Exhibit SA-8 Regional Plan Excerpts

REGIONAL PLAN

TRORC

Adopted 2/26/25

2025

found that "the estimated cost of high -quality early care and learning is currently unaffordable for almost 90% of Vermont families." The second report was Stalled at the Start[44], published in 2022 and produced by Let's Grow Kids, which analyzed the supply and demand of childcare.

One available program that could benefit families is the Childcare Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP)[45]. This is a government program that helps eligible families cover some of the cost of childcare. There is also a federal scholarship program for childcare center teachers that are trying to earn credentials/degrees. Through the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Vermont program[46], up to 80 percent of tuition can be covered, along with other benefits.

In 2023, Act 76 (H.217)[47], which pertains to childcare and early childhood education, was enacted into law. This legislation includes significant investments in Vermont's childcare system and introduces policy changes that will affect childcare services for both early childhood and school-age children.

F. Telecommunications

Information technology (such as broadband Internet and wired/wireless telecommunications) has become essential to residents and businesses in the Region. Our economy, educational systems, and functionality of our homes rely on ubiquitous availability of data and communications for our Region.

In the 2021 Vermont Ten-Year Telecommunications Plan[48], the Public Utilities Commission set the following goals:

- Bringing every currently unserved and underserved on-grid Vermont home access to 100/100 megabits per second (Mbps) broadband that can be scalable to faster speeds as demand warrants
- Leveraging residential fiber deployments into better mobile voice coverage along key roadways and in small communities
- Ensuring that telecommunications systems are resilient, redundant, secure, and futureproof for commercial, consumer, and public safety needs
- Facilitating competition and choice of multiple internet service providers at the majority of premises in the state
- Promoting local input and oversight in the direction of future use for publicly funded broadband infrastructure through empowered regional Communication Union Districts
- Leveraging fiber broadband expansion to ensure public safety has access to reliable and redundant communications capacity.

An example of a Cell Tower in Disguise
| © Bill Morrow

In the TRO Region, access to broadband is provided via a number of mediums, including cable, DSL (digital subscriber line), fiber-optic cable, cellular, wireless, and satellite. This access varies from town to town, with the highest concentration of availability being in villages and downtowns. Broadband providers tend to locate their infrastructure in areas with high population density to maximize the subscriber-to-infrastructure ratio. The farther away from a community center, the fewer options for broadband connectivity; this makes the "last mile" homes and businesses the least likely to have access.

Efforts to improve broadband coverage in the TRO Region are ongoing. Between 2000 and 2012, the State of Vermont invested a substantial amount of funding in an effort to bring broadband to all Vermonters. One such project was the Vermont Digital Economy Project (VDEP)[49], which was developed as part of the State's goal to create more resilient communities after Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 by

delivering 26 free Wi-Fi zones/hotspots and pursing other prominent projects that expanded digital literacy in rural towns. Similar in scope, the VT Community Broadband Board (VCBB)[50],was established in 2021 in order to "accelerate the development and implementation of universal community broadband solutions" all throughout Vermont.

In our Region, VDEP has built free village Wi-Fi zones in the communities of Bethel, Royalton, and Rochester. These investments provide residents who lack access in their homes with a reliable place to connect to the Internet. In East Barnard, there is also a community-funded Wi-Fi zone for residents. Village-wide access is a boon to businesses who can take advantage of the additional customers who are drawn to the village for Internet access. To see Wi-Fi coverage across our Region and Vermont, visit Vermont Department of Public Service's interactive map showing Wi-Fi hotspots[51].

The East Central Vermont Fiber-Optic Network (EC Fiber)[52] is a consortium of 24 towns (including 21 TRO Region towns) that is working to expand access to high-speed Internet. Major cellular providers are continually working to expand coverage, particularly along major transportation corridors, such as Interstates 89 and 91.

Use of cellular phones in day-to-day activities has skyrocketed over the past decade. The availability of broadband cellular data has increased the use of cellular phones to the point that they are essential to businesses and individuals alike. In fact, most U.S. households no longer have a "landline" phone[53]. The lack of cell coverage is a major deterrent to both attracting businesses and younger families.

Cellular access is determined in great part by topography in relation to the placement of cellular transmission towers. While coverage in the TRO Region is reasonably good along main travel corridors, it is spotty in more rural areas. In some instances, there are entire communities (such as Barnard) that have virtually no cellular access[54]. In most cases, residents support improved cell phone access, but are less supportive of having the necessary facilities located in their communities. When residents object to proposed facilities, it is almost always due to the potential for aesthetic impacts.

Wireless telecommunications facilities are primarily permitted under Section 248a[55]. The 248a process was created to enable a faster permitting process in order to achieve greater wireless coverage, and it specifically exempts projects that achieve this wireless coverage from local zoning or Act 250.

