

# Rethinking the Comprehensive Master Planning Process & Product

NNECAPA 2023  
Panel Discussion



## Discussion Goals

- Aiming for productive audience driven discussion
- How could the planning process be better?
- What are the most valuable planning products and outcomes?



# Panelists

- **Carl Eppich, AICP**

Maine – Municipal Planning Assistance Program

- **Noah Hodgetts**

New Hampshire – Office of Planning & Development

- **Ben Smith, AICP**

North Star Planning

- **Meagan Tuttle, AICP**

Vermont – City of Burlington



# Premise

1. Comprehensive Master Planning is often...
  - Time consuming
  - Expensive
  - Driven by state checklist
  - Too much past, not enough future
  - Exclusive and lack of reach
2. It doesn't need to be this way!



# Promise of Planning



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# Reality of Planning



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**Carl Eppich,  
AICP**

## **Maine's Growth Management Law (1988-9)**

**Primary Purpose:** "...to provide overall direction and consistency to the planning and regulatory actions of all state and municipal agencies affecting natural resource management, land use and development."

### **Manage Development, preserve Rural and Critical Resources**

- State planning framework
- Goals
- Inventory, Analysis, Policy, and Implementation Strategies
- 13 Topic Areas
  - Future Land Use Map, Capital Improvement Plan
- Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule (under review)
- Required for:
  - Zoning
  - Rate of Growth Ordinances
  - Impact Fees



**Carl Eppich,  
AICP**

## **Comprehensive Planning -Pending Legislation**

### **8 Pending legislative proposals to update the Growth Management Law**

- **Many to address housing**
- **MPAP office reviewing and making improvements**





**Carl Eppich,  
AICP**

## **Municipal Planning Assistance Program (MPAP) Direction**

- **Growth Management Program Evaluation – 2023**
  - **Findings and Recommendations** (survey/outreach)
    - 1. Development Tracking
    - 2. Local and Regional Planning Activity
    - 3. State Financial Commitment to Growth Management
- **MPAP looking at updating Growth Management Law**
- **MPAP has initiated Rulemaking to address Evaluation findings**



Carl Eppich,  
AICP

## Municipal Planning Assistance Program (MPAP) Direction

- Added capacity – GIS and Data analysis
- Training “New-to-ME” webinar series i.e. GMLaw, Subdivision Law, Shoreland Zoning, Site Plan Review...
- Growth Management Law –pending legislative proposals
- Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule (Chapter 208)
- Town Resources Map Explorer
- Regional Planning; Regional Plans; Regional Councils
- Integrating Climate Resiliency and Adaptation
- Housing LD 2003 integration
- Equity/DEI



