

INTRODUCTION

Northwest Regional Planning Commission

The Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) was created and is governed by the municipalities of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties in northwestern Vermont. The commission was first formed in 1966 by the acts of Franklin County municipalities; Grand Isle County municipalities joined in 1973. Until 1995, NRPC was known as the Franklin-Grand Isle Regional Planning and Development Commission.

Since its inception, NRPC has been governed by appointed representatives from each of its member municipalities. The commission exists to serve the needs of its member communities and to advocate for responsible, sustainable development within the region. NRPC helps to identify and implement goals and opportunities shared by municipalities and related organizations within the region and the state.

Because of the depth and complexity of issues facing municipalities and the region, the work of NRPC continues to be crucial. Local action is needed to implement state goals in areas such as housing, economic development, climate resiliency, and water quality. NRPC provides services to support local capacity, education and training, and project implementation. Additionally, regional collaboration can be an effective and efficient way to address broad challenges.

In 2019 NRPC formed a supporting non-profit corporation, the Northwest Vermont Regional Foundation Inc. The purpose of the corporation is to support NRPC’s efforts to promote the health, safety and welfare of the inhabitants of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties in Vermont by implementing its regional plan in support of a superior quality of life, a vibrant economy, a clean environment, excellent public health, and sustainable growth and development. The corporation is governed by a Board made up of NRPC Executive Committee members and up to three at-large members. It is used to take advantage of funding and partnership opportunities that would not be available to NRPC as a governmental organization.

The authority granted to NRPC to provide these services is enabled under state law and further defined by its Board of Commissioners. NRPC is permitted to receive and expend monies from any source, including funds made available by participating municipalities and by the state through annual appropriations and/or contract agreements. NRPC has no taxing or regulatory authority.

Northwest Region Municipalities

<u>Franklin County</u>	St. Albans City
Bakersfield	St. Albans Town
Berkshire	Sheldon
Enosburg Falls	Swanton Town
Enosburgh	Swanton Village
Fairfax	
Fairfield	<u>Grand Isle County</u>
Fletcher	Alburgh Town
Franklin	Alburgh Village
Georgia	Grand Isle
Highgate	Isle La Motte
Montgomery	North Hero
Richford	South Hero

The Region

The “region” may be defined for planning purposes as “communities of shared interests, resources and landmarks working toward common goals.”

~NRPC Board of Commissioners

The region’s citizens have a strong tradition of local planning and community development. Communities consider the needs of adjoining neighborhoods and the region as a whole, and they work together to ensure long-term economic, social, and environmental factors are balanced in the planning and decision-making process. This balance will ensure the region’s continued growth and well-being by promoting a healthy and sustainable quality of life.

Grounded in Vermont law and good common sense, the purposes of the Northwest Regional Plan are multifold. It is intended for use as a guide for decision makers, as a vision for the region, and as an eight-year action plan to address issues of regional importance.

This plan replaces the last comprehensive regional plan, which was adopted in 2023 and amended in 2024 to update the enhanced energy plan. NRPC’s first regional plan was adopted for Franklin County in 1969, amended to include Grand Isle County in 1973, and subsequently amended and readopted in 2007.

The Northwest Regional Plan addresses the economic, social, and environmental factors that influence and sustain growth and development in the region. This plan has been prepared under the direction of NRPC’s Board of Commissioners and the Plan and Policy Committee. Key additions in this plan update include a new Regional Future Land Use Map to conform to 24 V.S.A. § 4348a, new regional housing targets, and an analysis of environmental benefits and burdens.

REGIONAL PROFILE

The future is founded on the past; in order to plan for our region’s future over the next 10 to 20 years, we need to consider where we’ve been and take stock of where we are. The following section provides a listing of key demographic information and a brief description of the Northwest region, including its broader regional context.

The Northwest region of Vermont is defined by the 23 municipalities (19 towns, three incorporated villages, and St. Albans City) that make up Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, which are located in northwestern Vermont. The region is bordered by the province of Quebec to the north, New York State to the west, Chittenden and Lamoille Counties to the south and east, and Orleans County to the east. The city of Burlington, which is located 24 miles south of St. Albans, is the nearest metropolitan area. Plattsburgh, New York, is easily reached by ferry from Grand Isle or by crossing the bridge at Rouses Point, and the port of Montreal is less than a two-hour drive (70 miles) to the north of St. Albans.

Northwest Region Municipal and Population Numbers

Largest Municipality: Fairfield, 67.8 square miles
Smallest Municipality: St. Albans City, 2 square miles
Largest Population: St. Albans Town, 6,988
Smallest Population: Isle La Motte, 488

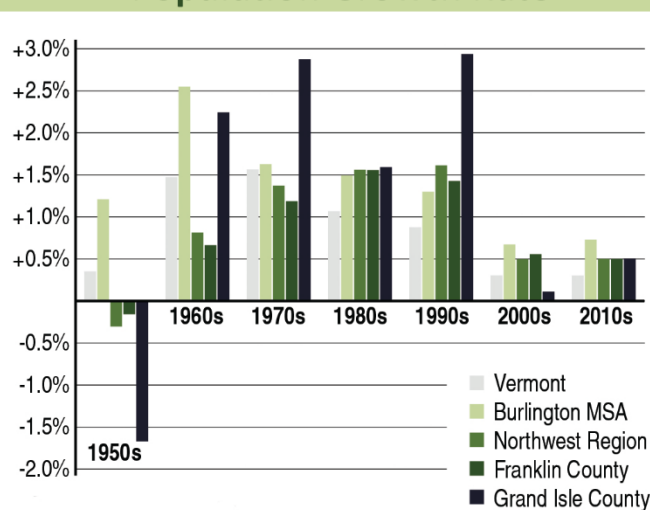
Geographically, the region spans the 45th parallel and is located wholly within the Lake Champlain drainage basin—extending from the height of the northern Green Mountains westward to the shores of Lake Champlain. It includes roughly 7.8% of the state’s total land area (720 square miles); however, its total area, which includes much of northern Lake Champlain, is significantly larger (887 square miles).

Past geologic events have shaped the region’s topography, soils, and drainage patterns. This, in turn, has influenced patterns of regional development. The region is divided into three distinct physiographic regions: the Champlain Lowlands, the Foothills, and the Green Mountains. The Champlain Lowlands, which include both the Champlain Valley and the Champlain Islands, have been heavily shaped by the flow of water and movement of glaciers over thousands of years. The result is an area that now supports some of the state’s largest and most productive farms. The local topography of the Champlain Valley is also well suited to development—unlike the Champlain Islands, a large percentage of which is covered by prime agricultural soils, wetlands, and soils with limited suitability for septic systems.

