

Manchester Town Plan, 2017

Adopted May 9, 2017



Town of Manchester, Vermont, Chartered in 1761

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Part 1: Vision, Policies & Actions

Manchester is a quintessential New England Community with a historic core surrounded by rural pastures and forested mountain backdrops. Situated in the Batten Kill Valley between the Green and Taconic Mountains, Manchester cherishes its natural beauty as the basis of a high quality of life for residents and the foundation of a strong visitor economy. The local education system with public and private options encourages innovation and personalized learning. The town encourages business growth and development and offers world class dining, hospitality and shopping options. Municipal parks and services are award winning and renowned. This town plan will serve as a guide for strengthening and protecting these qualities over the course of the next eight years, with adopted policies and actions in the categories of economic development, housing, energy, natural resources, transportation, education, municipal services, recreation, and arts and cultural resources.

Manchester has seen significant change in the last few years with the conclusion of the roundabout project and commencement of some large scale redevelopment within the commercial core. In addition, the town secured \$580,000 in state funding for bicycle and pedestrian enhancements to Depot Street. On top of that a municipal planning grant is helping the town move forward with the first comprehensive overhaul of the zoning ordinance since 1983. With these positive developments, the town also recently suffered the demise of the Manchester and the Mountains Chamber of Commerce. However, as the community comes together to decide how to fill the void left by the exit of the chamber, there are opportunities for improving upon the functions that the chamber did provide to the community.

Section 1: Economic Development & Housing

Section 1.1: Economic Development

Economic Development Mission: Create a vibrant economic environment that encourages people to both live and work in Manchester.

In 2016 the town completed in conjunction with the Village of Manchester and the Town of Dorset, the *Northshire Economic Development Strategy* (NEDS). That strategy for the three municipalities can largely be viewed as an economic development strategy for the Town of Manchester. In that vein, the mission statement for NEDS is appropriate for the town and, tailored to Manchester, is hereby adopted as the economic development mission for the town.

NEDS identified four goals in line with this vision: (1) Improve the economic development environment, (2) Cultivate tourism, food, arts and culture industries, (3) Support entrepreneurship and business development, and (4) Enhance the quality of life for residents and workers. Each of these goals is supported by identified strategies and specific actions, and many of those are reiterated here in this town plan.

The NEDS study confirmed that diversity of Manchester's economy remains an issue. While a number of manufacturing or office uses remain in town, the local economy generally depends upon tourism. Many retail and service businesses exist in support of tourism and second home development, but there are fewer retail businesses that exist to serve the residential population of the town. Consequently, NEDS found there is retail "leakage" that could be captured with new retail development in the areas of general merchandise, food, and sporting goods aimed to serve

- *Support the expansion of sewer service for existing and new development within the wellhead protection area.*
- *Carefully monitor increases in water usage and allocation and be prepared for system expansions, including expansion of the wellhead protection area, as capacity is approached.*

Section 3.3: Power & Telecommunications Facilities

Manchester recognizes the importance of efficient and functioning electrical power and telecommunications facilities, and will work with utility providers to ensure that siting of facilities is accomplished in a manner that protects the scenic, cultural and natural resources of the town.

Electric power is supplied to the town by Green Mountain Power (GMP), a regulated utility under the jurisdiction of the Vermont Public Service Board, having merged with Central Vermont Public Service Corporation (CVPS) in 2012. Significant concerns regarding the so-called “Southern Loop” portion of the electrical grid that serves the region were identified by CVPS in 2006. Issues included whether there was adequate supply of power at peak times, and adequate transmission capacity even if supply existed. CVPS undertook an outreach campaign in 2006 seeking input from various stakeholders on ideas and strategies that might solve these problems and be acceptable to communities. Support appeared to emerge for four strategies:

1. Conservation and increased efficiency
2. Installing a synchronous condenser on the existing transmission line to improve stability and flow of power
3. Replacing a key transformer at Vermont Yankee to avoid the lengthy disruption that could occur if this were to fail, and
4. Distributed generation - that is, smaller scale, indigenous power production.

