



# NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLAN

**2023 - 2031**

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*Photo: David Juairé*

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# NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

## GOALS

- 1. Protect significant natural resources, including air, wetlands, wildlife, lakes, ponds, woodlands, earth resources, open spaces, groundwater resources and wildlife habitat.**
- 2. Protect and conserve historically significant buildings and locations, archaeological resources, and important scenic and aesthetic resources, starting with those identified in local and regional plans.**
- 3. Maintain and wherever possible improve the quality of lakes, ponds, rivers, streams and groundwater.**

## ASSETS AND VALUES

The region is a reflection of its people and its land. With a traditionally agrarian, working landscape framed by the Green Mountains and Lake Champlain, Franklin and Grand Isle Counties are still heavily dependent on the natural resource base. With a built environment largely defined by compact villages surrounded by open countryside, the region retains much of its rural character.

The region is home to an abundance of archaeological, historic, and cultural resources. The archaeological resources provide clear evidence of the region's extensive and longstanding indigenous habitation, while many of the historic resources are tangible reminders of the communities built following the arrival of Europeans in North America. Cultural value is attached to events and physical items from prehistory through to the present day.

Archaeological resources include the villages, hunting camps, trade networks and burial grounds associated with indigenous people. Significant indigenous archaeological resources are known to be located in the vicinity of Route 78 in Swanton and Monument Road in Highgate. The location of many other such sites in the region remain private to protect their integrity. The Vermont Division for Historic Preservation maintains a listing of the 522 known archaeological sites within the region, of which 410 have detailed data. This figure likely represents a small fraction of significant sites in the region given that indigenous peoples lived in many places and intensive investigation of pre-historic site locations has not been undertaken. The Abenaki of Missisquoi continue to maintain a deep connection to the area in many ways, including via their tribal headquarters in Swanton.

Similarly, several historic settlements, sites and structures in the region (most reflecting post-colonial settlement) have been identified and entered into the State Register of Historic Places. In addition, over 75 properties within the region are included in the National Register of Historic Places. These include historic

districts, as well as bridges, border stations, places of worship, and farmsteads. They also include two historic sites: the Hyde Log Cabin in Grand Isle (managed by the Grand Isle Historical Society) and the Chester A. Arthur Birthplace in Fairfield (managed by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation). The region also hosts 10 museums, including St. Albans’s Museum in St. Albans and the Hyde Log Cabin in Grand Isle, and a growing roster of art-focused venues, such as the Cold Hollow Sculpture Park. The region’s 18 community-based historical societies work ever more diligently to document the diverse history of the region and its communities.

Long-standing cultural events such as the Vermont Dairy Festival in Enosburg Falls and Franklin County Field Days reflect the important role that agriculture continues to play in the region. For example, in St. Albans City, the Vermont Maple Festival typically draws more than 50,000 participants each year in honor of maple syrup, Vermont’s “liquid gold.” Newer and smaller cultural events, including those increasing awareness of the culture of the Region’s indigenous people, are also noteworthy. These and other cultural events, from farmers’ markets to concerts and parades too numerous to name, provide invaluable contributions to the local sense of place. Another event long considered symbolic of Vermont culture is Town Meeting Day. Indeed, residents in municipalities across the Region gather annually on or near the first the Tuesday in March to vote and make decisions that affect their local communities. Some municipalities have changed to Australian ballot voting combined with a public information session. Many municipalities temporarily halted in-person Town Meetings to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, though by 2023 all communities in the region have returned to in-person Town Meetings or information sessions.

Beyond the historical richness of the region, Northwest Vermont boasts a robust mosaic of diverse landscapes, from the Adirondacks-backed agricultural viewsheds of the Lake Champlain islands to the heavily wooded western slopes of the Green Mountains. With sensitive siting and design, it’s possible for scenic landscapes to be developed and still retain much of their intrinsic character. Aesthetic considerations are recognized as a legitimate public concern under Criterion 8 of Act 250. Conserving the region’s aesthetic resources is crucial to maintaining its sense of place.

Our downtowns and historic village centers provide a gathering place for the community, a sense of identity and a unique heritage that is an important cultural and historic resource. State programs that “designate” downtowns and village centers provide a mechanism to access grants and tax credits to assist redevelopment projects and promote growth in these places. The Certified Local Government (CLG) program establishes a preservation partnership between a local historic preservation commission, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the National Park Service. St. Albans City achieved CLG designation in 2020. As such, the city can access CLG grant funding for locally-based preservation projects.

## **Natural Resources**

**Bedrock and the Physical Landscape:** The Foothills of the Green Mountains are separated from the Champlain Lowlands by a series of thrust faults running north–south through Franklin County. The Hinesburg Thrust Fault and related erosional remnants—including Aldis Hill, Prospect Hill and Georgia Mountain—are among the most prominent landscape features in this part of the region. The Foothills are characterized by rolling hills and valleys ranging in elevation from 500 to around 1,000 feet above mean sea level. This area is differentiated from the Green Mountain chain more by elevation and topography than geology. Many of the region’s more picturesque villages and hamlets are located there.

The Green Mountains—which are part of the Appalachian chain and once stood higher than the Rockies—now reach heights within the region of less than 4,000 feet. Nevertheless, these old mountains still present a formidable barrier along Franklin County’s eastern border. Exposed bedrock, boulder surfaces, steep slopes and shallow soils are common. Because of its remoteness, elevation, steep slopes, shallow soils and poor

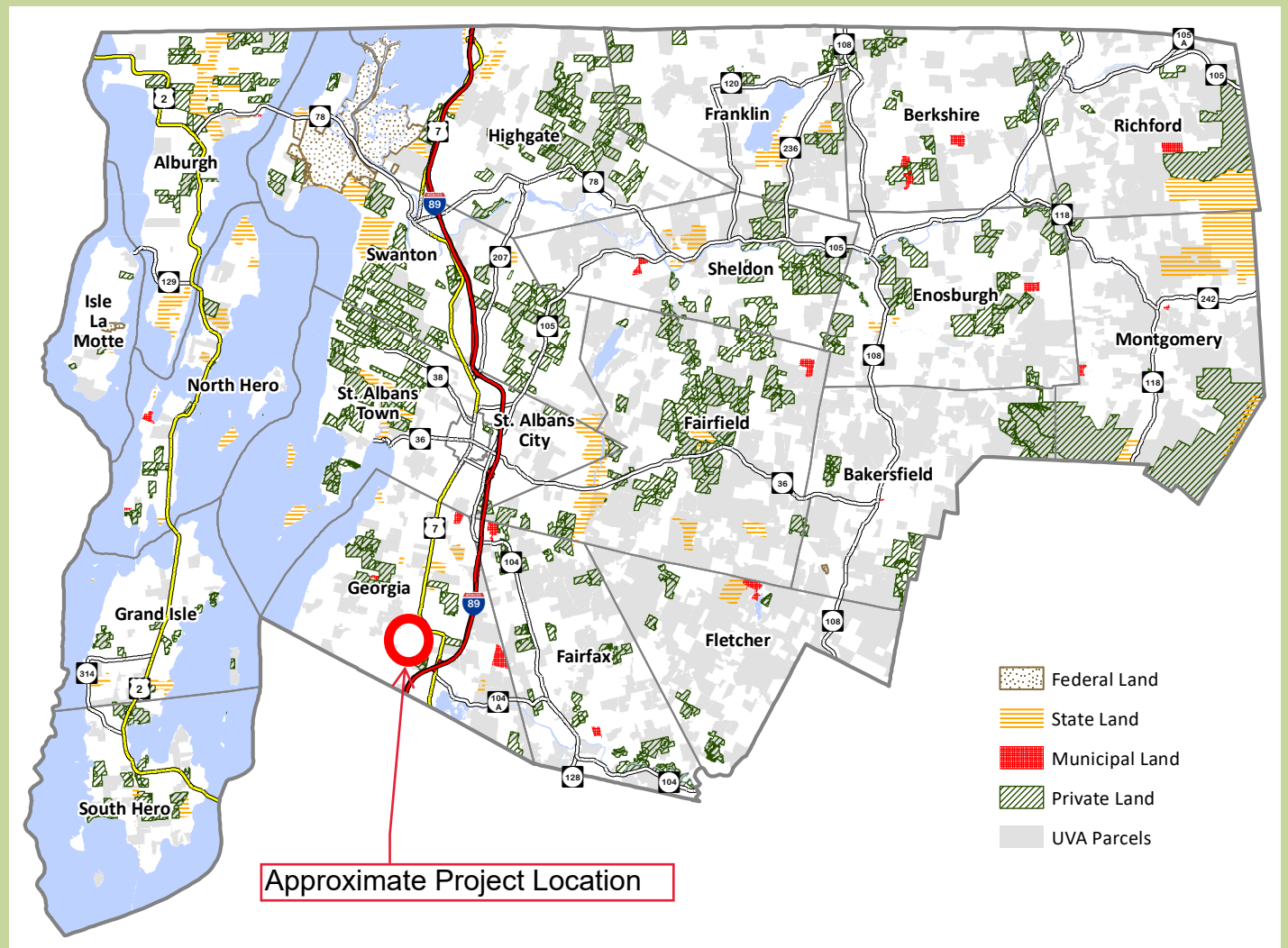
**Forest Resources:** The region's forests play an important role as a natural, cultural and economic asset to the local communities. Indeed, several communities in the region maintain town forests. These and other forests throughout the region are used for recreational and educational purposes and activities.

Northwestern Vermont is part of the Northern Forest, an area stretching across northern New York and New England and encompassing 26 million acres of forestland. The upland area of northwestern Vermont contains the largest tracks of contiguous woodland in the Northern Forest. This area is characterized by steeply sloping mature softwood and hardwood forests as well as streams that flow into the Missisquoi and Lamoille Rivers. The region's uplands strongly correlate with the preferred habitat for Vermont's black bear population, and these areas are generally the most undeveloped lands in Franklin County.

Forest products are a vital component of the local economy. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Vermont produced 48.1% of the nation's maple syrup in 2014, with Franklin County a leading production area in the state. Timber is also an essential industry in the region, and more than 10,000 MBF (million board feet) and 7,614 cords of pulpwood were produced by Franklin County in 2010.

Fifty percent of the land in the region is enrolled in Vermont's Current Use or Use Value Appraisal (UVA) Program, which means the land is being actively managed for agriculture or forestry (Map 10). The amount of

### MAP 10: Conserved Land



SOURCE: Vermont Open Geodata Portal and Use Value Appraisal (UVA) Program

Deer wintering areas, or “deer yards,” provide critical habitat for white tail deer and other species of vertebrates. These areas of hemlock, spruce, fir, cedar and pine species provide shelter from deep snows and permit easier winter travel for deer, compared to deciduous forests. Deer yards also benefit 169 of Vermont’s 386 vertebrate species (excluding fish). Of these, five species are threatened or endangered, and four are of special concern due to their limited population size. Numerous deer wintering areas have been identified throughout Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, the most extensive of which are located in the heavily forested areas of eastern Franklin County.

For habitat serving large mammal populations, the area along the Green Mountains on the eastern boundary of the region is critical. The Cold Hollow to Canada initiative is a partnership of community members in Franklin and Lamoille Counties. Its mission is to work together toward the common goal of land stewardship and wildlife habitat conservation across property and municipal boundaries through education, outreach and conservation of land and water resources. On a larger scale, several state and federal organizations have mapped large contiguous habitat blocks in the Green Mountains and vital corridors that connect them; these connectors are important for enabling the movement of large mammals (Map 11).

**Scenic Resources:** The region’s scenic resources are plentiful and include both natural and human-influenced elements. Undeveloped ridgelines are among the region’s highly valued natural scenic resources, serving both as vantage points (the areas we enjoy views from) and as terminal views (and create the scene we are enjoying through our observation). Because impacts on scenic resources are assessed as part of the Act 250 development review process, communities in the Region may wish to incorporate a scenic resource assessment as part of their planning processes.