People and Community

Franklin and Grand Isle Counties are demographically and socio-economically similar to other rural Vermont counties, but are experiencing a growth “spillover effect” due to their proximity and ease of access to Chittenden County. For example, the total population of Vermont grew by 2.8% between 2010 and 2020, while the total population of Chittenden County grew by 7.5% — and the two-county region’s population grew by 4.6%, an annual growth rate of less than 0.5%. This rate of growth is in contrast to the high population growth of the late twentieth century, when the region’s population grew three times faster, and Grand Isle County grew by almost 3% per year. There were 57,239 residents living in the two-county region in 2020. That was 2,523 more people than were counted in 2010.

FIGURE 1: Average Annual Population Growth Rate



SOURCE: Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau

Population change across the two-county region during the past 20 years has been uneven. Overall, the region has been experiencing slow to no growth — averaging 0.5% annually between 2000 and 2020. St. Albans Town and Fairfax were the fastest growing communities, accounting for 64% of the region’s 20-year population increase. Together, those two communities averaged 1.5% growth annually between 2000 and 2020.

The population of St. Albans City declined by 10% between 2000 and 2020, although the timing and methods of the Census may have resulted in an under-counting of residents. Isle La Motte and South Hero also experienced a small decline in the number of residents. Twelve of the 23 municipalities in the region saw their population increase by fewer than 200 people during the past 20 years.

Overall, the population of the two-county region is aging. The baby boomer generation continues to represent the largest share of region residents. The region, like the state as a whole, has fewer children and more people of retirement age than it did 20 years ago. The median age was estimated to be 40.5 years in Franklin County and 48.7 years in Grand Isle County in 2020. All municipalities in the region saw the median age of residents increase between 2000 and 2020. (American Community Survey)

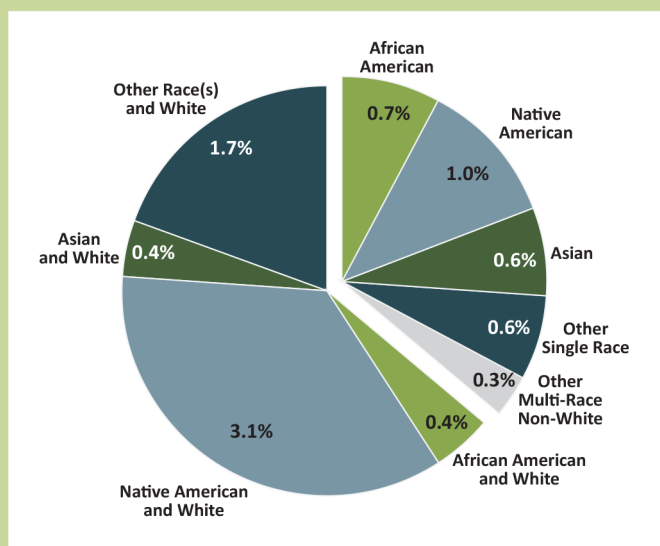
TABLE 1: Population Change 2000 - 2020

	POPULATION			% CHANGE	
	2000	2010	2020	2000 - 2010	2010 - 2020
FRANKLIN COUNTY	45,417	47,746	49,946	5.1%	4.6%
Bakersfield	1,215	1,322	1,273	8.8%	-3.7%
Berkshire	1,388	1,692	1,454	21.9%	-8.6%
Enosburg Falls	[1,473]	[1,329]	[1,356]	-9.8%	2.0%
Enosburgh	2,788	2,781	2,810	-0.3%	1%
Fairfax	3,527	4,285	5,014	21.5%	17%
Fairfield	1,800	1,891	2,044	5.1%	8.1%
Fletcher	1,179	1,277	1,346	8.3%	5.4%
Franklin	1,268	1,405	1,363	10.8%	-3%
Georgia	4,375	4,515	4,845	3.2%	7.3%
Highgate	3,397	3,535	3,472	4.1%	-1.8%
Montgomery	992	1,201	1,184	21.1%	-1.4%
Richford	2,321	2,308	2,346	-0.6%	1.6%
St. Albans City	7,650	6,918	6,877	-9.6%	-0.6%
St. Albans Town	5,324	5,999	6,988	12.7%	16.5%
Sheldon	1,990	2,190	2,136	10.1%	-2.5%
Swanton Town	6,203	6,427	6,701	3.6%	4.3%
Swanton Village	[2,548]	[2,386]	[2,328]	-6.4%	-2.4%
GRAND ISLE COUNTY	6,901	6,970	7,293	1.0%	4.6%
Alburgh Town	1,952	1,998	2,106	2.4%	5.4%
Alburgh Village	[488]	[497]	[593]	1.8%	19.3%
Grand Isle	1,955	2,067	2,086	5.7%	0.9%
Isle La Motte	488	471	488	-3.5%	3.6%
North Hero	810	803	939	-0.9%	16.9%
South Hero	1,696	1,631	1,674	-3.8%	2.6%
VERMONT	608,827	625,741	643,077	2.8%	2.8%

SOURCE: U.S. Census: 2000, 2010, 2020. [= subset population.]

While the population of the two-county region remains overwhelmingly white, there is some evidence that racial and ethnic diversification is occurring. The percentage of residents reporting as nonwhite (alone) in the region increased from 4.4% in 2000 to 8.7% in 2020. The 3,117 person increase in the nonwhite (alone) population represented 63% of the region's population growth between 2000 and 2020. The region's Hispanic or Latino population has tripled. The largest group of multi-racial residents identified as Native American and white. In 2020, there were 2,436 residents who identified as Native American either solely or in combination with another race, accounting for 73% of the nonwhite (alone) population. Larger concentrations of Native

**FIGURE 2:
Percent of Regional Residents
Non-White - 2020**



SOURCE: 2020 Census, U.S. Census Bureau

American residents are found in Swanton, St. Albans City, Highgate, and St. Albans Town. There were 941 residents who identified as white and “some other race” on the 2020 census. St. Albans City is the most diverse municipality in the region, with residents who identify their race or ethnicity as something other than white (alone) accounting for more than 13% of the population in 2020. All statistics are from the 2020 U.S. Census.

The Census Bureau estimates that nearly 13% of region residents have a disability (±7,000 residents), which is defined as a serious difficulty with hearing, vision, cognition, and mobility. That percentage is significantly higher for older residents. Data suggests that around half of residents age 75 or older have a disability. Ambulatory difficulties are the most common type of disability, affecting about 6% of the region’s total population. It was not possible to identify any trends with regards to changes in the number and characteristics of residents living with a disability due to

the limited availability of data for the two-county region. Additionally, the relatively small sample size of people with a disability reduces the reliability of data for the two-county region.