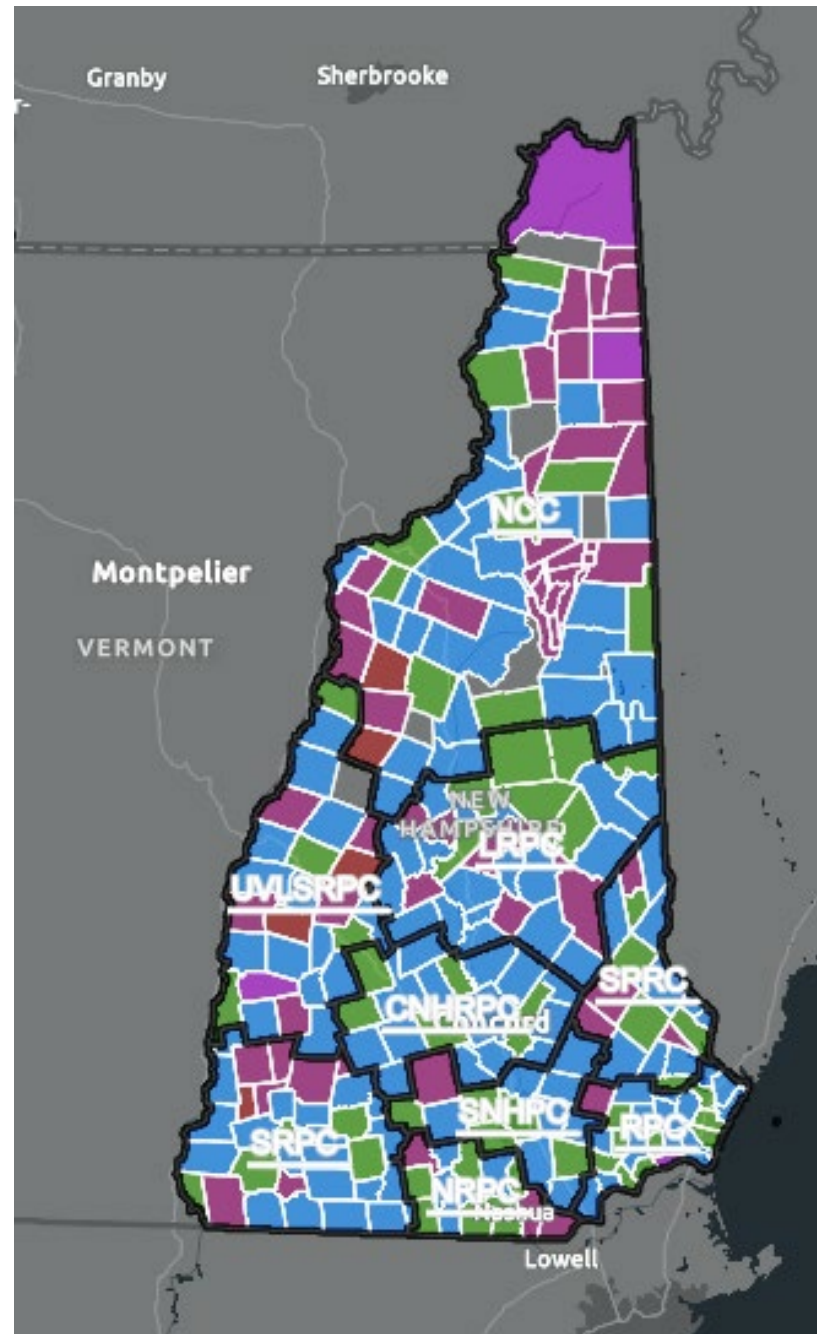


# NH Master Plan Overview

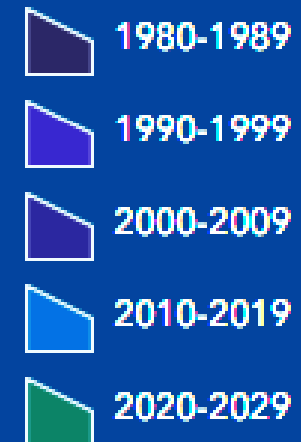
- Statutory requirements: NH RSA 674:1 – 674:5
- Every municipality that has a planning board must prepare a master plan “to guide the development of the municipality” (RSA 674:1, I)
- Supposed to be updated every 5 – 10 years
- Only the “vision section” and “land use” section are required
- No state or regional approval required