*Moose in a Highgate Wetland*  
PHOTO CREDIT: Bill Ashton

## GOALS AND POLICIES

### ① GOAL

**Protect significant natural resources, including air, wetlands, wildlife, lakes, ponds, woodlands, earth resources, open spaces, groundwater resources and wildlife habitat.**

- a. Support efforts to reduce air pollutants generated in the region from the residential, commercial, industrial and transportation sectors.
- b. Ensure that development will not present an undue risk of degrading the region’s air quality.
- c. Plan, construct and manage mineral and earth resource extraction and processing facilities to ensure that negative impacts are limited and rehabilitation is certain. Minimize noise and adverse impacts on existing or planned uses within the vicinity of the project, fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, prime agricultural soils and scenic resources. Ensure projects do not interfere with the function and safety of all modes within the transportation system.
- d. Ensure that development in floodplain or river corridor areas does not impede the flow of flood waters or endanger public health, safety and welfare.
- e. Locate and configure land development to avoid the fragmentation of and adverse impacts to natural areas, forest blocks, critical wildlife habitat and connectivity areas identified in the regional plan or local plans by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, or through site investigation.
- f. Ensure that outdoor lighting is designed to minimize the amount of light leaving development sites, overly bright areas or hot spots, and the amount of light pollution illuminating the night sky.
- g. Assist in efforts to combat the spread of invasive species.

## ② GOAL

**Protect and conserve historically significant buildings and locations, archaeological resources, and important scenic and aesthetic resources identified in local and regional plans.**

- a. Ensure that new land development minimizes impact on archaeological sites.
- b. Ensure that land development along prominent ridgelines and hilltops is designed to fit within the landscape and avoid undue adverse visual impacts.
- c. Encourage communication facilities to limit their impact on scenic resources by reducing their size or location so that exterior lighting is not required, by seeking opportunities for co-location, and by choosing sites, shapes and colors of structures that reduce visual impact.
- d. Encourage energy generation and distribution facilities to minimize their visual impact on ridgelines, slopes and open areas.
- e. Ensure that historically significant buildings and locations are conserved and/or made available for adaptive reuse whenever feasible considering their cost and condition.

## ③ GOAL

**Maintain and wherever possible improve the quality of lakes, ponds, rivers, streams and groundwater.**

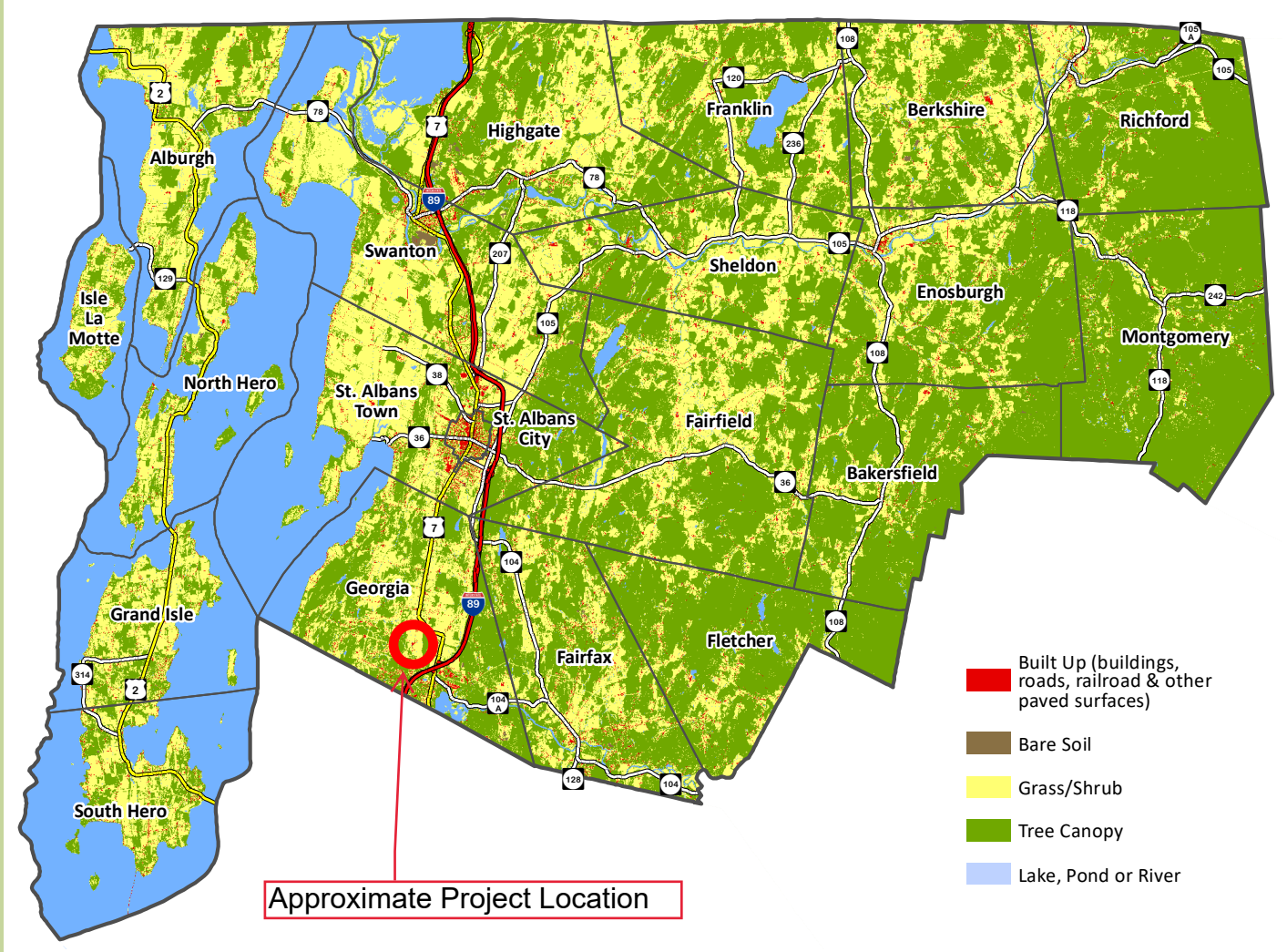
- a. Forbid the use of persistent harmful and toxic pollutants in groundwater recharge areas or in areas where they could enter surface or sub-surface waters.
- b. Ensure that development mitigates the anticipated effects on water quality through Low Impact Development techniques, such as limiting the amount of impervious surface on a site and incorporating adequate amounts of vegetation, trees and shrubs to aid in stormwater treatment.
- c. Improve surface water quality and protect it from point and non-point nutrient loading.
- d. Maintain and expand vegetative buffers along surface waters of sufficient width as a tool for improving water quality and protecting habitat.
- e. Support efforts to remove as much of the Missisquoi and Carry Bay causeways as possible given permitting and funding constraints.

# LAND USE

## GOALS

1. The region is characterized by compact villages and growth centers separated by rural countryside and the working landscape.
2. Maintain healthy and diverse forest and conservation areas as well as a strong working landscape of agriculture and forestry.
3. Target future economic growth primarily in the region’s existing and planned growth areas.

MAP 12: Current Land Use



SOURCE: Vermont Open Geodata Portal

With sufficient planning, cumulative commercial and residential development can avoid creating problematic conditions over time, such as traffic congestion, lack of or insufficient infrastructure and services, lack of or poorly designed parking, pedestrian inaccessibility and sprawl. The beginning of these growth-related issues can be seen in some areas of the region. While recognizing the opportunities that residential and commercial expansion brings to the region in terms of economic growth, it is critical to strike a balance between embracing growth and managing it to preserve rural character and traditional settlement patterns. It is also crucial to ensure that municipal and regional infrastructure, facilities, utilities and services are adequate and functional. An important role of the NRPC is to work with local municipalities in developing plans and local regulations to effectively manage growth. Specific tools and resources are discussed in the next section.

## PLANNING FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Most communities in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties have updated their plans and local regulations to keep pace with changing development pressures. However, ensuring local capacity to manage land use planning and development review continues to be a challenge. Faced with growth and development pressures, the workload and responsibilities of local governments will only expand in the coming years. Assistance and educational opportunities from the NRPC, the state, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, and other organizations will help make land use planning and development review more manageable now and in the future. It will also be important to take advantage of opportunities to share resources among municipalities.

To guide land use planning and development in this state, the Vermont Planning and Development Act outlines 13 planning goals and 9 smart growth principles. The smart growth principles are the core of the growth center designation program passed into law in 2006 and discussed later in this plan. If followed, these principles will prevent sprawl by focusing development in compact, pedestrian-friendly village, town, city or growth centers. The 13 state planning goals from 24 V.S.A. §4302 establish a policy framework for land use planning in Vermont. All municipalities are encouraged to adopt local plans that further these goals. The act enables communities to utilize numerous regulatory and non-regulatory tools to implement these goals, including but not limited to zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations.

### Regional Planning Area Mapping Criteria

#### Agricultural Resource Planning Area

- Farmed prime soils > 20 acres
- Farmed non-prime soils > 20 acres
- Negligible acreage of unfarmed prime soils

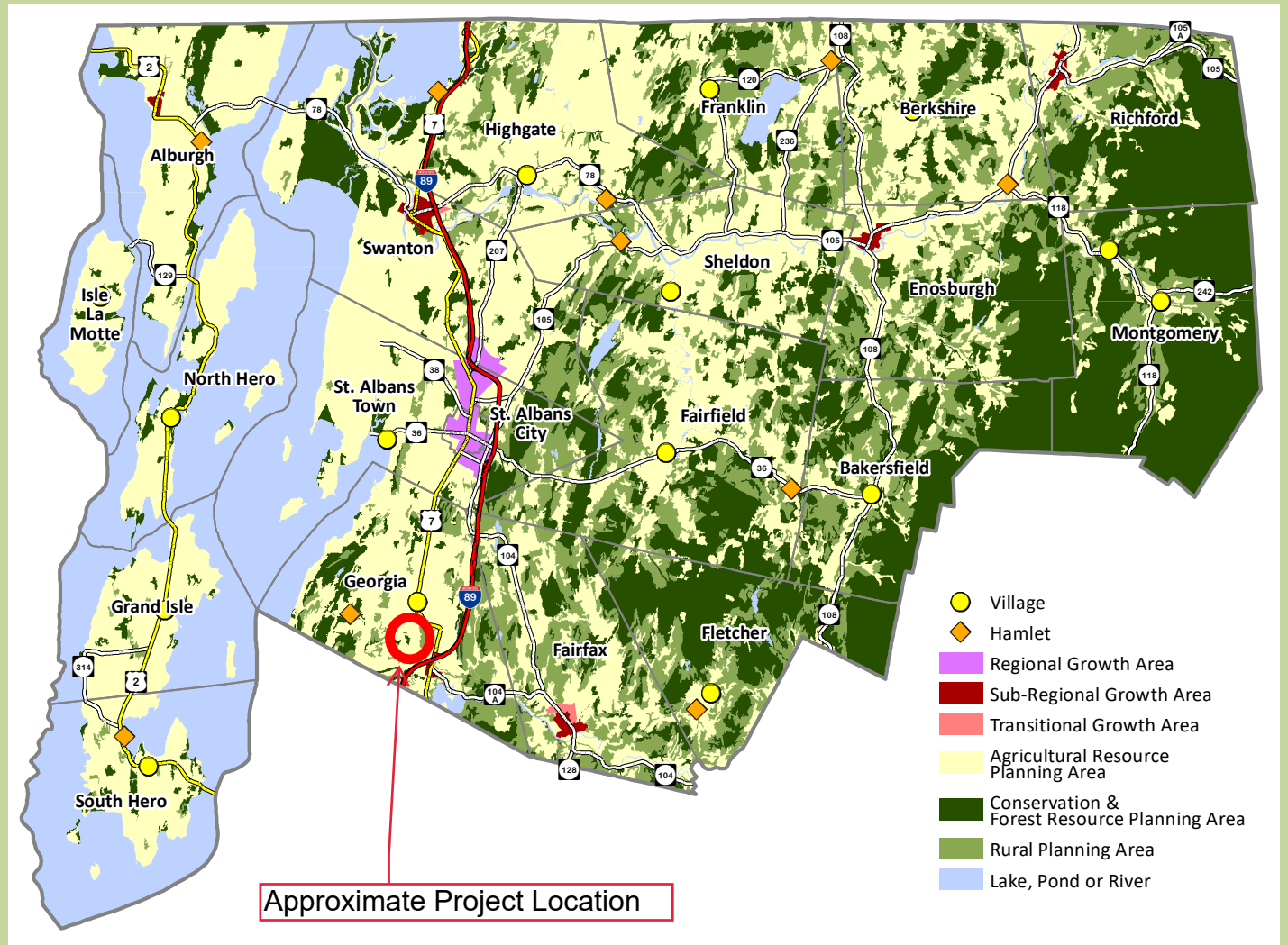
#### Forest and Conservation Planning Area