Under the Section 248a permitting process, the Public Utility Commission[56] must review the environmental, economic, and social impacts associated with a particular project prior to issuing a Certificate of Public Good[57]. The project is reviewed against both Regional and Town Plans, and even relevant parts of zoning that would otherwise apply, are accorded "substantial deference" in such reviews, unless there is good cause to find otherwise". Even when substantial deference is not granted, the 248a process must give due consideration to the recommendations of municipal planning commissions, selectboards, and regional planning commissions based on their respective plans. Accordingly, it is appropriate that this Plan address these land uses and provide guidance to town officials, regulators, and providers.

Transmission towers are necessary telecommunications facilities, but as land uses, these towers have planning concerns, primarily for aesthetic reasons. To ensure adequate transmission of signals in mountainous areas such as ours, towers and related facilities need to be located on hilltops or high elevation points. These areas are also significant contributors to the scenic and rural character of the Region. Protection of these areas from insensitive developments is a matter of public good. Thus, due to transmission towers' higher visibility from multiple vantage points, conflict with scenic landscapes has become an issue.

G. Municipal Buildings and Properties

Towns own a variety of public buildings, and every town has a town office building. Nearly every town has a town hall where they hold town meetings and other events. Sometimes, town offices are also located in this building. Towns with their own road crews also own town garages, some of which are woefully inadequate for their function, and are sites for salt and sand storage. Some towns own their own sand and gravel pit, but most contract this function out. Nearly all of the town halls and offices are in older structures, many of which need substantial maintenance or improvements, but several have been renovated to create better working space and improve energy efficiency. Town offices, like other civic functions, help to create a sense of community and give energy and

Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: Telecommunications

Goals

1. Universal broadband access using fiber is available throughout developed areas in the TRO Region.
2. Universal availability of mobile cellular service is available throughout developed areas in the TRO Region.

Policies

1. Public and private efforts to expand telecommunications access are supported, when done in a manner that does not have an undue adverse impact on the rural character of our communities.
2. Efforts to provide free public broadband access in places such as village centers and public buildings are supported.
3. Telecommunications facility development shall be excluded from the following areas:
    a. Floodways shown on FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps.
    b. Wetlands as indicated on Vermont State Wetlands Inventory maps or identified through site analysis.
    c. Rare, threatened, or endangered species habitat or communities.
4. All new telecommunications facilities and related infrastructure must be sited and designed to avoid or, if no other reasonable alternative exists, to otherwise minimize and mitigate adverse impacts to the following:
    a. Historic districts, landmarks, and sites;
    b. State or federally designated scenic byways and municipally designated scenic roads and viewsheds;
    c. Special flood hazard areas identified by National Flood Insurance Program maps; and
    d. Necessary wildlife habitat identified by the State or through analysis, including core habitat areas, migration, and travel corridors.
5. New telecommunications facilities and related infrastructure (including access roads, site clearing, on-site power lines, lighting, and off-site power lines) must be sited to avoid the fragmentation of large priority and high priority forest blocks.
6. Telecommunications facilities development shall minimize site clearing and highly visible roadways.
7. The developer shall minimize the aesthetic impact of the telecommunications facility or infrastructure on the surrounding landscape. This includes options such as the utilization of “stealth towers,” camouflage through paint scheme, or designs that blend into the surroundings, such as asymmetrical monopoles disguised as pine trees.
8. Telecommunications facilities shall be designed to be the minimum height necessary to achieve coverage.

Goals, Policies, and Recommendations: Telecommunications

Policies (continued)

9. All new facilities shall incorporate reasonable options for sharing space on the proposed towers. Applicants for new towers must demonstrate that there is no reasonable opportunity for colocation on existing towers.
10. To support resiliency, applicants shall make space available on towers for municipal communication systems to enhance or expand road and emergency service communication networks.
11. To minimize conflict with scenic values, facility design and construction shall employ the following principles:
    a. In rural locations, be located in forested areas or be sufficiently landscaped to screen the lower sections of towers and related ground fixtures from public vantage points, such as trails, roads, or water bodies;
    b. In more developed areas, utilize materials, architectural styles, color schemes, lighting fixtures, size, and other design elements to promote aesthetic compatibility with surrounding uses and to avoid adverse visual impacts; and
    c. Be located downgrade of the ridge so as not to exceed the elevation of the tree line as seen from public highways.
12. Consideration shall be given to the environmental limitations of any given site. Impacts on wildlife habitats, soil erosion, forestry and agricultural lands, and similar resources should be carefully addressed. Projects that materially impact these resources are discouraged.
13. The clearing of land associated with site development for tower and facility construction shall not negatively impact the scenic views present.
14. Towers or facilities that are designed to resemble trees or natural features shall not be placed unnaturally higher than the tree line.
15. Permits must require removal of facilities that are no longer used.

Recommendations

1. TRORC should continue to participate actively in Section 248a permitting process.
2. Communities should seek out funding to implement new or sustain existing Wi-Fi zones in villages and downtowns.
3. The State should continue to support programs that achieve universal broadband and cellular communication access.

Goal, Policies, and Recommendations: Recreational Facilities

Goal

1. The Region is home to a variety of indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities for all users.