Vermont Yankee has since ceased generating power and a synchronous condenser was installed, but conservation, increased efficiency, and distributed generation remain important.

In the past, electrical transmission and distribution lines have been located primarily at the convenience of the electric company, with little regard given to aesthetic or environmental concerns. The town is concerned about tree trimming done by the power company, which tends to have adverse impacts upon the beauty and longevity of trees. While important throughout town, this is of special importance in the downtown area, where great emphasis is placed upon streetscape design and street tree planting. While respecting and appreciating the need for a reliable electric supply, street trees are important to the town’s vitality and ways to protect them from trimming by the electric utility should be pursued. The provision of underground utility lines or other techniques (such as rerouting power lines behind buildings) to minimize visual impacts in developed areas, particularly in areas having special design and improvement priorities, will be pursued. Electric or utility lines and related infrastructure should be installed so as to minimize aesthetic and ecological impacts.

When planning new lines or upgrades to existing lines, special consideration should be given to any primary or secondary impacts that would reduce resource values (including but not limited to aesthetics and streetscape design, agricultural and timber resources, natural areas, and historic sites). When a new electrical transmission corridor is planned, it must be demonstrated that the proposed location is necessary based upon economic considerations, potential impacts on resource values, and the resulting public benefits. Where improvements are planned, such as

those for major downtown streets, the utility company will be encouraged to install underground lines, or to use other suitable techniques to minimize the visual impacts of transmission lines and poles. These strategies were demonstrated in the heart of the downtown as part of the Junction Roundabout project, and will be pursued as much as possible with the Depot Street Enhancement project. In addition, the Downtown Master Plan charrette process to occur in September 2017, will address a plan for relocation of the substation from Depot Street-Center Hill Road to an alternative location outside of the Depot Street gateway area.

Upgrading or constructing new power lines must be done in ways that consider and balance the need for a reliable power supply while minimizing adverse impacts on land and valuable resources. Except where improvements can be made, existing power line corridors should be used whenever possible. In order to enhance the aesthetics and visual character of the downtown area, public utilities (including but not limited to power lines, substations, and telecommunications facilities) should be relocated from public view along main streets wherever possible. This may include behind buildings, away from the street, along streets, or underground. Where this is not possible, these should be screened from adjacent properties with dense coniferous plantings. Accordingly, with regard to wireless telecommunications facilities, the *Manchester Land Use & Development Ordinance* requires conditional use review of all proposed development and siting of towers and related infrastructure. Visual impacts, lighting, noise generation, natural resource impacts, and site screening are all required to be carefully considered by the Development Review Board prior to approval of any new facilities.

Action: The town will pursue strategies to promote, encourage, and support the burial of utility lines, particularly in the downtown core to enhance the historic streetscape.

Section 3.4: Public Services

Municipal Services Mission: Encourage and maintain efficient municipal services that support an affordable and high quality of life.

Town Administration & Public Safety Services

In 1991, Town Hall was relocated from Depot Street to a facility on Main Street, in the former Mount Laurel Building. Offices for the Town Manager, Planning & Zoning Department, Town Clerk, Finance Department, and Assessing Office are found here. The building also serves other public functions, including the Meals on Wheels kitchen, a weekday senior meal program, senior exercise classes, and the Manchester Community Food Cupboard. This site will accommodate town government for the foreseeable future, and continue to provide space to non-profit organizations serving the Manchester community. The Town Hall parking lot also serves as a bus stop for the regional daily buses linking Manchester to Rutland and Bennington.

Manchester maintains a professional Police Department, staffed by a Chief of Police, eight police officers, and four full-time dispatchers. The Fire Department is staffed by a volunteer force of 32 individuals. In addition, the Manchester Rescue Squad (serving Manchester, Dorset, East Dorset, Mt. Tabor, Danby and parts of Winhall with 24/7 paramedic coverage) is staffed by 28 individuals. In 1996, the Manchester Police Department, Fire Department and Manchester Rescue moved to a new, combined facility located at the Town Hall site on Main Street. The public safety building provides space for equipment, personnel, and support for police, fire and rescue, and will continue to accommodate each department's needs for the foreseeable future.