- Wetlands > 5 acres
- 100-year floodplain
- Uplands (> 1,000' elevation)
- Public lands
- Shore land (< 500' from waterline)
- Everything from "moderate to severe" on suitability map

## PROPOSED LAND USE

The NRPC has divided the region into several proposed land use planning areas to encourage the conservation of valued resources and a development pattern that will maintain the character and quality of life that is important to this region. These planning areas are illustrated in Map 14 and include Agricultural Resource Planning Areas, Forest and Conservation Planning Areas, Rural Land Planning Areas, Growth Planning Areas and Sub-Regional Growth Planning Areas. In addition, the NRPC has identified villages, hamlets and transitional growth planning areas. It is important to note that planning areas designated in this plan are regional planning tools, not regulatory zoning districts. When reviewing land uses for conformance with this plan, emphasis will be placed not on whether the use is located entirely within or just outside a particular area, but on the impact the land use will have on underlying resources and how the use will affect the intent and function of the particular land use planning area.

## MAP 14: Proposed Land Use



SOURCE: Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and NRPC Collected Data

### Land Use Planning Areas

**Agricultural Resource Planning Areas:** Agricultural Resource Planning Areas represent the best farmland in the region and shall be given the highest level of support for their continued use as active agricultural lands. Nearly 39% of the region is included in this category, reflecting the significant acreage of prime agricultural soils, the large number of farms in the Northwest and the importance of agriculture in the region’s economy. Strategies that support the long-term protection of these lands from conversion to non- agricultural use are supported by NRPC. Where development does occur, it shall be located to minimize impact to primary agricultural soils. Recognizing the importance of farming to the region’s character and economy, and also recognizing that existing farms may occupy some good farming lands that would otherwise be categorized as Forest and Conservation Planning Area, Agricultural Resource Planning Areas were given precedence over the Forest and Conservation designation. For example, if a particular area has characteristics of both an Agricultural Resource Planning Area and a Forest and Conservation Planning Area, the area would be characterized as the former.

**Forest and Conservation Planning Areas:** Forest and Conservation Planning Areas, which constitute 25% of the region, include a variety of land types that are well suited for tree growth and habitat and generally not suitable for development. Land in this category usually should not be developed in order to protect the forest resource value of the lands. Development that does occur shall be limited due to natural resource constraints,

**Transitional Growth Areas:** Given the rate of growth in the region, some areas are certain to experience—due to geographic location or local planning—increased rates of local growth. To ensure well-planned and well-financed infrastructure and foster smart growth principles, it is of utmost importance for municipalities to plan for development in advance, rather than planning around established development after the fact. The NRPC will help municipalities with planning for these areas. Transitional growth areas have been identified north of the Fairfax sub-regional growth area and east of the Swanton sub-regional growth area.

**Industrial Areas:** The NRPC supports industrial parks, districts and areas that encourage economic expansion and high-wage businesses to locate in the region without adversely affecting neighboring land uses. Industrial parks and districts should be carefully planned to ensure access and connectivity. This can be achieved through public transportation service and walkability - both within the district in addition to making connections from the district to adjacent pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Thoughtful site planning can both ensure that off-site impacts, such as noise, are mitigated through buffers, landscaping and other design considerations while at the same time ensuring good quality of life and integration with the local community.

## GOALS AND POLICIES

### ① GOAL

**Ensure the region continues to be characterized by compact villages and growth centers separated by rural countryside and the working landscape.**

- a. Support infill and redevelopment of designated growth centers or existing strip development areas over new commercial strip development.
- b. Locate intensive residential development primarily in areas within or related to state or regionally designated growth areas and support redevelopment and infill opportunities.
- c. Ensure that residential development outside of growth centers, downtowns, villages and hamlets is clustered or otherwise designed to work with the landscape in terms of energy efficiency, protection of ecologically sensitive areas and conservation of farmland and agricultural soils.
- d. Ensure that public investments—including public facilities and the construction or expansion of infrastructure—will promote expansion in growth areas designated in this plan and will not encourage the development and/or fragmentation of farmlands or other resource areas.
- e. Ensure that the scale, siting, design and management of new development respect the existing landscape and the character of the area's built environment.

### ② GOAL

**Maintain healthy and diverse forest and conservation areas as well as a strong working landscape, including agriculture and forestry.**

- a. Ensure that development respects the physical limitations of the site and avoids negative impacts on the natural and cultural features of the landscape.
- b. Ensure that development in rural, forestry and conservation areas will not diminish the viability of agricultural or woodland operations, or fragment high-priority forest and connectivity blocks and other large contiguous tracts of woodland or wildlife habitat/ corridors.
- c. Limit the loss of prime and primary agricultural soils and active farmland to the greatest degree possible, and mitigate it whenever the loss cannot be prevented.
- d. Maintain all right-to-farm protections for agricultural operations that have acceptable agricultural practices.
- e. Ensure that development in designated conservation areas on the proposed land use map will be small scale and will not diminish the environmental value of the lands. Only allow development farther than

# NORTHWEST REGIONAL ENERGY PLAN

2024 – 2032

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# I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northwest Regional Energy Plan began as a pilot project funded by the Vermont Department of Public Service in 2017. The intent of the project was to complete in-depth energy planning at the regional level while achieving state and regional energy goals—most notably, the goal to have renewable energy sources meet 90% of the state’s total energy needs by 2050 (CAP Mitigation Scenario). This in-depth regional energy planning is needed to address three key issues: energy security, environmental protection, and economic needs and opportunities.

Specific goals to be achieved by this plan include the following:

- Collaboration with Vermont Energy Investment Corporation (VEIC) to create a regional energy model that identifies targets for energy conservation and renewable energy generation
- Creation of specific strategies to help the region achieve state energy goals
- Creation of regional maps prioritizing locations for the development of future renewable generation facilities in the region

The region’s energy supply and consumption are analyzed in Section IV to establish baseline energy use. The use of space heating energy, transportation energy, and electricity in the region is specifically examined.

The energy element of NRPC’s regional plan consists of the energy chapter of the Northwest Regional Plan and this Northwest Regional Energy Plan. While the energy chapter is a high-level overview of NRPC’s energy goals and policies, the energy plan takes a comprehensive and detailed look at the region’s energy context. This regional energy plan meets the standards required for an enhanced energy plan and therefore gives NRPC increased deference in Act 248 proceedings. The requirements for enhanced energy plans can be found in Appendix I. Since the development of NRPC’s regional energy plan, there have been several statewide planning efforts that will inform NRPC’s future energy planning. In 2020, the Legislature passed the Global Warming Solutions Act, which sets specific required emissions targets for the state. The Climate Action Plan (CAP), written in 2021 by Vermont’s Climate Council, sets out pathways to achieve these emission targets, as well as addressing how to ensure an equitable transition and climate resilience. In 2022, the state updated its Comprehensive Energy Plan (CEP). The CEP included an increased focus on ensuring an equitable climate change transition and three updated sector goals for thermal, transportation and electric sectors.

NRPC’s updated Energy Plan, adopted in 2024, further addresses these new statewide planning efforts and new regional considerations including a focus on an equitable energy transition for all residents.

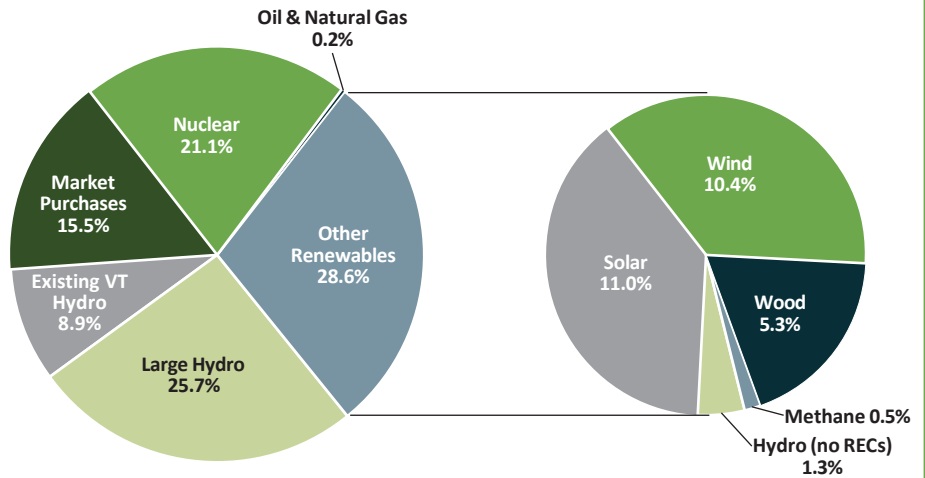
The NRPC worked with VEIC to create targets for energy conservation and renewable energy generation that align with state energy goals while taking into account regional factors. The energy saved via conservation and improved efficiency is targeted to equal approximately 3.5 trillion BTUs by 2050. Conservation and improved efficiency are planned through a variety of means including increased use of efficient materials during construction and weatherization of existing structures, installation of efficient technologies, and electrification of previously fossil fuel powered technologies. Most prominently, improved efficiency is targeted through the use of electric vehicles for transportation and electric heat pumps for space heating. The resulting increase in regional electricity demand means that electricity generation in the region will also need to increase.

Goals, strategies, and implementation steps are established in Section VI to guide the Northwest region to achieve the energy conservation and renewable energy generation targets created in Section V. Goals, strategies, and implementation steps have been specifically identified for the following categories: electricity conservation, thermal efficiency, and transportation. Electricity conservation, thermal efficiency and transportation are the types of energy conservation that the Northwest Region focuses upon in this section. Achievement of the goals set by NRPC will require the cooperation of regional partners, businesses, and the

**Non-Renewable Energy**

There is one non-renewable energy generator in the region: Project 10. This facility, which is located in Swanton, is owned by the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) and runs on fuel oil and/or biodiesel. The facility is a “peaking” plant that operates only during peak electric loads, which, according to the project’s Certificate of Public Good, equals approximately 600 hours per year. The facility can be converted to use natural gas as a fuel and is located near a natural gas line.

