

Roles & Responsibilities and the Municipal Planning Process

May 14, 2026

Agenda

- What is Planning?
- Board Roles and Responsibilities
- Municipal Plans & Public Engagement
- Implementing the Municipal Plan

What is Planning

Why do we plan?

1. Paints a clear picture of shared goals for the future
2. Make or strengthen great places to live
3. Ensure transparent public policies
4. Promote wise investments for the future



Over 100 years of Planning

The Vermont Legislature first authorized municipalities to create planning commissions & draft municipal plans

1921

1931

The Vermont Legislature first authorized Zoning Regulations.

Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act – Chapter 117

1968

1988

Act 200 makes substantial updates to the local and regional planning portions of Chapter 117

Act 115 makes substantial updates to the zoning portions of Chapter 117.

2004

2023

HOME Act (Act 47) makes changes to planning & zoning to promote housing growth.

Planning Process Goals

- 1) Planning is comprehensive and coordinated from the state, regional and local level
- 2) Planning involves widespread public participation at all levels
- 3) Planning considers how to best use resources and guide growth
- 4) Planning allows municipalities to work together to meet common goals

Board Roles and Responsibilities

Who Serves These Roles in Your Town?

Legislative

Selectboard

City Council

Village Trustees

Planning
Commission

Quasi-Judicial

Development
Review Board

OR

Zoning Board of
Adjustment
&
Planning
Commission

Administrative

Selectboard

Zoning
Administrator

Advisory

Conservation
Commission

Housing
Committee

Energy Committee

Appointment Process

- Selectboard: elected by voters at Town Meeting
- Planning Commission, DRB, ZBA: Members are appointed by Selectboard. In some communities, Planning Commission and DRB members are voted on at Town Meeting
- Zoning Administrator:
 - Planning Commission nominates candidate to Selectboard
 - Selectboard appoints Zoning Administrator for 3 year term

Legislative Functions

- Planning Commission:
 - Prepares the Town Plan
 - Prepares zoning and subdivision bylaws and amendments
 - Can prepare capital budget and program at the direction of the Selectboard
 - Can prepare ordinances at the direction of the Selectboard
 - Prepares other studies at the direction of the Selectboard

Legislative Functions

- Selectboard:
 - Reviews the Town Plan submitted by the Planning Commission and may make revisions before adoption or send to Town Meeting for voter approval
 - Reviews zoning and subdivision bylaws prepared by the Planning Commission and may make revisions before adoption or sends to Town Meeting for voter approval
 - Prepares, amends, adopts capital budgets
 - Prepares, amends, adopts ordinances

Quasi-Judicial Functions

Development Review Board

- Site plans
- Subdivisions
- Conditional uses
- Variances & Waivers
- Appeals of ZA decisions

OR

Planning Commission

- Site plans
- Subdivisions

Zoning Board of Adjustment

- Conditional Uses
- Variances & Waivers
- Appeals of ZA decisions

Advisory Functions

- May provide input for Town Plan
 - Example: Conservation Commission providing input on Natural Resources Chapter or Housing Committee providing input on Economic Development Chapter
- May be required in municipal bylaws to provide input on aspects of development proposals
 - Design Advisory Committee providing input to DRB on development with a town's historic districts
- Only provide advisory comments and not able to make decisions regarding land use applications

Administrative Functions

- Zoning Administrator:
 - Responds to questions from residents, property owners, developers
 - Helps coordinate review of applications across town departments
 - Reviews applications and issues or denies zoning permits
 - Conducts enforcement
 - Can serve as clerk to the Planning Commission, DRB, or ZBA
 - Can be authorized in the bylaws to review and approve new development proposals that would otherwise require approval by an appropriate municipal panel

Resources

- Statute
 - Planning Commissions: [24 V.S.A. § 4321 - § 4328](#)
 - Zoning Administrators: [24 V.S.A. § 4448, § 4449, § 4451, § 4452, § 4454](#)
 - Appropriate Municipal Panels: [24 V.S.A. § 4460](#)
 - Appeals: [24 V.S.A. § 4465 - § 4471](#)
- Vermont League of Cities & Towns: <https://www.vlct.org/>
- Zoning Administrator's Handbook:
https://www.vapda.org/uploads/1/3/1/8/131894470/za_handbook_vlct_may_2025_copy.pdf