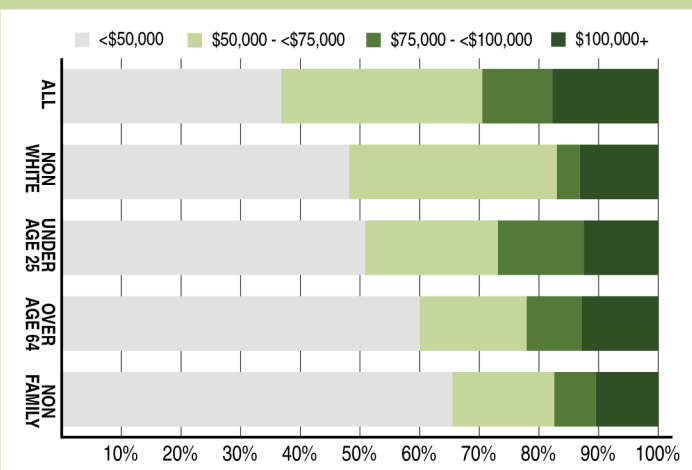
Income and Affordability

In 2020, the Census Bureau estimated that median household income in Franklin County was \$65,314 and in Grand Isle County was \$81,667. Median household income in Franklin County increased 4.5% above the rate of inflation between 2000 and 2020. The data shows much larger gains in Grand Isle County with a jump of 26.5% over the 20-year period.

The increase in household income was not evenly distributed across households of different types and characteristics. Family households saw their median income grow significantly more than non-family households. The median income of single-person households in 2020 was less than 50% of the median for multi-person households. Households headed by someone nonwhite, younger, or older were disproportionately represented in the region’s lower income groups.

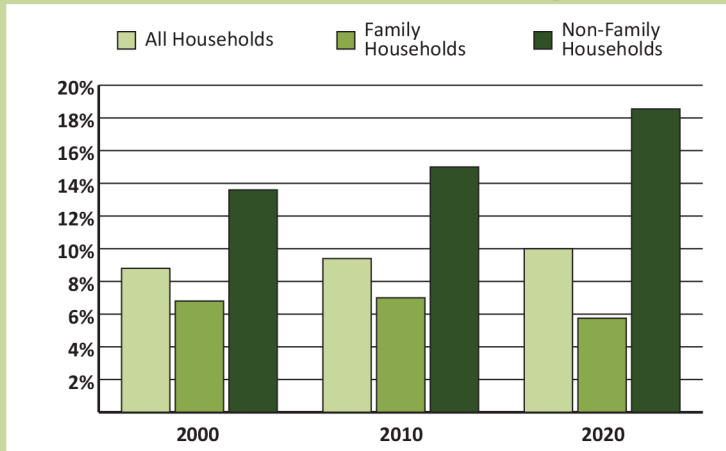
The Vermont Department of Taxes reported income statistics for 2020 that were similar to the median

**FIGURE 3:
Household Income - 2020**



SOURCE: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

**FIGURE 4:
Households in Poverty**



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

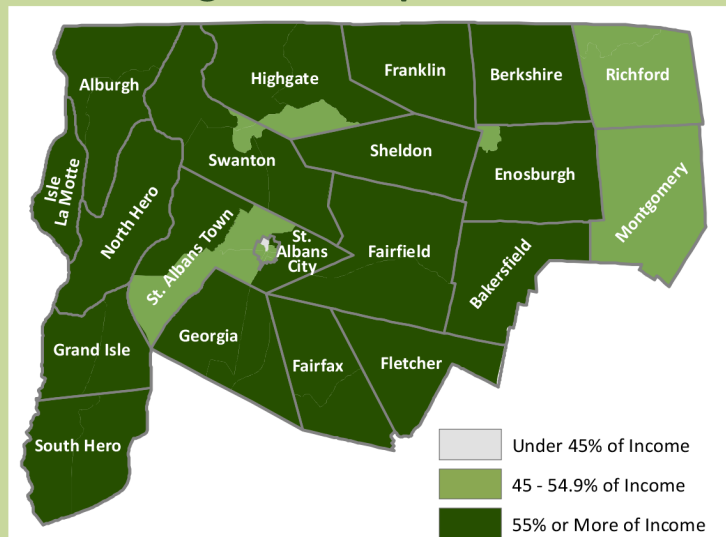
household income estimated by the Census Bureau for the two counties. The tax data provides a more accurate representation of income level at the town level. It shows that the average adjusted gross income per return varies widely across the region—from a low of \$42,769 in Richford to a high of \$109,415 in South Hero.

The Census Bureau estimated that 10% of the region’s households had an income below the poverty line in 2020. Both the total number of households below the poverty line and the poverty rate inched upwards between 2000 and 2020.

The increase in households below the poverty line is entirely attributable to nonfamily households (such as those with roommates). A non-family household in the two-county region is nearly three times as likely to have an income below the poverty line as a family household. Given that most of the region’s household growth is in nonfamily households, the income and poverty disparity between family and nonfamily households is a worrying trend.

NRPC has identified areas in the region that have less access to employment and education due to high transportation costs or high combined housing/transportation costs (Map 2). These areas have a higher concentration of households with lower incomes, a higher percentage of those living under the poverty line, and a measurable achievement gap between students of higher incomes and lower incomes.

**MAP 2:
Housing and Transportation Costs**



When considering the true costs of housing, the costs of transportation associated with living in a home must be considered. For example, consider a household of three people (with only one commuter) and a moderate household income of \$49,282. There are few places in the region where the housing and transportation costs total less than 55% of income. In addition, there is only one census block in the region where transportation costs are below the recommended rate of 45% of income. Therefore, when factoring in the true cost of house location, there is only one area of St. Albans City where combined housing and transportation costs total less than 45% of income in this example.

SOURCE: The Housing and Transportation (H+T®) Affordability Index 2020 (<https://htaindex.cnt.org/>)

EQUITABLE PLANNING

In 2024, the Vermont Legislature added the 15th state planning goal: to equitably distribute environmental benefits and burdens as described in 3 V.S.A. chapter 72. Under the updated law, regional planning commissions are required to

consider potential environmental benefits and burdens of the Regional Plan. (24 V.S.A. §4348a). NRPC first broadened its consideration of equity in its planning and implementation work in 2021. NRPC contracted with a consultant to:

- Improve the ability to respond effectively and respectfully to complex social, economic, and political issues that impact the community;
- Improve the decision-making processes to ensure that decisions are fair and balanced; and
- Create and support the development of a more inclusive workspace and external community culture.