**FIGURE 4.11 GMP ENERGY PURCHASES BY FUEL - 2021**

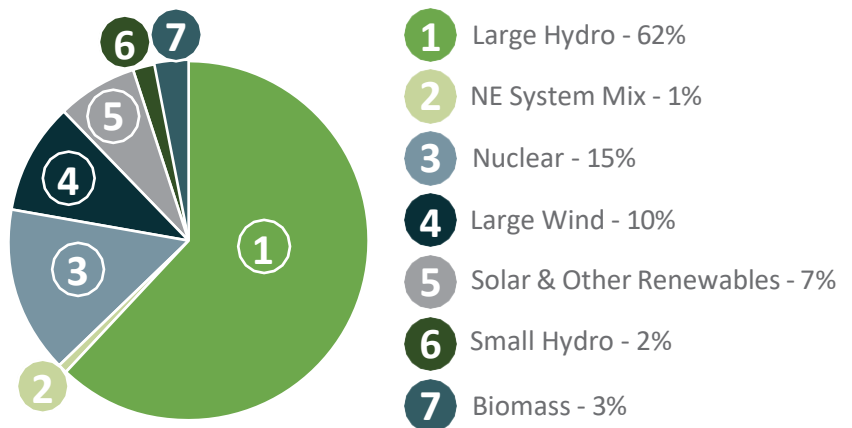


Source: Green Mountain Power

**PUBLIC UTILITY ENERGY SOURCES AND IMPORTED ELECTRICITY**

Four public utility companies in the Northwest region supply electricity (see Appendix C). Two of these utilities are operated by municipalities: Swanton Village and Enosburg Falls. Both of these utilities are part of Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA), an organization that represents 12 municipal electric utilities in Vermont. The other electric utilities servicing the region are Green Mountain Power and Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC).

**FIGURE 4.12 VEC ENERGY PURCHASES BY FUEL - 2021**



Source: Vermont Electric Cooperative

**Green Mountain Power**

Green Mountain Power generally services the southern and western parts of Franklin County. Figure 4.11 shows sources of electricity distributed by GMP in 2021 (before the sale of renewable energy credits (RECs)). The electricity comes from primarily outside the region with the exception of distributed solar generation and the GMP-owned dam at Fairfax Falls. GMP owns several generation facilities. It also enters into power purchasing agreements with individual power suppliers and purchases power on the open market (“System” power) (Figure 4.11).

**FIGURE 4.13 VILLAGE OF ENOSBURG FALLS ELECTRICITY SOURCES**

Type of Power	Generator
Hydro	Enosburgh Dam, NY Power Authority, Hydro Quebec, VEPPI
Farm Methane/Solar/Small Wind	Chester Solar (Chester, MA), Standard Offer
Landfill Gas	Fitchburg Landfill (Fitchburg, MA)
Fuel Oil or Biodiesel	Project 10 (Swanton, VT)
Natural Gas or Oil	System Power (source of supply not identified)
Biomass	McNeil (Burlington, VT), Ryegate (Ryegate, VT), VEPPI

prior to signing a lease. As a result, the landlord may not have a strong financial incentive to invest into home improvements such as weatherization or heat pumps. As a result, renters may face high utility costs with few options to address them. This is a particular problem given that in the Northwest Region the median renter household has half the income of the median owner-occupied household. Finding new ways to incentivize both landlords and tenants as well as provide targeted outreach and education on this topic could help to alleviate this issue.

- **Baseload vs. Intermittent Electricity** – Solar and wind generation technologies create electricity intermittently: when the sun is shining and when the wind is blowing, respectively. Unfortunately, the times when these generation sources are operating do not always correspond to the times when electric demand is at its peak. “Baseload” electricity, or electricity that is available on demand, is needed to ensure that peak demand can be met at any time. At present, baseload electricity is typically generated by fossil fuel, nuclear, or hydro generation sources; this may change in the future. Research indicates that solar and wind generation often complement each other, and increased solar generation in the region has helped the region address peak loads. Still, reaching the 2050 goal will require the development of alternative technologies such as more efficient and large-scale batteries, which will enable renewable technologies to supply baseload electricity. Biomass from farm and landfill gas as well as run-of-the-river hydro can be used to generate energy more consistently than solar or wind, providing a more reliable baseload. Each option comes with potential environmental & siting impacts that will need to be carefully considered to create a balanced system.
- **Grid Limitations** – The Vermont electrical grid was developed to have a one-way flow of electricity and distributed renewable generation can impact the function of the electrical grid. As with the rest of the United States, Vermont has historically depended on a small number of centralized power plants—the vast majority of which are located outside of the state.

With growth in distributed renewable generation, the way in which electricity is generated has changed. In some parts of the region, the grid may not be fully capable of allowing the placement of all scales of renewable energy generation facilities in every community. According to Green Mountain Power, its portion of the regional grid should be able to deal with additional solar generation, but there is less information available from VEC, the Village of Swanton, and the Village of Enosburg Falls. If the region and state are going to become more reliant on distributed solar generation, or even become a net exporter of renewable energy, Vermont public utilities and Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO) will need to increase the pace of system-wide upgrades. This may be a difficult task to complete without directly impacting ratepayers and the cost of electricity in the state and the region. Proposed investments by GMP and VELCO would add an estimated 108 MW in increased voltage limits.

- **Inclement Weather** – Increased reliance on electricity for regional heating and transportation energy needs could be challenged by the region’s weather. Winter storms and high winds often threaten the region’s electrical distribution infrastructure. Downed power lines could impact the ability of some regional households to produce heat or to have a means of transportation if the household is solely reliant on electric heat pumps and/or electric vehicles. Although this challenge may be addressed through increasingly concentrated regional development and improved battery technology, households might still need to have a secondary means of heating their homes (and carry the cost of maintaining a secondary heating source). Other means of overcoming the challenge of inclement weather include creating grid redundancy, creating microgrids (i.e., grids that can disconnect and operate when the main grid is not functioning), and developing more accurate weather prediction tools such as VELCO’s weather analytics tool.
- **Difficulty in Developing New Hydro** – As mentioned, it is difficult to develop new hydro power sources,



**GEORGIA**  
VERMONT

# TOWN OF GEORGIA, VERMONT

## 2024 TOWN PLAN



**PREPARED BY:**

Town of Georgia Planning Commission

**ADOPTED BY:**

Town of Georgia VT Selectboard

January 6, 2025



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## APPENDIX

- A. Community Survey Report
- B. Public Meeting Notes
- C. Town Reports and Studies List
- D. Vermont Conservation Design Report

# PART II GEORGIA TODAY

## The Community Setting

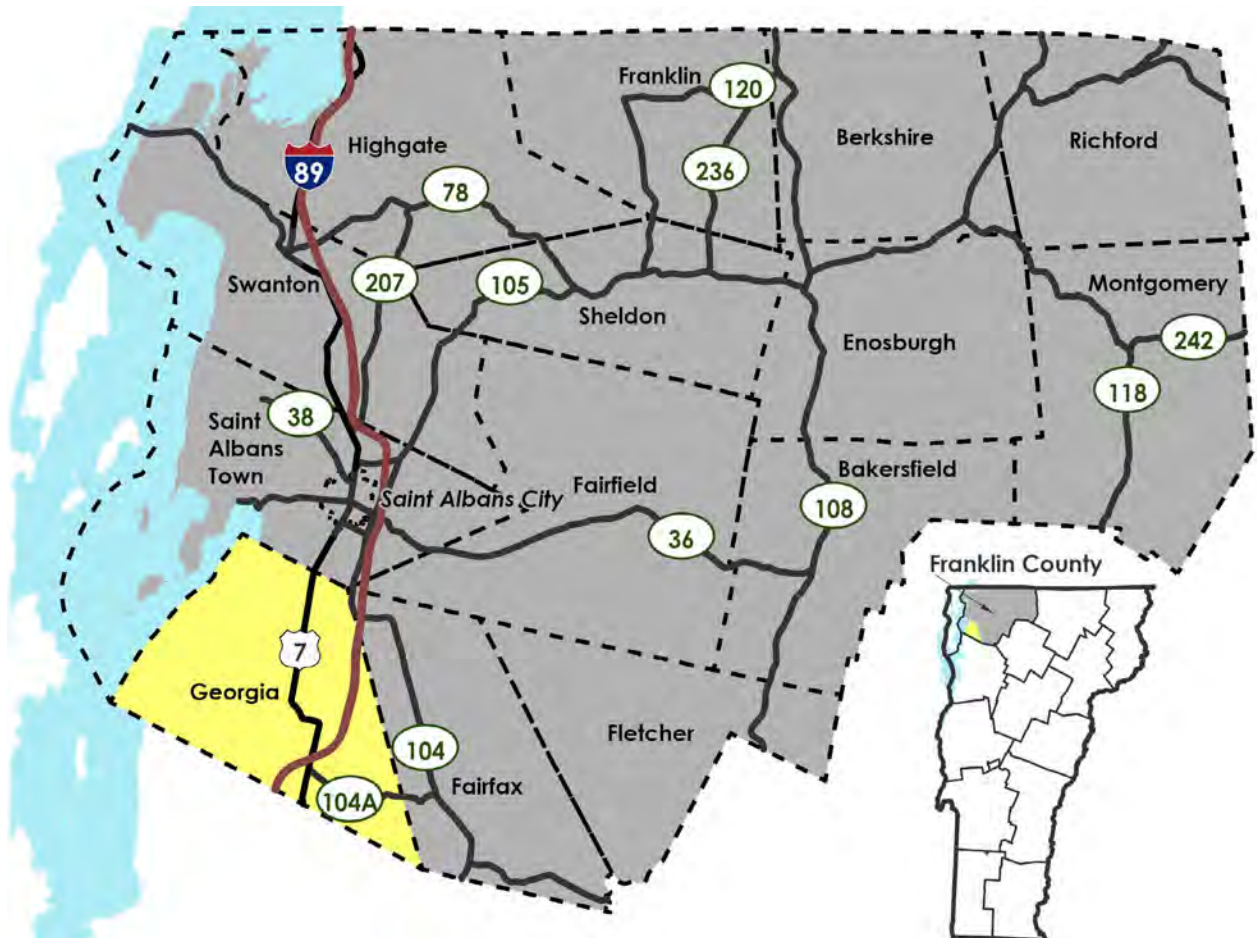
### Location and Boundaries

Georgia is located in the southwest corner of Franklin County and borders the Chittenden County towns of Milton and Westford to the south, the Franklin County towns of Fairfax to the east, St. Albans and Fairfield to the north and Lake Champlain to the west. Georgia has over seven miles of shoreline along Lake Champlain and part of its border with Milton bisects Lake Arrowhead.

The Town of Georgia has an area of approximately 45 square miles, including about 5.9 square miles of water in Lake Champlain. Excluding the water, the town is similar in size to the average Vermont town of around 39 square miles.

The Town is characterized by a narrow shoreline, a broad, relatively flat plain, the foothills of the Green Mountains, the Lamoille River and tributaries, as well as various other smaller streams, tributaries and wetlands. The Town is roughly half open land and half forested, with much of the open land devoted to agriculture.

Georgia’s long boundary with Lake Champlain, it’s relatively flat plain, and foothills of the Green Mountains make it a diverse and beautiful town.