Municipal Plans & Public Engagement

Municipal Plans are a Long-Term Vision

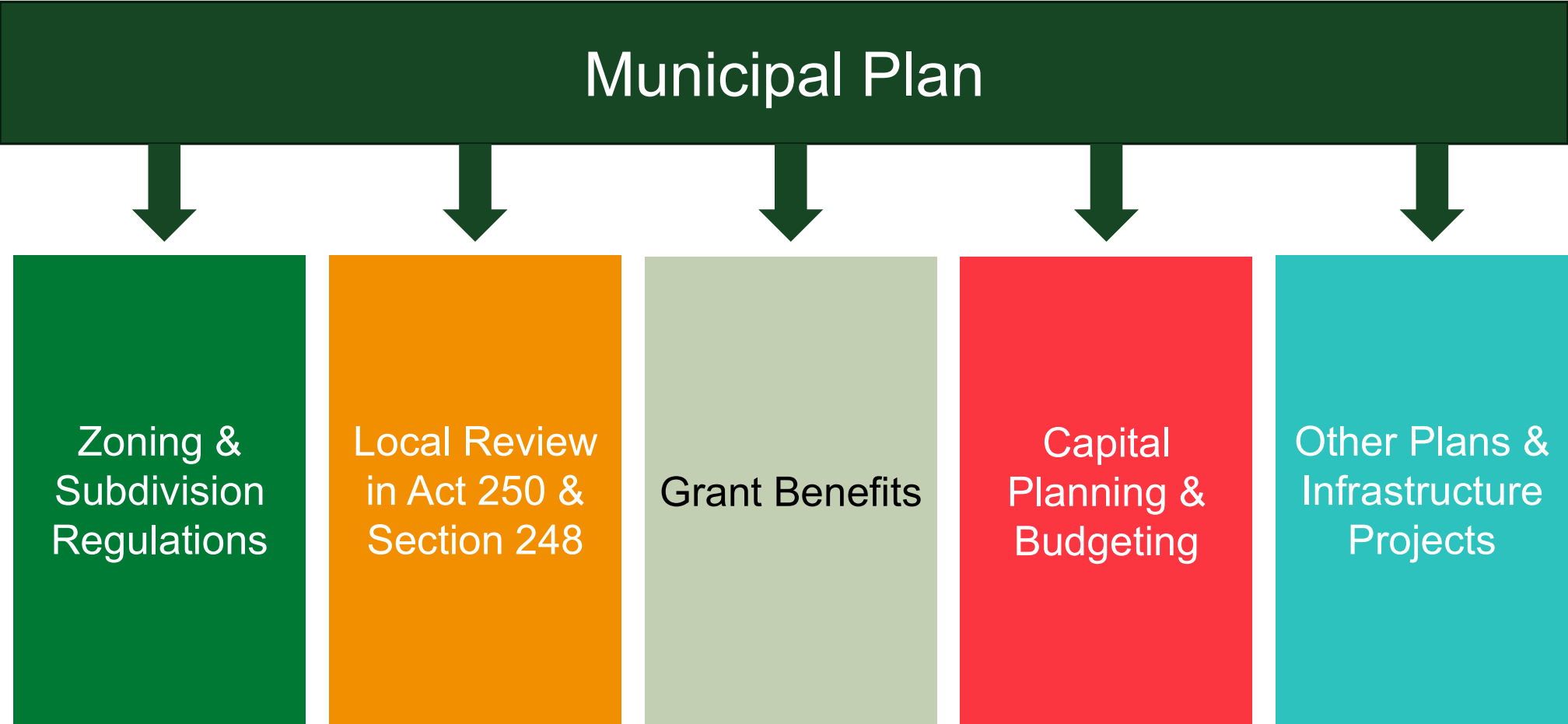


Image Credit: Vermont Center for Geographic Information (VCGI)

