

Town of Thetford Planning Commission Report

This report is in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4384(c) which states:

“When considering an amendment to a plan, the planning commission shall prepare a written report on the proposal. The report shall address the extent to which the plan, as amended, is consistent with the goals established in §4302 of this title.”

The Town of Thetford is currently considering the adoption of an updated Town Plan. In general, the changes that were made to the Town Plan were done to bring the document into compliance with changes to V.S.A. Title 24, Chapter 117, to provide for and identify priority interior forest blocks, to allow Thetford to qualify for Enhanced Energy planning designation by the State of Vermont, and to bring the information in the plan up to date.

The proposed 2019 Thetford Town Plan has three distinct changes to land use areas. The first is in the Thetford Hill land use area. The Planning Commission recommends changing the area east of Godfrey and Garey Roads to the Interstate 91, which is currently Thetford Hill Village Residential (VR), back to Rural Residential (RR) to decrease the likelihood of commercial development away from village centers. The planned boundary between VR and RR follows property lines where feasible.

Second, in Post Mills there is a small triangle of land at the northwest corner of Thetford bordered by the West Fairlee Road, West Fairlee, and Lake Fairlee that was added to the Post Mills Village Residential Land Use Area in the last change of the Zoning Bylaw. The change was made in part because it was shown that way on the planning maps provided by the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC). The Planning Commission recommends changing this area back to Rural Residential because it is contiguous with a large tract of natural forest land in West Fairlee and provides access to the lake from this wildlife habitat.

Third, the Planning Commission recommends dividing the Post Mills Village Residential (VR) area into two separate land use areas: a village center which remains designated as a Village Residential land use area, and a Neighborhood Residential (NR) land use area, where close residential settlement is the norm, but commercial development is more restricted than in the town center. This differentiation is designed to encourage commercial development in the village center and discourage sprawl outward from the village. We respect prominent village features such as the airport and church and residents' view of the effective limits of the town center.

Based on the above, the Planning Commission proposes creating a new land use area as follows:

NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL LAND USE AREA (NR)

The general purpose of the Neighborhood Residential land use area is to create relatively dense areas of settlement with the following characteristics:

1. Networks of streets and utilities that make efficient use of land.
2. Relatively dense housing, noting that village lots “grandfathered” before zoning were often smaller than the current minimum of 20,000 square feet.

3. Close proximity to Village Residential area, where resources such as schools, shops, libraries and commercial and public services for residents can be found.

The minimum lot size in this area is 20,000 square feet, which can support one- or two-unit dwellings. The minimum lot size requirement can be waived in a Planned Unit Development.

Residential uses, home businesses, accessory dwellings, churches, farmers markets, and customary accessory uses are the only permitted uses. Conditional uses include civic and institutional uses, businesses, recreational use, cemeteries, mobile home parks, cultural facilities, restaurants, and commercial services. Village and roadside commercial, industrial, kennel, junkyard, landfill, and travel trailer camp use will not be allowed.

No predictable immediate impact on the municipal tax base is anticipated. This change in land use alone should not create a need for new public facilities. We do not anticipate that any of these land use changes will result in changing traffic patterns.

The Land Use chapter's goal, policy, and recommendations now explicitly references the protection of priority interior forest blocks and habitat connectors, specifically within the Rural Residential Land Use Area designation, to be consistent with the requirements of Vermont state law.

The Planning Commission does not believe that the necessary forest block and habitat corridor designations will create a need for public facilities, changes in the traffic patterns, or have any immediate impact on the municipal tax base.

The Planning Commission's amendment to Thetford's Energy Chapter is consistent with the 2016 Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan and the stated goals therein. It is the intent and purpose of the Energy Chapter to set goals for Thetford's energy consumption and sources and identify areas where the Town can increase its energy efficiency while minimizing environmental impact, supporting Thetford's local economy, and increasing use of local and regional renewable energy sources. Thetford's Energy Chapter also includes the identification of preferred siting locations for the development of new generation and transmission facilities in each of Thetford's land use districts.

These changes to the Energy Chapter which focus on a more efficiency use energy by Thetford's residents its identified facilities will not result in any addition need for public facilities, changes in traffic patterns, or have any immediate impact on the municipal tax base.