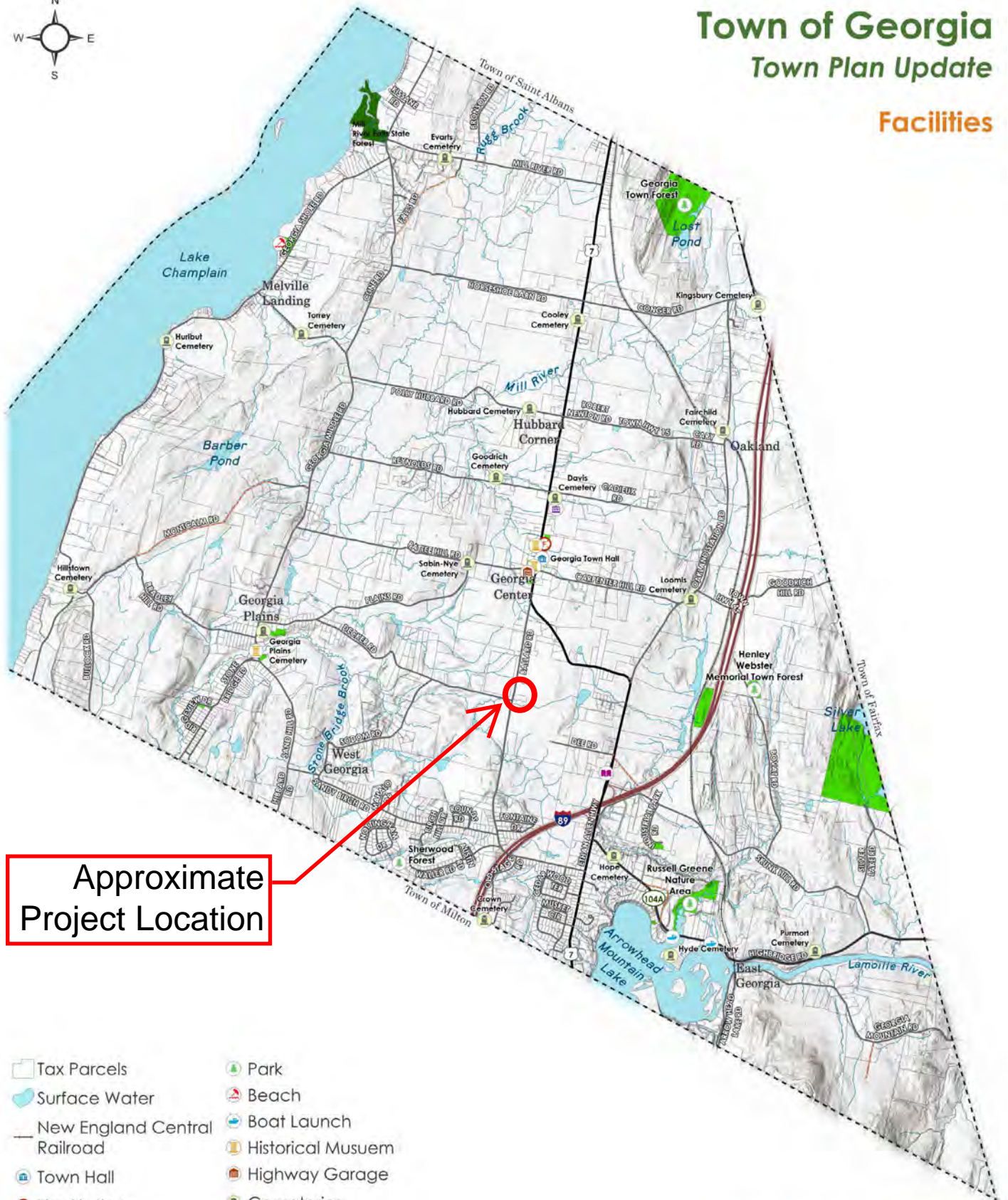


MAP 2.1 - Location Map



# Town of Georgia Town Plan Update

## Facilities



**Approximate  
Project Location**

- |                              |                   |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Tax Parcels                  | Park              |
| Surface Water                | Beach             |
| New England Central Railroad | Boat Launch       |
| Town Hall                    | Historical Museum |
| Fire Station                 | Highway Garage    |
| Schools                      | Cemeteries        |
| Public Library               | Town Land         |
|                              | State Forest      |

0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles

Map is for conceptual planning purposes only



Data Sources: Municipal Boundaries, Roads, Parcels, Library and Town Hall; Vermont Center for Geographic Information; Other Points of interest: USGS GNIS and parcel data; Cemeteries augmented from Cemeteries of Georgia map

MAP 2.3 - Town Facilities

lakeshore also presents unique concerns for sewage treatment and potable water supplies. Various areas of the town have been studied to determine the feasibility of wastewater disposal and community water systems to help address these concerns and/or support additional growth and density in specific areas. (See Appendix 'D' for a listing of town reports and studies) These areas include the South Village area, Georgia Center, and the Georgia Shore.

## Outdoor Recreation

The Town of Georgia and State of Vermont own and maintain several recreational lands and facilities, as follows (*See Map 2.3 Town Facilities*):

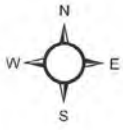
- » The Town Beach (10 acres). Facilities include the beach, fishing access, softball and baseball fields, tennis, pickleball, volleyball and basketball courts, bathrooms, playground, and a pavilion which can be rented for private events. The Town Beach facility is maintained and operated by the Georgia Public Works Department. During normal operations, the Town Beach is used for summer outings, Little League, picnics, swimming, fishing and boating access. In the winter, the beach welcomes visitors for ice fishing. Annually, the beach is also used for Fall Fest. Georgia Beach and the parking lot can be accessed from dawn to dusk via an electric gate.
- » Georgia Elementary and Middle School (GEMS) - (36 acres). Recreational facilities on this site include two gymnasiums; numerous soccer, softball and baseball fields; a walking path outside of the school, as well as several playgrounds.
- » Russell Greene Natural Area (43 acres). Recreational facilities here include multiple walking trails totaling 1.8 miles.
- » Falls Road Trail connects between Falls Road to Cline Road for 0.7 miles. There is no parking areas on either end of the trail.

- » Town Trail #4 is a short walking path off of Route 104A that starts near the entrance to Arrowhead Lake Industrial Park and travels along the fence and down the hill meeting up with 104A again near the Russell Greene Natural Area at Trayah Road. There is no parking for Trail #4.
- » Boat access is available off of Route 104A at Arrowhead Lake and at the Town Beach.
- » Henley Webster Memorial Town Forest (10 acres) includes walking trails and a picnic area with parking off of Bovat Road.
- » Silver Lake Woods (162 acres) includes 1.75 miles of trails abutting Silver Lake, with parking off of Silver Lake Road.
- » Mill River Falls Natural Area (35 acres) is a State Forest which includes 3.5 miles of trails with parking near the intersection of Mill River Road and Georgia Shore Road.

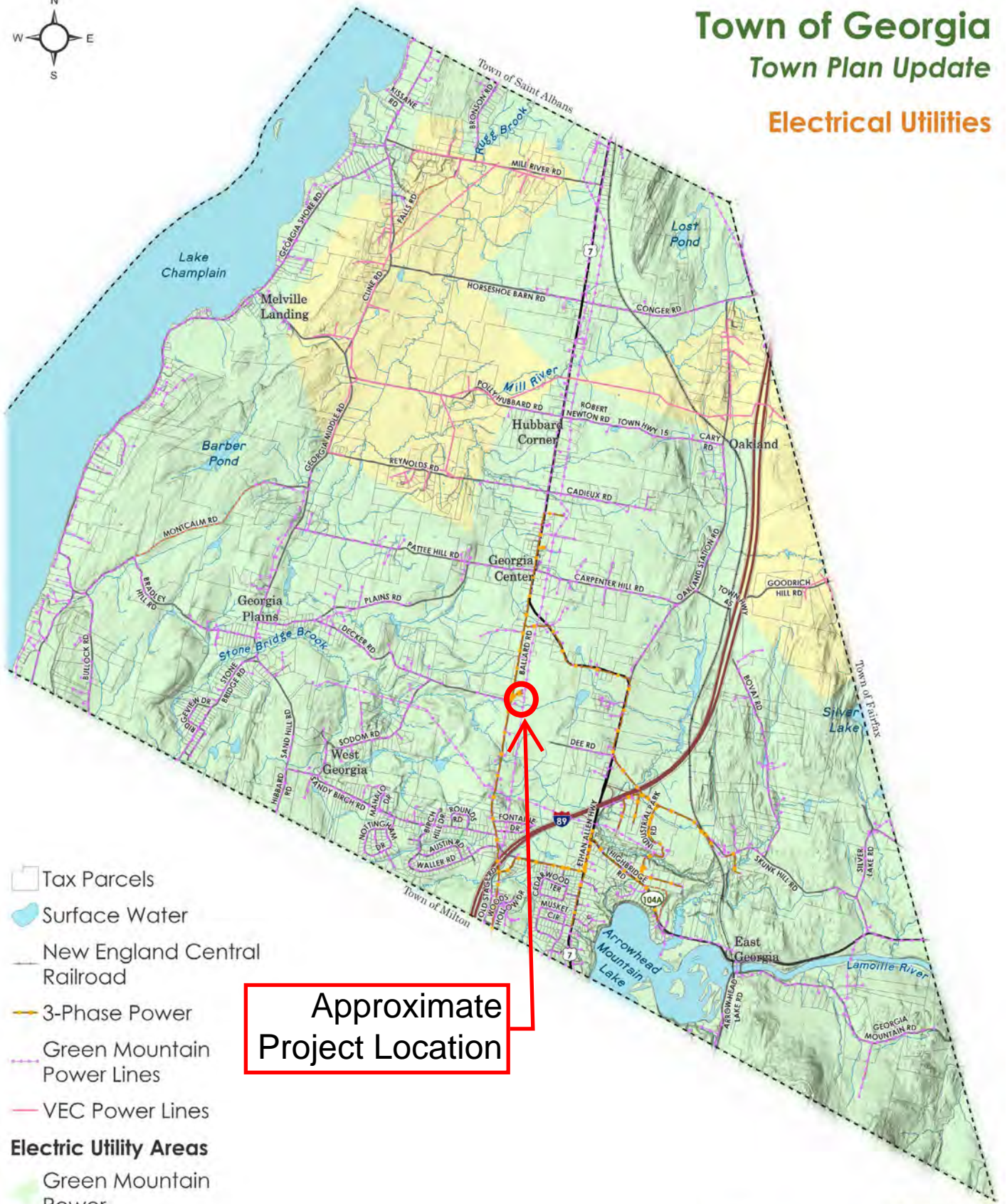
## Electric & Gas Service

Georgia is served by several utilities which provide needed electricity, gas and communication services. As shown on *Map 2.4, Electrical Utilities*, Green Mountain Power (GMP) serves a majority of the residential, commercial and industrial electrical needs of the town, with Vermont Electric CO-OP (VEC) serving the remainder, particularly in the northern end of town.

Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO) owns and maintains a major 115 KV transmission line which bisects the Town in a north/south and east/west direction, as well as transmission substations, and is currently planning to upgrade the 3-Phase electric power. These lines serve as a major transmission link for the power grid from Canada to the Northeast. Three phase power, which can deliver twice the amount of electricity and is important for supporting the growth potential of commercial and industrial



# Town of Georgia Town Plan Update Electrical Utilities



- Tax Parcels
- Surface Water
- New England Central Railroad
- 3-Phase Power
- Green Mountain Power Lines
- VEC Power Lines