Planning Process



Municipal Plan



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graph TD; MP[Municipal Plan] --> ZSR[Zoning & Subdivision Regulations]; MP --> LRA[Local Review in Act 250 & Section 248]; MP --> GB[Grant Benefits]; MP --> CPB[Capital Planning & Budgeting]; MP --> OPIP[Other Plans & Infrastructure Projects];
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Zoning &
Subdivision
Regulations

Local Review
in Act 250 &
Section 248

Grant Benefits

Capital
Planning &
Budgeting

Other Plans &
Infrastructure
Projects

12 Required Elements of A Town Plan

Overall Structure



Objectives and policies



Implementation plan



How plan relates to plans of adjacent municipalities and the region

12 Required Elements of A Town Plan

Planning Topics



Utility and facilities



Educational facilities



Transportation facilities



Land use



Natural, scenic and historic resources

12 Required Elements of A Town Plan

Planning Topics Cont.



Energy



Housing



Economic Development



Flood Resilience

Statewide Planning Goals



“When it comes to planning,
if you’re not doing it with
people – they think you are
doing it to them.”

Roger Millar, AICP
National Complete Streets Coalition

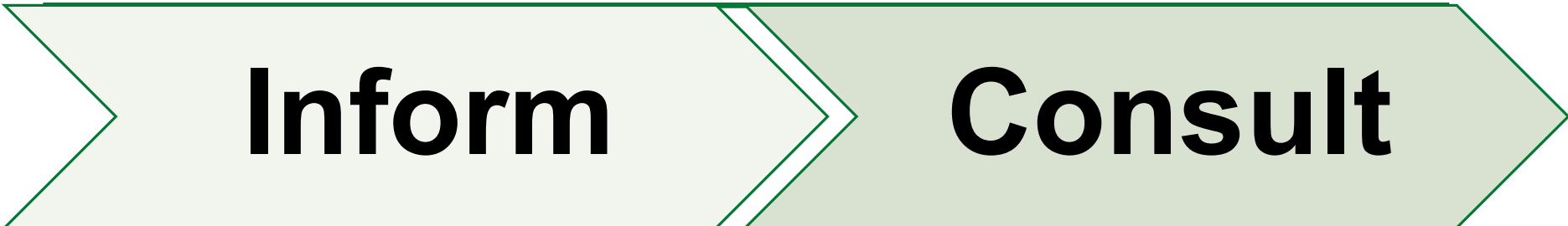
Spectrum of Participation



Spectrum of Participation



Spectrum of Participation



Inform

- Social media posts
- Press release
- Agendas
- Municipal website
- Mailings

Consult

- Comments at public meetings
- Open houses
- Public hearings
- Surveys

Spectrum of Participation



Spectrum of Participation



- Community workshops
- Focus Groups
- Advisory committees

- Community/co-lead boards
- Coalitions and partnerships
- Advisory Committee

- Community led process
- Delegated decisions

Engaging People in Planning



Talk to people



Food, fun and celebration



Meet people where they are



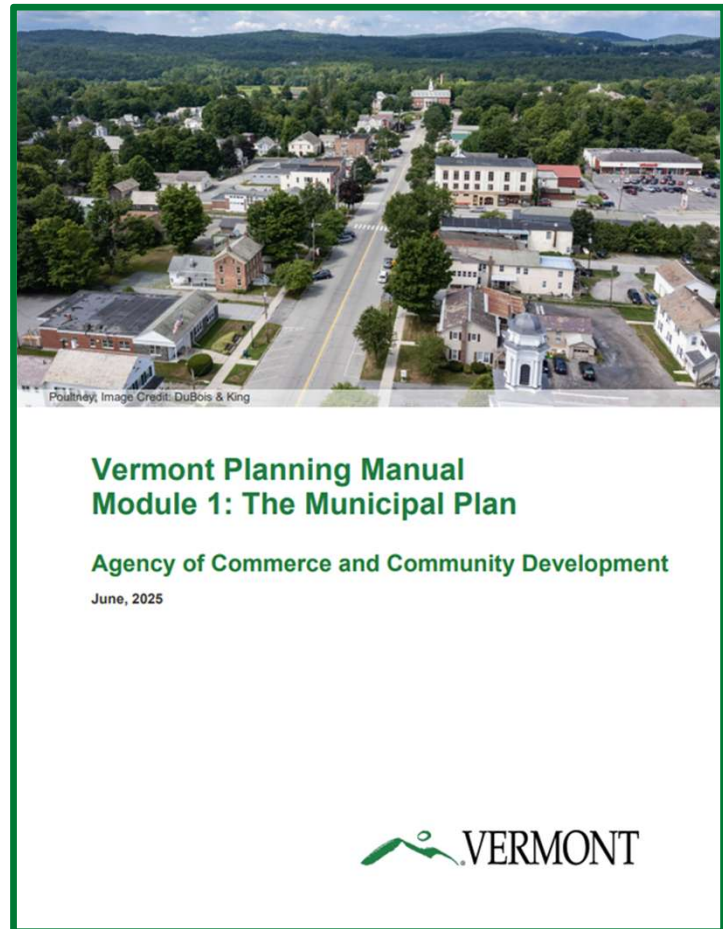
Meetings with local community groups



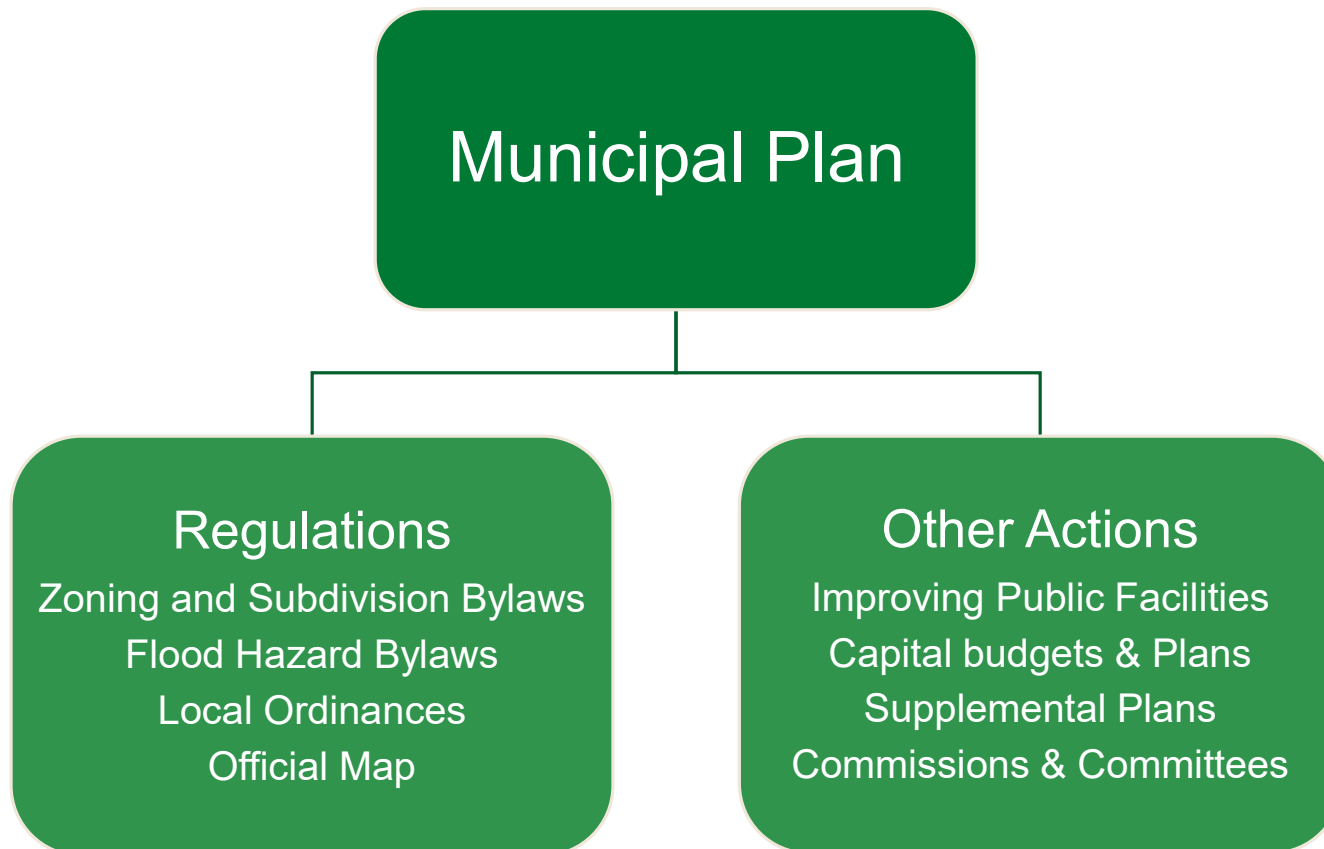
Have a culture of communication

Municipal Planning Manual: Module 1

Find it here



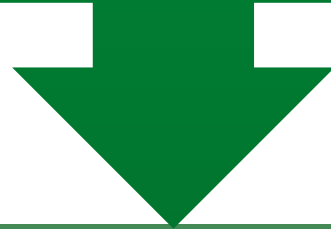
Implementing the Municipal Plan



Impact of Plan Policies & Actions

- Identify the guiding principles the municipality will follow
- Guide town staff on how they should act to reach municipal goals