Early in 2022, the NRPC Board of Commissioners adopted a statement of inclusion to help guide our work. This statement was modified from the Municipal Declaration of Inclusion, which was first adopted in Vermont by the town of Franklin. The NRPC Board of Commissioners has identified ways to implement the statement of inclusion and tasked each of its committees to identify how to consider equity and inclusion in their work. A summary of those discussions is shown in Table 2. These themes and ideas have been incorporated into this plan and will be considered further in the implementation of this plan.

TABLE 2: Statement of Inclusion - Action Steps

Board of Commissioners, Transportation Advisory Committee, Brownfields Steering Committee, Healthy Roots Advisory Committee, Basin Water Quality Councils

Considering inclusion and equity: How does the statement impact your work?

- Supports our work in general and provides overall guidance.
- Prioritization and project selection (water, transportation, brownfields) should include consideration of equity and environmental justice.
- Ensure equitable distribution of projects and identify ways to ensure benefits accrue to those who were negatively impacted.
- Aligns with the Working Communities Challenge Housing for All's mission.
- Advocate for more equitable funding besides local match for bike/ped infrastructure and public transportation.
- Each committee could create a program/committee specific Diversity, Equity and Inclusion statement or strategic goals.

Changing our approach: What could NRPC do differently to make progress toward this ideal?

- Expand representation and access by adding diverse voices to committees and marketing programs to areas/people not currently served.
- Improve outreach and ensure meetings are accessible to all people.
- Include Indigenous voices and participation.
- Educate partners about the NRPC goals and how they can help.
- Improve prioritizing projects and programs by giving priority weight to projects that further these goals.
- Elect women to chair/vice chair positions.
- Make efforts to recognize past injustices and give credence to them. Displacement of Native peoples and their voices is part of understanding the history of our landscape.
- Look to organizations who have done a lot of this work and learn about their failures and successes.

The result: What justice, equity, diversity and inclusion goals or objectives should be considered for the regional plan?

- Access and outreach for all.
- Promotion of fair and affordable housing.
- Environmental justice.
- Food justice, food sovereignty, land access, creating more community gardens.
- Transportation options for the low-income, those in poverty and elderly.
- All residents and visitors in the Basin have access to clean drinking water and safe water-based recreational activities.

In 2025, NRPC conducted an evaluation of the environmental justice benefits and burdens of the plan and considered their equitable distribution. Based on the state definition, 19 types of environmental benefits or burdens that could be impacted by the Regional Plan were identified. Where data was available, these benefits and burdens were compared with areas identified as environmental justice focus population (based on US census block groups as defined under 3 V.S.A § 6002(3)). NRPC identified 6 disproportionate impacts (Table 3). The goals and policies of this Plan aim to mitigate these disproportionate burdens and repair existing inequities where possible.

A full review of environmental benefits and burdens can be found in Appendix III.

The goals and policies in this plan for transportation, economic development, and education address issues of equity and provide policy guidance. NRPC will continue to partner with regional organizations to ensure regional projects and programs support improved access to opportunity for all people in the region.

TABLE 3: Disproportionate Impacts

Environmental Benefit and Burden	Measure for Environmental Benefit/Burden	Goals and Policies to mitigate any disproportionate benefit/burden
Access to Healthy Air/ Air Pollution	% of residents living in areas where air pollution is among the worst 20% in the state. ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect against negative air quality impacts from development. Negative emissions impacts to historically disadvantaged communities are limited.
Access to Green Spaces/Limited Access to Green Spaces	% of land publicly conserved ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase access to recreational lands for all residents, including specifically addressing financial barriers and equity.
Climate Change Impacts	% of people in areas with a significantly higher-than-average risk of property damage from disasters ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus disaster resilience efforts on frontline underserved communities.
Increased flooding or stormwater flows	% increase in land that is at risk for flooding if extreme floods become more common ⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow for development in flood hazard areas in growth areas only, and only if that development does not make flooding worse.
Erosion Risk	% of land with very steep slopes ⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mitigate potential erosion risks for all new development on steep slopes.
Water pollution	Miles of impaired streams/rivers per 1000 acres ⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies reduce risk to water quality impairment. Maintain and improve quality of surface waters, including ensuring mitigation of the impacts of new development.

¹ % of population with >80th percentile PM2.5 concentration in their census tract (EJ Screen, 2024)

² % of land area publicly conserved (VT Conserved Lands Database, 2025)

³ % of population that's in an area >75th percentile nationwide for building loss (Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, 2024)

⁴ % increase in floodplain land acres from 100-year to 500-year (FEMA 100-year Floodplain, UVM LIDAR 500-year Floodplain)

⁵ Acres of >15% slope per total land (USGS Slope Data)

⁶ Miles of impaired streams/rivers per 1000 acres (303(d) map in Tactical Basin Plans)

Defining Environmental Benefits and Burdens (3 V.S.A. § 6002)

Environmental Benefits: The assets and services that enhance the capability of communities and individuals to function and flourish in society.

Environmental Burdens: Any significant impact to clean air, water, and land, including any destruction, damage, or impairment of natural resources resulting from intentional or reasonably foreseeable causes.

Environmental Justice Focus Population: Any Census Block Group in which

- A. The annual median income household income is not more than 80 percent of the state median household income;
- B. Persons of Color and Indigenous Peoples comprise at least six percent or more of the population; or*
- C. “Limited English proficiency” means that a household does not have a member 14 years or older who speaks English “very well” as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

** Under the state definition, 93% of regional Census Block groups would be considered environmental justice focus populations. Therefore, to analyze disproportionate impacts at the regional scale, this plan defines Census Block Groups of more than 10% Persons of Color and Indigenous Peoples as an environmental justice focus population.*

Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Communities

It is important for NRPC to understand areas of vulnerability within the region so that planning efforts can keep overburdened areas from becoming even more so and can strategically prioritize efforts that positively affect some populations more. In addition to the environmental justice focus populations, several mapping and analytical tools have been developed by state and federal agencies that aim to identify areas of vulnerability and weakness in communities. Vulnerable communities are understood to be those that are less able to respond to the impacts of a certain hardship—this could be exposure to chemical contaminants, limited access to housing, health care or food, or responding to higher temperatures. As a result, they become disproportionately burdened when crises occur. NRPC has reviewed and aggregated information from the following tools:

- The Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (2023)¹
- The Environmental Justice Mapper (2023)²
- The Vermont Department of Health’s Social Vulnerability Index and Heat Illness Vulnerability Index

These mapping tools pull data from sources like the Census Bureau, the American Community Survey, and the National Emissions Inventory, among others.

Incomplete census data can lead to high standard errors on any one indicator, but used together these tools can show a pattern of information that indicates areas in the region that may need specialized planning assistance and additional priority consideration for projects and programs.

Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool: Two census tracts in the Northwest region have been highlighted as disadvantaged in this analysis, by meeting the associated socioeconomic thresholds.

