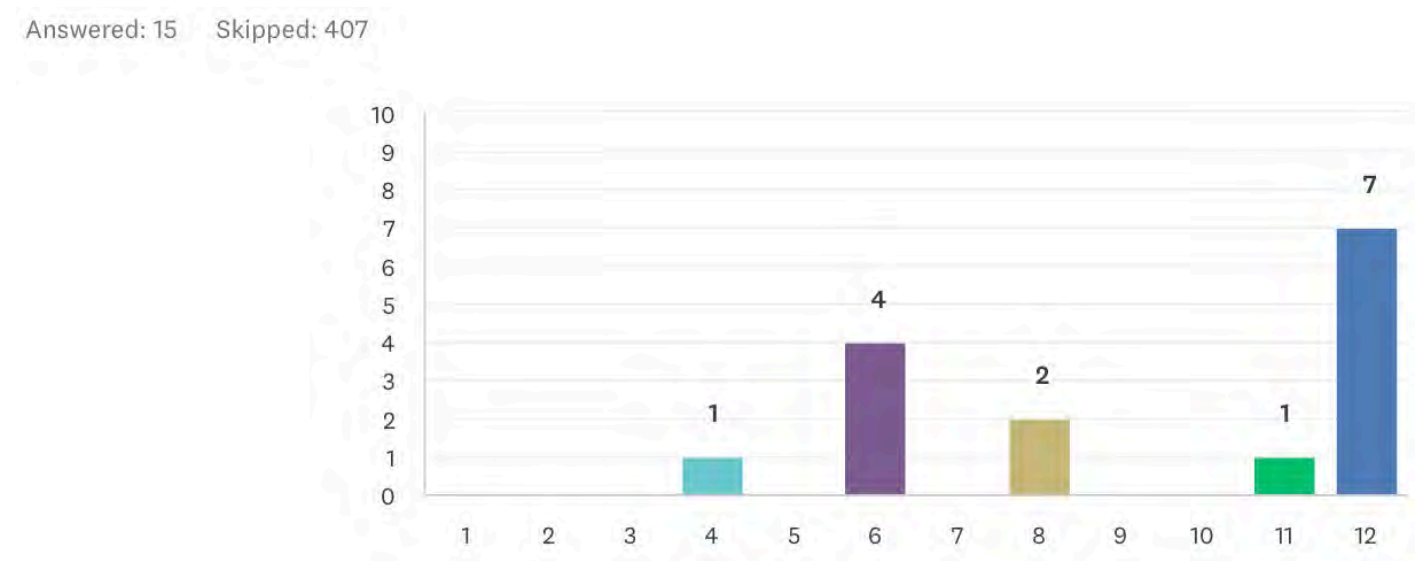


Q33 - **Check all of the following that may apply:** *(Select all that apply)*

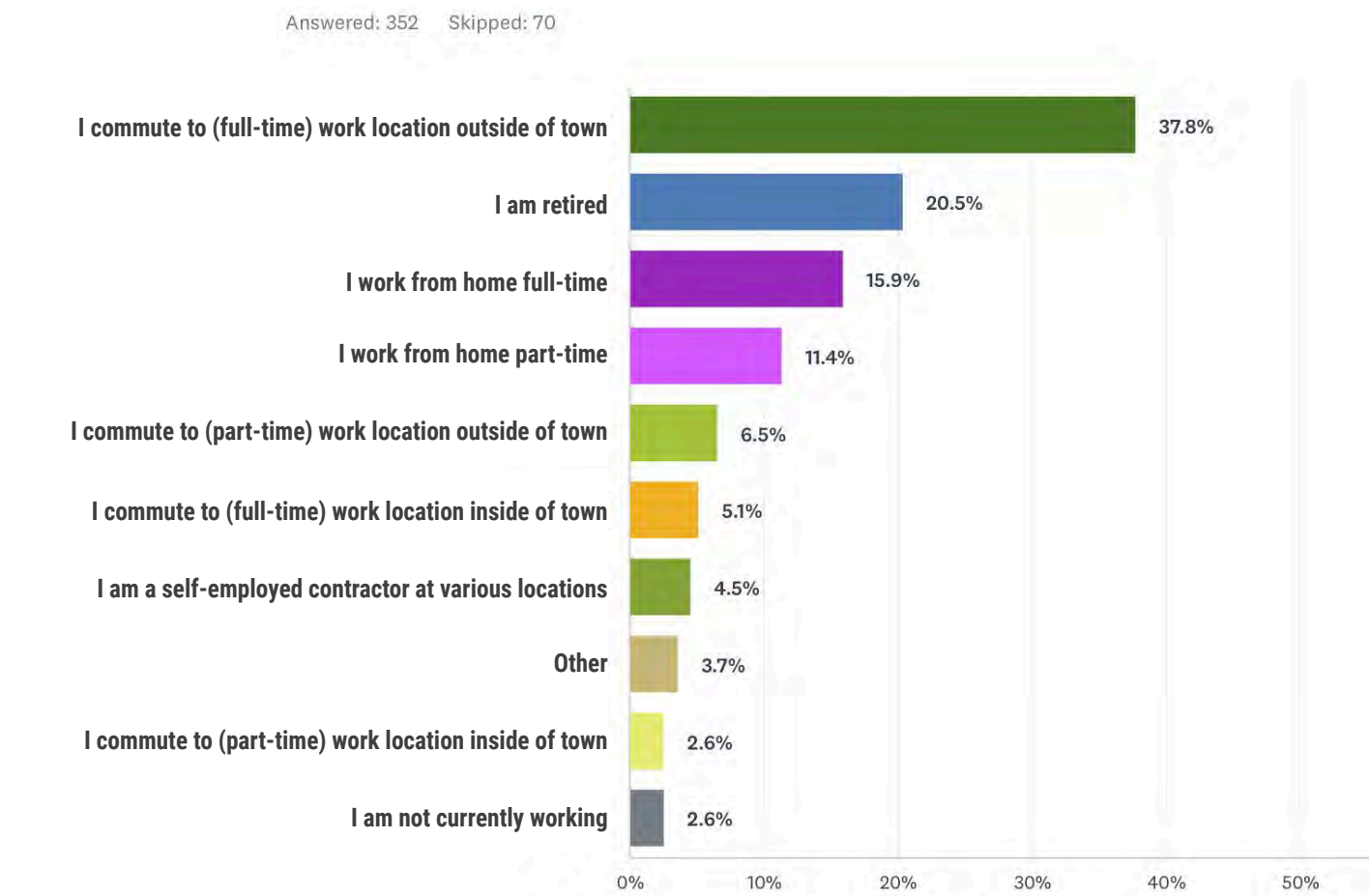
Answered: 372 Skipped: 50



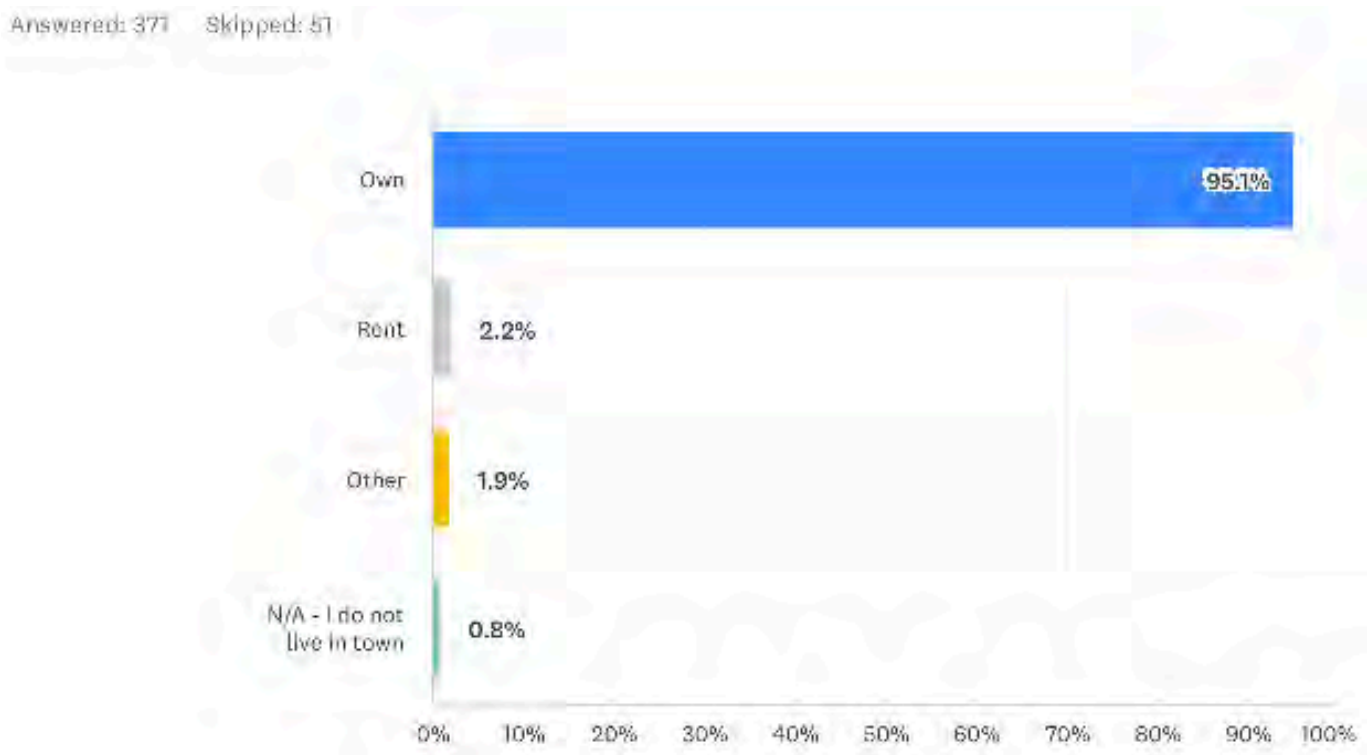
Q34 - If you are a part-time resident, about how many months of the year do you typically live here in town?



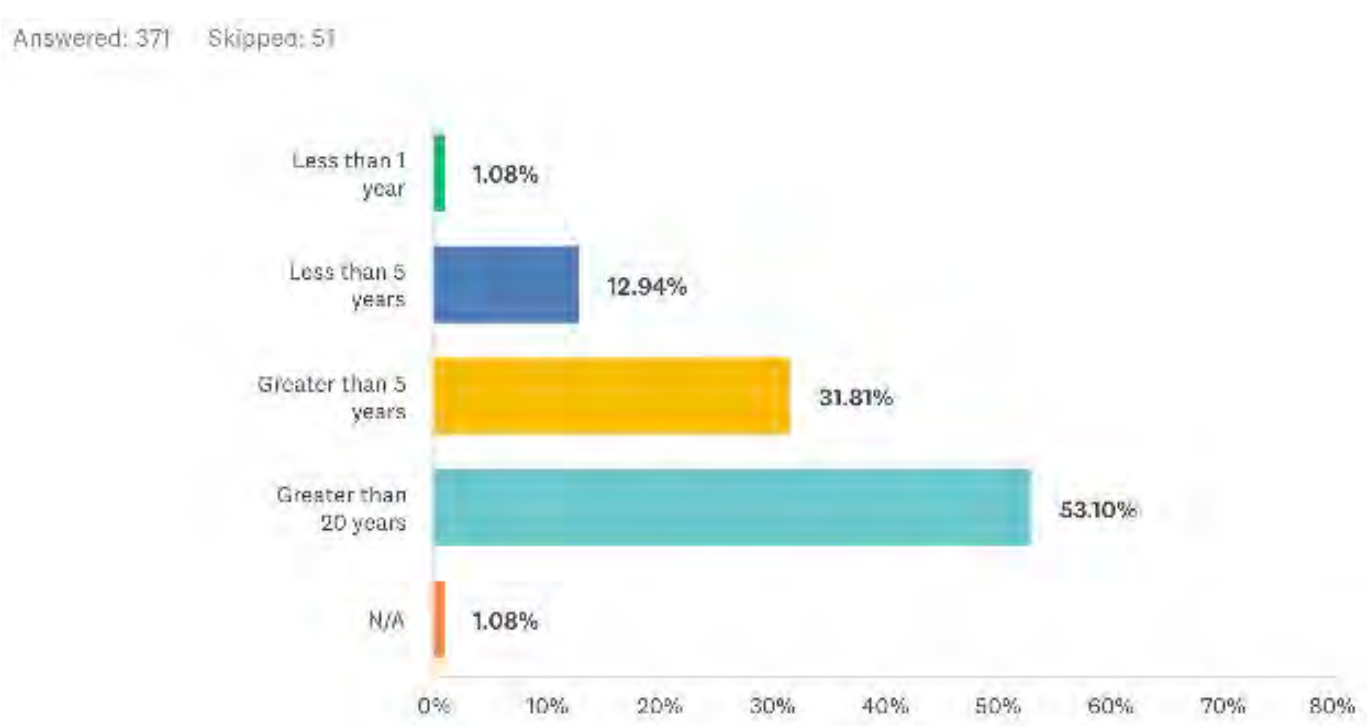
Q35 - Where do you work? (Select all that apply)



Q36 - Do you own or rent your place of residence in Georgia? (Select One)



Q37 - How long have you lived in the Town of Georgia? (Select One)



Prepared by:



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B - PUBLIC MEETING NOTES

MEMO

Georgia Vermont Town Plan Update

Public Meeting Notes **DRAFT**

Open House Input Summary

October 24, 2023 1:00pm - 5:00pm Georgia Fire & Rescue



Introduction:

An Open House was held at the Georgia Fire & Rescue Meeting Room to collect public comments and ideas related to the Town Plan Update. Attendees were provided a series of boards with questions where they could attach notes and comments. The following represents a transcript of the written notes provided, as well as notes taken from verbal conversations with the public. In cases where the written comments are unclear, a [?] follows the word(s) which are uncertain. Photographs of the comment boards have been provided on the project webpage.

OCTOBER 24TH OPEN HOUSE - PUBLIC COMMENTS

BOARD 3 - What do you think are the most important issues in the Town of Georgia today?

- How quickly Georgia is growing and the infrastructure to support it.
- The maintenance of existing roads and safety
- Appropriate and quality growth of Georgia
- Child care
- Senior activities
- No more building in wet/swampy areas, lots of homes being built on very wet land (may not technically be "wetlands")
- Community events
- Community organizations
- Activities for older citizens
- Safety, lack of police presence
- Affordability for our fixed income residents
- Transportation
- Sidewalks along Ballard Road
- Safe bike lanes
- Preserving natural areas
- Lack of effective law enforcement
- Constant 4-wheeler races on Georgia roads
- Loud trucks doing burnouts on residential roads
- Unsightly cluster housing developments diminishing rural countryside
- Wetland area protection vs development
- Remembering small town is OK
- Affordable housing - rebirth of smaller housing developments

- A better way to alert the public about Town information “A Sign Board”
- Community events, engagement
- Community spaces
- Too much sprawling growth
- Holding businesses accountable for property maintenance (i.e. Dollar General)
- More recreation programs, for adults as well as kids
- Needed businesses in Georgia, including pharmacy and convenient restaurant
- Lack of child care
- Housing - need more services in town before expanding low income housing
- Police presence (more needed)
- Community events + spaces/reasons to come together
- There have been rumors about new town hall new town library etc. What is the succession plan(?) on old building if this is true, Ex. Town garage old and new
- The present form of taxation is not working
- Housing in general needs restructuring - landlords need control over tenant behavior
- Lake quality
- Keep the rural feel
- Appropriately sized and placed growth
- Walkability
- Not paying for SV WW - limited benefit for a majority of residents
- Uncontrolled development ruined my small hometown I grew up in. Flood plains were built on causing home flooding
- Redistricting areas to allow for subdivision / more affordable housing
- Preserve landscape farmland open space
- Keep town historic small town feel
- Better road maintenance (i.e. should complete paving a road instead of sporadic parts)
- Developments/Growth that are a typical to a small historic town
- It would be nice to see a Homestead Act in place where certain areas have min. Of 5 acres example
- Consider providing for more environmental responsible transportation i.e. electric car power restoring
- Need to preserve the environmental sustainability of landscape and Lake Champlain
- More safety
- Keep zoning acreage
- Quality of education
- Housing
- Transportation
- Air & Water Quality
- Green Energy!

BOARD 4 - What would you like to see CHANGE in the Town of Georgia?

- More sidewalks
- Limitations on local gov't positions
- A restaurant
- A more central park
- Making sure new town building fit the environment they will be in Ex. town garage (again)
- More areas restricted from major development
- Local places to eat/gather still WITHOUT drive-throughs
- Creating a town that is one town, and not parts of another (Fairfax, Milton and St Albans)
- New Library centered with municipal or small business - similar to Milton or Shelburne
- Also - keep new bldgs looking like New England architecture
- Cell phone coverage
- Designation of South Village (State Designation Program)
- Our own Post Office
- Youth group volunteers - for needy citizens, for town projects
- More responsible oversight of lakeshore protection and improved stormwater infiltration on town owned property - roadsides, Town Beach
- Limit development
- A plan to increase tourism and agri-tourism
- An increase of social media coverage of what is happening with the Town
- No more cluster housing visible from roads
- Less development
- Strong law enforcement presence
- Enforce laws w/ 4-wheelers racing on roads, truck burnouts, trespassing
- Return of quality education at GEMS
- A more diverse selectboard
 - ^ agreed!
- Walkable town space, increased business in high density area
- A revaluation of a noise ordinance policy
 - ^ yes!
- Municipal WS/WW in SV and ex. Town Hall area
- Speed limit on Rte 7 35 mph to the highway
- Better law enforcement coverage
- Easier Accessory Dwelling Unit approval/regs.
- A tool for affordable housing
- More community based activities
- More support for local businesses
- To be able to have drive thrus
- Better law enforcement and first responder coverage
- More development in Center, less in village
- Value Agriculture and small business over industrial development

- Bring back the Parade!
- Continue Town Green gatherings
- Plan should have some focus on Equity
- Like to see more emphasis on small town and open space
- New library & town office in the South Village
- Better community communications
- Less sprawl more cluster housing
- Adding a Town Manager that way the Selectboard could spend time forward thinking!
- Develop Library as multi-age community center with resources, services, supports
- Promote Universal Accessibility
- More focus on climate change & support for green energy
- Road improvement fund to pave some dirt roads
- Better contracted police services. NO Police force!
- Landlords who rent out rooms or apartments are often victimized by tenants. In frustration they refuse to rent again. With housing at such a premium, we NEED more places for people to rent.
- Increase cell phone coverage.

BOARD 5 - What would you like to see STAY THE SAME in the Town of Georgia?

- Rural quaint town / farming community
- Open space
- Rural nature / not Chittenden Co.
- Small safe village
- Don't turn it into Winooski
- Space + natural areas clustered business area
- Keeping Georgia a small town! Not a suburb
- Keeping the individual sections of town - Georgia Center, West Georgia, Georgia Plains, East Plains, South Village
- Keep the same rural nature of the town
- Limit residential development - now a constant flow of contractor vehicles, residential traffic is rapidly increasing
- Small town Ex. Stafford, VT
- Agriculture
- Keep Ag areas while building up/welcoming more businesses + affordable housing in high density areas (i.e. by the highway)
- Agricultural, support farms and open areas
- Leave Georgia agriculture including South Village
- Celebrate the history - both human and natural - of this area, i.e. appropriate road names - don't leave it up to developers
- Small town character!
- It is great to welcome residents to town committees and activities

BOARD 6 - Do you have any suggestions for specific places in the Town of Georgia?

- Focus development in already developed + congested areas (South Village)
- Keep rural areas open
- Traffic signal needed at Rt 89 intersection
 - ^ agree!
 - ^ Yes!
- Transfer of Development Rights for South end and south village
- Strip mall for food/clothes places for example, dunkin donuts or a pizza place
- Possibility of a trail system around Arrow Lake
- Better traffic flow 104A/Rt 7/189
- Keep Industrial development in South Village
- Better traffic flow at Rt 7 and 104A intersection
 - ^ YES
- Sharp curve sign for Polly Hubbard Rd
- Widen Road along Georgia Shore or put in a bike path
- Better traffic control around Exit 18

BOARD 7 - Do you have any suggestions for the HAMLETS in the Town of Georgia?**MELVILLE LANDING**

- Walking path at the Beach.
- Additional land purchase for the Beach/Park

GEORGIA CENTER

- Historical signage on the Town Common
- Georgia Center should be made the 'Center' of Georgia
- Geo Center - Need to consider alternatives to stormwater management that is responsible for excessive sediment loading in ditches on Town Common

GEORGIA PLAINS

- Enforcement of speed limits
- Keep growth on 89 side

SOUTH VILLAGE

- Drive thru coffee shop
 - ^ Yes!
 - ^ Yes!
- Needed businesses: services - pharmacy, take-out restaurant, etc.
- Restaurant - Not a CHAIN

- Remove the stipulations / change restrictions for the housing along 104A between Route 7 and Georgia[?] Health Center
- Town NOT pay for sewer that only serves to benefit a very select few but will be a tax burden for everyone
- Better/SAFER traffic flow BEFORE any new housing or businesses
- Don't make the South Village a ghetto should be mix
- Safe walking/bike path or sidewalk along Ballard Rd, Rt 7, in business areas
- Walkable/bikeable connections[?] of developments in south side
- Better traffic flow especially at 5pm
- A park/playground ballfield walkable distance from the big developments in the south end

EAST GEORGIA

- Additional land + trails for recreation

OTHER

- Where is the hamlet of North Georgia??

BOARD 8 - What words might you use to describe your future vision for the Town of Georgia?