 - “Shall cooperate with”, “Shall assist”, “Shall monitor”, etc
- Will be used in the review of statewide permitting processes including Act 250, Section 248 (energy projects) and Section 248a (telecommunications towers)

Town Plan (24 V.S.A §4381 - §4387)



Zoning & Subdivision Regulations (§4410 - §4428)

Why Have Local Land Use Regulations?

Implement the vision and goals in your municipal plan, such as:

- Promote compact walkable villages and downtowns
- Protect important natural resources & farmland
- Allow for a variety of housing options
- Encourage efficient use of infrastructure
- Ensure safe circulation of pedestrian & vehicle traffic
- Make the communities more flood resilient

Land Development May Include...

Division of land
into 2 or more
parcels or
boundary change

Construction,
reconstruction,
conversion,
structural
alteration,
relocation, or
enlargement of
any building or
other structure

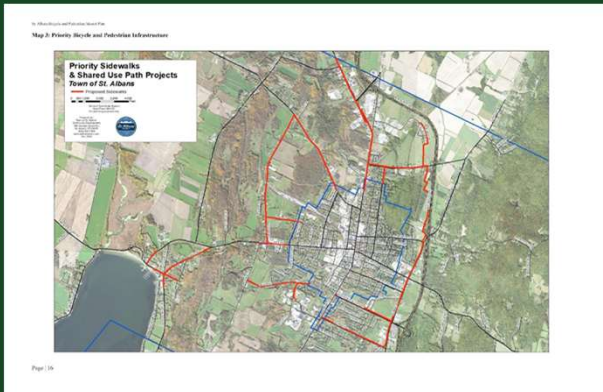
Mining,
excavation, or
landfill

Change in use of
any building or
other structure, or
land, or extension
of use of land

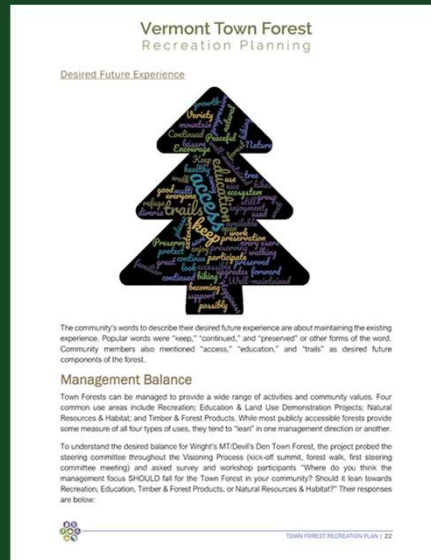
Check your bylaw, definition varies substantially across towns