# Status of Master Plans in NH

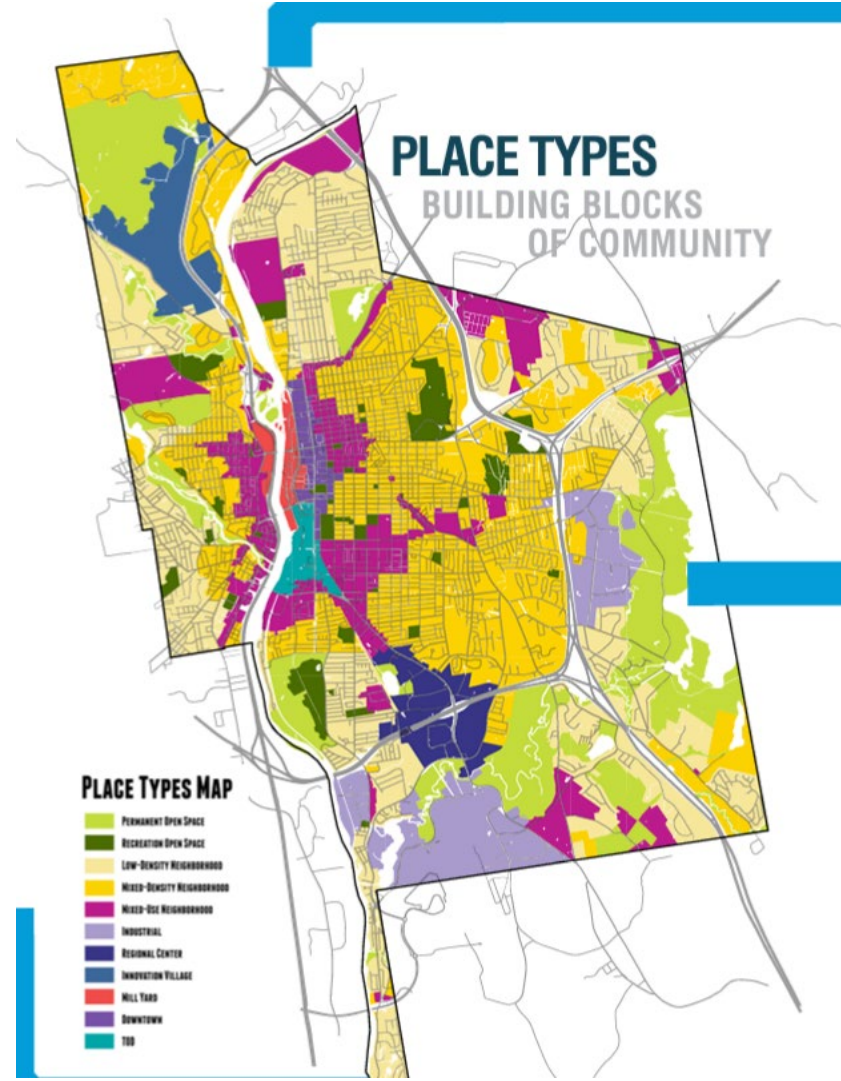


## Master Plan Layer 2022





# Innovative Approaches to Master Planning

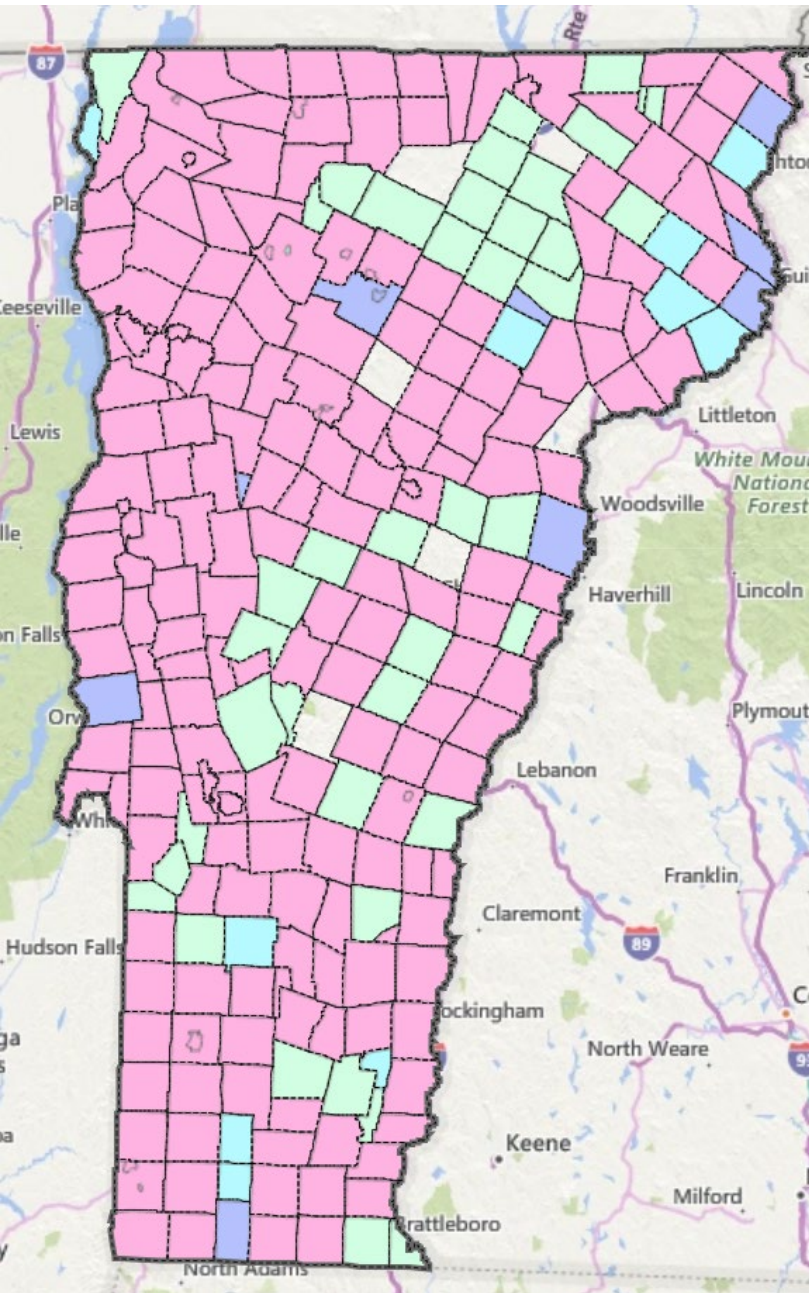


# NH Master Plan Observations

1. Municipalities are increasingly adopting master plan chapters around current issues such as broadband, community health, climate change.
2. State statute recommends master plans be updated every 5 to 10 years. However, in many communities there is only adequate funding to update one chapter at a time and in some cases master plans are 30+ years old.
3. A few municipalities have adopted an implementation chapter as part of their master plan and are actively working on implementing their plan, but majority aren't actively being used
4. A municipality's zoning ordinance is supposed to be consistent with and supported by the master plan, but there is no state statute which requires this.
5. Connection between state development plan, regional plan, and master plan could be strengthened







## In VT, municipal planning process must be approved by Regional Planning Commissions in order to:

- Adopt zoning and subdivision regulations, certain other free-standing regulations
- Adopt capital budget and assess impact fees
- Influence state regulatory proceedings such as Act 250 development applications and Section 248 Certificates of Public Good
- Qualify for certain state and federal funding for planning and implementation (i.e. tax credits, infrastructure, brownfields)

*Map of municipalities with confirmed plans and/or zoning/subdivision regulations, courtesy of Vermont Planning Atlas (Nov 2023)*

# “It’s your Municipal Plan (but there are requirements)”

-TRORC Land Use Essentials  
Training Material

## 24 V.S.A Ch. 117 provides foundation for municipal and regional plans’ content and applicable planning process:

- Generally guides plans that are consistent with statewide planning goals to preserve compact settlements and urban centers surrounded by rural countryside
- Outlines 12 elements that plans must include to be confirmed by RPC, ranging from big picture to specific
- Requires municipal plans to be compatible with regional plan and with neighboring municipalities’ plans
- Requires report detailing how subsequent zoning amendments consistent with the goals of the adopted plan
- Must be updated at least every 8 years