- How about a local newspaper!
- Keep small town character we already have!
- Develop more in Center
- Agriculture
- More traffic control along Exit 18 area
- Better law enforcement/first responder coverage
- Hamlet
- Village
- Agriculture
- Small community
- Historical
- Quiet
- Stable
- Green/open space
- Keep it rural and taxes low by limiting costly residential[?] development
- Responsible, limited growth in already developed areas (South Village)
- Keep rural areas open + protected from development
- Growth will happen but keep it a quality[?] town
- Seeing the Town take care of its properties/maintain them. Keep the historical presence
- A real town center there/where[?] events would occur for gatherings
- Small town community feel while adapting to the growing world
- Georgia is already a bedroom comm'y
- Conduct Quarterly "listening" meetings like this to increase resident participation and trust

- LOCAL PROJECTS for towns people to work together on

BOARD 9 - Are there any questions you would like to see us ask in the upcoming town-wide survey?

- What % of the budget will be allocated to our road maintenance
- Town government changes: A qualified Town manager
- What kind of percentage of new comm/residential do we want to see in town (inc. SV)

OPEN HOUSE - OTHER VERBAL NOTES AND COMMENTS

- Learned about this event on Facebook, but think it would be good if you also advertised on other social media platforms, perhaps put up more posters?
- Concern about development proposals in South Village - developers don't maintain properties, code enforcement issues
- Don't like some of the new stuff being developed down in Williston - large buildings chopped up into different color blocks, it should blend into the surroundings
- Town Beach Recreation Area - a pavilion was gifted to the town, but eventually couldn't be agreed on so offer was eventually withdrawn, problems with design, concern about it blocking view of lake
- Beach could use a more modern snack bar and better restroom facilities
- Fall Fest held at recreation area - should encourage more uses and activities like this
- Recreation area largely used by sports programs but it has many other potential uses and possibilities, it shouldn't be only one thing. No passive recreation opportunities, can't walk dog, fly kite, etc. It is supposed to be a community space. Look to make it more inclusive of the wider community.
- Recreation area has issues with drainage on fields sometimes
- Looking at statistics and demographic data - Franklin County data is not always a good measure of local conditions in Georgia, Chittenden County is a closer comparison
- See Milton Independent article - Georgia Beach project
- Wetland areas and flooding in the South Village area - these wet areas could be used as flood water storage or flood mitigation potentially, but we don't know yet, should be careful how we use them, could be used to our advantage
- Search for potential municipal sewer system locations, need to find what areas might be appropriate, however two potential spots already taken
- Having the Library and Town Offices located in South Village as part of new development would be nice
- Overall water quality protection should be incorporated into town plan
- People can no longer afford the taxes in many communities, people who have lived here for generations often can't afford to stay
- Want to protect the viewshed looking west across town over lake, but we need to catalog what the viewshed is first. Property on one side of Ethan Allen height capped to protect view
- Should keep the local road names tied to actual local history, not just made up
- South Village - why do housing above commercial, it is noisy, you have 104A there
- Georgia Center - should be more concentrated
- Land along Mill River Road - need this for housing, would like to see more flexibility w/ subdivision regs, currently is 5 acre zone now
- "HULA" style flexible incubator space, similar to what they are doing in Burlington, potential for South Village, or something similar to Taylor Park in St Albans

- May be useful to inquire in the survey about how long each resident has lived here for, and where they moved from.

[* * END MEETING 5:00 pm * *]

Written comments collected via the project online comment form (to date) are copied below:

- Would like to see PUDs allowed in the L1 District.
- The ban on first floor housing within the South Village does not make housing more affordable, yet this is a stated goal of the Town Plan.
- State designation program for south village district (and municipal water and sewer)
- Build the sidewalks that have been in the town plan for years. (Ballard Rd, Rte 7) It's probably the cheapest thing we could do to increase activity in the town.

MEMO

Georgia Vermont Town Plan Update

Public Meeting Notes **DRAFT**

Public Workshop Summary

October 24, 2023 6:00pm Georgia Fire & Rescue



Introduction:

A public meeting was held at the Georgia Fire & Rescue Meeting Room to collect public comments and ideas related to the Town Plan Update. Michael Allen from Regrowth Planning began the meeting with a brief presentation about the Town Plan update, including the goals, steps and projected schedule of the effort. This presentation was followed by an open discussion period, where comments and questions were taken from the audience. The notes from this discussion are provided below. This is not intended to be an actual transcript of the conversation. A copy of the presentation slides have been provided on the project webpage for reference, as well as a link to a video of the meeting.

WORKSHOP NOTES

Comment: Wanted to clarify that we don't have a Recreation Center, and we don't have plans to have a Rec Center. It's a Recreation Area.

Comment: Concerned about traffic flow in the 104/Route 7/I-89 corridor - it gets backed up at certain times of the day, there are no signal systems, trying to get off from 104A onto Route 7 is a problem. Having the bank driveway directly opposite makes it harder.

Comment: Just getting off the interstate is a problem. If you are heading north, you have to sit there for a long time.

Comment: For it to work we need to change the interstate offramp from a single lane to two lanes, people create two lanes. That area needs work, especially if that area is going to grow like our town plan envisions.

Comment: There is a transportation study for that area, but there have been studies for many years, though not much has been done.

Comment: We are always trying to find solutions for cars, but we shouldn't forget other modes of transportation such as bicycling and walking. I run on Route 7 and that can be harrowing. I know several of us who run or jog in the area, but unless we get in our cars there is not really a place for us to run. As we are thinking about changes to improve vehicle travel, we should also think about bicycles and pedestrians too. Not just "Complete Streets", but also thinking about open space and parks where we could have dedicated off-road paths. This could really help grow the appeal of the town. We have land right now that could be designed for this, get the bikes off the road, connect some of these resources. Would be good to plan for this now before things get built up too much.

Question: What are some of the other communities where you have done this work?

Moderator: Have been a practicing professional planner for about 20 years now, more recently worked with Chatham NY, Woodstock NY, Williston VT, Mount Holly VT, Pawlet VT, Warrensburgh NY, Schroepfel NY, and others.

Question: Are you aware that there is a Georgia South Village Transportation Master Plan.

Comment: I don't know how much there is we can do with Route 7 and 104A being state routes, state jurisdiction with VTrans, they have the final say in any of those decisions.

Moderator: Correct, they do, however having these recommendations in an adopted town plan will give us more leverage than if they are not addressed in the plan.

Comment: We need to put more thought into the Energy portion of our town plan. All of these towns are going to be going through a huge energy transition over the next 10-20 years, I don't think we have put enough thought into it as we probably need to. Also not sure if our current plan meets state standards with regard to energy. Need to address energy use, as well as supply.

Comment: Solar "farm" development is happening in the area, although it isn't happening in a negative way, people don't really have concerns about it, but we want to do it in a planned way to provide some guidance. Although the state has the final say in these matters, if towns have an adopted plan with the right energy strategies, they have more say than if they don't.

Moderator: Can you clarify if you are looking to set goals for more specific fossil fuel reductions, or more general policies?

Comment: Personally I think we do need to have demand-side reductions, weatherization of town buildings as well as individual buildings. The automotive side will probably happen independently of us, but we can start thinking of what we want to have happen when some of the gas stations begin to close.

Comment: One of the reasons we are looking to update the town plan has been to look at what do we do for new public water and sewer, what opportunities. It is something which limits our growth potential.

Comment: I'd like to see a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) policy, where you can get more density in one area in order to conserve more space elsewhere, so you aren't just growing everywhere.

Comment: Our town plan currently calls for protecting prime Ag and forest land, but other than asking people to leave that as their open space when they do a PUD (Planned Unit Development), we don't have much recourse for them to work with that, we don't have a way for them to swap with another piece of property, we don't have other options.

Comment: Because some of the farms are going out of business, but their fields are still available, you have farm equipment which travels very long distances to go serve other fields and then has to travel back to where it is needed next, we end up with large tractors needing to be on the roads which adds to our transportation issues. Can get stuck behind a tractor at all different hours of the day. It adds to the congestion and wear and tear on the roads.

Comment: Concerned about quality and consistency of cellular coverage, from a connectivity standpoint, connectivity with future technology, commuting families. Route 7 could benefit from better cell coverage.

Moderator: What about broadband internet?

Comment: Not good coverage, there are still a lot of places that don't have it.

Comment: Broadband is a very popular topic right now and there are a lot of people working on it, but people seem to have forgotten that we still need to be able to use our phones.

Moderator: Is there a bigger priority between improving cellular coverage or broadband?

Comment: Depends if you already have broadband or not. Some of the new cellular service with 5G is better. One or the other needs to come in with better coverage.

Comment: It is important to coordinate with adjacent town and municipalities with some of these goals, such as coordinating the north end of town with St. Albans in terms of roadway and pedestrian infrastructure. The south end of town with Milton. Would be good to customize or coordinate infrastructure with these other communities. St Albans Bay area with the Georgia north shore area. Would be helpful if there was better collaboration.

Comment: The town is bringing sidewalks out to about a ¼ mile from where Georgia town line starts, so there is going to be a gap.

Comment: At the end of the day, all of our suggestions are going to involve costs to the municipality, so we should be mindful of affordability of these ideas.

Moderator: Would like the town plan update to really focus on identifying what the major priorities are that we should be focusing our efforts.

Comment: Regarding costs, I don't want to be paying for sewer in the South Village, which is going to be benefitting very few people but potentially costing everyone, even with grants. There has already been pushback where they want to develop more housing, but there is less interest in brick and mortar businesses, when that is the reason we would provide the sewer, so it seems like we are getting pulled two different ways. I don't want to see my taxes paying for a service like that. Same with the town center designation - why are we pursuing this if it only benefits a select few. I don't want to be paying for someone else's sewer when, if my septic system goes, i'm on the hook for the 30-40k. Vast majority of the town is not going to be able to hookup to it.

Comment: Ditto.

Comment: That's why I say we need to keep our mind on affordability. If we are talking about water and sewer there, what is the plan for making it support itself?

Comment: At the same time, for a reasonable cost, if we can save more green space by having more density there instead of houses out in the farm areas, and it becomes more self-sustaining down there, perhaps with a shared system with Milton. Then maybe it does make it worthwhile.

Comment: Milton has a sewer district, but it doesn't come up to the Georgia town line.

Comment: It would be nice to have the town plan address the lake and water quality. It is a huge asset to the town, people are buying \$400-600k camps, would be nice to keep the water nice. Even though that topic is a statewide issue, it would be good for us to address it also, and I don't think the town really does that much right now on this issue.

Comment: This is a planning issue, like when you have a couple of fallow fields there that got turned into developments, they have no sewer there. So you have a field where there are now 12 new septic systems right on the lake, does the town have a say in how that is developed. It would be nice to give that more thought.

Comment: Having the town address this issue is a good way to open potential funding opportunities, which can leverage grants.

Comment: Moved to Georgia shore 33 years ago, every one in front of us was all little camps. They were grandfathered in years ago. Now they are all brand new homes now. Very few camps anymore, mostly year round homes on postage-stamp lots. They have to park in the road just to take their groceries into the house. Camp is right on the water and they have no land, no idea where they put their septic system.

Comment: Some properties have their septic on the other side of the road.

Comment: One of the conflicts with the conversation about South Village and housing, it has been argued that housing affordability could be addressed by providing more smaller units in South Village with a denser population center. We don't know if that will prove itself out. But that is a problem we have with the cost of housing right now. Rental units are practically non-existent.

Comment: Short-term rentals are also causing some complaints, at least out by the lake, where the guests are sometimes being a nuisance to adjacent property owners. How do we deal with that as a town?

Moderator: Are you experiencing a lot of problems with short-term rentals, or just a few?

Comment: There are a few, we are hearing from property owners that they are concerned.

Comment: In Georgia, there are few places that are full year-round short-term rental properties. This is more of a summer season issue, which is the time when short-term rentals here are more popular. As was stated you have a few camps along the water, those are more likely to be rented out as a short term rental, and they have conflicts with the houses near them. That is really more of the issue here, it's not really a loss of housing stock. A lot of communities experience a loss of housing stock from the popularity of short-term rentals, but that is not really what we are experiencing here. It's mostly summer residences on the lake being rented out.

Comment: We should take a good look at how Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) can be utilized to improve housing costs in this area. This is being done at a state-wide level as well.

Comment: Wondering about the 70 acres on the other side of South Village, I know there were plans to try and develop that, but there were issues with the infrastructure that was needed to do it. Is there an update to this?

Moderator: I think that is still being looked at, though we should be asking ourselves what sort of development would we like to see in South Village, if we could choose? What is needed here?

Comment: A Restaurant.

Comment: The Library would have been a great place for a nice restaurant.

Comment: Pharmacy, Hardware. All of these things used to be here but they aren't anymore.

Comment: There is a bunch of stuff in the South Village area, and then there is St. Albans. So there is half of us who just go north to St. Albans to do things. We can get what we need up there, so we need better connections up there to get to it. Route 7 is basically a highway now, which I'm not excited about, but if we could think about improved connections there like biking paths or something that would be good.

Comment: Restaurants, food, pharmacy, coffee - these are things that people will still go to locally and is an opportunity to socialize. Also a lot of people are working from home. It would be good to have some of these places locally so you don't have to go to the next town to get them. I would rather have these things here in town. Georgia Market is busy.

Comment: We are very fortunate to have Georgia Market. They have reduced hours now but still nice to have.

Comment: We do not want to lose the one market we have in town.

Comment: This town plan will go into effect and be valid for about 8 years, so we need to think about the next 8 years or so, but while that is happening we will have new people move to the area and have more demand.

Comment: Appropriate scale mixed uses, like a Georgia-scale version of Maple Tree Place where it doesn't feel like big box stores but some of the businesses are complementary to each other and are what the community needs. Physical proximity. Think about kids and teenagers before they can drive, what do they need or want, how do they get there? What about a Fieldhouse or something where kids can go without having to drive down

to Essex or a small movie theater. Some of that could be supported by the growing population and more density. Recreation, fitness, entertainment.

Moderator: Where do people socialize locally?

Comment: Schools mostly. School events, sports.

Comment: It is the school activities, but it ends at each grade. But the community breaks apart when each family follows their kids to where they choose to go to high school.

Comment: And not everyone has school age kids, or kids at all.

Comment: One of the issues is, this meeting room here at the Firehouse is one of the biggest community gathering spaces we have available. To actually have a community event, it becomes an issue.

Comment: I've always felt like there is the School, and then there is the Town. There is not a lot of universal use of the school facilities. I have suggested that during the summer when kids are out of school they could move the books from the School library to the town library so they could be used by everyone, but this didn't happen. As a town resident I pay for these amenities but I can't use them, and it is that way with a lot of things. The school has these facilities and amenities, but as a resident you don't really have access to them. They have the largest buildings in town, publicly owned, but aren't really accessible. We aren't taking full advantage of the resources we have. The school fields could be used for summer sports instead of the Town Beach.

Comment: We can't get access to school property because the school is maxed out. We are one of the few growing school districts in the state, which is fortunate, but we are also bursting at the seams. Basketball practice goes until 8 or 9 at night because they have to stack the different teams. St Albans has gone through some expansions, but there is only so much money to go around. We should take a look at what we have as a community, and what other communities have as a whole. Some of what we have is underutilized. We can't afford another pool, but we have one nearby in St. Albans. Should take an inventory of all these things and coordinate, join them so these become shared resources and we aren't building something new which is already provided next door.

Comment: It's hard to be a destination town when there is so much already provided on both sides of us.

Comment: What can we offer that they don't already offer. We are one of the few that has a great beach area, we could extend it out and link to other beach areas? Between Georgia, St. Albans, Milton - none of us are that big, we should work together where we can. See what they have and what they don't have, and work together to share resources. They are already talking about expanding basketball courts, a great indoor space, or an ice hockey rink. Is there a way to get our kids up there without having to drive on Route 7, otherwise kids get isolated.

Comment: The town does have a center, owned by the Church, Georgia Plains Baptist, Jimmy Center. Would it be possible to reach out to them and ask if there are ways to open this up as more of a community center? I think the church would be open to having more visitors, something for the seniors, something for the youth, could the town rent space for some of these things?

Comment: As far as I know that is open to the community for a lot of the activities they do there, though its not that big.

Comment: Would like to see a little bit more interaction with the churches. A lot of churches are underutilized these days, and would love the interaction. If we could put it into the plan to recognize these assets of the community it would help remind everyone they are here and support them more, regardless of individual religion. Should be acknowledged as part of the community.

Comment: I'm involved with the "Bone Builders" group at the Catholic Church twice a week, and have really enjoyed it, for people who have osteoporosis or help building up muscles as you get older. Has been a great social event, we need more of those types of events or activities to keep contact with your community members.

Comment: We had a hard time finding a space large enough, and we spoke to some other churches who said they only used their space for our members. Its great that we have these churches but they may not be willing to always share space with outside groups.

Moderator: What about a traveling event which takes turns at the different churches?

Comment: Maybe if the town approached the churches with this idea to ask it might be received better.

Comment: Some churches have reservations about hosting different things perhaps because of their insurance requirements or something, but perhaps there is a way to work through that.

Comment: There used to be a dance company, they would also do Zoomba there, but they had to move out after rent got raised. Same with day care, they had to move out. The economics of this need to be somehow addressed where we are not forcing out local amenities or services, it is harder for these small locally-owned operations to compete against larger companies.

Comment: We had a gym here locally, but that didn't last long. The pizza shop. We had these things but they all left or shut down for whatever reason. What is preventing these businesses that we want from staying.

Comment: We are not a "go-to" location, we are more of a "be-from" location. Everyone goes to St. Albans or Chittenden, most people unless you work from home go outside of the town to go to work and then pick up the shopping they need there on the way home. Having Milton and St. Albans on either side of us - do we want to try and duplicate what they already have because I don't see that as being economically feasible. We would be in competition with them. We need to be strategic with our growth in a way that it doesn't overload our capacity.

Comment: Since you will be putting out a survey, many of us work from home, I would like to understand how much of the population here works from home now, and how often? A lot has changed in the past few years.

Comment: My concern is some of the big apartment complexes that people have talked about putting up in town. Concerned how that would affect our town, how it would impact our schools, the demographics of the people who would come. In St. Albans I watch how the people with vouchers go from apartment complex to apartment complex because they are kicked out, going from Swanton to Albert to Richford to St. Albans to Milton and bringing their kids to each school along the way, which impacts the schools. Everyone needs housing but we need to be cautious how that affects us.

Comment: I am curious what the demographics are here in town right now, how many seniors we have vs. younger families, etc. The seniors won't be around forever, and when they are gone their houses would be open for younger families to live in. If we put too many houses in now, will we really need them?

Comment: Would like to see more senior housing, since most of us would want to still live in the town, but wouldn't want to take care of a large house. That would open the older house for the next generation to have it, but we wouldn't have to move to the Carolinas or Florida. A senior community, one floor.

Comment: Not a lot of condos, I don't want to live in a condo.

Comment: 2 bedroom ranches.

Comment: That comes down to density, the ability to walk to things.

Moderator: Well for walkability it would want to be somewhere like South Village where you have amenities nearby you can walk to, transportation, water and sewer etc.

Comment: Senior housing mixes great with local businesses in a mixed use environment.

Moderator: The mixed use model does not work as well for senior housing if the housing is on the 2nd or 3rd floor of the mixed use development, because that housing wants to be at ground level, so instead you may need it mixed use but horizontally, not vertically.

Comment: So much commercial property in St. Albans is empty, with people buying things online now, people aren't opening businesses, they are consolidating offices. The plan now has that first floor commercial office space but I don't think it will work, it will sit empty.

Comment: The old campground behind Dollar General, had heard that had been purchased to become senior housing, is that still happening?

Comment: They had purchased the property, but there is no formal plan yet, they have had sketch plan review but nothing set in stone yet. But it will probably be multiple uses, not just one thing. They are looking to use the entire property.

Moderator: We have heard from some people that there are concerns about the track record of some of the developers who sometimes don't take care of their properties and they are left in disrepair. There may be something we can implement at the local town code level which could address that concern.

Comment: That works both ways, as a property owner I have a hard time getting contractors nowadays to do normal repairs, a developer with many properties probably has same difficulty getting maintenance done. Been waiting on one guy for 3 years.

Comment: For South Village do we want more space for businesses, or do we want to move away from more space for businesses, because first floor commercial isn't as viable? We have discussed getting water and sewer to enable more business there, maybe we need to pick a lane. As a community we need to decide. What is the right proportion of commercial vs residential. Multistory would be more efficient, but would it actually work.

Moderator: Finding the right mix of commercial and residential will be important, but we don't have full control of the private sector. Generally speaking, commercial development is usually more profitable for the tax base than residential. I'm not imagining senior housing taking up all of South Village.

Comment: But a 60 or 45 unit senior housing is already planned there.

Comment: It is planned, but lots of things have been planned there.

Comment: How would this work with the existing traffic problem which we already have there? Isn't that going to compound the problem?

Comment: The traffic problem is already terrible. If you add more people it would get worse.

Moderator: Some of the traffic problems are because of the existing roadway configurations. The question becomes, if we agree that South Village is the area we want to promote some more growth, then how much growth do we actually want there, within the limits of what we can handle.

Comment: Some discussions with VTrans are needed, if we had a ramp to go south and another ramp to go north that would take care of quite a bit of that congestion, at least for the interstate.

Moderator: Has there been any discussion of a wider market feasibility study of what is already available in the area and what would be needed or successful here locally?

Comment: Fairfax is a small community and they have a really good restaurant and hardware store, post office, grocery stores etc is a small community but they somehow seem to get all those things.

Comment: If a feasibility study was recommended in the plan that would increase funding chances for it.

Comment: You could control what you had in South Village if there was enough desire for it, if it is a desirable enough location you can put whatever stipulations on it you want and they will still come. The problem is there isn't a lot of desire for businesses to be there, so you don't have that level of control.

Comment: And the thought was with more residential there it would increase the desirability of walkable commercial, but it becomes the cart before the horse.

Comment: There are 2 things missing to draw businesses into the South Village. A dense population base, and public sewer/water. The developers get incentives for building where there is sewer and water and that helps them on the financials.

Comment: You said you would be updating the demographic data as part of this update, it seems like that data is something we need up front to be able to use as part of this discussion. It may help inform this debate. When will that data be available?