### Electric Utility Areas

- Green Mountain Power
- Vermont Electric Co-op

**Approximate  
Project Location**

0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles

MAP 2.4 - Electrical Utilities

Map is for conceptual planning purposes only

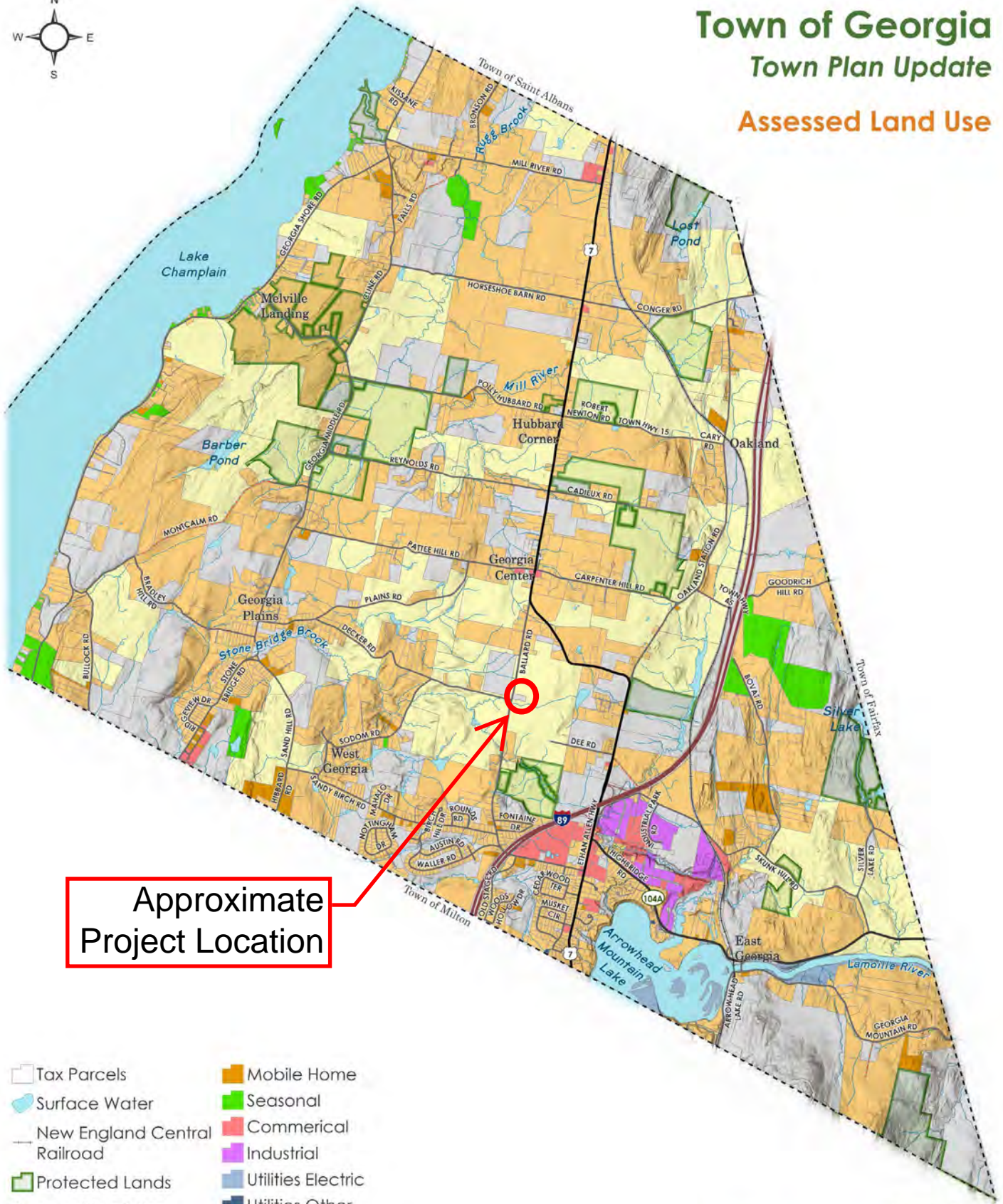


Data Sources: Municipal Boundaries, Roads, Parcels, Powerlines and areas: Vermont Center for Geographic Information



# Town of Georgia Town Plan Update

## Assessed Land Use



**Approximate  
Project Location**

- Tax Parcels
- Surface Water
- New England Central Railroad
- Protected Lands
- Assessed Land Use**
- Farm
- Residential
- Mobile Home
- Seasonal
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Utilities Electric
- Utilities Other
- Miscellaneous/ Other/ Unclassified

0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles

Map is for conceptual planning purposes only



Data Sources: Municipal Boundaries, Roads, Protected Lands: Vermont Center for Geographic Information; Land Use: CAT field from Georgia Parcels, Vermont Center for Geographic Information, 2024

MAP 2.5 - Existing Land Use - based on assessor data

## Existing Land Use

The use of land, both historically and currently, defines the physical make-up of Georgia, providing not only a sense of place, but an insight to how the town functions economically, physically and socially. The changing distribution of land use types affects the town’s ability to provide services and has implications for taxes. **Table 2.3 - Land Use Types by Parcel** shows the distribution of different land use types by parcel over the years, showing residential uses comprise over 80% of the properties in town, while commercial/industrial uses represent only about 3%.

Overall, since the last plan, there was an increase of 179 parcels in the town, 81 of which were identified as residential and the remaining identified as “other.”

The number of seasonal vacation homes has been decreasing since the 1980’s, often converted into year-round residences, and the latest data shows this continues to be the case. The number of agricultural/open space properties has remained relatively the same. The number of commercial/industrial parcels has been slowly increasing since 2005 however the latest data shows an apparent decrease. It is not clear

why this is the case, however it should be notes that the land use classifications provided in the latest GIS data did not fully align with the categories in the previous town plan. It may be important to note that growth in the number of parcels only indicates that a property was subdivided, but does not tell us if anything was built on the new property.

As a rural and agricultural community, much of the existing development concentration has taken place in one of three village centers: Georgia Center, Georgia Plains, and more recently South Village near the highway interchange. **See Map 2.5 - Existing Land Use.** The highway in particular has been very influential in attracting new residential, commercial and industrial growth at the southern end of town. Concentrating growth in limited, selected areas of town has been a valid strategy for helping to reduce sprawl and undermine the rural character of the area. These focal points of growth, along with other notable character areas of the town, are briefly described below.

**Georgia South Village.** The Georgia South Village is an area of approximately 120 acres located south of the Exit 18 interchange of Interstate 89. This area

**Table 2.3 - Land Use Types by Parcel**

PARCELS	2005 <sup>1</sup>		2010 <sup>1</sup>		2015 <sup>1</sup>		2024 <sup>2</sup>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Residential	1,419	77%	1,504	76%	1,582	77%	1,663	75%
Vacation	184	10%	160	8%	141	7%	113	5%
Commercial/Industrial	57	3%	66	3%	76	4%	64	3%
Agricultural/Open Space	39	2%	37	2%	36	2%	36	2%
Other	149	8%	218	11%	214	10%	352	16%
TOTAL	1,848		1,985		2,049		2,228	

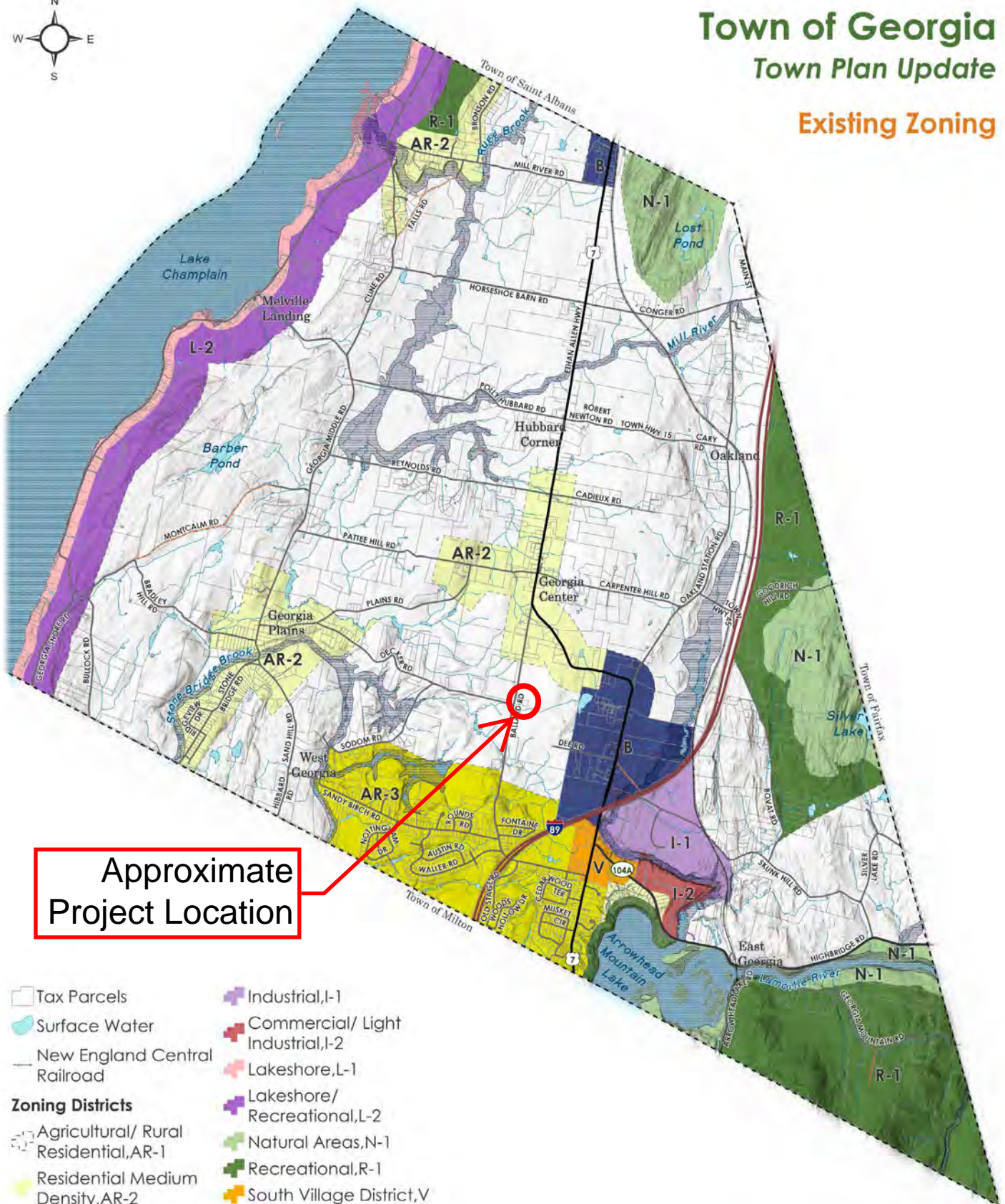
1 - Source: 2017 Town Plan

2 - Source: 2024 Vermont State GIS data. Note land use categories from 2017 Town Plan do not align fully with 2024 GIS data. “Vacation” properties include parcels identified as Seasonal 1 & 2; “Other” land use includes parcels identified as Unlisted, Miscellaneous, Other, and Utilities.



# Town of Georgia Town Plan Update

## Existing Zoning



**Approximate  
Project Location**

- Tax Parcels
- Surface Water
- New England Central Railroad
- Zoning Districts**
- Agricultural/ Rural Residential, AR-1
- Residential Medium Density, AR-2
- Residential High Density, AR-3
- Business, B
- Industrial, I-1
- Commercial/ Light Industrial, I-2
- Lakeshore, L-1
- Lakeshore/ Recreational, L-2
- Natural Areas, N-1
- Recreational, R-1
- South Village District, V
- Flood Hazard Overlay District

0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles

Map is for conceptual planning purposes only



Data Sources: Municipal Boundaries, Roads, Zoning; Vermont Center for Geographic Information

MAP 2.6 - Existing Zoning

consists of commercial and residential development along routes 7 and 104a, surrounded by high-density residential neighborhoods to the south and southwest. Because of its proximity to major transportation corridors, this area has been envisioned for many years to become a walkable mixed-use neighborhood similar to a traditional Vermont downtown village, where the core commercial activity would take place. Several studies have been conducted toward this goal, including the Georgia Village Plan (2003); Georgia Sewer Feasibility Assessments (2005); South Village Bicycle and Pedestrian Feasibility Study (2012); US Route 7/104A Intersection Scoping Study (2013); the South Village Transportation Master Plan (2019); and was the focus of a new rezoning to enable the desired vision. Despite these efforts, the South Village area has not yet realized the desired growth or form envisioned. The obstacles which have been preventing this are discussed further in Part III of this plan.

**Georgia Center.** Georgia Center has served as the municipal center for our community, reinforced by the presence of the Town Offices and the Georgia Fire and Rescue facility. This historic hamlet was the subject of the 2003 Georgia Village Plan (along with the South Village), which outlined a vision for the expansion of municipal and educational facilities, multi-family and senior housing, and modest commercial together with ample greenspace and parks. Today, it continues to be a focus of potential new growth.