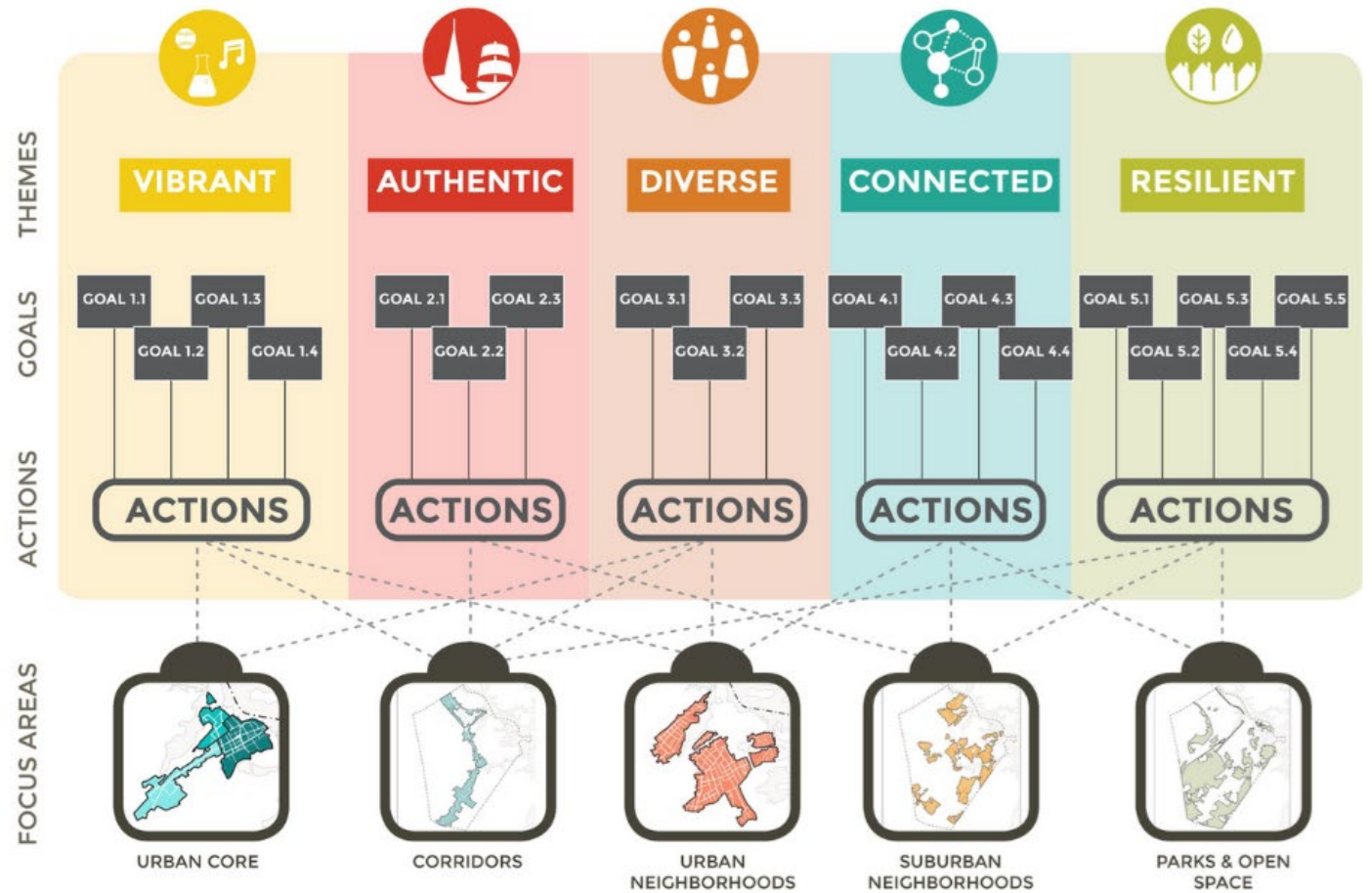
## Recent & Upcoming Legislation

**Act 47 (Home Act) of 2023 included a number of changes to municipal and regional planning statutes focused on the state's housing crisis, including (but not limited to):**

- Zoning must allow duplexes statewide; minimum densities, allow 3-4 unit buildings, and density & height bonuses for affordable housing in areas served by water & sewer
- Increased threshold for state's Act 250 development review from 10 to 25 units within state-designated growth areas
- RPCs to use housing targets developed by statewide housing needs assessment to provide municipal housing targets & recommended actions; integrate into the housing element of municipal plans
- 4 interrelated studies looking at state's development review process, future land use designations in regional plans, and state designations to support growth in designated places
  - *Studies due to legislature by end of year, likely to inform key elements of one or more bills in 2024*

# PORTSMOUTH 2025 MASTER PLAN

Image courtesy of Flickr user Keith Burgie





planBTV is all about...