Moderator: It was going to be updated over the course of this effort, but that is a good point we may want some of this information earlier and so I can prioritize that earlier. There is an issue with some of the data however since the US Census data right now isn't very up to date and also seems to have some irregularities so not sure how much we can rely on it. May have to look for other sources.

Comment: How can we incentivize the community to respond to the community survey? Have you had success in getting good feedback?

Moderator: Depends how the survey is implemented. Due to cost constraints we are not currently planning to direct mail it to every household because that is expensive. Have done direct mailing in the past, which can get better Moderator rate around 30-35% which is very good. Not sure how to incentivize it. Planning to make it available for pick up but also available online.

Comment: What about a partnership with the school to help distribute the survey?

Moderator: Have done that in the past, would be good to help get some younger respondents also, so we can look into that option.

Comment: We sometimes make the mistake of assuming 100% of the people want to respond, when in reality the 35% who respond may be everyone, while the rest of the population believes that their elected and appointed government representatives will just make the correct decisions for them.

Moderator: Survey may be opportunity to get a better handle on current demographics since census data appears questionable.

Comment: Census data may be the best data we can get right now.

Moderator: Possibly, but concerned a lot changed during covid that was not accurately captured. I think census data missed a lot. A lot of people moving up from downstate and buying real estate, moving to rural areas.

Comment: A lot of that was not actual data, it was more an impression that people had that people were moving in from out of state, but where were they moving to? We don't have a lot of real estate in Georgia to buy, unless someone moves out, and people weren't moving out during the pandemic.

Comment: We do tend to lose a lot of families when their kids get to high school, they move out to follow the school, many to Essex.

Moderator: What are the issues that make young people or families to leave the area, what is missing here, what can we do to help retain them?

Comment: One of the things that makes Fairfax unique is they have a K-12 school system, when families settle there they stay. Our kids either go to St. Albans or Essex or Milton, Fairfax and it splits everything.

Comment: It's not even the school system, it is the extracurricular activities that pulls people away. Our neighbors had high schoolers which were involved 5 days a week in different after school activities, so they were away more than they were home. Why stay here, might as well move to where their activities are. Love the fact that we have school choice, but it comes with a drawback.

Comment: That is something unique we need to consider in local planning.

Comment: Our town plan needs to address equity one way or another. Either say that we are very equitable and that is great, or aspire to be more equitable. Should either affirm or aspire, in terms of inclusion and diversity, etc. That plays a role in affordability and transportation and many issues. Northwest Regional Plan addresses equity in each of their chapters and could be used as a model.

Comment: Perhaps in the survey a question about the willingness of the community to invest in itself, take on more responsibility. For example, the state would be happy to give up responsibility of Route 7, even just from Milton town line to Interstate. The town does not have the stomach for taking that over, however it would open up a lot of possibilities for planning and redesign of that corridor, sidewalks, speed limits, etc. We would gain control of it, however we would have to pay for it. This is an important question if we want to see something change there.

Moderator: Has there been any discussion of a phased transition of responsibility?

Comment: No that wouldn't work.

Comment: We are already asking way too much of the part time volunteers of the local boards and selectboard. Another question is do we have the stomach for more community engagement committees, handled by the selectboard, to find other volunteers needed to get some of these things done in the community. Special task force committees, transportation, housing, energy, trails etc. Need more volunteerism.

Comment: People ask why don't we have a parade anymore. We don't have a parade anymore because no one stepped up to keep it organized and going. Summer activities. These things happen because someone stepped up to volunteer to make it happen.

Comment: Many would agree it is harder to learn what is going on in town, unless you have kids in the school system, how do you get involved in things, learn what is going on.

Comment: One of the comments on the boards was about having more community events to get involved in, a group effort day, we do very well with Green Up Day, recently an issue was brought up about the Veterans Cemetery lacking maintenance and all of the sudden there was a crowd that went up and took care of it. The community could do more of this.

Comment: Like the trails thing, I did not know there was an opportunity for this.

Comment: There was a request to look into connecting the 4-wheeler trails in Milton and St Albans or Fairfax through town, but it is illegal to ride them on local roads. Did not get much support.

Moderator: Reminder to everyone to check the project webpage for materials, copies of this presentation, and they can use the comment form to submit ideas and concerns.

[** END MEETING 5:00 pm**]

MEMO

Georgia Vermont Town Plan Update

Public Meeting Notes **DRAFT**

February 27, 2024 6:00pm Georgia Fire & Rescue



Introduction:

A public meeting was held at the Georgia Fire & Rescue meeting room to present the results of the town plan survey, and discuss takeaways and potential updates to the plan.

Michael Allen from Regrowth Planning began the meeting with a slide presentation of the survey results, pausing after different categories to take questions and comments from the audience. This was followed by an open discussion period, where general comments and questions were taken. Approximately 20 attended in person, and 5 people watched via Zoom. The notes from this discussion are provided below, and a copy of the presentation slides have been provided on the project webpage for reference, as well as a link to a video of the meeting. This is not intended as a verbatim transcript of the conversation, but a summary of the main questions and points made.

TOPIC: GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

Comment: If the community seems to be against residential growth, how will we have the population to support more businesses in the South Village? How will those businesses thrive at the population levels we currently have? It seems like a tough balancing act.

Moderator: Instead of taking action which would boost the housing population, which people do not seem to want, the intent is to instead focus on commercial investment. Not sure that we need to have a bigger population to have more commercial. New restaurants are very desired. They may not have survived down in Milton, but in Georgia we have an interchange from the highway which could capture those travelers, which Milton doesn't have.

Question: Do you have any data on the demographics of the survey respondents? Are they renting, do they own, etc.

Moderator: Yes, these results are in the last part of the report. Most respondents own their home. Age breakdown was well distributed, but not many younger people below 25. 95% full time residents. Majority commute to full time employment outside of town, second largest group (20%) are retired. Majority have lived here for more than 20 years.

Question: How do the demographics of the survey compare to the demographics of the town?

Moderator: Have not looked at that yet.

Comment: Cost of housing relative to commercial is something to discuss. The survey showed there is a need for it, though the cost of it to the community may not be the \$1.20 shown in other towns, there are a lot of other factors to it that may or may not apply to Georgia. Does the community have water and sewer, plowing, etc. South Village and Georgia Center may not need to spend \$1.20 to get \$1.00 back. A quick study could be done with the Town Assessor to see what actual dollar value these housing developments might bring in and cost to serve, versus the example towns in New Hampshire which might be spread out over a large area and require more municipal effort. A quick study could be done to see if it is instead \$0.80 cents per dollar for some of these proposed developments.

Moderator: Yes, the cost of serving residential is sometimes higher because it is spread out over a very large area, not as efficient.

Question: In your experience, is the response to the survey skewed in any way by the fact that a large amount of older and retired people participated in the survey?

Moderator: It is very typical in communities like this that we see a large response by older residents and seniors, and we often have a harder time getting response from younger folks. However, this wasn't intended to be a "vote", we did not take the expense of mailing this out to every household. This was intended to get a read of the general sentiment of the community. This turnout probably does skew the results somewhat, at least regarding housing.

Question: You mentioned the town should work toward a wastewater system in South Village, but what about water system?

Moderator: I misspoke, I should have mentioned both wastewater and water.

Question: Short-term rentals, do you know if they are "cost-neutral" in terms of taxes? Burlington is trying to regulate them in terms of housing needs. Is there any reason besides housing needs that we need to regulate them?

Moderator: Yes, in some communities they can be an issue in terms of nuisances, people acting poorly, noise, etc. That can be an issue, but affects some places more than others. In Lake Placid it was a big problem, other places not as much. In general though it can have a positive economic effect because those visitors are usually spending money locally, but it can take away potential housing stock.

Comment: You implied that a new restaurant here wouldn't make it, however we have about 30,000 people living within 15-20 minutes of here, if you had a restaurant that drew people here it would be successful, you just have to find the right niche.

Moderator: I have overheard some skepticism on local social media that a new restaurant wouldn't work here, that there isn't enough population, that restaurants down in Milton have gone under, etc. but I think with the highway interchange and other factors it could work.

Comment: Milton also has half a dozen restaurants competing against each other so that makes it harder for them.

Comment: In the first slide you showed the results of people wanting more or less growth, what were the five categories of responses again? I disagree with your assessment that it was leaning toward more growth, because if you add up all of the responses from the bottom up to the "steady/currently fine" you will find more people wanted less growth.

Moderator: The largest response was growth has been "just about right" (28%). There were two categories above that for people wanting a "little more growth" (26%), and "a lot more growth" (11%). There were two categories below that for people who felt there has been a "little too much growth" (18%) and "way too much growth" (11%). So 37% seem to lean toward more growth and 29% seem to lean toward less growth.

Comment: I disagree, I think you should be counting the 28% who feel growth has been about right with the 29% below it, and that would show an overall sentiment wanting less growth instead.

Comment: I don't read it that way.

Comment: There was a traffic study undertaken a number of years ago, and VTrans has suggestions on the docket for 104A and Route 7. It is unknown when, if anything, would happen but a process is in the works.

Comment: I work for Northwest Regional Planning, and VTrans has accepted the South Village transportation issues into the capital program, covering south of Ballard Road to north of the interchange, Skunk Hill Road, park & ride, on and off ramps. Just waiting to have a consultant develop a design. There were alternatives identified.

TOPIC: HOUSING

Comment: All of the housing types that scored “low need” are generally the more affordable variants.

Question: Is there any state data that matches up with this result? If somebody thinks that Georgia has plenty of rental units, that's not true.

Comment: Georgia is its own town, we don't have to do what every other town is doing.

Comment: Accessory Dwelling Units are already permitted where single family homes are, so that already aligns with the Vermont State HOME Act.

Comment: Are you going to cover State issues more? The State has passed the 30/30 Law, with the goal of preserving 30% of Vermont's land area by 2030, and 50% by 2050. This is a current statute, and should be addressed in the town plan.

Comment: The plan to implement the state goals is due by December 2025.

Comment: I think there needs to be a balance - yes there is a housing crisis, we want to maintain our town, we don't want to make it an uphill battle for people to build, but we shouldn't be bending over backwards to benefit a few people in a small limited spot. It may not benefit the town. That \$1 dollar of tax revenue in, \$1.12 out for residential growth is concerning. I looked up the Freemont NH example you gave, and they don't have sewer, so that doesn't explain the costs. Concerned about bending over backwards to help a few.

Moderator: In other words, what is the appropriate amount of responsibility the Town of Georgia has in addressing the housing issues.

Comment: To go along with that though if you want to have commercial/industrial growth, you need housing for the people to live.

Comment: People love Georgia for what it is, not what it is going to be in 10 years. So why would we change our community? Why would we want to build more and make it not what Georgia is? I moved here 20 years ago because it was a quiet town with open space and fields and I don't want our community turned into a bunch of developments like Milton or St Albans.

Moderator: You may have missed response to first question, top 3 responses were all about protecting natural resources, open space, small town character. That should be the top priority of the plan. But if we want to address future growth, the relatively small South Village area is somewhere it can be located with minimum impact to the rest of the town.

Comment: Since I was on the Planning Commission I have been a proponent of a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) mechanism that would help to preserve areas of farmland and forests and instead allow that development potential to be allowed elsewhere in town where it is not as important to preserve, and that is something we should look at.

Comment: For 20 years the Planning Commission has been looking at these density ideas for South Village of Georgia Center, rehashed many times, but nothing has happened. Its a divided issue between people's wants and needs.

TOPIC: LOCAL SHOPS AND SERVICES

Question: Where these results only from the online survey?

Moderator: They were mostly from the online survey, there were 15 paper surveys returned. The online and paper surveys were the same.

Question: So in the list of shops and services, was that a list provided to them to pick from, or were those suggestions people made?

Moderator: That was a list provided in the survey for people to pick from.

Question: When you think of things that will actually bring people to Georgia to help support the restaurants, we don't have turf fields, the ice rink is bursting at the seams. Was there any discussion on venues like this that would attract people to town?

Moderator: Yes, that topic is covered in the survey as part of community services, recreation options, and the possibility of sharing services with neighboring towns. We got a lot of write-in responses to that.

TOPIC: COMMUNITY AMENITIES AND SERVICES

Comment: People are looking for more communication from town government, the new website is so much better, easier to find info, can see where permits are. A lot of good things are in process.

Comment: State has designated Georgia Shore Road as a bike route already - Champlain Valley Bikeway.

Question: How does the town influence cellular and internet services? Those are independent entities.

Moderator: It is largely out of our control, but it is something that we should still address in the plan and maybe it will help influence decision making. If we don't put it in the plan, it isn't going to get recognized, could give us more leverage.

Question: When you said people maybe didn't know what trails were available, what were you referring to?

Moderator: I have heard people mention they were surprised that off-road trails were needed, because the town has plenty of open space and trails to enjoy. I don't know personally, but it became a question of maybe it was an issue of people not knowing what local trail options were already available. If that is the case, then we should see how we can do a better job letting people know what's out there.

Comment: I would disagree with that. The Conservation Commission has done a great job advertising their trails and what they have, advertised at the library, schools, online, town meeting day. People need to be responsible for their own knowledge, we can't spoon feed them. They just have to look for it.

Moderator: So people feel then that there is a need for more trails?

Comment: I think we can always use more trails, enjoy our community and what we have. It's a great gift, why not have more?

Comment: There are a lot of new community members, people moving here, they may not know what is here. Something like a "welcome packet" could be used to inform them. I have a few new neighbors who aren't aware.

Question: So the option for trails, was that for only walking and biking, or was that for ATV trails?

Moderator: The survey option was for "off-road recreational walking/biking trails". It did not include ATV's or snowmobiles.

Comment: (via Zoom) Really appreciate you making this available online for working parents of small children. Really appreciate all the details provided and the community participation. Excited about this process.

Comment: Regarding cellphone and internet service, I believe the town can join the group that is trying to bring internet to underserved communities, and there is a group that is not really our county but the town joined that group. Don't know what we are getting out of it yet.

Comment: That's the CUD(?) Union District. Pretty sure Georgia is still a member.

Comment: Haven't heard anything on it.

Comment: Think they are focusing on Fairfax and Fairfield.

Comment: The Interstate bisects the town and most of the town is cut off from South Village except for two places at Ballard Road and Route 7 for pedestrian access where you can cross, and neither are bike/pedestrian friendly.

Moderator: That becomes an obstacle to getting around town then. It may also cause an issue from an emergency standpoint, if one of those passages is blocked, then it potentially becomes harder to get to the other side for people or emergency vehicles.

Comment: Can use the lake.

Comment: For the renewable energy topic, it would be nice if there was something encouraging solar installs on roofs, so then there is less of an impact to land.

Comment: For comparison purposes, of the 251 towns and villages in Vermont, where do people think Georgia ranks population-wise? We are 19th. Of the 16 towns similar in size to us (+/- 1000 people), all but one has police service. Half of them have sewer and/or water. Some of them are smaller towns. We don't have any of these things. These other towns have a lot more services. Our population is growing but we aren't keeping up with the rest of the region.

Moderator: And many of them have restaurants, which are presumably supported by the local population.

Comment: The state has designated growth areas of different levels. How many of those 16 town have some sort of growth designation? Kyle Grenier is a huge asset to this town, he is now at Regional Planning, has anyone applied for a sidewalk grant? I would like to see that Georgia is not missing out on these opportunities. The differences between what Georgia has done and other smaller municipalities have accomplished.

Comment: Have to be careful though because the Interstate impacts us differently, don't know how many of the other towns are on the Interstate. We can hop on the highway and be in Burlington in 20 minutes - that is going to affect how and where the growth centers are. They aren't going to want to replicate a new growth center here when there is already one 20 minutes away.

Comment: One of the reasons why we aren't eligible for some of these grants is because we don't have a designated growth center, or village designation, of any sort in the town, which puts us at a disadvantage.

Question: What does Village Designation mean?

Moderator: For a small commercial hamlet area you can apply, and the state can approve, a delineated area as a designated village center. You can then get priority access to certain grant funding, or access to certain grants for that part of town.

Comment: But we have a hamlet area, why cant we just do that?

Comment: He made it sound simpler than it really is. There is criteria that you have to meet for this, and we can't meet it.

Comment: Want to clarify that there are different designations, and some of the terms are being mixed up. Each designation has its own requirements. For example South Burlington, new town centers, which are much bigger and more involved, and smaller village ones. Growth Centers, and Town Centers and Downtowns are a much bigger deal, those are not what we are looking to do in South Village.

Comment: Historic Village Center Designation is what we would be looking for. According to the State, these would be for areas which were a village at some point 50 years ago or more, and met certain criteria within it. A guy at the State reviews your information, if he agrees there is or used to be a village there you get the green light to apply. The problem here is that he does not believe that there used to be a village in our South Village area, even though there used to be businesses there. Georgia Center however is eligible for the designation, and the Plains is also. You can get aid in historic restoration.

Question: Why don't we pursue those villages then?

Comment: Because it wasn't identified in the Town Plan at the time, if we want this would need to put it into the new Town Plan.

Comment: Don't have to do it only in one area, could do multiple areas if we wanted.

Question: If we decided to make the South Village "the village" would we have to move the library or town offices there?

Comment: No, don't have to move those functions.

Comment: The Town of Georgia can indicate in the Town Plan that South Village is "a village", but unless it meets other criteria, it won't get the official village designation that gets you the benefits.

Comment: Back before the Interstate the South Village area was farm fields. The highway was what influenced development there. Williston is an example where they designated an area right off the highway for growth because it was easy access, but their actual village is far away from that. Most towns already have an old village where their town grew up, like Charlotte, and they can get grants to help improve it. We are trying to replicate that old village or duplicate it down in South Village where we don't get that grant support, and it is problematic.

Comment: The public should be made aware of the fact that the "cat is out of the bag" for South Village. There are multiple development proposals for the area in the works, and design standards. This has been a vision for quite awhile. Only a few parcels that haven't changed hands, not a lot of shaping that can still happen. Not sure what the benefit of water and sewer would be there anymore when so much has already been designed without it.

Comment: Concerned that there are people who don't want to see any growth and they are ignoring the reality that growth is still going to happen, that we could put ourselves in a situation where we miss opportunities. Need to make sure our Town Plan is robust, recognize that growth is still going to happen so we need to plan for how it happens. Need to maintain and protect rural agricultural areas of the town and have a vibrant center.

Moderator: I think a big part of the town plan should be looking at the potential of South Village and what it can become.

Comment: People ranked apartments lower than other housing types because we don't want the impact on the local schools. Concern about the large 60-70 unit development projects in South Village, how are they going to impact the schools?

Question: Troubled by the effort on the Town Plan, the Town Plan has no effect on what happens in town, that is dictated by the zoning, so what is the point of this?

Moderator: Correct that the zoning actually dictates how the town develops, however the zoning is dictated by the Town Plan, and needs to conform with it. So, if we agree on what goals and policies we want to move forward with, then the zoning would need to be updated to align with the Town Plan.

Comment: Need to look at the number of housing units per school. GEMS school is experiencing declining enrollment. Has gone from 635 to 599 students, so there is capacity for new students and families.

Comment: I disagree. In reviewing old records from school they have gone from 50 students per class to 70 per class. More kids would stress the system which is already strained.

Comment: You can look at school enrollment in the Town Report to get actual numbers. The reality is that there are "bubble" classes where they get an influx of kids one year but the next year they don't so it is not all uniform. Overall, the enrollment has been in decline.

Comment: School and rental properties are an issue. It's possible that we have room for more kids in the school district, but some are Section 8 housing, I have witnessed many families moving from town to town bringing their kids to the next school and it is a burden on the community.

Comment: Not sure that building the water and sewer infrastructure is worth all the trouble to get apartments.

Question: Why do they have to be three stories?

Comment: It is important to note that these plans are shaped by the people who show up to these meetings, not everyone can make it and participate. Those people aren't represented. Low turnout from younger folks, maybe it isn't cool to come to these events.

[MEETING END]

OTHER:

Questions/Comments submitted via the online comment form since the survey report was compiled:

What was the total N for responses on the town survey? (Total number of responses received.) also, is there any demographic data reflected on who submitted surveys? (Age, gender, etc).

NOTES

Georgia Vt Town Plan
Town Plan – Draft Plan Presentation
July 30, 2024
Georgia Fire & Rescue/Zoom



Re: Draft Town Plan Presentation

A Public Meeting was held at the Georgia Fire and Rescue Building in Georgia Center, Vermont on July 30, 2024 to review the draft (version 1.0) Town Plan and discuss potential changes to the specific goals and policies of the plan.

Michael Allen from Regrowth Planning moderated the presentation and discussion, and began with a slide presentation providing an overview of the new draft plan. A majority of the presentation focused on identifying the specific changes being proposed to the plan Goals and Policies, and taking public comments and questions.

This meeting was attended by approximately 20 people in person, and another 7 people via Zoom, where the meeting was broadcast. A copy of the presentation slides, as well as a video of the meeting, was provided on the project webpage (www.tinyurl.com/Georgiatownplan) after the meeting.

The following are summary notes of the public comments collected at that meeting, as well as a copy of comments received via the online comment form.

* * * * *

COMMENT: This Town Plan is intended to be the guiding framework for our town, what is the timeframe that it is supposed to envision, planning for the next 8 years?

It guides our town, particularly with respect to new zoning, for about the next 8 years. We can't put things into the zoning unless it is established in the town plan. Some of the goals are for recreation, development review, etc also.

COMMENT: One difficulty is that when you get to the end of the 8 year period, it becomes harder to accomplish all of the stated goals, and a new plan has to be developed to update things.

In a perfect world all of these items would get done but in reality a town can only do so much.

If the town doesn't get around to completing the goals, that is ok and understandable, however it can't pass a local law or do something that runs contrary to the stated goals, or it could be legally challenged.

COMMENT: Has there been any prioritization of the goals in the plan yet?

Not yet. We hope to identify the 3 or 4 most important priorities to work on as part of this, pending discussion with the Planning Commission.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES CHANGES

COMMENT: New Policy A7 - This used to be a policy of the town, but fell into disuse. Most of the roads are not being accepted as town roads, so developers are naming them whatever they want.