**Georgia Plains.** The third focal point for village type growth has been the area of Georgia Plains. While the soils in this area drain less well than those in the primary development corridor, the area contains fewer natural resources than either to the east or west. While this area remains primarily residential, there is potential for some very limited small-scale non-residential uses which would serve the immediate area and provide a place for people to interact and congregate.

**Georgia Shoreline.** Although not a focal point of potential growth like the areas described above, the Lake Champlain shoreline is a unique and

important feature in the town. The area along the lake has traditionally developed over time as a mix of residential and agricultural uses, including many seasonal/vacation homes. This area comprises most of the seasonal residences within the town. The views of this lake and the sensitive natural environment here are important considerations in future planning.

**Agricultural/Open Space.** Much of Georgia outside of the traditional village centers has historically been agricultural lands and open space which contribute greatly to the rural character of the town. Agriculture and forestry continue to be important components of the local culture and economy. It is important to remember that owners of farms and forests provide a public benefit by not developing their property, and cost the town little in terms of municipal services. These lands provide agricultural industry, popular scenic vistas, and important wildlife habitat which must be balanced against the desire for future development.

**Industrial Lands.** Industrial Development is generally concentrated in the two industrial parks located to the east of Exit 18, which measure approximately 600 acres. These industrial activities contribute greatly to the local tax base, and are designed to have minimal impact on adjacent residential areas due to their location and buffers.

## Existing Zoning

The Town of Georgia is currently divided up into 11 different zoning districts as follows: (*See Map 2.6 - Existing Zoning*)

**Agricultural/Rural Residential (AR-1).** The primary purpose of this district is to provide a place in Georgia for agriculture and silviculture uses, and encourage development in other areas of town. Residential and other uses permitted in the district are intended to be very low density and should not interfere with the agricultural and rural nature of the district, and should not place an unreasonable burden on the town's ability

to provide and maintain services to all residents. Land here should be developed so that large contiguous (non-fragmented) expanses of agricultural, forestry, significant geological areas, wildlife habitat, scenic areas, and other important open space land will be protected. Development may be phased in order to meet the purposes of this district.

**Medium Residential (AR-2).** The purpose of the AR-2 District is to enable, in areas where historic centers of the Town are located, residential development at a higher density than surrounding rural districts. In addition, small scale commercial uses will be allowed. Development in the district should reflect historic village patterns, protect important resources, enable the economic provision of services, plan for pedestrian and vehicular access, avoid strip development, and be planned so as not to burden the ability of the Town to provide adequate facilities and services.

**High Density Residential (AR-3).** The purpose of the AR-3 District is to enable higher density residential development where existing development at a higher density has already occurred. Development in the district should enable the economic provision of services, reasonable pedestrian and vehicular access within the district and to nearby business and recreation districts, protect important resources, avoid strip development, and be planned so as not to burden the ability of the Town to provide adequate facilities and services.

**South Village Core (SV).** The intent of the South Village Core District is to promote development of a compact settlement with a mix of small-scale business, civic, and residential uses and to foster a built environment patterned on a traditional Vermont village center with streetscapes and public spaces where people can walk, gather, and meet comfortably. Design of development in this area is 2009 South Village Core Strategic Plan.

**Business (B).** The Business District is a moderate traffic area with good access to major highways. The purpose of the Business District is to enable

mixed commercial and residential uses in an interconnected, unified pattern that does not result in strip development. Development in the district will have controlled access on highways, screening and landscaping, creative design and layout, some pedestrian circulation, and connections to adjoining residential and commercial districts. This district is not intended to serve as a regional growth center. Commercial uses shall be of a scale and size appropriate only for a local growth center.

**Industrial (I-1).** The I-1 District enables industrial development in an area with good highway and rail access and is set apart from agricultural and residential districts. The I-1 District enables heavy and light industrial development in an efficient pattern.

**Commercial-Light Industrial (I-2).** The purpose of the I-2 District is to enable commercial and light industrial development in an area with good highway access and set apart from agricultural and residential districts. The I-2 District enables light industrial development to develop in an efficient and integrated pattern. This district is not intended to serve as a regional growth center. Commercial uses shall be of a scale and size appropriate only for a local growth center.

**Recreation (R-1).** The Recreation District has severe limitations for development, including steep slopes, poor soil suitability, and high elevations. Therefore, much of the district is best suited to remain in a natural state or to be used for outdoor recreation purposes. Residential uses are limited to large lots to limit fragmentation and minimize the impact on the land and prevent substantial alteration to the landscape. Land should be developed so that large contiguous expanses of agricultural, forestry, significant geological areas, wildlife habitat, scenic areas, and other important open space land will be protected.

**Natural Areas (N-1).** The N-1 District has significant natural features or areas which are unique or irreplaceable. The purpose of this district is to protect

The presence of appropriate soils is also critical to supporting other working landscapes in Georgia, including forestry. *Map 2.11 - Forestry Soils* indicates the approximate locations of soils that best support forestry operations. Primary forestry soils are important to sustain commercial forestry operations, wood supplies, and wildlife habitat in the region, based on their relative soil productivity. As development occurs, these areas can become fragmented and weakened. Sustainable management of the soils resource base through accepted management practices should be considered in determining which tracts of forest land should be maintained long-term for commercial use.

Note these maps show a broad picture of the town soil locations and do not indicate that specific sites might or might not be suited for development, however they are useful for general long-term planning.

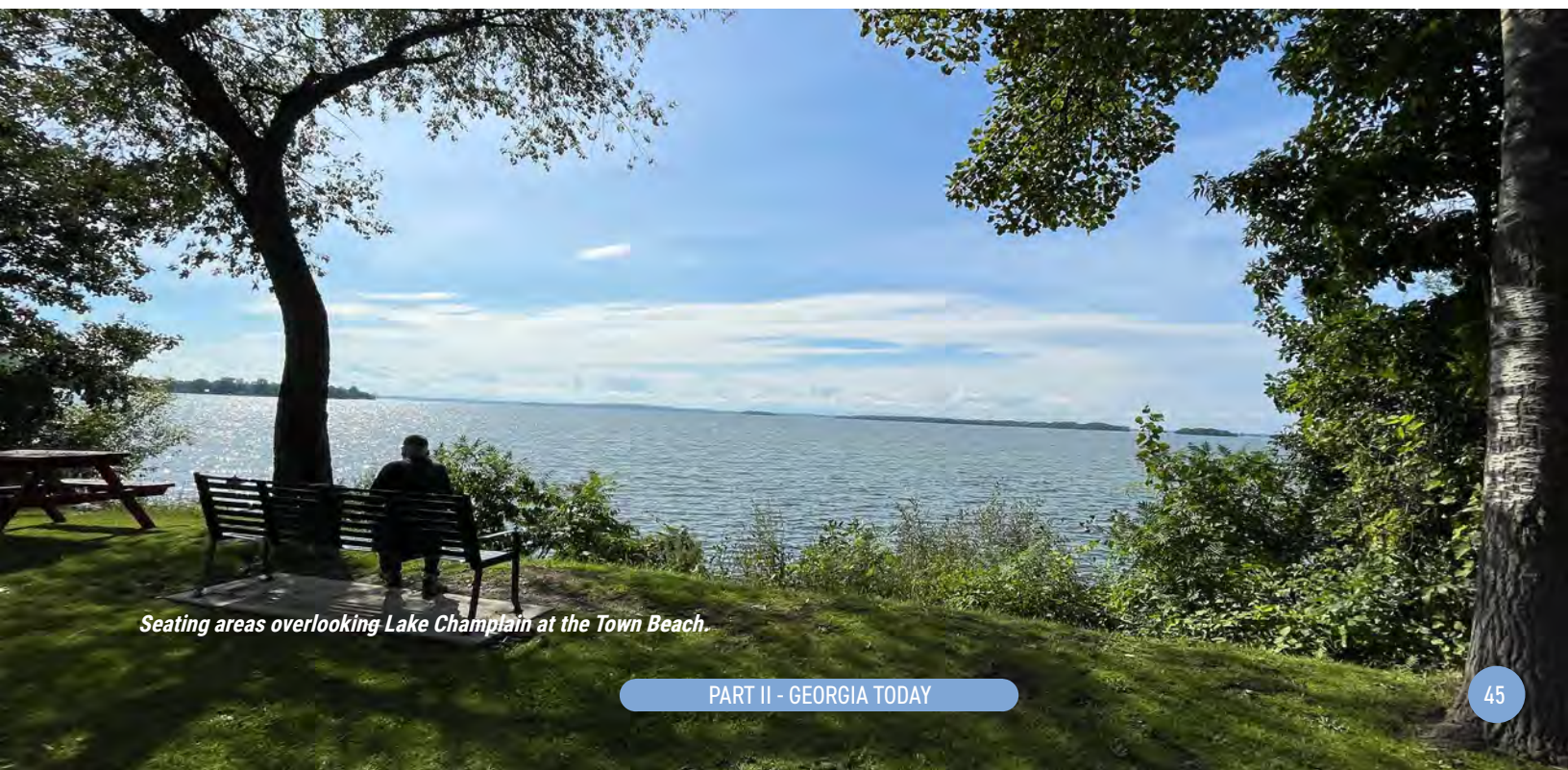
As far as more specific development potential is concerned, the town has a mix of soils which vary widely in suitability on a more property-specific scale. Some lands are ill suited to development, having low permeability (or high), shallow depth to bedrock, or high water table. Others are well suited because

they present few development constraints. Because Georgia relies on private septic systems for disposal of sewage and ground water for our drinking water supplies, the individual soil types of each property is an important variable in locating development.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) maintains soil survey maps for approximately 95% of the United States. This information is publicly available online through the Web Soil Survey, which can be accessed through their home page at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>.

## Scenic Resources

The views and scenic beauty of the Georgia landscape are greatly valued and appreciated by residents and visitors alike. Georgia's gradual transition from the foothills to the lake provides beautiful scenery: The juxtaposition of rolling farmland, historic settlements, and forest within the Champlain lowlands creates a landscape that enhances our community and our quality of life. The scenic resources of our town take many forms, including ridgelines, the foregrounds of distant views, open agricultural lands, vistas of the



*Seating areas overlooking Lake Champlain at the Town Beach.*



*Ballard Woods on Sodom Road*

lake, scenic roadways and historic village settlements. Lake Champlain is particularly important as visual and aesthetic resource for the Town of Georgia. To the west, we enjoy beautiful views of the Adirondacks and to the east we see the Green Mountains. The shoreline itself is a scenic resource and is particularly sensitive to human and natural change. These resources are highly regarded yet often difficult to quantify and map like other elements, though they are no less important.

## Land Cover

Today, the Town of Georgia still remains a mostly rural and natural community. The single largest type of land cover in the town is wooded areas with tree canopies which represent 40% of the total land area in town. This is followed by agricultural lands, which represent 22% of the land area. Taken together, the various different natural areas in town including wooded areas, wetlands, waters and fields cover at least 87% of the town. Buildings, roads and other man-made impervious surfaces represent less than 3%. (See [Map 2.12 - Land Cover](#))

## Fragile, Unique and Sensitive Ecology

All physiographic regions of the town contain sites which include natural, unique, and fragile areas or species. [Map 2.13 - Wildlife Areas](#) indicates the approximate locations of critical habitat areas of threatened and endangered species, as well as uncommon species and deer wintering areas.

The 1992 Non-game and Natural Heritage Program Report identified five sites in Georgia as Biological Areas of State-Significance. The Program, part of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, determined the sites on the basis of uncommonness of the natural community type, ecosystem integrity and lack of major disturbance, and the presence of rare species. State significance implies that a site is one of the best examples of its natural community type in the state, or that it is the site for at least one rare species.