## burlington as a distinctive city.

Burlington is an urban village, with a rich architectural legacy set within an exceptional natural setting. Together these characteristics provide the foundation for its vital economy, human-scale environment, and high quality of life. Burlington will remain the core of a regional population, economic and cultural center, and will grow in a way that allows it to meet its current and future needs without compromising these celebrated characteristics.

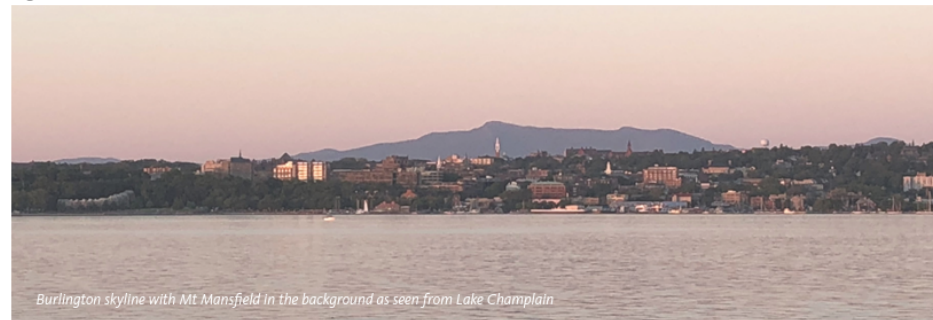
### *Our vision for Burlington as a distinctive city.*

Burlington is located within an outstanding natural setting—surrounded by Lake Champlain and the Winooski River, with views of the Adirondack Mountains to the west and the Green Mountains to the east. Burlingtonians value—and the city is known for—being in close proximity to both natural and recreational resources, supporting high-quality arts and educational opportunities, and benefiting from a diverse and robust year-round economy.

The city is built for people, with buildings of all scales being designed and situated to offer connections to streets that are attractive and comfortable public spaces. The built environment reflects a legacy of moderately-scaled buildings, high-quality urban design, and a rich architectural heritage, and new development integrated within and complements the unique and historic design characteristics of each neighborhood.

Development patterns enable growth, while also protecting important natural and man-made features. This is achieved by concentrating the highest density of mixed-use development in taller buildings within the downtown core, which is a distinctly urban place, and in activity centers where the scale and mix of uses supports surrounding neighborhoods. Residential neighborhoods are diverse in their patterns and character, with unique built, social, and cultural identities. Medical and educational institutions have a respected place in the community and are concentrated on core campuses. And developed areas are surrounded by and integrated with a network of open spaces and natural systems which are cherished as valuable natural and economic assets.

The city is a place where people can get their start—from companies launching, experimenting and growing, to residents of diverse cultures having access to jobs and housing. The city leverages the industries at the core of its economy—education, healthcare, the arts, industry, technology, food production, and environmental services—to provide economic and cultural value for the city and the region.



*Burlington skyline with Mt Mansfield in the background as seen from Lake Champlain*

*This summary was produced by the City of Burlington's Department of Planning & Zoning.*

*This is a snapshot of the 2019 update to*

## **planBTV: Burlington's Comprehensive Plan**

*Find more at: [www.burlingtonvt.gov/planbtv](http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/planbtv)*

### *Being a distinctive city is all about:*

- Protecting Burlington's natural context and features, particularly Lake Champlain
- Our place in history as the foundation for the future
- The city's architecture and patterns of the built environment
- City's overall development pattern of mixed-use centers surrounded by residential neighborhoods
- Our community's and individual neighborhoods' characteristics
- Social and cultural diversity
- Unique economic identities as a center for innovation and technology, education and healthcare, industry and agriculture, arts and entertainment
- How diversity of people and economic identities adds to the city's cultural richness

### *Why is this important? Because...*

- Burlington's identity is the foundation for its continued evolution
- Lake Champlain and our natural resources are cherished and valuable assets
- the built environment is an important factor in making Burlington the special place that it is
- the city's distinctive characteristics fuel its economy