SCENIC AND NATURAL RESOURCES CHANGES

COMMENT: New Policy B8 - A lot of this is already dictated by the State, to get a stormwater permit, and the town has little say in it. Presently in our regulations we can encourage it, but cant say much. State is very backed up, and we have to send approval back to the developer long before we get a reply from the State, and it gets approved by default because they didnt respond in time.

COMMENT: New Policy B8 - That action is not in the purvue of the DRB. That is more an issue for the Planning Commission to create the regulations, DRB only applies the regs.

COMMENT: What are the two new developments being proposed off of the I-89 exit that are involved in this Town Plan? Very little detail available online.

Not aware of what those specific developments are. Technically they are governed under the current Town Plan, this new plan would not take effect until adopted.

There are not any set plans for those developments yet, they are not finalized.

COMMENT: Should modify language that refers to priority inventory of Conservation Design maps so the language is consistent.

COMMENT: Do we presently have state authorization to set up a Transfer of Development Rights program? There is a State authorization for municipalities to do this, but the town would need to set the program up to get approval.

COMMENT: An important part of this is going to be public investment, like policy B29 protect and restore floodplains and river corridors, if we want to take development out of the floodplain it may require condemnation or compensation with the landowner. There may be payment involved.

That's part of the reason the State of Vermont is listed here as the responsible party. Big chunk of money to do this, every time there is a flood there is more money put in to do this.

COMMENT: How much area in Georgia is flood area?

It's not a lot of area, you can see it on the map in this draft for waterways, it basically follows the river and stream corridors, that is the flood zone. It's not a lot of area.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, GROWTH AND TAXES CHANGES

COMMENT: Comment on policy C11, which is already an existing policy, which says development should occur based on projected need. This sounds great, but we don't get a choice. When an applicant proposes a project, we don't have legal authority to deny it, other than guiding them within the regulations. I don't want the public to think we have absolute control of these things.

Correct. An alternative then is to do a long-term impact analysis on projected future development, and calculate what we anticipate the overall costs and impact of that to be on our local system, and then using that math you can establish impact fees apportioned to each applicant to try and offset the costs so we can keep up with the services.

There is also phasing of larger projects which we have done in the past.

We already have those impact fees right now, those have been established.

The impact fees we have now need to be adjusted. They were last updated about 3 or 4 years ago. There is a school portion and a town portion.

Should have more discussion about this then.

At the moment it is up to the market. We would love to be able to attract certain kinds of development that we want, but the private sector market is the one that really decides if they want to come here or what they think is marketable to build. The current town plan talks about our preferences, but we don't really have control of it. We don't have an economic development team which goes out and lobbies or attracts certain businesses to locate here.

COMMENT: We limit the contractors on how many houses they can build in a year, correct? Are we planning to increase that number, keep the same, or decrease that number?

That number isn't in this document, it is in the zoning regulations, however this document would guide what the zoning regulations should aim for.

We have had a limit of 35 houses per year here in the town for many years, and have never come close to hitting that cap. Having the cap is useful because it gentles the growth when there is a large application so you don't suddenly have a huge number of new neighbors, it happens more gradually. We have not talked about a change to this yet. The state would like to see more housing built in general, but what is getting built here in Georgia isn't really what the state is hoping for. But that is a good question.

COMMENT: Regarding the policy change of including home occupations in the list of potential air quality pollution sources, do you have any examples of home occupations which would degrade air quality, were there specific examples that we were concerned about?

It's one of the questions when approving a conditional use, about potential odors or smoke it may create, but there isn't a specific example.

Sometimes it might involve smoke, or plastics molding, auto repair waste products, we want to make sure they are handling things properly.

The state has air quality standards which we need to make sure we are adhering to.

HOUSING CHANGES

COMMENT: When you talk about encouraging a diversity of housing, would this be through incentives? The types of incentives would have to be flushed out.

That's what we are aiming for, is coming up with some incentives so that it isn't all the same large 4-bedroom homes.

COMMENT: The housing goal which talks about "available and affordable" housing, above policy D4, the word affordable has many meanings for different people. What about language which is closer to "affordable at a variety of different price points" along more of a spectrum? It isn't just one thing.

When you say affordable, I think Section 8, subsidized housing.

We aren't talking about Section 8 housing, we are talking about a wider variety of different things like starter homes for people who are just buying their first home, senior housing.

I would recommend changing the wording to match what we used below in policy D2, which says "more affordably accessible housing in various price ranges" because we are talking about stepping stones here at different life stages such as an apartment for when you get out of college, a first home, a second home, and then at the other end of the spectrum as you get older and you want to downsize to an easy to maintain single story house for seniors.

Could take out the word affordable and just put various price ranges.

The word "creation" of housing isn't quite right, because we want to encourage also the adaptive reuse of existing structures, it's not just about building everything new. Like large old farm houses which have been split up into a few apartments, for example.

Perhaps "creation and rehabilitation" instead.

COMMENT: What is the status of creating a town center to get water and sewer established?

The town has been trying to get Village Designation for this area but has been having difficulty because it does not meet the prerequisite requirements as a historic hamlet. There is a new recommendation later in the draft which talks about a "New Town Center" which is an alternative that has less qualification requirements. This alternative does not have as many of the benefits of the Village Center as far as priority grant consideration, but it is a potential start.

The process through the state is also changing, so it may change in our favor. In the process of changing it.

COMMENT: In the previous goal, we talked about meeting the needs of housing for Georgia residents, but is that just for Georgia residents, are we excluding other populations?

Don't think we were interpreting the goal that way, didn't pick up on that nuance, it wasn't intended to mean only the people who already live here. It was intended for anyone who comes here. Can look into clarifying that.

TRANSPORTATION CHANGES

COMMENT: Would there be the possibility of another item in there to have a coordinated “town administration” meeting, i.e. Selectboard, Planning, DRB, Conservation, Library etc. to sit down and come up with a plan for what we are going to do this year?

Possibly - we have a couple of suggestions similar to that in here where we recommend coordination between different groups in town as well as coordination with adjacent towns on similar efforts.

Thinking that if we had a policy written down it would hold our feet to the fire to get something done.

Like an annual town review.

COMMENT: Note that the goal before about coordinating with the state on Route 7 and 104A talks about meeting state and local needs, which are largely out of our control. This other one is more specific to our local needs.

COMMENT: Regarding the language where you say “consider pursuing” grant funding. You are writing a new town plan here, and recently we have tried to do some of these things and the Selectboard does not seem to be on board with supporting some of the goals. There was an opportunity to put some sidewalks in, something like 80% of the funding was free and the Selectboard had to come up with the other 20%, but they voted it down. If the Selectboard isn't going to be on board with these things, why do we continue putting them in a plan?

So do you mean, instead of saying “consider pursuing”, we should either just say “pursue” this goal, or take it out of the plan?

Can't speak for the Selectboard, but I think their idea was to promote another portion of the town plan which was to put that money into the roads right now, instead of the sidewalks, and that is why they turned down the grant.

The Selectboard changes often, and this is several years worth of goals.

But it has been several years worth of goals in the current plan.

This is a new goal though which is being added.

The wording on this is soft, it does give the Selectboard some wiggle room.

Don't get me wrong, I think it is great to have it in here, it just seems that we are putting things in the plan that go year after year in different plans and never get realized, they get voted down. At some point in time we need to look at this stuff.

Can this document have actions, action items, instead of saying “consider”? That wording is vague.

We can make the language as tight as we want to remove the wiggle room, though often you want to provide some wiggle room.

This has a lot of wiggle room.

There is not one entity that can come in and say, this is what it is. It has to go through a couple of committees before it gets to that point, or more than one entity has to sign off on these things to get them thru. It's a process.

E8 was the top of the list in actions in the last town plan, I support the Selectboards change. A lot of people have fought to have sidewalks and safe pedestrian routes, I just wonder what the current state of some of the recent decisions are, it seems like we are just putting things in the plan that end up having birthdays.

August 10, 2024

I'm not against dropping the word "consider" and having it simply say "Pursue", and then when it gets to the point where the Town Selectboard has to approve this plan, then the ball is in their court to decide if they want to keep it or not.

There is nobody showing up at the Selectboard meetings, you have to go to the meetings if something is important to you and if you speak up, they will listen to you.

I'm on the Planning Commission so I am behind it, but you have to remember when this topic came up we were also asking the Selectboard to lower taxes and ask for \$200,000 at the same time. So, how do you expect them to vote?

You need to remain involved in the conversation to help make sure these ideas move forward.

COMMENT: On policy E5 we are talking about developers having to cover costs of necessary improvements, I believe it is presently in the regulations, I think it also requires them to do a traffic study. The town doesn't necessarily have the money to do its own engineering studies. So that has to be covered by the applicant, should add that to the policy.

TOWN SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE CHANGES

COMMENT: The new policy of pursuing updated service contracts for police coverage, that idea actually works well with coordinating with adjacent municipalities because not all places have their own police, such as Fairfax. So we could coordinate with Fairfax on a contract potentially for shared services.

COMMENT: There is a local ethics policy that is not really followed, it was cast aside and then re-adopted but it's not really realistic. They are in the process of writing a new one or fixing it, they had a committee that studied it. Instead of saying "consider" here, we should just say "adopt".

COMMENT: Policy F3, about upholding the policy prohibiting discrimination, which policy are we upholding? Is that referring to Title 6? We should name the policy or law here which we are talking about so it is clear.

This was intended to refer to the town's recently adopted policy or statement regarding discrimination, and I believe that statement was trying to mirror the language of the State language.

We should name the actual policy or law so it is clear.

COMMENT: Policy F4 - we might add the State to the list of responsible parties because we are following an outdated rule of noticing which requires we post notices in local papers, but we have lost a lot of local newspapers over the years, and some of the papers that remain only come out every two weeks, so it is getting harder and harder to meet the old requirements.

And the paper we are noticing in is a paper that nobody here even reads. It's kind of a joke.

We need to adjust our own practices but also see if we can get the State to update their rules to be realistic about the newspaper industry.

They have either gone out of business or been consolidated and downsized into a conglomerate that provides much less coverage, and don't print as often.

COMMENT: Regarding the zip code for Georgia, do you mean a post office?

We have had a post office before in Georgia, but did not have the zip code.

Ideally this is intended to mean Georgia having it's very own zip code that isn't shared with other towns.

One of the problems with it is data collected by zip codes makes the Town of Georgia invisible, for example, this town had zero cases of Covid which of course is not true. A lot of important data is collected at the zip code level.

COMMENT: Regarding future trails, there are some easements that are on the books but need to be captured at the mapping level and brought up to date.

COMMENT: Regarding locating telecom, solar and wind energy infrastructure, the State has control over that. We don't have a say in it, they ask us "what type of plants do you want to have around it" .

Later on in the Energy section, there is a recommendation about joining a Regional Plan for these types of facilities, and if the Town joins the regional Plan then it is supposed to give you more local control and say in where these are located, although I don't know how much.

COMMENT: Regarding policy F19, we should add Public Works and Fire Dept to the responsible parties because they are both involved in developing a local emergency operations plan.

ENERGY CHANGES

COMMENT: Why are we using the word "consider" for each of these policies? To me that says "we considered it, and decided not to do it"

Well that is somewhat intentional, it provides some wiggle room for the town, if maybe later they find a specific reason why we don't want to do this at this time, they aren't boxed in.

Perhaps when we identify our priority goals, the 3 or 4 that we really want to make sure happen, then we can fine tune the language and the wording in those is stronger. All of these ideas sound great in theory, but if tomorrow something happens and our town roads all wash out in a flood, the Selectboard is going to need to address that priority and other things may have to wait.

The word consider isn't used in the current plan, but it is used a lot here.

It is habit from trying to find the right language that will get support from the most number of people, get their agreement.

COMMENT: Regarding the goal for reduced energy and fossil fuel consumption, we should reword that to put those words at the end of the sentence, because otherwise it reads like we want to reduce geothermal, heat exchanges and solar, when in fact we want to increase those but decrease energy use. Put it at the end instead.

FUTURE LAND USE

COMMENT: Policy H3 - do we want to use the word "requesting" or go back to using the word "require"
We may already require it.

[ONLINE COMMENT FORM - COMMENTS COLLECTED TO DATE – 8/12]

I would love to see more recreational trails developed. The trails at Silver Lake woods have been such a great asset, and I would love to see some mixed-use trails for biking and walking. These trails would not all need to be on town owned land; they could be created with right-of-ways on private property and connections to current class 4 roads, such as Montcalm Rd that runs north-south along a ridge in West Georgia. I am willing to be on a committee to help with this.

I noticed there is not very much information on the library and it's future. It is in a very outdated building and there was talk of moving it (I believe there was a million dollar grant offered to the library- did the town administrator do the paperwork accepting it?), and is moving it still something that is talked about? Also, on page 73 the loss of agriculture is blamed on younger generations not wanting to work hard. According to government data, this younger generation is working harder with longer hours than any generation in our nation's history (outside of slavery). Just after it is explained how cost of land has increased exponentially, people are leaving small family farms due to difficulty competing with big Ag, and land is being sold at a high price for residential use, I find putting the blame on the younger generations being lazy is an interesting choice of reasoning. I will assume it is not meant the way I'm taking it and that we all have a shared goal for our state and the people in it. Perhaps we can brainstorm ideas on how to say that in a more productive way. The older generations of this town already view the younger generations unfavorably, but we are literally their future, I hope to change the way they see us. Thank you for all of the work you have put into this.

Thank you for your work on this plan. I have two young kids at GEMS and both me/my husband work in education. Many priorities of the plan align with our values. I would emphasize that GEMS and our school system are what attract many younger families. We must ensure we find ways to continue supporting our GEMS facility and community - it is such a life-line to community activity and known as a supported school system attracts young families. The plan to invest in our local town for community activities and gatherings is important, but I think we have an opportunity to also continue and expand partnered opportunities with Fairfax, St A, etc. if we can keep costs accessible and expand services without infrastructure overhead. Finally, having GEMS 5-8 provide a vision for Georgia might be telling. What are our youth missing in this community? They are our future and a focused exercise might be helpful to identify alignment and opportunity. Rural VT is so beautiful and so much of this plan represents why we live here - but our youth will bring ideas of how to address community barriers that might tie to infrastructure, but also how we can also support community health. Perhaps not direct to this plan, but a dependency. Thank you again for your work!

Thank you for your work on this plan. I have two young kids at GEMS and both me/my husband work in education. Many priorities of the plan align with our values. I would emphasize that GEMS and our school system are what attract many younger families. We must ensure we find ways to continue supporting our GEMS facility and community - it is such a life-line to community activity and known as a supported school system attracts young families. The plan to invest in our local town for

community activities and gatherings is important, but I think we have an opportunity to also continue and expand partnered opportunities with Fairfax, St A, etc. if we can keep costs accessible and expand services without infrastructure overhead. Finally, having GEMS 5-8 provide a vision for Georgia might be telling. What are our youth missing in this community? They are our future and a focused exercise might be helpful to identify alignment and opportunity. Rural VT is so beautiful and so much of this plan represents why we live here - but our youth will bring ideas of how to address community barriers that might tie to infrastructure, but also how we can also support community health. Perhaps not direct to this plan, but a dependency. Thank you again for your work!

The library provides welcome services to the town. Townspeople are proud of and support the programs and the library. We can go backward and review what and who may have failed to ask the right questions, but we would rather look forward and promote the library through a supportive and informational narrative.

The Library Trustees respectfully ask that the following paragraphs be included in the Town Plan under the Library heading. Thank you.

The Georgia Public Library supports the town with programming and services wholly valued by the townspeople. GPL programming includes weekly story time, chess club 3x a week, bi-weekly dungeons and dragons club for both kids and adults, robust summer reading programming with 3+ activities and presentations per week during summer break in addition to regular activities, a tween book club, art-based activities, tech education classes, author visits, dance classes, story walks that bring books to hiking trails in town, hosting community meetings like the Stream Wise program by the Friends of Lake Champlain, and organizational meetings for Georgia United Soccer club, plus so much more!

This snapshot of the in-progress 2024 summer program (June 14-July 31) is a simple, strong example: 70 programs were presented, and 231 adults and 367 youth attended these. Between June 1 and July 31, 1,783 people came through the library door.

The GPL has received grants from the National Library of Medicine, The Northwest Counseling Support Services, the Winnie Bell Learned Fund, the United Way of Northwestern Vermont, and Vermont Department of Library Grants for the Summer Reading Program and an Inter-library Courier Grant.

The GPL does not just provide access to books and e-resources, often considered the sole role of libraries. These additional services include: a cooling station for townspeople; providing seniors with tax services through AARP; giving shelter to high school students after being dropped off by the late afternoon school bus; providing technology support; assistance with resume writing support, and so much more. Residents just need to ask and we will try our best to find a way to support that request.

Long-term goals for GPL include, but are not limited to bringing the building into compliance with American with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards; a two-person circulation desk that is sized to meet Library programming needs; additional electrical outlets and an exterior electronic sign that promotes not only the Library but Georgia Town information vital to the townspeople; updated parking; and most importantly, staff to accommodate the growth and needs of the community."

C - REPORTS & STUDIES

The following related planning documents and studies are available on the Town of Georgia website through the Planning Commission page:

2003 - Georgia Village Plan

2005 - Town of Georgia Sewer Feasibility Study

2005 - Wastewater Feasibility Study

2006 - Georgia Town Center Economic Feasibility Study and Master Plan

2012 - Georgia South Village Bicycle and Pedestrian Feasibility Study

2013 - U.S. Route 7 / VT 104A Intersection Study

2019 - South Village Transportation Master Plan

2023 - Town of Georgia Development Regulations

D - CONSERVATION DESIGN

VERMONT CONSERVATION DESIGN

MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING AN ECOLOGICALLY FUNCTIONAL LANDSCAPE



Summary Report for Landscapes, Natural Communities, Habitats, and Species

February 2018

Eric Sorenson and Robert Zaino

Core Participants:

Jens Hilke, Doug Morin – Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Keith Thompson – Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation
Elizabeth Thompson – Vermont Land Trust



Acknowledgements

This document summarizes two technical reports of Vermont Conservation Design. Jens Hilke, Doug Morin, Keith Thompson, and Elizabeth Thompson coauthored these reports. Their expertise, insight, thoughtfulness, and commitment to a conservation vision made this work possible. Special thanks to the Vermont Land Trust for Liz's time in the Landscapes phase. We also greatly appreciate the time and expertise contributed by the steering committee and workgroup participants and their respective organizations listed below. They tackled tough questions and provided sound scientific input. We thank Commissioner Louis Porter, Mark Scott, Kim Royar, and John Austin (Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department), and Commissioner Michael Snyder and Deputy Commissioner Sam Lincoln (Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation) for their feedback, support, and encouragement. This project was funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through State Wildlife Grants.



Steering Committee and Workgroup Participants

Landscape Features

John Austin, VT Fish and Wildlife Department
Jayson Benoit, NorthWoods Stewardship Center
Jeff Briggs, VT Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation
Dan Farrell, The Nature Conservancy
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Rose Paul, The Nature Conservancy
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Liz Thompson, Vermont Land Trust
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Natural Community and Habitat Features

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For More Information

For data layers, technical reports, and additional information, please visit the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department website: www.vtfishandwildlife.com, or contact the report authors.