¹ Originally developed by the federal Council on Environmental Quality, removed from agency website January 2025. Plan data is from 2023.

² Originally developed by the Environmental Protection Agency, removed from agency website January 2025. Plan data is from 2023.

- Richford and Montgomery have been identified as disadvantaged in areas of energy, health, and transportation. Specifically, energy costs, asthma rates, and transportation costs are all in the top 10% nationwide.
- The western half of St. Albans City has also been identified as disadvantaged in three areas: health, housing, and water and wastewater. This part of the city ranks in the lowest 10% nationwide for low life expectancy, and leaking underground storage tanks within 1,500 feet of homes.

Social Vulnerability Index: In this tool, indicators that are over the 90th percentile statewide are flagged, indicating higher vulnerability when considering community health. It should be noted that some of the data from the Northwest region have high relative standard errors, meaning the results may not be as accurate as desired. The following communities were above the 90th percentile for the areas noted:

- *Highgate* – people with no high school diploma
- *Franklin, Sheldon, Fairfax, Fletcher, and Georgia* – population of children under 18
- *Berkshire and Enosburgh* – population under 18 and minority population
- *Fairfield and Bakersfield* – people with limited English proficiency
- *St. Albans Town* – people who are unemployed
- *St. Albans City* – percentage of single parents, and in the western part of the city, people with disabilities, people in poverty, and households with no vehicle available
- *Richford and Montgomery* – people who are unemployed, per capita income, and people with no high school diploma

Heat Illness Vulnerability Index: The Heat Illness Vulnerability Index is a composite of six indicators. In the Northwest region, the index identifies St. Albans Town and St. Albans City as more vulnerable overall to heat illness than the rest of the state.

Environmental Justice (EJ) Screen: The EJ Screen includes six environmental indicators that focus on air and air pollutants; four are areas of concern in the region. The particulate matter 2.5 and ozone indicators had the farthest ranging areas of concern for the region, with 11 census groups falling within the 90th to 100th percentile within the state. In Northwest Vermont, traffic proximity is only an issue in St. Albans, and similarly, the diesel particulate matter index indicated higher percentiles in St. Albans City and Swanton. Although there are no superfund sites in Northwest Vermont, the block groups surrounding St. Albans City, including ones in St. Albans Town and Swanton, are located near facilities that have highly toxic substances. St. Albans City is noted as an area with a high percentile for the environmental indicator of underground storage tanks (USTs) and leaking USTs.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Under 24 V.S.A §4345, NRPC is responsible for developing and carrying out a participation process that encourages and enables widespread citizen involvement and meaningful participation as defined in 3 V.S.A. §6002. Meaningful participation means that all individuals have the opportunity to participate in decision-making.

NRPC is required to hold informal working sessions with municipalities, local citizens, and organizations that allow for meaningful participation, provide information on the regional plan requirements and gather information to be used in the plan update.

NRPC developed and carried out a public participation plan to meet these requirements. NRPC directly engaged with regional residents and collaborated with municipal officials in all 23 regional municipalities. Key activities included:

- Developing and publicizing materials for the public and municipalities including a project website, newsletters, paper flyers posted across the region, social media postings, front porch forum updates and memorandums to municipalities.
- Holding 14 open houses across the region at businesses and community gatherings, engaging over 100 regional residents in conversations about the regional Future Land Use Map and housing targets.
- Developing an online survey and map comment tool available on NRPC's website
- Meeting with all municipal Planning Commissions and most Selectboards to present on the Future Land Use Map and housing targets.
- Providing information to each eligible municipality on Act 250 exemptions available through Tier 1A and Tier 1B status.
- Meeting with partner organizations across the region to receive feedback on plan policies and implementation.

Prior to the most recent update, NRPC completed an extensive community outreach effort centered around the "Formidable Four" barriers to economic success. The Formidable Four are transportation, housing, child care, and substance misuse. Reducing these barriers was the key focus of this community engagement. Through focus groups, a community survey, and public meetings, the Working Communities Challenge developed into the implementation project Housing for All, which supports the creation and improvement of housing for healthy, inclusive, and prosperous communities. NRPC also actively participated in the Community Needs Assessment completed by the Northwestern Medical Center. That effort also included extensive public engagement, including focus groups, community surveys, tabling events, and interviews. Key priorities identified in that effort are incorporated into this plan.

Meaningful Participation and Collaboration

Several aspects of NRPC's public participation process specifically addressed meaningful participation.

- 1) Outreach materials clearly identified what decisions can be impacted by public feedback and which are determined by state statute or municipal authority.
- 2) Outreach materials were written in plain English and designed to be understandable to those without planning knowledge.
- 3) NRPC held regional open houses at locations across the region where residents already are, such as local stores, farmer's markets and community events.
- 4) NRPC provided online open house sessions and opportunities to comment on the NRPC website.
- 5) Documentation of feedback and comments and how NRPC addressed this input.

Incorporating Community Ideas

NRPC received a range of feedback from municipal officials and residents on all sections of the plan. In many cases, this feedback led to changes in subsequent drafts of the plan. NRPC collaborated with municipalities on changes to the Regional Future Land Use Map. Where the feedback aligned with the statutory definitions of the future land use areas and the overall goals of the Regional Plan, NRPC made alterations to the Regional Future Land Use Map.

The section below highlights general comments that were received and considered in developing and revising regional plan policy and implementation program:

Infrastructure Needs



- Residents noted that lack of water and/or sewer infrastructure or capacity limits on existing systems could make developing additional housing in areas planned for growth challenging.
- Some of the areas where municipalities or residents would like to see development lack bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure necessary to map them as planned growth areas.

Housing Needs & Concern about Impacts of Housing Growth



- Some residents noted the need for additional housing, particularly housing that is affordable to regional workers.
- Some residents had concerns that new housing could alter the character of their neighborhoods and communities or could negatively impact the school system.
- Some residents were concerned that new housing would be used for short-term rental or seasonal uses, rather than year-round housing.

Rural Conservation Concerns



- Some residents had concerns that the Regional Plan would limit their ability to develop their land.
- Some residents wanted more land to be mapped as Rural Conservation or noted specific areas that are unsuitable for development.

PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION

The goals and policies for the region's future outlined in this plan set a clear direction for public policy decisions that impact our region's municipalities. This plan is a dynamic document that will change over time. The state requires this plan to be updated every eight years, but the commission will review this document regularly to determine how it fits with the changing needs of the region and to evaluate implementation. In addition, different chapters will be updated and modified regularly to improve the quality of information.

