TOWN OF BERLIN, VT
TOWN PLAN
June 21, 2005

I. INTRODUCTION

A. FORWARD

A Town Plan is a policy statement for guiding future decisions of the Town. This Plan is a snapshot of the Town at present and a vision of the Town in the future. That vision is intended to reflect the best interests of the Town as a whole rather than the interests of any particular individual or special group.

The Town Plan addresses a number of issues that will impact the quality and character of life in the future. Included are discussions of population growth and characteristics, housing, natural resources, transportation, public utilities and facilities, historic resources, and land use patterns.

The Town Plan is based on an analysis of the current conditions in the Town, along with a projection of anticipated growth and development in the Town and in the surrounding region. The Plan presents a long term (10 to 20 year) vision of the future, but it is expected that this vision will be re-examined periodically. Indeed, Vermont's Planning Act (24 VSA, Chapter 117) requires that municipal plans be reviewed, updated, and re-adopted every 5 years. It is important to remember that the planning process is fluid and on-going, and that the Plan will be continually reassessed and revised as goals and objectives are re-evaluated. Only in this way can progress be made toward a constantly evolving vision of the future.

Revisions to the Plan were prepared by the Planning Commission to incorporate significant planning efforts and studies undertaken subsequent to the 1997 adoption. Perhaps the most significant of these are the 1998 "*Citizens Vision for Berlin,*" the report entitled *Planning Concepts for: A New Town Center and The Barre-Montpelier Road Corridor*, dated May, 2000; the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission's *Vermont Route 62 and Barre-Montpelier Road Corridor Study*, dated September 2001; the *Water and Wastewater Master Planning Study,* dated April 2001; the Wilbur Smith Associate's *Berlin Interchanges Analyses, dated July 2003; and The Berlin Mall Village Center Study, dated November 2004.*These studies are discussed in greater detail elsewhere in the plan.

B. PURPOSE

The preparation and adoption of municipal plans are authorized by Chapter 117 of Title 24 of the Vermont Statutes (the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act). Section 4302 of that Act presents the overall purposes of the Act, which are to be incorporated into municipal plans. In addition to the statutory purpose, this Plan is intended to serve a number of local purposes including:

maintained and is generally in very good repair. In 1993, the school's electric heating system was replaced with a wood chip boiler and oil back up. Energy efficient lighting was also installed at this time. The school roof was replaced in 2003. School and community use of the building for before and after school programs as well as vacation and summer activities has greatly expanded over the years.

During the spring of 2004 the School Board charged a Facilities Committee to make recommendations regarding facility needs for the present and into the future and to prepare plans, if necessary, to address health, safety, code, and program needs. The Board has contracted with the architectural firm EH Danson Associates of St. Johnsbury to develop plans through the pre-bond stage of a school renovation/expansion project.

G. ENERGY.

Almost everything we do requires energy of one form or another. Human activity is generally based on food energy which is essentially renewable. The energy we use to run our homes, vehicles, and businesses, however, often comes from limited energy reserves. While the circumstances which dictate the type and amount of energy used are often beyond the control of an individual Town, there are some things that local communities can do to reduce the energy required for domestic space, water heating and for transportation. The following recommendations are intended to assist in achieving increased energy efficiency in the Town.

1. Encourage new construction to use energy efficient materials and appliances. This can substantially reduce average energy consumption for water heating, water consumption as well as reducing space heating, and air conditioning where used.

2. Encourage the retro-fitting of existing structures with energy saving devices such as insulation, storm windows, heating equipment, etc. This can achieve the same kinds of efficiencies as described above.

3. Encourage the layout of commercial areas such that walking between establishments is facilitated. This can reduce the energy used for automobile travel.

4. Work to reduce energy consumption for transportation by encouraging non-automobile travel. Possibilities include the following:

    a. Promote connections between major activity centers by bicycle/foot paths to encourage non-automobile travel.

    b. Promote the use of ride-sharing by providing park-and-ride facilities near major commuting routes.

c. Cooperate with multi-municipal efforts to make automobile travel more efficient.

5. Encourage alternative energy resources such as wind and solar, however siting of these resources should take into consideration the significant natural features goal.

H. SIGNIFICANT NATURAL FEATURES.

The most significant natural features of the Town of Berlin are the forested mountain ridges, the Dog River Valley, and Berlin Pond. There is strong support for the protection of these resources.

Forests and mountain tops have been identified as our most important natural resources. Much of the Town's ridges and large tracts of forest are located in the Highland Conservation District. The mountain ridges are steep and rocky and have very limited access, although these areas are coming under increasing development pressure.

Over half of the respondents to a 1998 questionnaire expressed support for protecting the Dog River. The land along the Dog River is designated for industrial, commercial, and primarily rural residential development at low to moderate densities, but some areas are limited by flood plain constraints. Maintaining adequate building setbacks and buffer areas to protect a riparian corridor along the length of the River, as well as other streams, is critical to the long term protection of water quality and wildlife habitat. Protecting stream banks and riparian corridors, through proper management of stormwater from nearby land uses, including developed sites that create large areas of impervious surface and agriculture, is critical to the maintenance of water quality in local streams.

Other important rivers and streams include the Winooski River, which should be protected through the establishment of riparian buffers, and the Stevens Branch, which could serve as a visual and recreational focal point along a revitalized Barre-Montpelier Road. With greater attention focused on the Stevens Branch due to redevelopment activities and the construction of the bicycle path along the existing rail lines, efforts should be pursued to allow riparian vegetation to restore itself. The protection of smaller upland streams, through the maintenance of forested buffers, is also critical to the protection and enhancement of water quality throughout town.

In addition to these major features, there are several wetlands which have been identified. In many cases these are incorporated into flood plain areas. The large wetland area around Berlin Pond is either in the Montpelier City Forest or in the identified flood plain areas.