Additional Plans and Studies

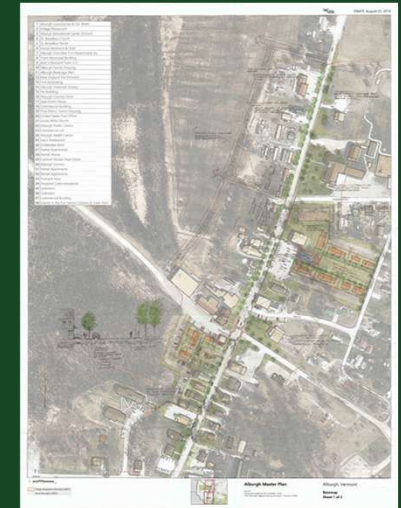
Sidewalks & Bicycle Infrastructure Plans



Recreation & Trail Plans

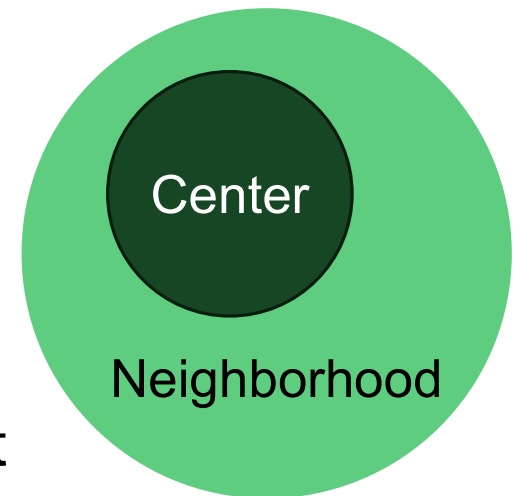


Village/Downtown Master Plans



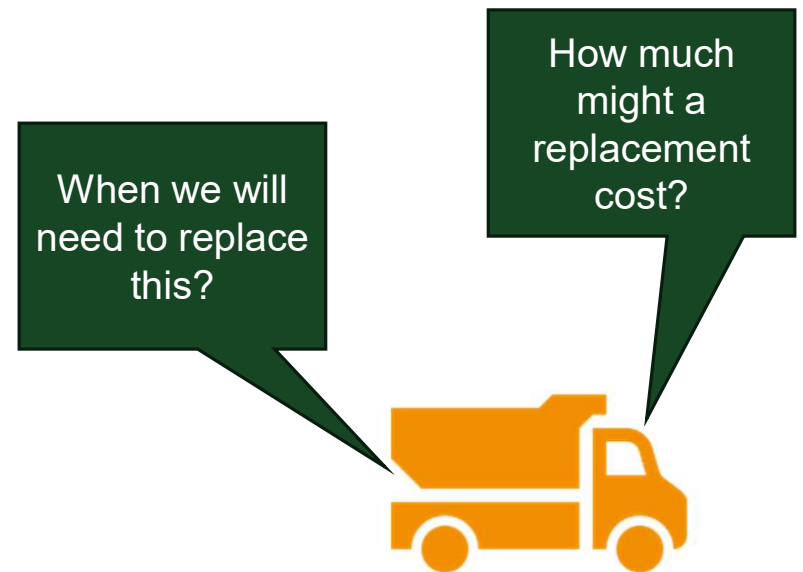
Center & Neighborhood Designations

- Neighborhood and Center Designations are based on the Regional Future Land Use Map
 - Town Plans are used to help determine these boundaries
- Having a Town Plan is required to have a neighborhood designation
- Designations provide benefits such as tax credit programs, priority for certain grants and more



Capital Plans and Budgeting

- Capital plans consider the long-term replacement needs for capital assets- like municipal buildings, vehicles and utility infrastructure
- A capital plan & budget allows you to save a little bit each year towards the replacement cost
- Capital plans can be prepared by the Planning Commission or Selectboard



Other Commissions and Committees



Housing Committee

- Housing needs assessment
- Education & advocacy



Energy Committee

- Enhanced energy plans
- Advise on energy/climate elements of capital planning



Conservation Commission

- Natural resource inventories
- Manage town forest/conservation areas



Recreation Committee

- Manage and plan for recreation areas and programming

RPC Assistance with Planning

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