Contents

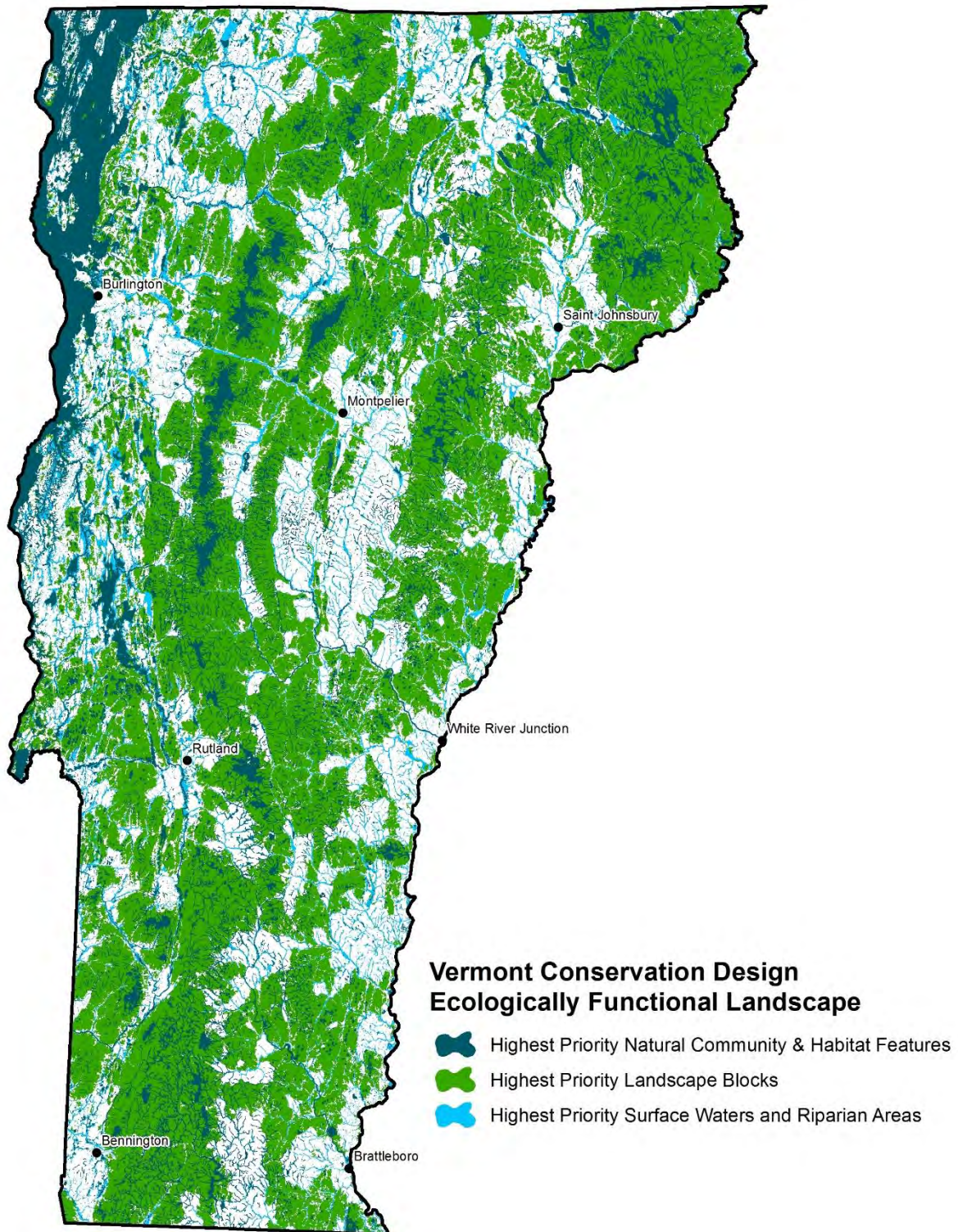
Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction	7
The Ecologically Functional Landscape	8
Coarse-filter Conservation Approach	8
Methods and Results	9
Conserving Ecological Function	10
Landscape Features	11
Interior Forest Blocks	12
Connectivity Blocks	14
Surface Waters and Riparian Areas	16
Physical Landscapes	18
Wildlife Road Crossings.....	20
Natural Community and Habitat Features.....	21
Natural Communities	22
Young and Old Forests	24
Aquatic Habitats.....	26
Wetlands	28
Grasslands and Shrublands	30
Underground Habitats	33
Species Conservation	34
Putting it All Together: The Ecologically Functional Landscape	35
Literature Cited	37

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Executive Summary

- Public surveys show strong support for conservation in Vermont. Vermonters value wildlife, nature, the state's rural character, and our working forests and farms. We depend on the natural landscape to support these and other values.
- Habitat loss and fragmentation, non-native species, and a rapidly changing climate all pose grave threats to species and ecosystems. The future of Vermont's forests, waters, and wildlife is uncertain.
- Vermont Conservation Design is a practical and efficient plan to address that uncertainty and sustain the state's valued natural areas, forests, waters, wildlife, and plants for future generations.
- Using our best scientific data, we identify easily understood and recognizable features that, when appropriately conserved or managed, collectively offer high confidence for the long-term continuation of an ecologically functional landscape.
- The foundation of Vermont Conservation Design is an intact, connected network of unfragmented Forest Blocks, Surface Waters, and Riparian Areas. These landscape features provide many functions, such as habitat for interior forest wildlife and clean air and water. They also allow species to move around the landscape. Landscape features occupy a relatively large area but offer wide latitude in management and conservation strategies.
- Natural community and habitat features are smaller, special places such as hemlock forests, rich fens, young forests, old forests, aquatic communities, grasslands, or caves. These all support particular species or ecological functions and are key components of this design. They occupy a relatively small area but often benefit from more specific management or conservation strategies.
- Together, these identified features represent a rigorous, science-based conservation design for Vermont. We have high confidence that they can keep Vermont's common plants and animals abundant and help prevent the disappearance of vulnerable species.
- Vermont Conservation Design maintains nature and the benefits it provides. The ecologically functional landscape it envisions sustains environmental services, like clean air and water, carbon sequestration, and flood protection. It provides resilience to climate change, allowing plants and animals to shift distributions. It supports numerous social and economic values, including outdoor recreation, the forest products economy, and the natural beauty that draws people to Vermont.
- Vermont Conservation Design is a vision to sustain the state's ecologically functional landscape based on our best science. Many tools can be used to achieve this vision. Thoughtful stewardship of private lands, with public support and incentives, will be essential to success. Other tools include conservation easements, regulations such as local planning and zoning, and ownership by a public agency or conservation organization. This document and these maps do not presume which of these tools are best suited to specific places or features.



Executive Summary Map: The Highest Priority Features identified by Vermont Conservation Design. A wide variety of management and conservation strategies can be used to maintain the ecological functions of each feature.

Introduction

Forests and fields, waters and wetlands, and their wildlife and plants, are central to Vermont's identity. Vermonters strongly value wildlife, nature, and the state's rural, sparsely developed landscape, including lands that support outdoor recreation, and working forests and farms. We depend on the natural landscape to support these values along with environmental services such as clean water, crop pollination, and flood resiliency. Time and again, public surveys show strong support for conservation in Vermont (Roman and Ericson 2015).

Thanks to nature's resilience, and thoughtful conservation and stewardship, much of the state is in good ecological condition. However, habitat loss and fragmentation, the spread of non-native species, and a rapidly changing climate all pose grave threats to species and ecosystems. The future of Vermont's forests, waters, and wildlife is uncertain.

Vermont Conservation Design is a practical and efficient plan to address that uncertainty, and sustain the state's valued natural areas, forests, waters, wildlife, and plants for future generations.

Vermont Conservation Design is a practical plan because it sets science-based quantitative and distributional goals for maintaining and restoring an ecologically functional landscape. For the first time, this plan provides a scientific benchmark for long-term conservation success in the state. Vermont Conservation Design is also practical because the aim is sustaining ecological functions and environmental services, using the full range of conservation and management tools. These functions and services provide enormous benefits to nature and to people, and they cannot be replaced once they are lost. Vermont Conservation Design is grounded in Vermont's tradition of responsible land stewardship.

Vermont Conservation Design is efficient because it specifically identifies or targets a minimum number of features to achieve conservation success. Vermont has tens of thousands of native species; it is simply not possible to study and conserve each one individually. Using a "coarse-filter" approach, Vermont Conservation Design targets those features of the landscape that support the most species and ecological processes. In this way, we can confidently work towards long-term support of ecological function without needing to understand the life-history of every species. We recognize that some species will always require special conservation attention and Vermont Conservation Design helps us to focus on the species with the greatest needs.

In this report we identify four landscape features and six natural community and habitat features whose conservation and management is highest priority for maintaining ecological function. Landscape features—forest blocks and riparian areas—occupy large areas and are the foundation for intact and connected natural systems. Natural communities and habitats are the finer-scale pieces, such as hemlock forests, alder swamps, and grasslands that provide critical ecological functions and support our plants and animals. Together, these landscape and natural community-scale features form Vermont's ecologically functional landscape.

The results of this project represent a rigorous, science-based conservation design for Vermont. We have high confidence that if all these targeted features (forest blocks, surface waters and riparian areas, natural communities and habitats) can be conserved or managed appropriately, they will sustain nature and its benefits.

We present Vermont Conservation Design as a vision for Vermont's future—a vision that maintains nature and all its complexities as defining characteristics of this small and diverse state. The densely populated areas of southern New England provide a clear story of how natural systems, wildlife habitat, ecological functions, and rural economies can be compromised or lost. Vermont Conservation Design provides a framework for us to carefully consider our choices for the future.

The Ecologically Functional Landscape

Vermont Conservation Design is based on the concept of an *ecologically functional landscape*.

Maintaining and enhancing ecological function across the landscape is fundamental to conserving biological diversity. Ecological function—the ability of plants and animals to thrive, reproduce, migrate, and move in response to land-use changes and climate changes, and the ability of ecosystems to function under natural processes—is served by high-quality terrestrial and aquatic habitat, natural connections across the landscape, a wide variety of habitat features from low elevation to high, clean



water, and healthy rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and wetlands.

An ecologically functional landscape contains all the native species in Vermont, and the full range of native habitats and natural communities known to occur in

the state. It also contributes to regional conservation, by maintaining species and habitat conditions that may be in regional decline (such as grassland birds and their habitat), or that may be well-represented in Vermont but regionally rare (such as habitats resulting from calcium-rich bedrock). It must be well-connected at multiple scales, allowing species movement and gene flow across the landscape. An ecologically functional landscape is also resilient, allowing species to shift distributions and natural communities to rearrange themselves in response to a changing climate and other stressors.

Coarse-filter Conservation Approach

We used the coarse-filter approach to conservation (Noss 1987; Hunter et al. 1988). It would be overwhelming to identify and manage for the individual needs of the estimated 24,000-43,000 species of plants, animals, invertebrates, and fungi in Vermont. The coarse-filter conservation approach treats larger-scale components of the landscape as proxies for the species they contain (Panzer and Schwartz 1998; Molina et al. 2011; Shuey et al. 2012). If examples of all coarse-filter features are conserved at the scale at which they naturally occur, most of the species they contain—from the largest trees and mammals to the smallest insects—will also be conserved. By maintaining or enhancing these proxies, or coarse-filters, we can have high confidence that we can efficiently conserve the majority of Vermont's native species.

The coarse-filter conservation approach can provide for the habitat needs of many—very likely the majority—of Vermont’s species, allowing for efficiency in conservation planning and design. This project focused on identifying coarse filters. We have high confidence that this conservation design identifies areas essential for the long-term functioning of Vermont’s landscape and the species it contains. However, coarse-filter conservation alone cannot adequately address the needs of all Vermont’s species. Very rare species, whose distributions on the landscape are infrequent and unpredictable, or species facing pests or diseases largely unrelated to habitat (e.g. moose and many bat species), cannot be conserved with coarse filters. Some species are simply vulnerable as a result of being in our human-dominated landscape and will always need conservation attention. A complementary “fine-filter” conservation approach is necessary, and Vermont Conservation Design has made it possible for the first time for us to identify many of those species in need.

Methods and Results

Vermont Conservation Design identifies landscape-level and natural community and habitat-level coarse filters—we refer to these as **landscape features** and **natural community and habitat features**. These features were selected using a repeatable process, our best scientific data, and professional judgement. The specific rationale and methods for these steps are described in the Vermont Conservation Design Technical Reports. Broadly, we listed potential features that could serve as coarse filters, and the finer-scale elements (species, communities, and ecological processes) that could be effectively conserved by each. This allowed us to select coarse filters that are the most efficient while still being readily understood and recognizable. We then compiled a final set of features that provides high confidence for the long-term conservation of ecological function in the state.

Based on these steps, we selected five landscape features and six natural community and habitat features as being the most effective and parsimonious for maintaining an ecologically functional landscape. These ten features are:

Landscape Features

- Interior Forest Blocks
- Connectivity Blocks
- Surface Waters and Riparian Areas
- Physical Landscapes

Natural Community and Habitat Features

- Natural Communities
- Young and Old Forests
- Aquatic Habitats
- Wetlands
- Grasslands and Shrublands
- Underground Habitats

In addition, we also identified Wildlife Road Crossings as a key element of the conservation design. Wildlife road crossings are road segments with suitable habitat on both sides of the road. Although not actually a coarse filter, wildlife road crossings are essential to the functions of the five chosen landscape features and therefore are a critical component of maintaining and enhancing Vermont’s ecologically functional landscape.

Once we had selected these features, we tested the overall design against a diverse list of more than 200 species. This list included common species, as well as rare and declining species of plants and animals that are Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in the Vermont Wildlife Action Plan. The results of this analysis provide additional confidence in the overall functioning of the design.

When the ecological functions of each of these features are maintained and enhanced, and when each is conserved at the appropriate scale and distribution across the landscape, the majority of Vermont's species and ecological processes are very likely to be conserved even as the climate changes.

While each feature in Vermont Conservation Design is important on its own, they cannot function in isolation. Maintaining or enhancing an ecologically functional landscape in Vermont depends on both the specific functions of each feature, and the ability of the pieces to function together. Interactions between features are what support Vermont's environment and are essential for long-term conservation of Vermont's biological diversity and natural heritage.



Each of these features is described below, and whenever possible, a map shows the areas identified as “highest priority” for each. In some cases, it is not possible to map features due to lack of spatial information.

The following descriptions and maps identify a large percentage of Vermont's lands and waters for conservation priority. We are highly confident that these features and their ecological functions must be maintained if Vermont is to have an ecologically functional landscape into the future.

Conserving Ecological Function

The goal for each identified feature in the design is to maintain, restore, or enhance its ecological functions. As each feature has unique functions, the strategies and tools to achieve this will be diverse. For example, the goal for Interior Forest Blocks is to maintain the unfragmented, interior forest of these areas that provides critical habitat for many species of plants and animals. There is considerable leeway on what can happen within a forest block and still maintain interior forest function. For example, most forest management activities are compatible with maintaining the long-term interior forest functions for these blocks, providing these activities are thoughtfully planned.

Conservation and management of natural communities and habitats is very specific to the individual feature. A very rare, small patch natural community such as a Pitch Pine-Oak-Heath Rocky Summit might call for a minimalist approach – perhaps little more than invasive species control. In contrast, grassland habitat for nesting birds requires active management—the timing of field mowing is critical. Successfully implementing these targets will likely require the full range of conservation and management options available.

Many tools can be used to achieve the overall goal of retaining ecological function. With approximately 80% of Vermont's land privately-owned, management and stewardship of private lands will be an essential path to success. Other potential tools include landowner incentives, conservation easements, regulations such as local planning and zoning, and ownership by a state or federal agency or a private conservation organization. This document and these maps do not provide suggestions as to which of these tools are best suited to specific places. The Vermont Conservation Design Technical Reports include recommendations for further prioritization filters that users can apply to help make these decisions.

Each section below provides guidelines on what is needed to maintain ecological functions for that feature.

Landscape Features

At the most basic level, an ecologically functional landscape must have intact and connected natural systems. The large, unfragmented forest blocks and the network of aquatic systems and their riparian areas identified in this section are the foundation for ecological function in the state. Minimizing fragmentation of these features, and maintaining or restoring connectivity across the landscape, is critical to the conservation of all of Vermont's species and their habitats, and the ability of species to shift their distributions over time in response to ecological changes.

We identify the Highest Priority for each of the landscape features in this summary report. Additional Priority Areas are identified in Part 1 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report. These Priority Areas form a second tier of importance for each feature. In addition, areas of Vermont that are not identified on any of the maps for landscape features may contain important forest blocks, habitats, natural communities, or other features. Although they are not identified as Highest Priority Landscapes, they too can be managed or conserved to contribute to an ecologically functional landscape.



Interior Forest Blocks

Forest blocks are areas of contiguous forest and other natural communities and habitats, such as wetlands, ponds, and cliffs, that are unfragmented by roads, development, or agriculture (Sorenson and Osborne 2014). Forests blocks are the first foundational unit of the Vermont Conservation Design.

Ecological Functions

Interior Forest Blocks provide many ecological and biological functions critical for protecting native species and the integrity of natural systems (Austin et al. 2004). These include: supporting natural ecological processes such as predator-prey interactions and natural disturbance regimes; helping to maintain air and water quality and flood resilience; supporting the biological needs of many plant and animal species, particularly those that are wide-ranging or sensitive to human encroachment; supporting viable populations of wide-ranging animals by allowing access to important feeding habitat, reproduction, and genetic exchange; and serving as habitat for source populations of dispersing animals for recolonization of nearby habitats that may have lost their original populations of those species.

In addition, large, topographically diverse forest blocks will allow many species of plants and animals to shift to suitable habitat within a forest block in response to climate change within the next century without having to cross developed areas to other forest blocks (Beier 2012).

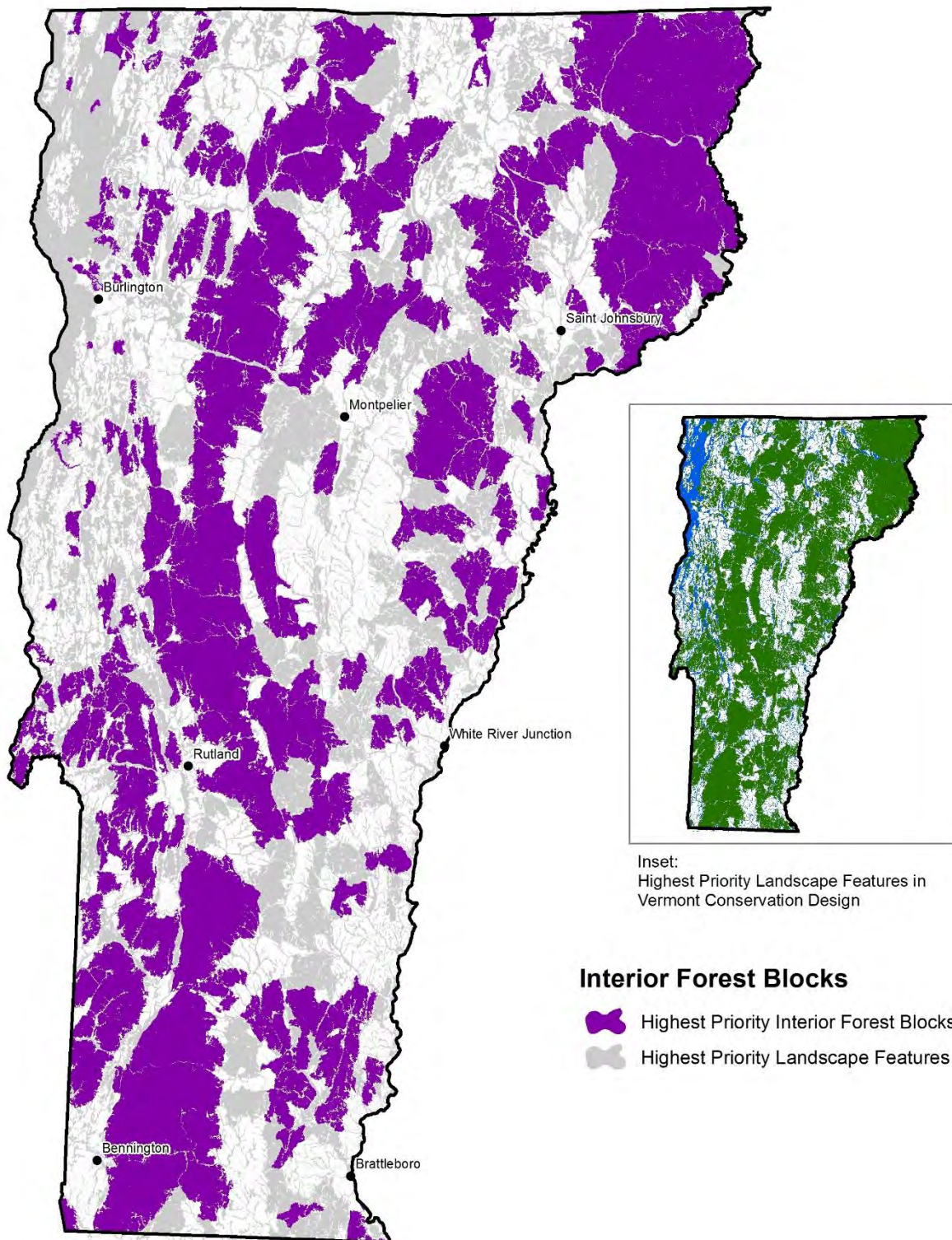
Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

Vermont Conservation Design identifies a set of forest blocks across the state that are highest priority for maintaining interior forest. These are the largest and/or highest ranked forest blocks from all biophysical regions that provide the foundation for interior forest habitat and associated ecological functions. The primary goal for these areas is to maintain the interior forest condition by avoiding permanent fragmentation from development. Limited development on the margins of large forest blocks may not have a significant adverse effect, provided it does not reduce connectivity between blocks or encroach into the forest block interior. Forest management that maintains forest structure and results in a distribution of all ages classes is compatible with maintaining the ecological functions of these forest blocks.

For more information on interior forest blocks, see the following section in the Part 1 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Interior Forest Blocks





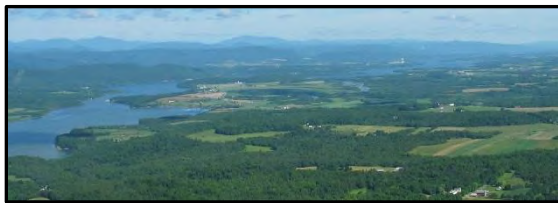
Map 1. Highest Priority Interior Forest Blocks.

Connectivity Blocks

Landscape connectivity refers to the degree to which blocks of suitable habitat are connected to each other (Noss and Cooperrider 1994). Connectivity Blocks are the network of forest blocks that together provide terrestrial connectivity at the regional scale (across Vermont and to adjacent states and Québec) and connectivity between all Vermont biophysical regions. There is a high level of connectivity within individual forest blocks. The proximity of one forest block to another, the presence of riparian areas, and the characteristics of the intervening roads, agricultural lands, or development determine the effectiveness of the network of Connectivity Blocks in a particular area.

Ecological Functions

A network of Connectivity Blocks allows wide-ranging animals to move across their range, allows animals to find suitable habitat for their daily and annual life needs, allows young animals to disperse, allows plant and animal species to colonize new and appropriate habitat as climate and land uses change, and contributes to ecological processes, especially genetic exchange between populations (Austin et al. 2004). Maintaining the landscape connectivity function requires both Connectivity Blocks and Riparian Corridors, especially in highly fragmented areas of Vermont. There is general agreement among conservation biologists that landscape connectivity and wildlife corridors can mitigate some of the adverse effects of habitat fragmentation on wildlife populations and biological diversity (Beier and Noss 1998; Noss and Cooperrider 1994; Haddad et al. 2003; Damschen et al. 2006). Specifically, climate change adaptation is enhanced if the long-distance movements of plants and animals is supported by a combination of short movements within large, topographically diverse forest blocks and short corridor movements between forest blocks (Beier 2012).



Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

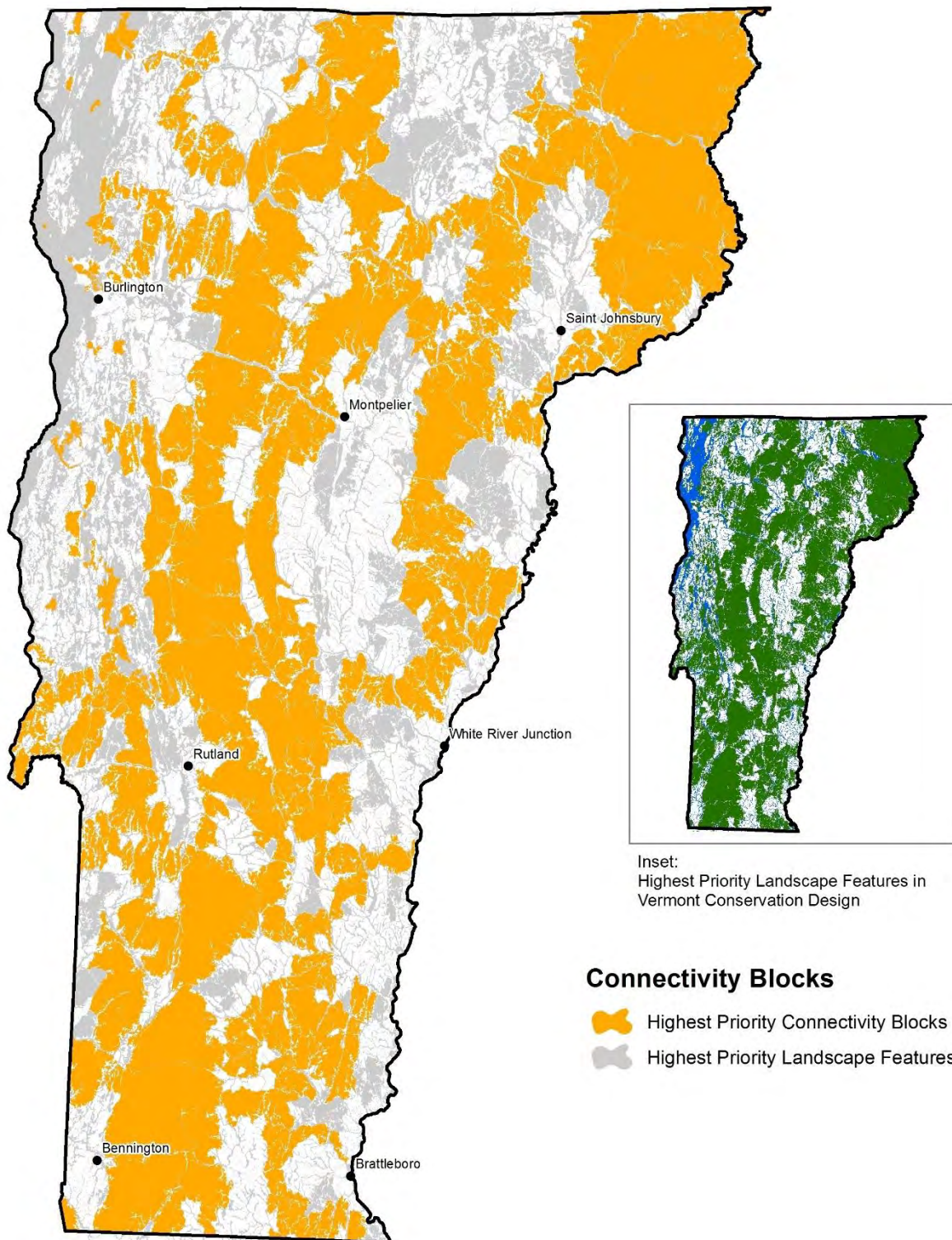
Vermont Conservation Design identifies a highest priority network, or “backbone” of connectivity blocks.

This “backbone” incorporates the spines of the major mountain ranges, connections outside Vermont to unfragmented habitat, and anchor blocks in fragmented biophysical regions based on abundant known occurrences of rare species and significant natural communities. Small forest blocks are included at pinch-points in the connectivity network as they are critical stepping stones.

Similar to Interior Forest Blocks, it is important to maintain the interior forest conditions in Connectivity Blocks by avoiding permanent interior forest fragmentation resulting from development. Connectivity within forest blocks will remain high if they remain unfragmented. For Connectivity Blocks it is also critically important to maintain or enhance the structural and functional connectivity that occurs on the margins of these blocks where they border other blocks. This can be accomplished by maintaining forest cover along the margins and by limiting development in these areas of block-to-block connectivity.

For more information on connectivity blocks, see the following section in the Part 1 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Connectivity Blocks



Map 2. Highest Priority Connectivity Blocks.

Surface Waters and Riparian Areas

Vermont's network of lakes, ponds, rivers and streams, and their associated riparian zones, valley bottoms, and river corridors are the second foundational unit of Vermont Conservation Design.

Ecological Functions

Aquatic systems provide vital habitat for a rich assemblage of aquatic species, including fish, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates (e.g., insects, mussels, snails, worms, freshwater sponges), and plants. Naturally vegetated riparian areas provide many functions, including stabilizing shorelines, storage of flood waters, filtration of sediments and nutrients, shading of adjacent surface waters to help moderate water temperatures, and direct contribution of organic matter to the surface water as food and habitat structure. Riparian areas are also very essential habitat for many species of wildlife, including mink, otter, beaver, kingfisher, spotted sandpiper, and wood turtle. The shorelines and riparian areas of rivers and lakes support floodplain forests, several other rare and uncommon natural communities, and many species of rare plants and animals.



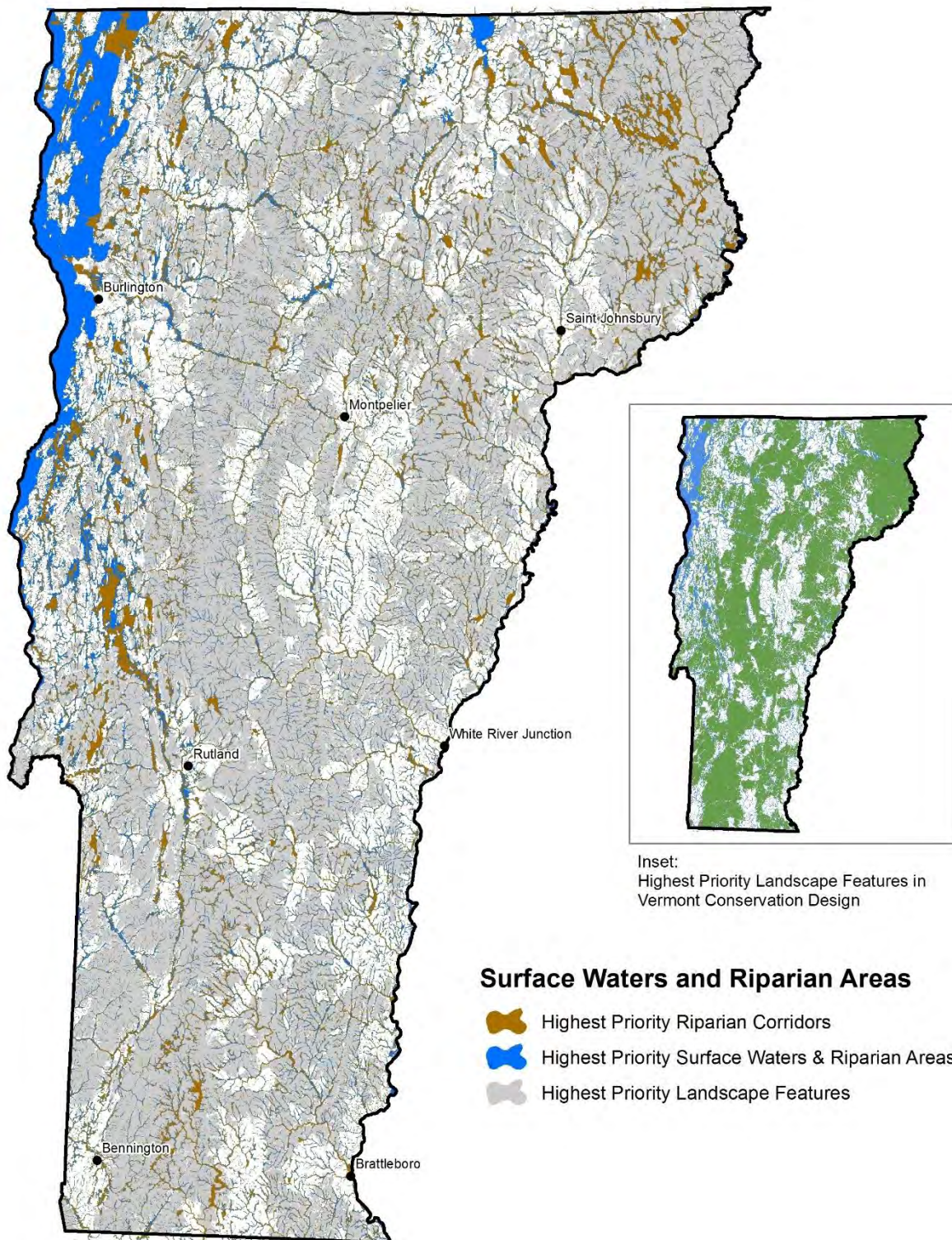
The linear network of riparian areas provides a crucial element of landscape connectivity. Many wildlife species use riparian corridors for travel to find suitable habitat to meet their life requisites, but certain species are almost entirely restricted to riparian areas, including mink, otter, beaver, and wood turtle. The combination of Riparian Areas for Connectivity, and Connectivity Blocks, provide the best available paths across the landscape, especially in highly fragmented regions like the Champlain Valley. Riparian connections also allow for long-term plant and animal movement in response to climate change (Beier 2012). Although many riparian areas and river corridors are highly altered by agriculture, roads, and urbanization, the risk of flooding serves as a natural deterrent for future development. Riparian areas also respond rapidly to restoration efforts (Beier 2012).

Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

Vermont Conservation Design identifies the entire undeveloped network of surface waters and riparian areas as highest priority for maintaining an ecologically functional landscape. The ecological integrity of an aquatic system is critically tied to the condition of the riparian area adjacent to the stream or pond. Rivers and streams must have access to their floodplains and freedom to meander. Maintaining or restoring river channel equilibriums, the unimpeded movement of aquatic organisms, and natural riparian vegetation is essential to protecting water quality and providing high-quality habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species. The width of naturally vegetated riparian areas needed to provide terrestrial riparian connectivity varies from 100 feet or less on some small streams (50 feet each side) to 600 feet or more (300 feet on each side) for larger rivers or riparian areas that span long distances of otherwise unsuitable habitat.

For more information on surface waters and riparian areas, see the following sections in the Part 1 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Surface Waters and Riparian Areas
- Riparian Areas for Connectivity (Riparian Corridors)



Map 3. Highest Priority Surface Waters and Riparian Areas (blue). Highest Priority Riparian Corridors (brown) are the naturally vegetated portions of the network that facilitate wildlife travel.

Physical Landscapes

Physical landscapes (often referred to as enduring features) are the parts of the landscape that resist change. They are the hills and valleys, the underlying bedrock, and the deposits left behind by glaciers. They remain largely unchanged when changes in land cover and wildlife occur, as plants and animals move, and even as the climate changes.

Ecological Functions

If nature is likened to a dramatic play, it's possible to think of the physical features as the stage and the individual species as the actors. The play is the natural communities, habitats and species that occur in a given place at a given time, but regardless of the action, the stage does not change. The importance of “conserving nature’s stage” is that we can be much more confident in our ability to conserve biological diversity and maintain a functional landscape into the future, with the capacity to adapt and be resilient to climate change, if all elements of physical landscape diversity are represented in the conservation design (Anderson & Ferree 2010; Beier and Brost 2010; Beier et al. 2015).

Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

Vermont Conservation Design identifies conservation of a representative selection of all physical landscapes as highest priority for maintaining ecological function. To do this, the entire landscape design includes all of Vermont’s physical settings roughly proportional to their occurrence in the state. To do so, additional blocks—Physical Landscape Blocks—were added to the highest priority Surface Waters and Riparian Area network and the highest priority Interior

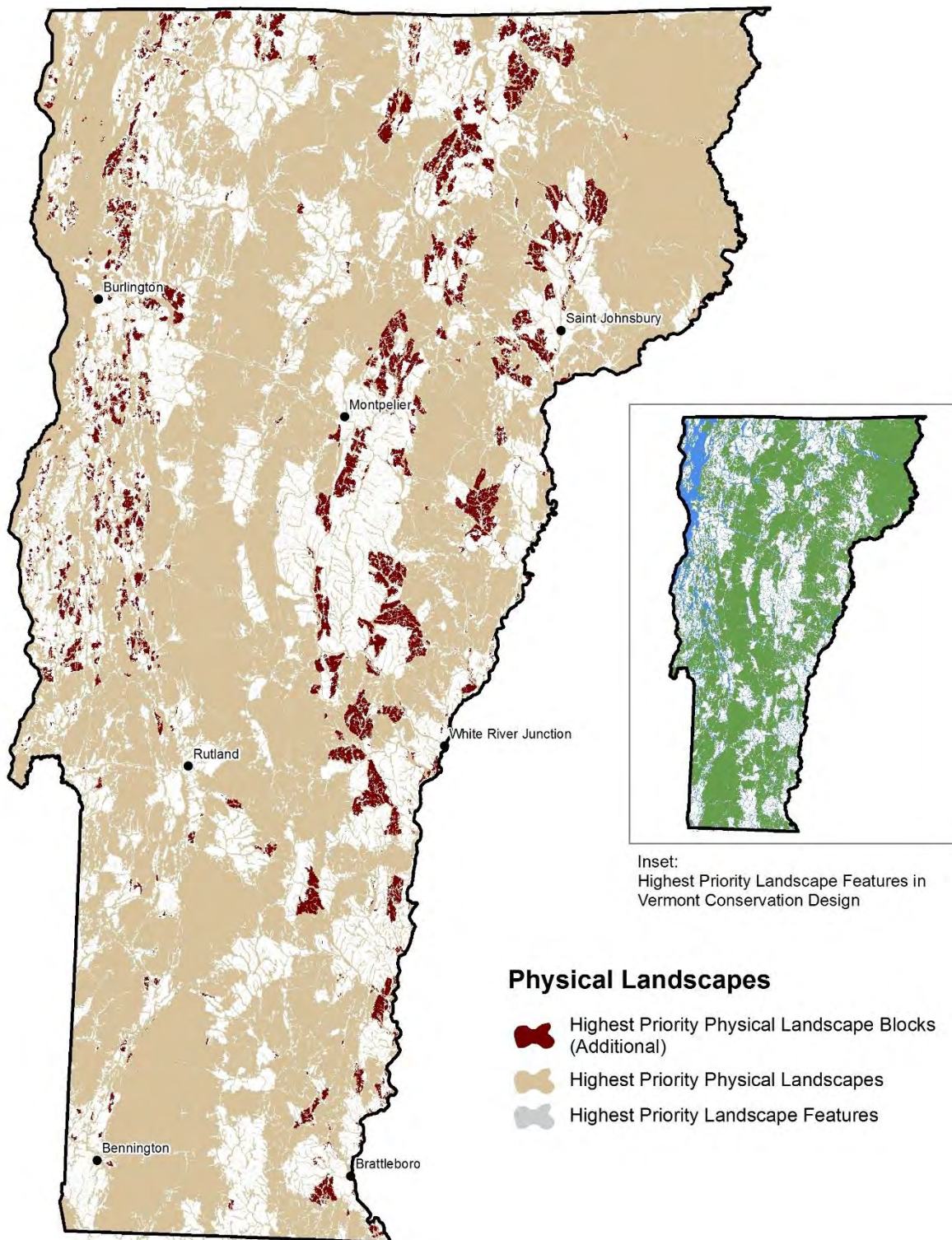


Forest Blocks and Connectivity Blocks in order to reach an overall design that includes the full range of physical diversity found in Vermont. We highlight these Physical Landscape Blocks in Map 4, but stress that the conservation of the entire design is necessary to provide the coarse-filter and climate resilience functions provided by the full range of physical landscapes.

Similar to the Interior Forest Blocks, maintaining and restoring natural vegetation and limiting development within these areas will protect the functions of these physical landscapes. Forest management that maintains forest structure and results in a distribution of all age classes is very compatible with maintaining the physical landscape diversity functions.

For more information on physical landscapes, see the following section in the Part 1 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Physical Landscape Diversity Areas



Map 4. Highest Priority Physical Landscapes. Blocks shown in dark red were added to the design specifically to increase representation of rare and important physical settings. Note that Highest Priority Physical Landscapes overlap all of the Highest Priority Landscape Features.

Wildlife Road Crossings

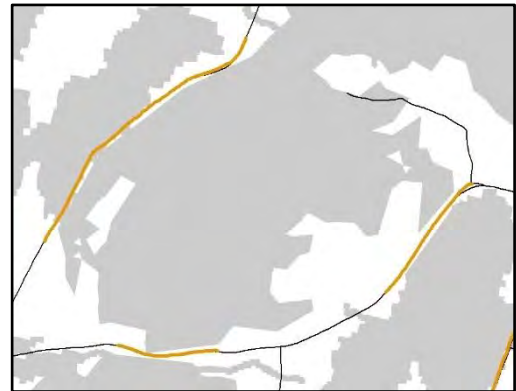
Landscape-scale connectivity and the ecological functions it provides depend on the ability of species to travel between forest blocks or along riparian corridors. Roads represent a barrier to wildlife movement and dispersal of many other species, including some plants.

Ecological Functions

Sections of roads that have suitable habitat on both sides are more likely to allow wildlife movement and dispersal of other species and, therefore, these sections of roads are critical components of maintaining or enhancing an interconnected, ecologically functional landscape. Wildlife road crossings that provide connectivity over or under roads are critically important between adjacent forest blocks and along linear riparian area networks. In addition, allowing for the passage of aquatic organisms through bridges or culverts is critical for the functioning of the network of rivers and streams.

Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

Vermont Conservation Design identifies a set of wildlife road crossings that are highest priority for maintaining connections between highest priority forest blocks, and that are highest priority for maintaining permeable riparian corridors.



Map 5. Highest Priority Wildlife Road Crossings connect forest blocks and riparian areas.



Structural connectivity across identified wildlife road crossings is provided by the presence of forest cover, wetlands, or other natural habitats. Maintaining or restoring natural vegetation on both sides of identified road crossing segments will maximize the effectiveness of the road crossing for connectivity.

Forest management that maintains forest cover

adjacent to the road is compatible with this function. Roadside development that further restricts animal movement is detrimental to connectivity. Road and highway structures that allow or promote fish and wildlife movement, such as bridges and oversized culverts, and limiting the use of fences and roadside barriers that impede movement, are all effective in promoting wildlife passage.

For more information on wildlife road crossings in Vermont Conservation Design, see the following sections in the Part 1 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Wildlife Road Crossings
- Connectivity Blocks
- Riparian Areas for Connectivity (Riparian Corridors)

Natural Community and Habitat Features

While landscape features such as forest blocks and riparian areas are foundational for ecological function, they are greatly enhanced when combined with finer scale features. In this section, we identify the highest priority natural communities and habitats that—when conserved in conjunction with the landscape features—are necessary to maintain and enhance an ecologically functional landscape in Vermont. These finer-scale features together occupy a much smaller land area than the landscape features. However, they are closely associated with more specific environmental settings or ecological conditions that are not fully reflected by the landscape features. Many plant and animal species depend on the combination of the landscape features and these specific natural communities and habitats.

We can fully describe the natural communities and habitats that are needed for an ecologically functional landscape, but we cannot necessarily map them all. Some, such as young forests or shrublands are temporary on the landscape, and shift locations over time. Others, such as natural communities and wetlands have incomplete inventory across the state, and mapping reflects the best current knowledge. The descriptions provided here should help planners and land managers determine if an unmapped, unassessed feature meets the criteria of being highest priority.



Natural Communities

Natural communities are interacting assemblages of organisms and their environment, and they are classified into types, such as Northern Hardwood Forest, Hemlock Forest, Red Maple-Black Gum Swamp, and Cattail Marsh, that repeat across the landscape wherever similar conditions are found.

Ecological Functions

Natural communities are one of the most important “coarse filters” for conserving biological diversity (Hunter 1991, Thompson and Sorenson 2000). This is because there are relatively few natural community types—97 in Vermont—compared to the tens of thousands of plant and animal species. Collectively, these 97 types in Vermont encompass the full range of habitat conditions that native flora and fauna evolved with and are adapted to. Therefore, conserving high-quality examples of all the natural community types is an efficient way to conserve most species.

Natural communities are relatively stable in a human timeframe, but their species assemblages have changed over thousands of years and will continue to shift in response to a changing climate. Sites with high-quality natural communities today represent places that are expected to continue to support important natural communities, and associated species, into the future.

Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

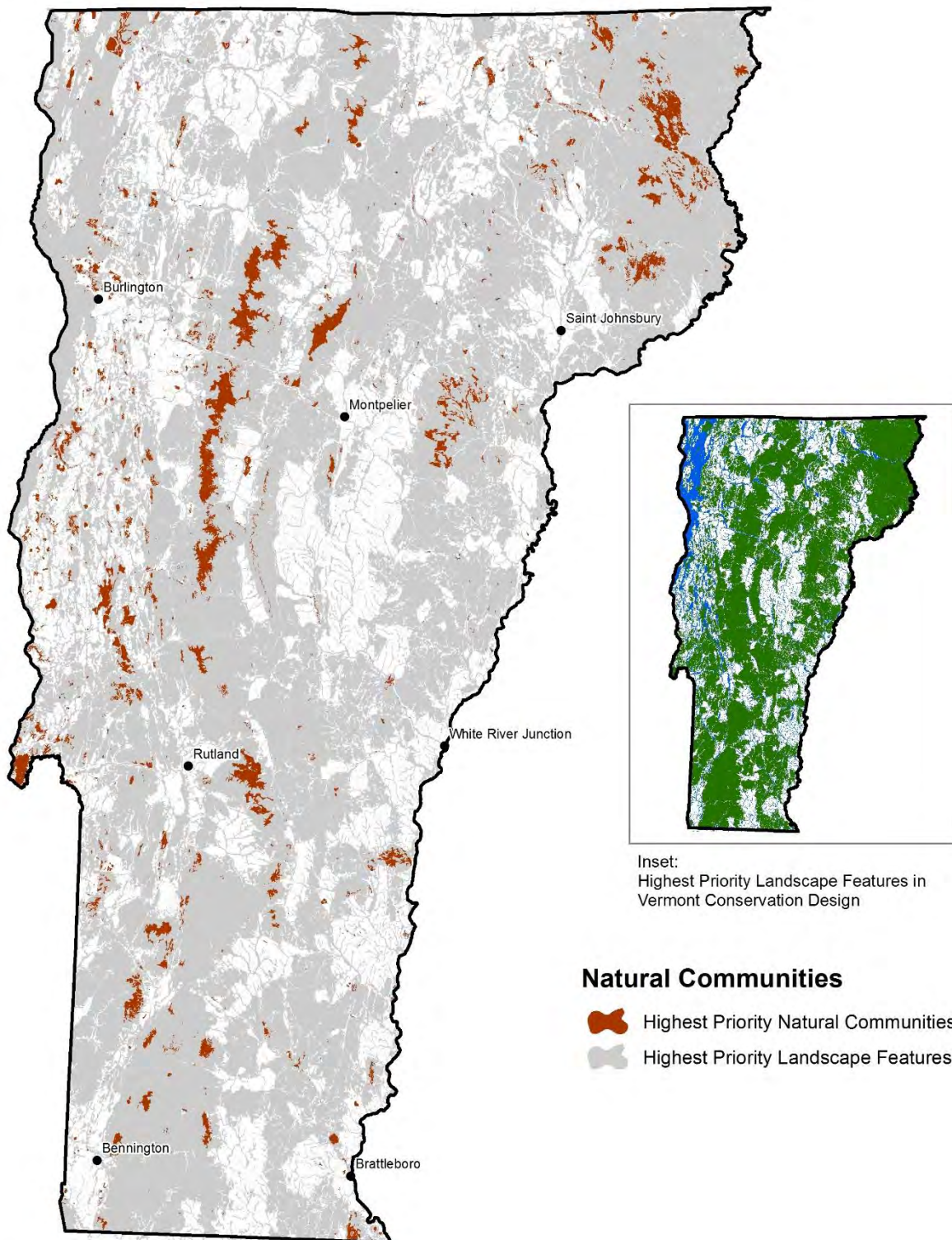
Vermont Conservation Design identifies conserving state-significant examples of each of the natural community types as a highest priority for maintaining ecological function. Specifically, this means conserving all significant examples of rare natural community types, and 50% of the significant examples of more common types, distributed across biophysical regions, and within an intact and connected natural landscape whenever possible. Some community types can be effectively conserved by other coarse filters. Matrix community types, such as Northern Hardwood Forest, are effectively captured by forest blocks and old forests. Seeps and vernal pools are captured by forest blocks and wetlands, respectively.



These natural communities should be maintained in, or restored to, a state of high ecological integrity. This translates into several measurable characteristics. Each natural community should be dominated by the native species characteristic of that community type. The species composition and physical conditions (soils, hydrology, etc.) should be largely unaltered by, or mostly recovered from, human disturbances. Natural disturbance processes should predominate. In general, high ecological integrity will correspond to an A or B- ranked element occurrence, and A-ranked condition, using Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department’s Natural Community Ranking Specifications.

For more information on natural communities, see the following section in the Part 2 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Natural Communities



Map 6. Highest Priority Natural Communities. Mapping represents the best current knowledge; additional highest priority natural communities exist that are not yet mapped.

Young and Old Forests

Young forests are regenerating forests dominated by dense seedlings and saplings less than 15-20 years old. Old forests are biologically mature forests, generally with trees exceeding 150 years in age.

Ecological Functions

The vast majority of Vermont's native plants and animals are adapted to the forest conditions that preceded European settlement. Because approximately 80% of Vermont's forest was cleared in the 19th century, today the forest composition and structure is very different than the conditions in which these species evolved. Old forests with large trees, abundant dead and downed wood, and natural canopy gaps, are essentially absent on the landscape. The complex structure of these forests creates diverse habitats, many of which are not present in younger forests. These complex structures also make these forests remarkably resilient. Old forests will be important "life-boats" that allow species and ecological processes to adapt to a changing climate.



At the same time, in most regions of Vermont young forest is less abundant today than it was before European settlement when natural disturbance created gaps and openings in the widespread forest. Young forests support a suite of wildlife species, many of which are in regional decline. Young forests also support many common species. Prior to European settlement almost all young forest was created by natural disturbance. Currently, forest management creates the majority of young forest in the state.

Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

Vermont Conservation Design identifies increasing the amount of both young and old forest in the state as highest priority for maintaining an ecologically functional landscape. A return to the pre-European abundance of young forest (approximately 3-5% of the forest) is needed to reverse a declining trend and reach a level that at one time supported all of Vermont's native species that require young forest. While it is not practical or possible to return to a landscape dominated by old forest, allowing about 9% of Vermont's forest (specifically, 15% of the matrix forest within the highest priority forest blocks) to become old forest will bring this missing component back to Vermont's landscape and offer confidence that species that benefit from or depend on this condition can persist.

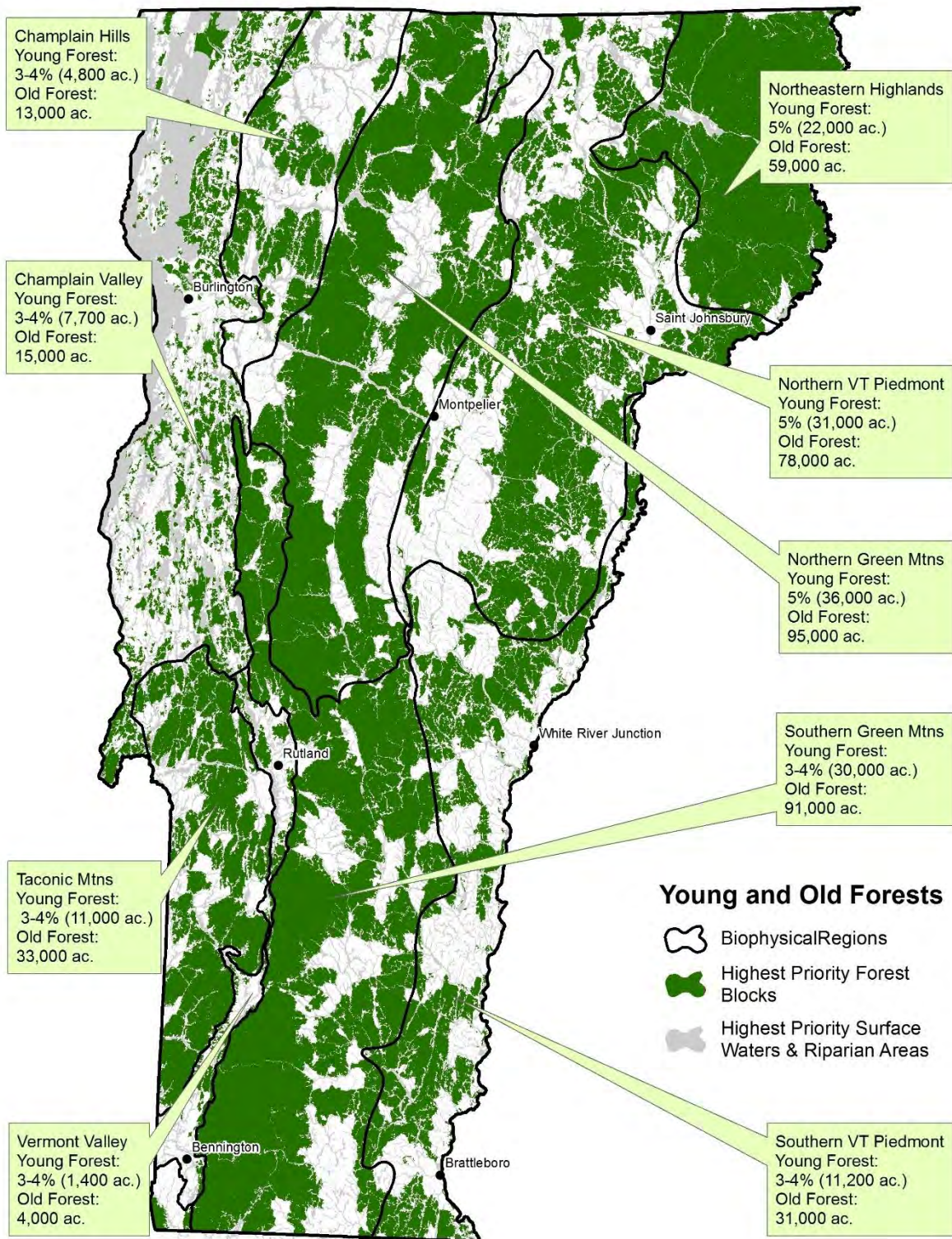
Young forest patches should be large enough to meet the needs of obligate species (generally 5 acres or larger), without compromising the ecological functions of other highest priority features. Old forests



should operate under natural disturbance regimes and need to be maintained in patches large enough to accommodate natural disturbance regimes without compromising old forest characteristics. In most forests, passive restoration will result in old forest. In some cases, active forest management may promote forest composition and structure suitable for subsequent passive restoration.

For more information on young and old forests, see the following sections in the Part 2 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Young Forest
- Old Forest



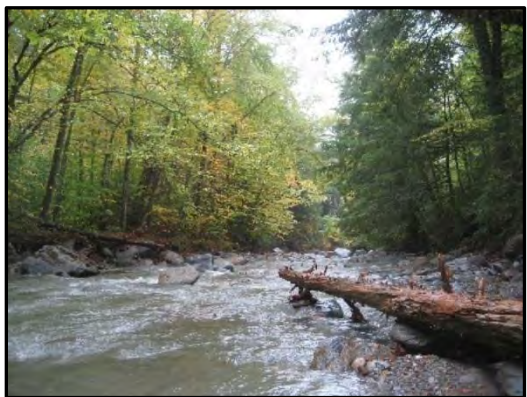
Map 7: Highest Priority Young and Old Forest acreages within the highest priority forests blocks in each biophysical region.

Aquatic Habitats

Aquatic habitats are those found in rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds. These places are a vital subset of the Surface Waters and Riparian Areas network, but they still depend on the successful functioning of the entire aquatic network.

Ecological Functions

Aquatic habitats are essential for many species, including fish, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, and plants. Particular lakes and ponds, and segments of rivers and streams, make exceptional contributions



to Vermont's biological diversity because of their unique physical characteristics arising from geology or topography, because they are good examples of aquatic habitats, or because they have concentrations of rare species and/or important species assemblages.

Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

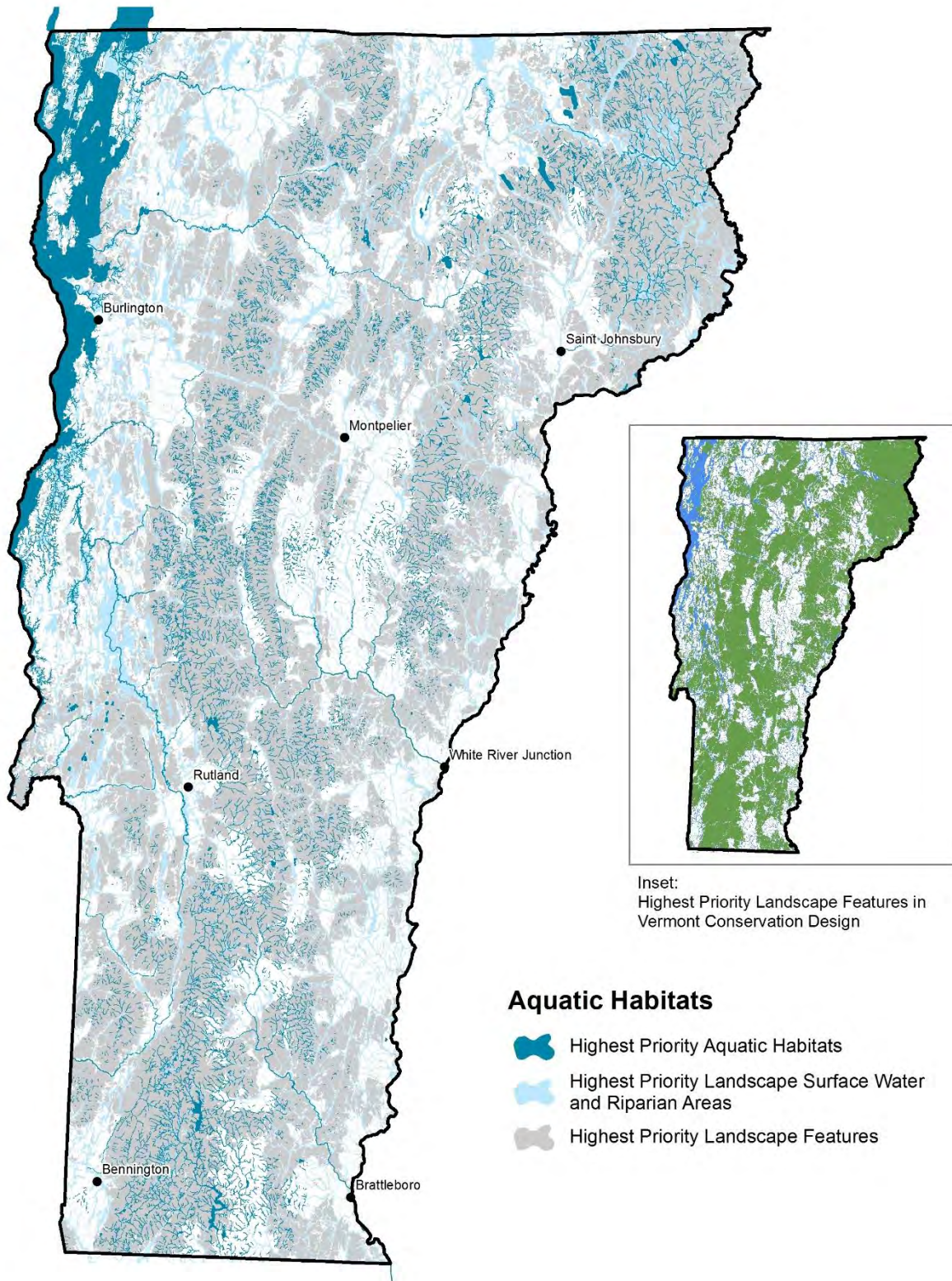
Vermont Conservation Design identifies a set of aquatic habitats that are highest priority for maintaining ecological function. These are lakes and ponds, and

segments of rivers and streams with known concentrations of rare species, exceptional species diversity, or which are examples of high-quality habitat. Collectively these features are representative of physical aquatic conditions. The river and stream segments include the full range of stream sizes, gradients, and temperature conditions in Vermont as identified by Anderson et al. (2013). Lakes and ponds include full representation of trophic status, depth, and alkalinity, which are generally the main factors that shape biological communities in lakes (Wetzel 2001). These highest priority aquatic habitats must be part of a fully functioning network of surface waters and riparian areas. Although areas with exceptional biological contributions can be identified, they cannot function independently.

An aquatic system's ecological integrity depends on the condition of the watershed in which it occurs, but it is critically tied to the condition of the adjacent riparian area. River channel equilibriums need to be maintained or restored. Artificial barriers to aquatic organism movement (culverts, dams, etc.) should be removed or mitigated. Natural vegetation should be maintained or restored along shorelines, and should have adequate width to maintain water quality, stabilize shorelines, and provide shade and the recruitment of downed wood and other natural organic matter. Runoff and erosion should be minimized along developed shorelines. Underwater habitat and vegetation should be maintained or restored to provide suitable conditions for foraging, shelter, and reproduction of aquatic organisms. The spread of aquatic invasive species and pathogens should be prevented and controlled where possible.

For more information on aquatic habitats, see the following sections in the Part 2 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Important Aquatic Habitats and Species Assemblages – Rivers and Streams
- Important Aquatic Habitats and Species Assemblages – Lakes and Ponds
- Representative Lakes and Ponds



Map 8. Highest Priority Aquatic Habitats (dark blue). These features are a subset of the landscape-scale Surface Waters and Riparian Areas (light blue). Aquatic habitats depend on the ecological functioning of the entire aquatic network.

Wetlands

Wetlands are vegetated ecosystems characterized by abundant water. Vermont's wetlands range from small vernal pools and seeps to vast swamps and marshes covering thousands of acres.

Ecological Functions

Wetlands store water and attenuate downstream flooding. They maintain water quality by trapping sediments and removing nutrients and pollutants. Shoreline wetlands protect against erosion during floods and storms. Many wetlands are associated with groundwater discharge and form the headwaters of many cold-water streams. Wetlands provide important wildlife habitat and spawning and nursery habitat for fish species. Wetlands in Vermont provide habitat for a disproportionately high percentage of rare species. As climate change brings more frequent and larger storm events, and results in warmer surface waters, wetland functions will become even more important.

Vernal pools are a special type of wetland that provides critical breeding habitat for wood frogs and several salamander species, including spotted salamanders. These species migrate to vernal pools for spring breeding from the adjacent upland forests where they spend the majority of their life cycles. Eggs are laid in the pools and amphibian larvae develop and mature there. The mature amphibians then move to the adjacent forest for the fall and winter.

Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

Vermont Conservation identifies a set of wetlands and vernal pools that are highest priority for maintaining ecological function. These are primarily wetlands and vernal pools associated with the landscape-scale forest blocks and riparian areas. It also includes wetlands in degraded watersheds where wetland functions are especially critical for water quality, water storage, and erosion control.

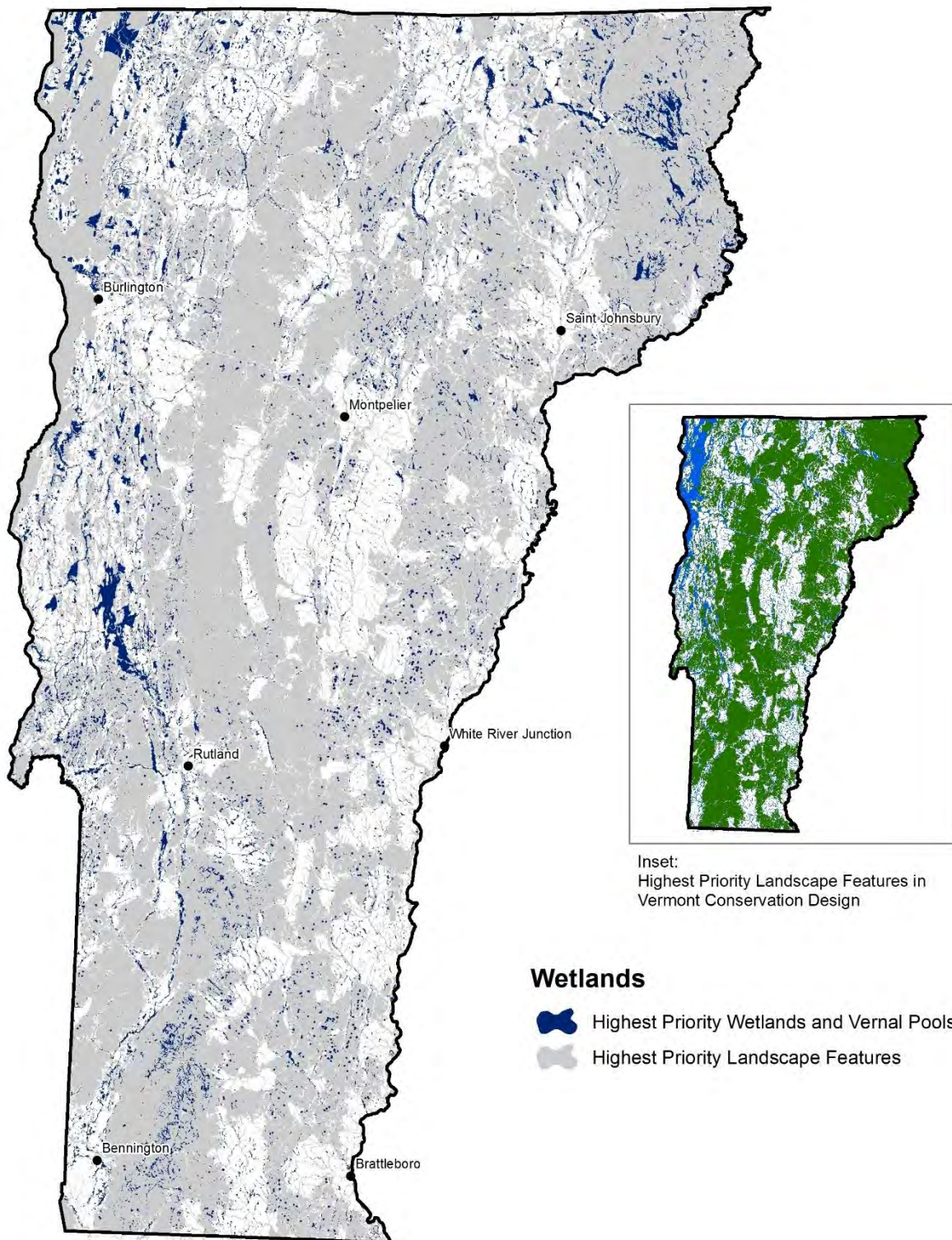
Wetland functions can be conserved by maintaining or restoring natural ecological conditions, including unaltered soils and hydrology, native vegetation appropriate to the site, and suitable conditions for native fish and wildlife species. Conservation should account for appropriate upland buffer zones, the ecological processes that support wetlands (especially



hydrology), and a network of connected lands, waters, and riparian areas to allow ecological exchange between wetlands. More than 35% of the original wetlands in Vermont have been lost to agriculture, development, and other land uses, so wetland restoration is needed to achieve full ecological function across the landscape. For vernal pools, special attention is needed to maintain or enhance conditions in and around the pool for pool-breeding obligate species. In addition to the guidelines above, maintain or restore a mostly closed forest canopy with native species, abundant coarse woody debris, and a lack of artificial barriers to salamander movement in the 650 feet of forest adjacent to the vernal pool.

For more information on wetlands, see the following sections in the Part 2 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Wetlands
- Vernal Pools



Map 9. Highest Priority Wetlands and Vernal Pools. Mapping represents the best current knowledge; additional highest priority wetlands and vernal pools exist that are not shown on the map.