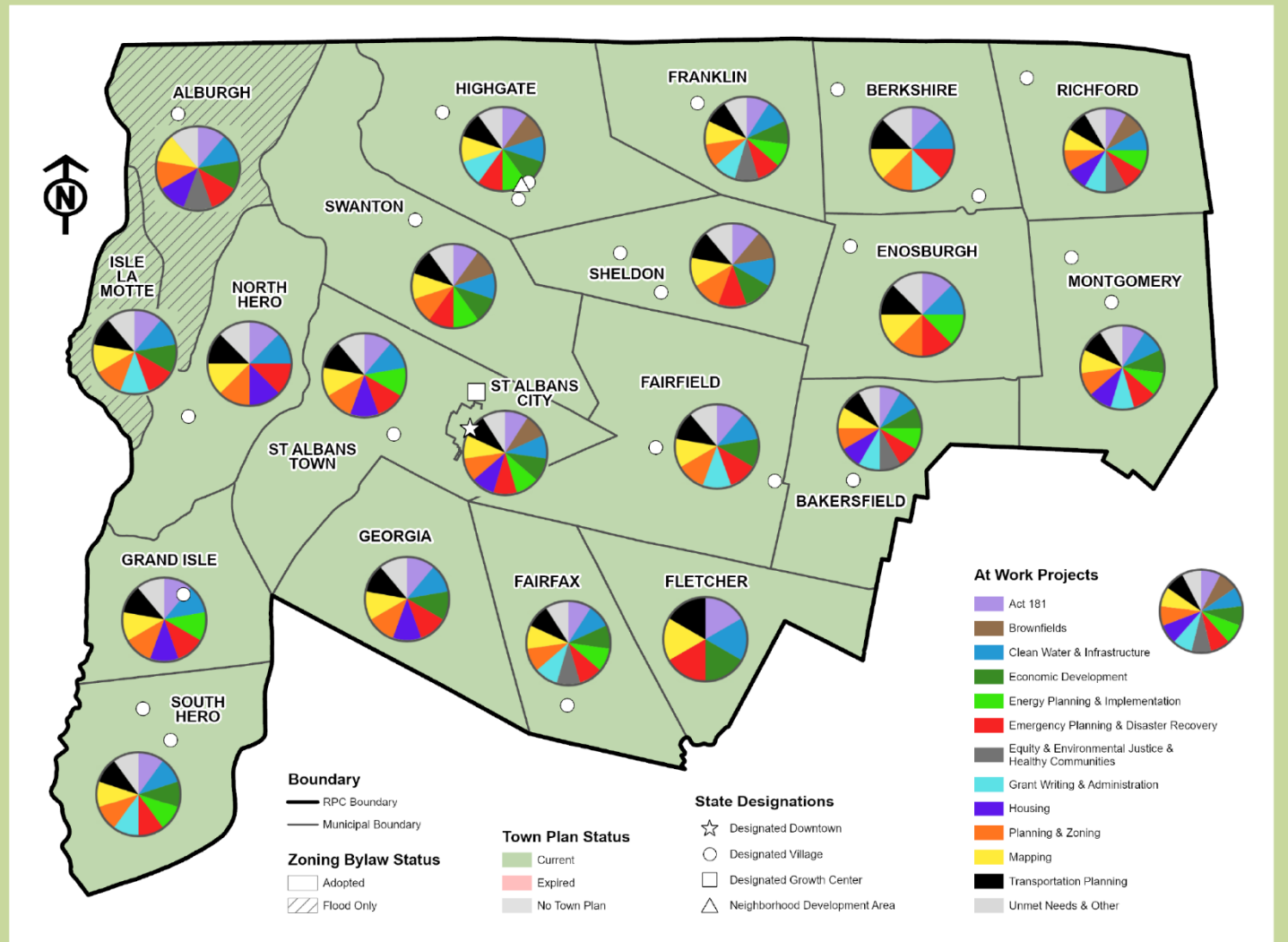
Implementing this plan is one of many activities undertaken by the regional commission within its statutory requirements. Doing so requires a collective effort by the many local, state, and federal governments as well as individuals, organizations, and private interests that serve the region. Ultimately, its success hinges on a desire of all the region's interests to work together for the improvement of the region. Implementation will be completed in the following ways:

1. **Governance and Shared Services:** NRPC will work with local stakeholders, municipal and state government and legislators to identify methods of increase cooperation and collaboration through additional regional governance models. One potential model, Councils of Government, was recommended by the National Association of Development Organizations in their 2024/25 evaluation of the regional planning commissions.
2. **Regional planning:** Through NRPC's annual work program and its ongoing activities, the commission will focus on projects and programs that implement this plan.
3. **Local planning:** Municipal plans, bylaws, capital budgets and programs, infrastructure development, and other implementation activities will support municipal plan goals and the goals of this plan. NRPC will support these efforts through technical assistance to our member municipalities.
4. **Coordination with regional and state entities:** The implementation of this plan will require coordination with regional organizations focusing on economic development, public health, education, solid waste, environmental quality, and public safety. State agencies and departments will also be key partners, including the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, and Department of Health.
5. **Public participation:** The commission recognizes that the citizens of the region have the most to gain from this plan. Input, ideas, opinions, concerns, and support from people in the region form the basis of this plan and will guide its implementation. NRPC adopted a Public Participation Policy in 2024, and is committed to ensuring meaningful participation for all regional residents.
6. **Development Review:** Project review is one component of NRPC's overall implementation strategy. During review of projects that fall under the requirements of Act 250 (the state's development control law) or Section 248 (30 V.S.A. §248, which regulates certificates of public good for new energy-related resources), NRPC will consider the goals and policies of this regional plan within the context of local guidelines. NRPC will report its opinion about whether the project conforms to the regional plan to permit officials. Development review by NRPC has many purposes. Project review can: enable implementation of the regional plan and support of the goals and policies; help support a project through the regulatory process; address concerns of a regional nature; and consider issues not addressed through the local review process. In completing any development review, NRPC will proceed according to its adopted project review policies, which encourage cooperation and compromise and consider the needs of local communities and the region.
7. **Annual work program:** In recent years, the range of activities conducted by NRPC has grown significantly. More requirements are being placed on municipal governments, and many programs require a regionally based approach to be both effective and efficient. In addition to its traditional regional and local land-use planning and coordination activities, NRPC now tackles projects related to watershed planning, energy conservation, housing, brownfields redevelopment, emergency planning, transportation planning, GIS mapping and analysis, and community and economic development, among others. NRPC's involvement in these myriad activities means that the commission's annual

work program will be one of the most effective tools available for implementing this plan. The breadth of NRPC’s work is demonstrated in Map 3.