### *What are our goals for ensuring Burlington will preserve and foster its distinctive identity?*

- 1** Improving and protecting the quality of Lake Champlain, the Winooski River, tributary waters, natural areas, and open spaces throughout the city and protect them from degradation
  - 2** Creating new opportunities for mixed-use infill and redevelopment in the most densely developed areas consistent with the city's scale and urban form, while conserving and strengthening adjacent residential neighborhoods.
  - 3** Protecting historic buildings, architectural features, and archaeological resources, while encouraging the adaptive reuse and historically-sensitive redevelopment of underutilized sites and buildings.
  - 4** Strengthening the city's role as a cultural and arts center, and supporting efforts to expand public art and placemaking within the built environment.
  - 5** Leveraging the city's unique characteristics, economic advantages, and core industries to further strengthen its economy.
- Expand stormwater management measures in new and existing developments
  - Work with local, state, and regional agencies on watershed policy and planning
  - Evaluate capacity of neighborhood mixed use areas to support additional services and development
  - Utilize the benefits associated with the state's Downtown and Neighborhood Designation programs to rehabilitate buildings in the core of the city
  - Create a city-wide comprehensive plan for historic preservation
  - Create and support education and tourism that promotes the city's historic and cultural resources
  - Develop a city-wide arts and culture plan
  - Create a Percent-for-the-Arts program for public art
  - Create a comprehensive economic development strategy that identifies industries that are central to the city's economy and tools for supporting them
  - Strengthen local partnerships that support economic development, job creation, and youth education



### *What are some actions we can take to achieve these goals and implement this vision?*

*planBTV: Comprehensive Plan* outlines Burlington's goals and objectives for the future and is the City of Burlington's principal guide directing land use policy and decision-making. It is all about ensuring that Burlington continues to be a dynamic city of opportunity at the heart of a regional population, and that as it evolves over time it preserves its distinctive identity, becomes more inclusive, and strengthens its connections. The 2019 update to this plan is a project of the Burlington Planning Commission and the Planning & Zoning Department. For more information, to read the full plan online, and to provide input on the current draft, visit: [www.burlingtonvt.gov/planbtv](http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/planbtv).



# Brattleboro Town Plan

BRATTLEBORO | VERMONT | 2018

## Town Plan Implementation Matrix

Chapter Policy	Actions	Lead responsibility	Priority	Commitment of Resources			Land Use Regulations		
				Existing staff	General Fund, operating	Capital	Grant	Zoning Ordinance	Subdivision
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT									
2.1 Build partnerships with public and private stakeholder groups to capitalize on significant development opportunities	2.1.1 Participate in regional economic development planning activities	Town Manager	ongoing	✓	✓				
	2.1.2 Participate in efforts to create a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)	Town Manager	short	✓					
	2.1.3 Support organizations doing economic and community development	SB	ongoing		✓				
	2.1.4 Develop a neighborhood plan for the New Market Tax Credit eligible Census Tract	PSD	short	✓	✓		✓		
2.2 Affordable business infrastructure	2.2.1 Identify potential business opportunities along existing railroad spurs	PSD	long	✓					
	2.2.2 Identify utility and access constraints for parcels in the Industrial Districts	PSD	long		✓				
2.3 Childcare	2.3.1 Provide information to childcare providers about resources to help grow the business	SBAP	short	✓					
ENERGY									
3.1 Measure and analyze	3.1.1 Report annually on energy progress	EC	ongoing						
	3.1.2 Review Town Procurement Policy and make suggestions on energy conservation and efficiency criteria	EC	short	✓					
	3.1.3 Encourage improved energy efficiency of municipal and school district buildings	EC	short						
3.2 Energy conservation and efficiency	3.2.1 Organize program participation to increase residential and commercial energy efficiency and renewable energy	EC, En. Coord.	ongoing	✓			✓		
	3.2.2 Promote the use of the Community Energy Dashboard	EC, En. Coord., SB	short	✓					



# Discussion

- Thoughts from the panel
- Discussion with the audience



Thank you!

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