Grasslands and Shrublands

Grasslands are dominated by non-invasive (but often non-native) grasses in agricultural settings. Shrublands are old fields and other upland areas characterized by at least 50% cover of native shrub species. (Wet shrublands, such as Alder Swamps, are included under natural communities and wetlands.) Grasslands and upland shrublands are managed habitats created by humans.

Ecological Functions

Grasslands and Shrublands support many wildlife species—particularly birds—that have become more abundant in Vermont since the start of widespread agriculture. In grasslands, these include bobolink, eastern meadowlark, and savannah sparrow. Shrubland species include American woodcock, brown thrasher, eastern towhee, blue-winged warbler, and eastern cottontail.

Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

Vermont Conservation Design identifies the need to maintain these habitats and their associated species as highest priority for an ecologically functional landscape. Specifically, a total of 7,500 acres, divided between the northern Champlain Valley/Champlain Hills, southern Champlain Valley, and the Lake

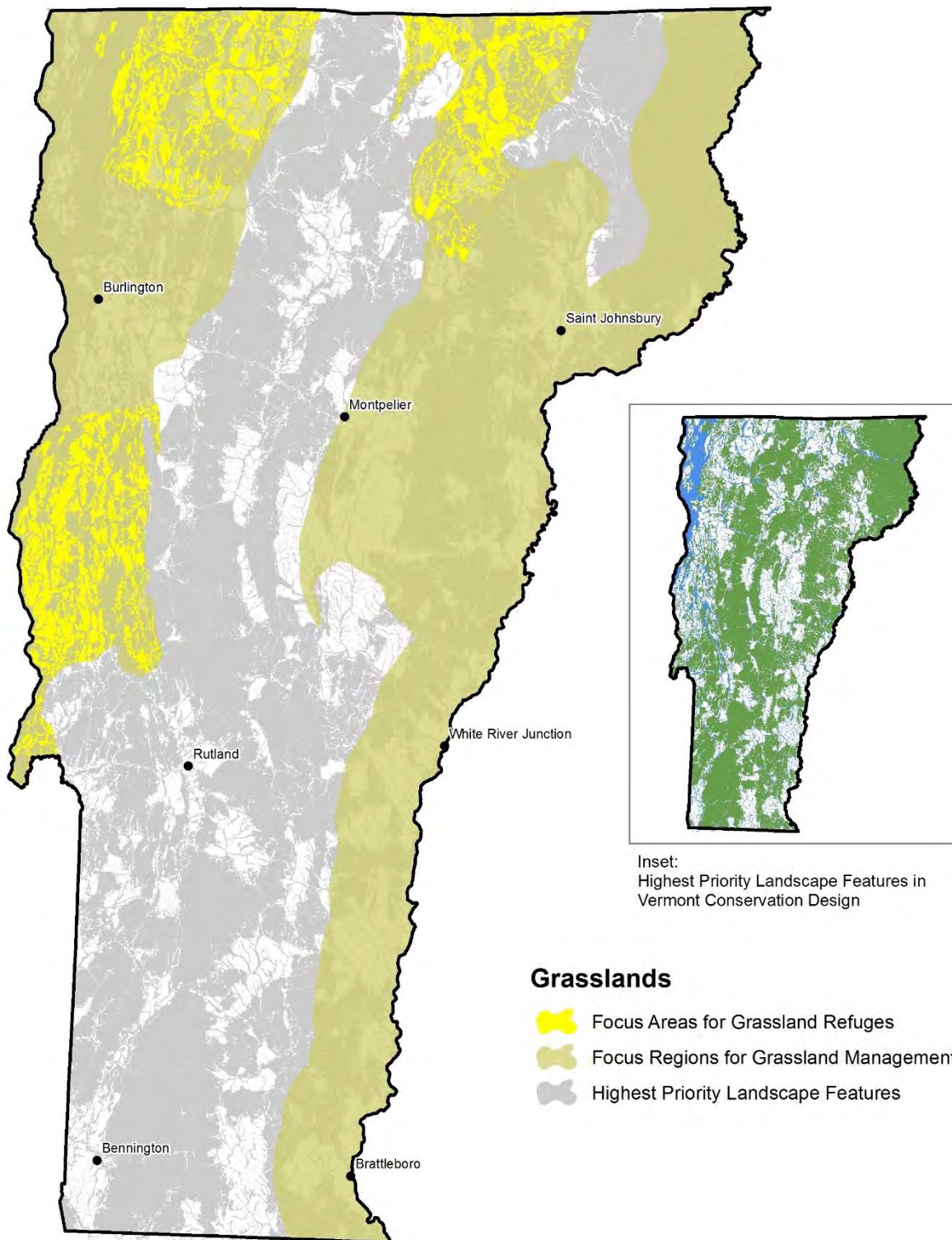


Memphremagog area, should be managed as “refuges” for grassland birds. In addition, bird-friendly practices should be promoted on active agricultural fields in the Champlain Valley, Champlain Hills, Northern Vermont Piedmont, and along the Connecticut River. Shrublands should be managed as a percentage of the undeveloped land in each biophysical region, with a target of 2-3% in the Champlain Valley and 0.5-1% in all other regions.

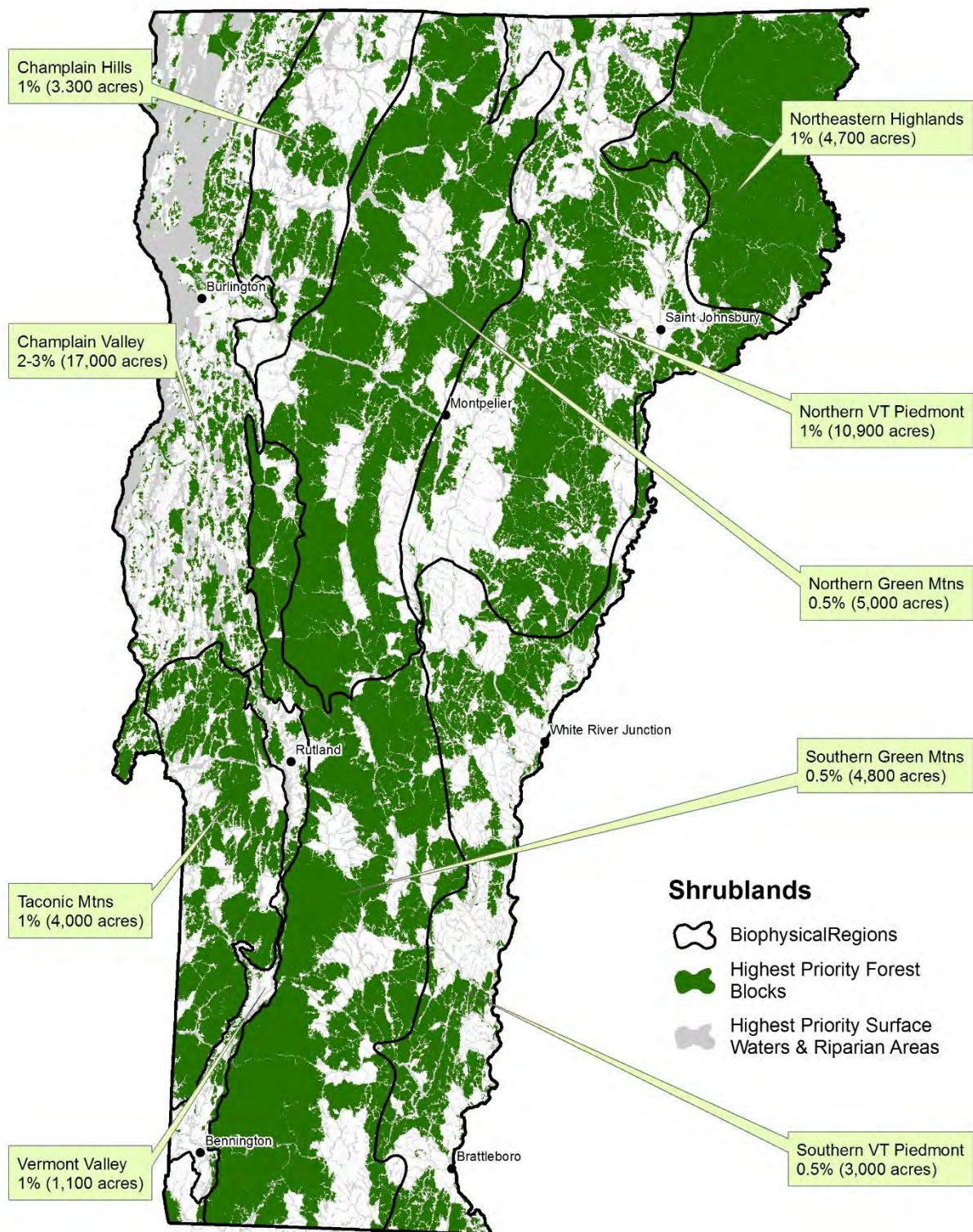
Grassland management must maintain quality grassland, while not destroying nests during the breeding season (May to early August). Mowing or other management should take place after August 1. Grassland patches should be larger than 25 acres. Patches that are blocky or circular have more interior area and support more birds. Mowing should incorporate best management practices for birds and reptiles. To avoid conflicts with other ecological functions, grasslands should be located outside of highest priority landscape features. Shrubland management (mowing, grazing, burning, etc.) should occur outside the growing season (preferably April-early May or October-November) to minimize mortality to foraging and nesting birds, reptiles, and insects. Disturbance should be regular enough to prevent trees from gaining dominance. To allow successful breeding of many shrubland birds, patches should be at least 5 acres and should be blocky or circular in shape to maximize interior area. Shrublands should be composed primarily of non-invasive vegetation.

For more information on grasslands and shrublands, see the following sections in the Part 2 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Grasslands – Refuges
- Grasslands – Managed Agricultural Lands
- Upland Shrub-Forb



Map 10. Focus areas within which the Highest Priority 7,500 acres of grassland refuge could be established. Specific grasslands cannot be mapped due to a lack of spatial information. To avoid conflicts with other ecological functions, grasslands should be managed outside of the highest priority landscape features.



Map 11: Highest Priority Shrubland acreages by biophysical region. Shrubland can be created and maintained both within and outside of the highest priority landscape features, as long as it avoids conflicting with other ecological functions.

Underground Habitats

Caves are a unique habitat with a consistent environment of temperature, relative humidity, and air flow. Abandoned mines can provide many of the same habitat qualities of natural caves.

Ecological Functions

There are six species of bats known to hibernate in Vermont caves and mines. Recent surveys indicate that caves may hold as few as 10 individual bats to over 70,000. Bats use these sites for hibernation, but also spend a disproportionate amount of the year in the area surrounding the cave (e.g., fall swarming). Interest and understanding in the invertebrate communities associated with caves is just beginning, and even less is known about native fungi and other life forms. The condition and biology of the subterranean aquatic habitats is poorly understood. At the national and global scale, it is well-documented that caves provide habitat for specialized invertebrates (Peck 1998). Caves are expected to function as a coarse filter for these species which are poorly understood. Although abandoned mines are not of natural origin, they augment the natural habitats available and are an additional coarse filter for bat species.



Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

Vermont Conservation Design identifies a set of 22 caves and 19 abandoned mines that are highest priority for maintaining ecological function. Ideally, this set of caves would represent the full range of bedrock type and cave formations found in the state, but currently there is insufficient information to fully assess this. Additional study may ultimately refine these targets.

Changes in structure and hydrology could greatly affect the habitat provided by subterranean areas. Subterranean areas should remain intact, with limited human alteration or influence from above-ground pollutants. Maintain natural processes in caves, including temperature regime, airflow, humidity, and hydrology; natural vegetation conditions above the cave footprint and a 50-meter buffer to moderate air and temperature conditions; and natural groundwater sources. For abandoned mines, maintain the conditions that support hibernating bats or other known obligate species. Recreational exploration of caves and mines can pose a threat to physical conditions and species. Within a 0.25-mile zone around the cave or mine entrance, maintain natural forest vegetation with a diversity of age classes, and abundant live or dead known or potential roost trees with cavities, cracks, crevices, and/or peeling bark.

For more information on underground habitats, see the following sections in the Part 2 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Caves
- Abandoned Mines

Caves and abandoned mines are not listed or mapped in this report in order to protect sensitive species and sites.

Species Conservation

Combined, the landscape, natural community, and habitat features identified in Vermont Conservation Design form the ecologically functional landscape. We are confident that these features, if appropriately conserved and managed to maintain their functions, will support the habitat needs of most of Vermont's native species. However, it is equally important to identify those species that will not be effectively conserved by this design. These species may need specific conservation and management actions to maintain viable populations in Vermont.

We tested the overall conservation design against a diverse list of more than 200 species. This list included common species, as well as rare and declining species of plants and animals that are Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in the Vermont Wildlife Action Plan. We determined which of these species are expected to be conserved in Vermont by the identified features, and which are expected to require fine-filter conservation attention. Through this analysis, we found that all of the common species assessed can be effectively conserved by Vermont Conservation Design, and approximately 50% of the SGCN. This analysis of the design's capacity to conserve many common species and SGCN demonstrates the efficacy of the selected features and supports our confidence that the targets presented here will effectively conserve many other species—including cryptic and poorly understood species. This analysis of Vermont Conservation Design and the species it effectively conserves is a significant result of the project and will help guide our efficient conservation work—it is included in the Part 2 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report.

We plan to expand this analysis in collaboration with experts on specific taxonomic groups to include more common species, more SGCN, and all rare plants and animals. To be most effective, this analysis will need to be an iterative process, with periodic reassessment of species as environmental conditions and risk factors change. The results of these analyses will provide a strong framework for focusing

Vermont's species-level conservation and management work.



There will always be certain species that need attention. For example, spiny softshell turtles are extremely rare in Vermont and threatened by nest predation. Other species, such as some wildlife game species, have legal and social, as well as biological, considerations.

Species have come and gone from Vermont over the past millennia. We expect this shifting to intensify with current climate change. Northern species will likely shift out of Vermont, and southern species will likely become more abundant. These changes are part of nature's resiliency, and the ecologically functional landscape facilitates them. As these changes take place, however, we may face difficult choices. Should we attempt to keep in Vermont a species at the southern edge of its range, such as spruce grouse, knowing that its suitable climate is retreating northward? Should we embrace the movement of southern species, like tulip tree, into the state? Vermont Conservation Design cannot fully answer these questions, but it provides a framework to maximize our options into the future.

Putting it All Together: The Ecologically Functional Landscape

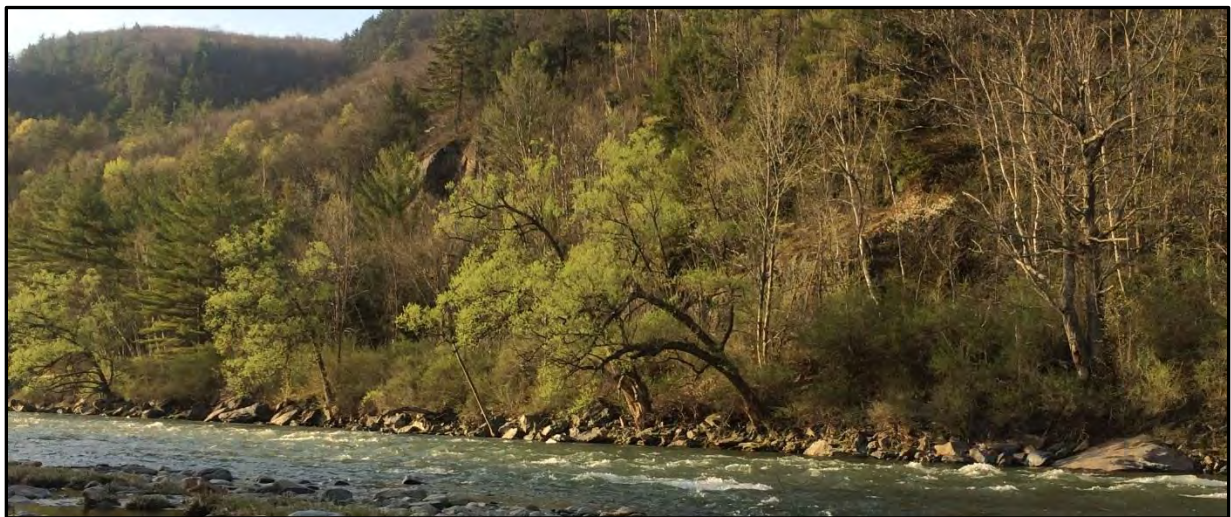
Maintaining or enhancing an ecologically functional landscape in Vermont depends on conservation of all the features described in this report: Interior Forest Blocks; Connectivity Blocks; Surface Waters and Riparian Areas; Physical Landscapes; Natural Communities; Young and Old Forests; Aquatic Habitats; Wetlands; Grassland and Shrublands; and Undergrounds Habitats. It is the specific functions of each of these features, and the complementarity of these features functioning together at multiple scales, that are critical for long term conservation of much of Vermont’s biological diversity and natural heritage.

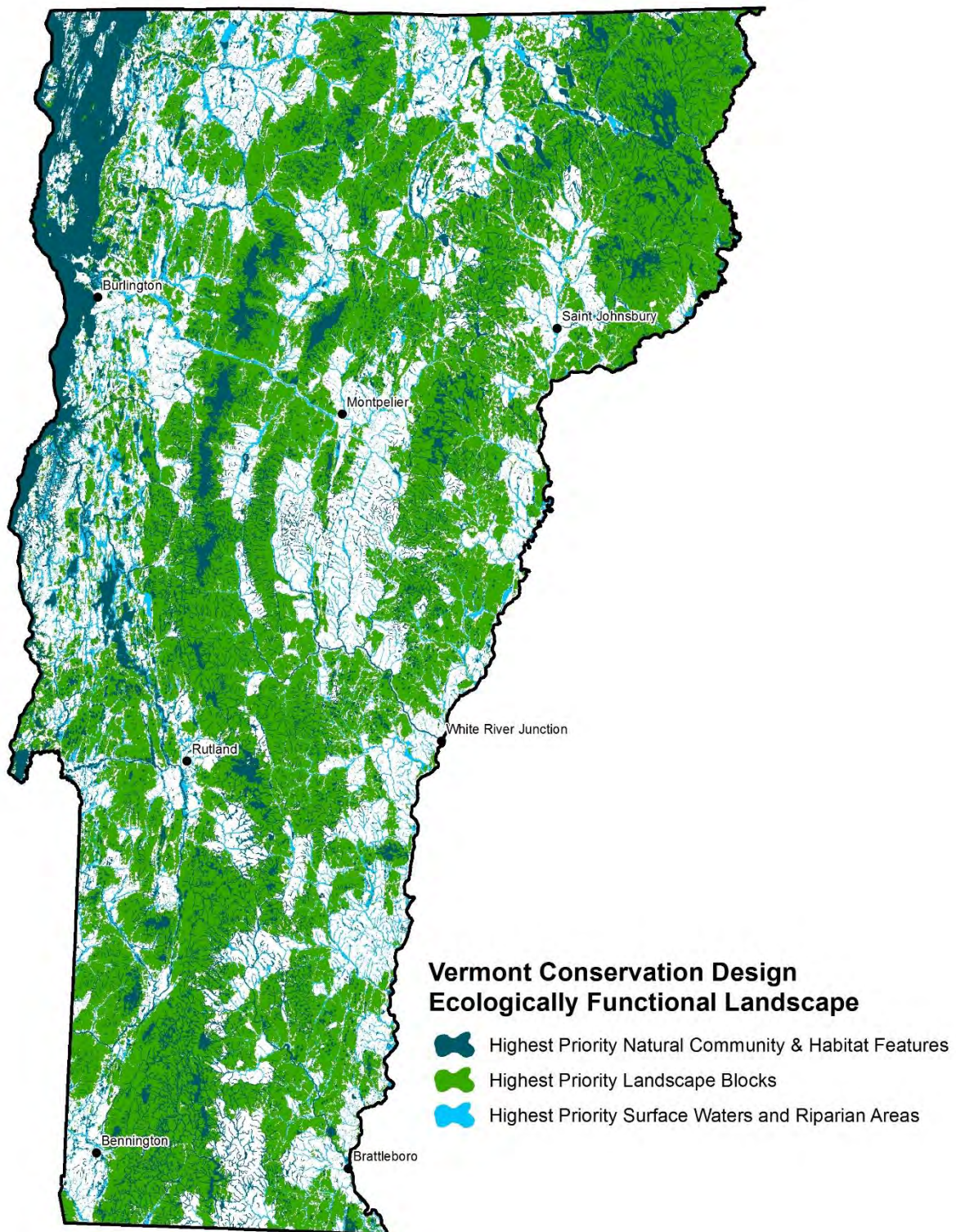
The following map shows the ecologically functional landscape conservation design, with all the highest priority landscape features and all the mapped natural community and habitat features included.

Vermont Conservation Design can maintain our valued natural landscape and the benefits it provides. The landscape it envisions sustains environmental services, like clean air and water, crop pollination, carbon sequestration, and flood protection. It provides resilience to climate change, allowing species and natural communities to rearrange themselves so that all these benefits continue into the future. It supports numerous social and economic values, including our outdoor traditions and outdoor recreation opportunities, the forest products economy, and the landscape that draws people to Vermont. It supports nature—for its intrinsic values, and our enjoyment and use.

It is our hope that this information will inform land management, local planning and development, and land conservation decisions throughout Vermont. We hope that private landowners, municipalities, state agencies, and conservation organizations will use this information as we all work together for a vibrant and healthy Vermont.

Vermont Conservation Design is a science-based vision for the future of Vermont’s natural areas, forests, waters, and wildlife. It can guide us to the long-term conservation of the state’s iconic landscape. Expansive forests, clean water, and abundant fish and wildlife can be our legacy.





Map 12: The Ecologically Functional Landscape of Vermont Conservation Design. Note that all three of the highest priority feature types shown on this map can overlap.

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