8. **Measuring impact:** If the implementation program and the goals and policies in this plan are successful in realizing positive opportunities for the region, then we can expect that there will be measurable results. NRPC will develop key indicators for each of the areas of this plan. Based on our vision for the future, we will show whether the indicators should increase, decrease, or stay level in the future. The indicators will not be inclusive of all of the goals, policies, and actions in this plan; instead, the indicators will be representative measures of successful implementation. NRPC will seek public comment on the indicators and will report progress or changes at least annually.
9. **Implementation priorities:** In addition to the items listed above, the implementation table (Table 4) shows specific items already identified to assist in implementing this plan. This focuses on actions in which NRPC can take the lead, can support others, or can be part of a collaborative effort. NRPC will continue to prioritize additional actions as they are identified.

MAP 3: NRPC at Work



SOURCE: NRPC collected data

TABLE 4: Implementation - Part 1 of 2

ECONOMIC REGION - Economic Development, Infrastructure, Energy	Timeframe
1. Work cooperatively with other RPCs and RDCs to coordinate the Economic Development District serving the region and the other four northern counties.	ongoing
2. Partner with other organizations and employers to identify needed training and retraining opportunities.	ongoing
3. Perform a region-wide inventory of infrastructure and unused capacity and identify the additional infrastructure needed at local/regional/state level to support 2050 housing targets, businesses & communities.	short term
4. Work with RDCs and municipalities to identify future industrial areas or opportunity for expansion if sufficient need is determined.	short term
5. Assist municipalities with developing and adopting land use ordinances that facilitate energy conservation, encourage energy efficient construction and redevelopment to reduce energy consumption.	ongoing
6. Support municipalities in developing, updating and implementing local enhanced energy plans.	ongoing
7. Collaborate with stakeholders to implement the actions in the enhanced energy plan.	ongoing
SOCIAL REGION - Social Infrastructure, Housing, Community Health	Timeframe
1. Partner with municipalities to identify multi-jurisdictional and regional opportunities related to recreational programming and facilities and assist with a regional convening on recreation opportunities.	short term
2. Assist municipalities with municipal plan and bylaw language that helps meet housing targets through the development of multi-unit housing, affordable housing, inclusionary zoning, senior housing, mixed uses, and planned unit developments (PUD).	ongoing
3. Provide assistance to municipalities with bylaw language that provides for residential development that supports 2050 ongoing housing targets, with a focus on infill and compact development in areas planned for growth.	ongoing
4. Support the work of housing trusts that serve our region with mapping, grant applications and other assistance. Support development of projects that are in conformance with regional plan policies.	ongoing
5. Utilize lessons learned from the Accessory Dwelling Unit Pilot Project to help promote development of ADUs and identify recommendations for process changes to eliminate barriers.	short term
6. Provide assistance to municipalities on incorporating public health (mental health, physical health, substance abuse, etc.) into local plans.	ongoing
PHYSICAL REGION - Natural Resources	Timeframe
1. Through work as the Clean Water Service Provider provide technical assistance and funding to watershed groups and municipalities in the Missisquoi River and Lamoille River watersheds, and organize and convene Basin Water Quality Councils.	ongoing
2. Provide technical assistance to municipalities and undertake necessary regional actions to implement practices in the Lake Champlain TMDL, including FEH zoning, river corridors, or similar regulations.	ongoing
3. Work with communities to address conservation in local plans and bylaw by addressing forest blocks, productive forest soils, important water resources, wildlife habitat and connectivity, rare, threatened, and endangered species, significant natural areas and deer wintering areas.	ongoing
PHYSICAL REGION - Transportation	Timeframe
1. Serve on the Board of the transit organization serving the region, representing the interests of expanding transit through Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, with specific focus on the VT 105 corridor, unserved areas in Franklin County and service in Grand Isle.	ongoing

TABLE 4: Implementation - Part 2 of 2

2. Regularly convene a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) with representation from municipalities in the region to discuss and prioritize transportation issues that impact the region.	ongoing
3. Encourage VTrans to install a permanent variable message board on I-89 near Exit 17 to alert motorists of US 2 road closures in Grand Isle County.	short term
4. Host at least one workshop a year for municipal road crew on best management practices, new water quality regulations, grant opportunities and/or opportunities to share municipal resources.	yearly
5. Provide support to municipalities for park and ride development through coordination with Vermont Agency of Transportation, grant writing, feasibility analysis, with specific attention to southern Grand Isle County.	short term
6. Assist municipalities in the development of complete streets considering all modes of transportation, including bicycle trails, sidewalks, and public transit. Assistant might include grant writing, municipal project management, master planning, or other technical assistance as needed.	ongoing
7. Support communities with reliable and comprehensive bridge and culvert inventories. Complete field work for 3-5 municipalities each year and work with other communities on minor updates as needed.	ongoing
PHYSICAL REGION - Land Use and Physical Infrastructure	Timeframe
1. Educate and provide technical assistance to municipalities on developing land use regulations that support walkable, compact and dense housing and mixed-use development in areas planned for growth.	ongoing
2. Provide assistance and project management to municipalities and community groups interested in developing community water and wastewater systems in areas planned for growth or in areas where existing settlements may threaten water quality.	ongoing
3. Coordinate with staff at other Regional Planning Commissions across the state regarding regional land use planning and programming.	ongoing
4. Consult with municipalities on their planning program twice in the 8-year planning cycle, in accordance with State Statute.	ongoing
5. Provide at least 2 trainings to municipal officials on the Vermont planning and zoning laws, managing and administering yearly local planning and zoning, new legislation or other special topics each year.	yearly
6. Host a Zoning Administrator’s Roundtable twice annually to support networking and learning amongst the region’s zoning administrators.	yearly
PHYSICAL REGION - Disaster Resiliency	Timeframe
1. Develop and update FEMA approved and locally adopted Hazard Mitigation Plans that include Hazard Identification and Risk Assessments and mapped hazard areas such as landslide, 100 and 500 year flood plain sites, hazardous materials storage facilities and transportation routes for municipalities within the region.	short term
2. Provide technical training and education for communities on the National Flood Insurance Program, new NFIP maps, and river corridor protection and restoration to reduce the risk flood damage to infrastructure and improved property.	short term
3. Provide education and support to municipalities regarding funding opportunities to reduce damages through FEMA’s Mitigation programs for repetitive loss properties.	ongoing
4. Promote public awareness of emergency preparedness through promotion of flood readiness and public service announcements during disaster preparedness month.	yearly

Substantial Regional Impact

It is expected that in most instances the regional plan and local plan will be compatible. In cases where the plans are not compatible, the local plan will take precedence when the project benefits and/or negative impacts stay within the host municipality. However, when the project has the potential to benefit or negatively impact more than the host municipality, it is important to consider the regional context. To determine when a project may affect more than local interests, a threshold of substantial regional impact (Appendix I: Definitions) and a framework for considering the cumulative impacts of development over time was developed as part of this plan. Projects located in Planned Growth Areas may have regional impacts due to their role as the hubs for the regional economy and housing stock.

