

Vermont's Climate Action Plan

Vermont Planners Association Recommendations

January 13, 2023



Overview

The reality of climate change makes our state's future uncertain, affecting our natural resources, the built environment, our economy and jobs, public health, food system and more we cannot anticipate. The most impactful way to address the climate crisis in Vermont is through good land use planning. Good planning helps communities navigate uncertainty and achieve the best outcomes for all, particularly those whose voices often aren't heard. After passing the Climate Action Plan, Vermont now needs to provide coordinated oversight and funding at the state, regional, and municipal level implement the recommendations.

VPA is grateful for the enormous effort by the Vermont Climate Council to develop the Vermont Climate Action Plan, as well as the Legislature's actions to implement it through recent legislation. However, there is much more to accomplish. VPA believes there are two main categories of work to be done: **climate mitigation** (actions that are taken to reduce the speed and amount of climate change) and **climate adaptation and resiliency** (actions that are taken to reduce or respond to adverse impacts from climate change, or to take advantage of beneficial impacts).

Recommendations



1. **Enabling Statutes:** Make revisions to the planning half of Title 24, Chapter 117, Sections 4302, 4348a and 4382, in order to modernize the law and integrate climate mitigation and adaptation and environmental justice into municipal and regional plans. In addition, update Act 250 in keeping with the Climate Action Plan recommendations.



2. **Funding:** Fully restore allocations to the Municipal and Regional Planning Fund (MRPF). The CAP recommends a new staff position in each RPC, as well as funding the RPC's and VHCB according to the original formula. The Municipal Planning Grants and VCGI should, likewise, be fully funded according to formula.



3. **Coordination:** Establish a single statewide climate planning office or interagency panel (including representation from planners) to distribute funding, share best practices, and improve coordination among state agencies. The body should be charged with integrating state policy, implementing the Climate Action Plan recommendations related to land use, aligning them with Act 250, municipal and regional planning processes, and other relevant plans with equity as a lens to focus and guide this work. The Office would also assist in prioritizing climate planning and investment in the allocation of state and federal funding.



4. **River Corridors:** Revise state oversight of river corridors to recognize that different standards and tools are needed within existing settlements, including residential and mixed-use areas surrounding but outside the designated centers.



5. **Data:** Provide VCGI with the funding and authority to organize data collection, analysis, and interagency/sector policy buy-in on data needed to help communities navigate climate change uncertainty and achieve the best outcomes for all. This includes \$1.75 million for new aerial photographs that will document change and provide crucial real-world data to planners.

Challenges



Enabling Statutes: Although regions and municipalities are starting to address climate change in their planning process, they are not specifically enabled (or required) to do so under current statutes (24 V.S.A Chapter 117). Adding this would support consistency and coordination from the state CAP to local implementation.



Funding: Vermont has done an excellent job of creating plans and goals to address future challenges. However, historically there has been far less financial support for implementation. In addition, municipalities and regional planning agencies are not immune to inflation challenges that worsen the chronic underfunding of planning in the state and prevent us from taking proactive measures to address challenges.



Coordination: Once enabling statutes are aligned and funding is secured to advance the CAP, Vermont needs an organization to oversee coordinated, multi-sector land use policies to address the combined challenges of climate adaptation and mitigation. This would ensure holistic approaches infrastructure investment, housing needs, economic development, and natural resource conservation.



River corridors: Increasing frequency and severity of flooding will put existing settlements near rivers at risk. While new development should avoid areas prone to flooding and erosion, creative approaches are necessary to make historic centers more resilient where they stand. Adaptation and resilience would include floodproofing existing buildings, or using green infrastructure to absorb floodwaters naturally.



Data: Robust data and mapping will be necessary to support all the above initiatives, particularly to ensure equitable distribution of the impacts of climate change as well as the resources needed to respond to it. National data, while helpful at a state level, is not accurate enough at the regional or local scale to support informed decision-making on environmental justice issues.

VPA Contacts:

- Alex Weinhagen, President, aweinhagen@hinesburg.org, 802-777-3995
- Darren Schibler, Legislative Committee Chairperson, dschibler@ccrpcvt.org, (802) 846-4490 ext. 135

VPA is a non-profit advocacy and educational organization of over 150 planners and related professionals. We are dedicated to the advancement of community planning in Vermont at the local, regional, and state levels, to foster vibrant communities and a healthy environment.

Our membership is diverse, including municipal planners, regional planning commission staff, private planning consultants, state planning professionals, etc. We also work to coordinate VPA's advocacy and education with other groups involved in planning policy such as VAPDA (VT Association of Planning & Development Agencies), VLCT, and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.



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