NRPC will review proposals according to regulatory guidelines, duly adopted municipal plans, and this regional plan. If a conflict exists between the regional plan and applicable municipal plans, NRPC shall proceed according to its adopted project review policies, which encourage cooperation and compromise, and consider the needs of local communities and the region.

Cumulative Impacts of Development

When determining whether a project has substantial regional impacts, the impacts caused by the project itself are considered. However, as the region experiences development of varying intensities and densities over time, impacts not evident on a project-to-project basis, but evident when considering the impacts of many projects in a limited geographic area together, can be revealed. Project review will consider cumulative impacts in centers, planned growth areas, village areas, transitional areas, and in any other area experiencing new development. Examples of undesirable cumulative impacts, which are currently noticeable in some areas of the region, include but are not limited to a failed intersection, a lack of pedestrian or public transit connections, a road of insufficient width for traffic, or a sewer and/or water system at capacity with no immediate plan for financing an expansion.

NRPC believes that new development should not be held solely responsible for such cumulative impacts, but that all contributors should share the cost of improvements. Project review will anticipate cumulative impacts in high growth areas, such as planned growth areas, and make recommendations for cost-sharing methods to ensure negative impacts are mitigated or improved.

Proper implementation of planning goals, and in particular master planning, can mitigate undesirable cumulative impacts. NRPC strongly recommends that communities work with public and private interests to complete effective comprehensive municipal plans and master plans for subregional and regional growth centers and growth expansion areas.

THE PLAN IN CONTEXT

When implementing this plan, it is important to review how the region fits within the context of our communities, neighboring regions, and the state as a whole. Also, it is important to note how this plan meets the legal requirements outlined in the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act (Title 24, Chapter 117).

Compatibility with Plans of Member Municipalities

The Northwest Regional Plan was prepared in consultation with representatives of member towns. NRPC staff reviewed the goals and policies contained in the regionally approved plans, as well as other plans in the region, to ensure the regional goals and policies were not in conflict. NRPC staff and commissioners appointed to the Regional Plan and Policy Committee wrote this plan, which was reviewed and voted on by the full commission after the required public hearings.

This regional plan reflects the local plans of our member municipalities. This plan strongly supports concentrating growth in areas served by existing infrastructure and in locales that have or adjoin areas with population densities clearly higher than the surrounding region. These growth areas were based on town plan maps and high-density districts when designated. Approved municipal plans within the region also support the concept of targeting the majority of growth into compact areas and avoiding widespread growth in more rural areas. Regionally approved municipal plans support the conservation of farmland and wildlife habitat—goals that are consistent with the regional plan.

Compatibility with Title 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117

This regional plan is consistent and compatible with the requirements outlined in the state’s land-use planning law, including 14 statutory goals related to growth, development, and conservation (Figure 5). These goals align with the principles described in the introduction to this plan. In addition to the goals discussed above, the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act requires regional planning commissions to follow certain guidelines in the construction of regional plans. The 11 elements that must be addressed in regional plans are included in this plan; community health and disaster resilience are not required elements in regional plans, but are included here because of their importance to the success of the region.



Compatibility with Plans of Adjoining Regions

The NRPC plan is considered compatible with other plans if it helps to make progress toward the goals and policies, or at least does not interfere with the goals and policies of that plan.

Chittenden County lies to the south of the Northwest region. The **Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC)** member towns of Colchester, Milton, and Westford are located on the southern border of the Northwest region. The CCRPC adopted its current Environment, Community, Opportunity, and Sustainability (ECOS) plan in 2018.

To the west, Lake Champlain acts as the border between the Grand Isle County towns of South Hero and Grand Isle and the Chittenden County towns of Colchester and Milton. The Colchester/South Hero Causeway, which is part of the Island Line Rail Trail, crosses the border of Colchester and South Hero and Route 2 (the primary access to Grand Isle County, known as the sandbar) and bisects the border of South Hero and Milton. Decisions regarding exit 17 in Colchester along Route 2 have a great impact on Grand Isle County, and NRPC will continue to participate in transportation planning and project development in this area.

Lands farther to the east in Milton and Westford have been designated by the CCRPC as Rural. Development is limited in this area, which is compatible with the NRPC's designation of Conservation Lands interspersed with Agricultural Resource Lands along the Lamoille River. The area in Milton located between Route 7/Arrowhead Lake and Route 104, where Husky Injection Molding Systems is located, is designated as an Enterprise Planning Area in the CCRPC future land-use plan. Although this area is not immediately adjacent to the town of Georgia, NRPC will continue to monitor it to ensure that future conflicts concerning growth in this area do not arise.

The CCRPC Regional Plan contains goals and policies pertaining to transportation, economic development, and public health. These goals and policies are compatible with those of the Northwest Regional Plan.

The **Lamoille County Planning Commission (LCPC)** adjoins the southeastern corner of the Northwest region along the town borders of Fairfax, Fletcher, Bakersfield, and Montgomery, with Cambridge, Waterville, and Belvidere in Lamoille County. Areas adjacent to the Northwest region are largely classified as Rural and Working Land and Working Lands - Forest. Areas of mutual interest with Lamoille County include the Route 104 corridor, the Route 108 corridor, the Lamoille River, Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, and forest habitat blocks. The LCPC's 2023 regional plan future land-use map, and its goals and policies are compatible with NRPC's regional future land-use plan.

The **Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA)** re-adopted its current regional plan in 2023. The NVDA region adjoins the northeastern border of the NRPC region. The NRPC towns of Richford and Montgomery are adjacent to the NVDA member towns of Jay, Westfield, and Lowell. The NVDA identifies development areas on its future land-use map. Village Centers are identified within Westfield and Lowell, while a Service Center is identified in Jay. None of these three development areas are less than 10 miles from the Franklin County border. The NVDA plan encourages growth to concentrate in these areas, which is a strategy consistent with this plan. The NVDA also recommends little commercial or industrial development in rural agricultural and forest areas. Although it does not specifically discourage residential development in forest and agricultural areas, it suggests that development in these areas should be limited. As the adjoining area between the NRPC region and the NVDA region is primarily the wooded and steep Green Mountains, incompatible growth is not likely to be a significant problem. The NVDA plan is compatible with the NRPC regional plan. NRPC will continue to participate in planning and permitting for the master plan for Jay Peak Resort to ensure that its development will enhance the neighboring communities in the Northwest region and that any negative impacts on transportation, water quality, housing, or the local economy are mitigated.