Habitat loss and fragmentation, non-native species, and a rapidly changing climate all pose grave threats to regional species and ecosystems. These changes pose many long-term threats to humans as it slowly



## Protection of Local Character & Natural Resources

An overarching theme emerging from the public input was a strong desire by many residents to protect the Town of Georgia from changes which would erode its historic rural setting and natural resources. This position was supported in the public comments and responses to several survey questions. When asked in the survey to identify which factors were most important for managing future growth and development in the town, the top three responses were: protection of water quality and natural resources, protection of local working farms and agricultural lands, and protection of small-town rural character and scenic views. A combined 76% of survey respondents also felt it was either important (22%) or very important (55%) to protect the view of the lake along Georgia Shore Road. When asked to rank overall priorities for the town to address, “preserving town character and natural resources” ranked as the highest overall priority, noticeably higher than all other topics provided.

Specific natural resources suggested for protection included Lake Champlain, Arrowhead Lake, Silver Lake, as well as local wetlands and streams. The view of Lake Champlain along Georgia Shore Road was often suggested as an area for viewshed protection.

These natural resources are important not just for maintaining the scenic beauty and charm of our town however. As our climate changes, having contiguous

### COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

*The “Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act” (CRBPA) was enacted by the State of Vermont in 2022. This Act seeks to address the loss of critical biodiversity from human development, climate change, pollution, habitat fragmentation, and invasive species. The Act seeks to protect the priority ecological areas of the state identified in the Vermont Conservation Design, with the goal of conserving 30% of Vermont’s land area by 2030, and 50% by 2050. This plan seeks to support and coordinate with those goals.*

areas of the natural landscape which maintain ecological function helps plants and animals to survive, reproduce, migrate, adapt and be more resilient to change, in turn helping us and our localized environment. The preservation of these resources, in short, helps make us more resilient for future generations. It is clear from the public input that this issue is of high importance to the community, and should be a focal point of this plan.

## PLAN GOALS:

Protect the quality of Georgia's water resources, including groundwater and surface water.

Protect fragile, unique and sensitive natural resources, including those which contribute to Vermont's high priority inventory for ecological integrity.

Protect the existing open spaces, agricultural lands and scenic views which define Georgia's rural character.

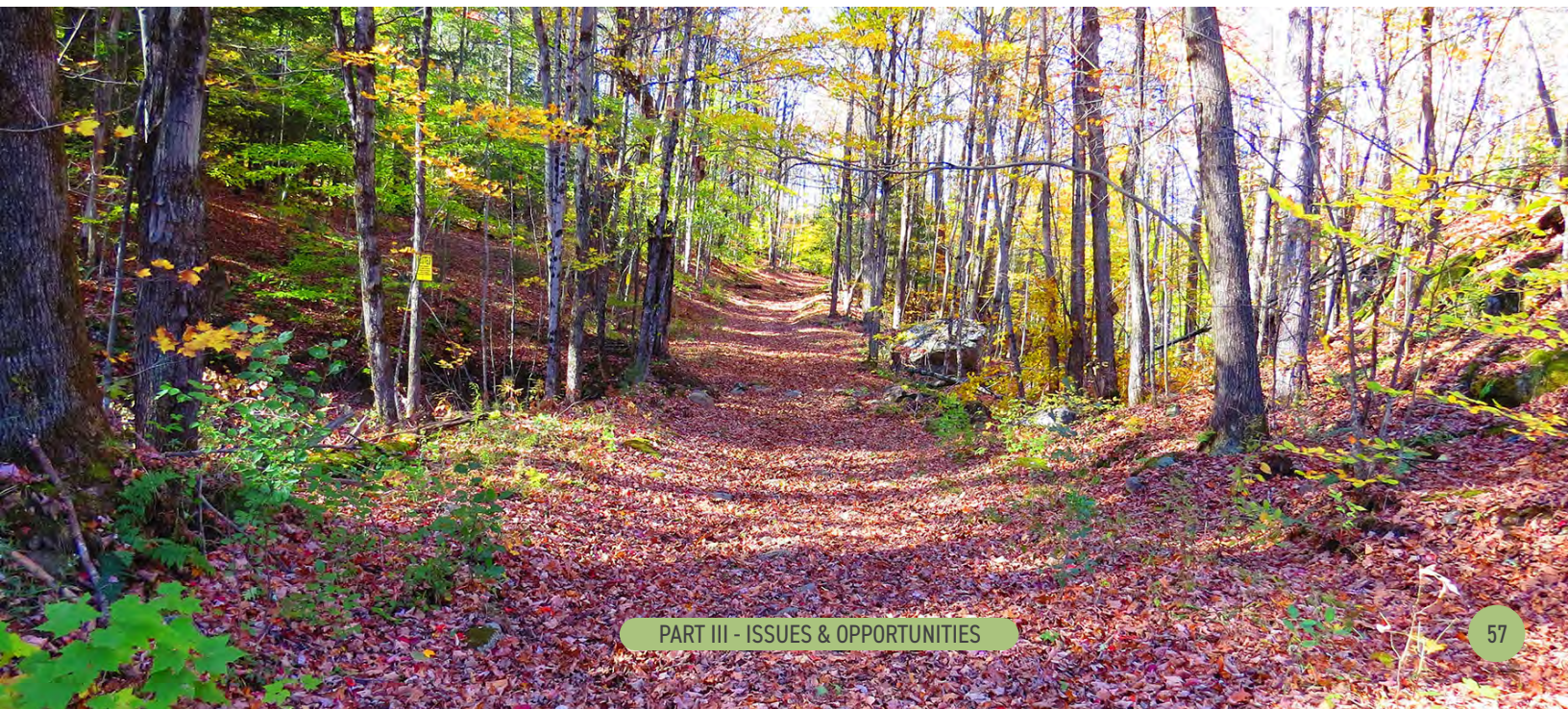
Maintain and preserve the quality of important soils, such as agriculture and forestry soils, when considering the future development of the town.

Protect private and public investment and maintain the natural environment by considering topography and geology when determining land use.

Protect local earth resources until needed for future use for the benefit of the community; and to minimize the impacts of extraction on the environment.

Consider climatic factors and to protect the quality of the air when planning for future development.

Support the goals of the Vermont Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act with the conservation of important natural areas and critical biodiversity lands.





## Protection of Historic & Cultural Resources

Much like our natural resources, the cultural and historic artifacts of our community help to define the rural character of Georgia. As with many Vermont towns, the value of Georgia's cultural and historical resources is greater than the sum of its parts. The development pattern of villages and countryside, the context for Georgia's historic sites, is a valuable asset. In addition to Georgia's historic structures, numerous cemeteries are located around the town. These cemeteries serve as a link to the previous generations of Georgia residents. Their preservation is of utmost importance, as they represent a significant cultural resource of the town. The Lamoille River and Deer Brook corridors have sites of known archaeological sensitivity, while the stream corridors extending northward from Arrowhead Mountain Lake to Silver Lake contain sites of expected archaeological sensitivity.

These examples are fragile and fleeting, and it is important that we work to maintain them as a reminder of our past. Once they are gone, they cannot be bought back.



### PLAN GOALS:

Ensure that Georgia's noteworthy historic and cultural resources remain intact.



## Energy, Sustainability and Resilience

### 2022 Vermont Energy Plan

*The “Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan” was developed in 2022 providing goals and strategies for energy adequacy, reliability, security and affordability. This plan sets statewide goals to meet 25% of our energy needs from renewable sources by the year 2025, 45% by the year 2035, and 90% by the year 2050.*

Many communities are working today to try to address the growing issues of climate change, increased sustainability, energy independence and storm resilience. At a time when severe weather events appear to be more prevalent and destructive, finding alternative sources of energy is prudent to make long-term changes in our behavior and provide short-term backup plans. In general, these efforts seek to conserve energy, reduce reliance on foreign energy sources, and protect the environment with less energy pollution. Public input during the development of this plan showed that there was very strong support for the town to take a more active role in leading or supporting sustainable energy solutions. This includes energy and fuel reductions at the municipal level, switching to cleaner energy solutions, as well as providing support to private homeowners and businesses who wanted to pursue similar efforts.

Georgia is not alone in identifying the benefits and needs of taking such steps. The Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan was recently updated to outline the need for more sustainable energy sources, providing ambitious statewide goals for energy independence (see sidebar). A Regional Energy Plan is also developed by the Northwest Regional Planning Commission to help to achieve these milestones at a more localized level. Each municipality shares a responsibility to work toward this effort. The town should support and take an active role in addressing these issues where we are able, for the long term health of the community.

There are funding sources and incentive programs available which the town could participate in, including the Municipal Enhanced Energy Plan and the Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP). A Municipal Enhanced Energy Plan is an optional plan that municipalities are authorized to adopt under 24 V.S.A. §4352 to help implement the Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan at the local level. Plans typically include an assessment of current energy use and generation, analysis of priority locations for future energy generation, and recommended strategies to support the state's overall energy goals. Adopting a local energy plan increases a municipality's leverage in Section 248 proceedings, giving them substantial deference in the potential siting of future electric generation and transmission facilities. These programs provide specific metrics, goals and funding to help municipalities adopt local changes, with benefits upon certifying certain milestones. It is beneficial for the town to participate in such programs.

It is also important for the town to continue to provide strong guidance regarding the placement of any future energy facilities, and keep these standards up to date with changes in technology and best practices. Georgia supports the development of renewable energy, provided they can be located in appropriate places in the community. Rooftop, building-integrated installations, and the use of formerly developed areas such as industrial lands, gravel pits or brownfields should be prioritized and streamlined as alternatives to systems located in otherwise rural lands. The town currently has specific standards to help avoid larger-scale energy generation systems from adversely affecting sensitive areas such as scenic viewsheds, primary agricultural soils, environmentally sensitive areas, farms, and forests. These areas must be avoided where they would adversely impact our natural systems or rural community character, and these standards should be periodically updated to ensure they are sufficient to do so.

Lastly, our community should be vigilant in preparing for and mitigating the potential effects of severe weather and other hazards. The continued update of our local Hazard Mitigation Plan and Emergency Preparedness Plan is necessary to address our changing times, and can save money, lives and unnecessary disruptions to our way of life.

## PLAN GOALS:

Support the goals of the Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan by working to promote and pursue sustainable energy solutions for all town operations, including but not limited to geothermal systems, heat exchangers, solar and wind energy systems, and reduced energy and fossil fuel consumption.

Support the goals of the Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan by working to encourage and support the use of sustainable energy solutions by local homeowners and businesses.

Public utilities and services should be enhanced in ways that improve economic development opportunities and quality of life, but that do not jeopardize public health, the environment or scenic resources.

Ensure that Georgia is a flood resilient community.

Prepare for emergency contingencies and work to limit their potential impact on local citizens, services and infrastructure.

# FUTURE LAND USE

## PART IV VISION, GOALS & POLICIES

### Future Land Use

The Future Land Use Vision Map (*Map 4.1*) is intended to serve as a guide of present and prospective land uses which describe the anticipated location, character and use-intensity of future land development activities as envisioned in this plan. It is not intended to act as an official zoning map, however is intended to help inform future zoning map changes. The different land use character areas identified on the map are described as follows:

**Conservation/Recreation.** The Conservation/Recreation character area largely covers the areas currently zoned as “Natural Areas” (N-1) and “Recreation” (L-1). These areas of town have significant natural features and development constraints which make development in these areas unfavorable. These areas are best suited to remain in their natural state to the extent possible for present and future generations. Any future development permitted in these areas should be limited to large lots and sensitive design to minimize the impact on the land.

**Lakeside.** The Lakeside character area largely covers the areas currently zoned as “Lakeshore” (L-1) and “Lakeshore/Recreational” (L-2). This area of town contains land bordering Lake Champlain, a significant natural feature of the town. The purpose of this character area is to continue to allow for the sensitive residential and recreational enjoyment of the lake while protecting the water quality, natural beauty of the shoreline, and scenic views. Future development within this area should remain at low densities in response to the soil conditions and steep

slopes, and take steps to preserve the open lands and viewshed of both the lake and shoreline.

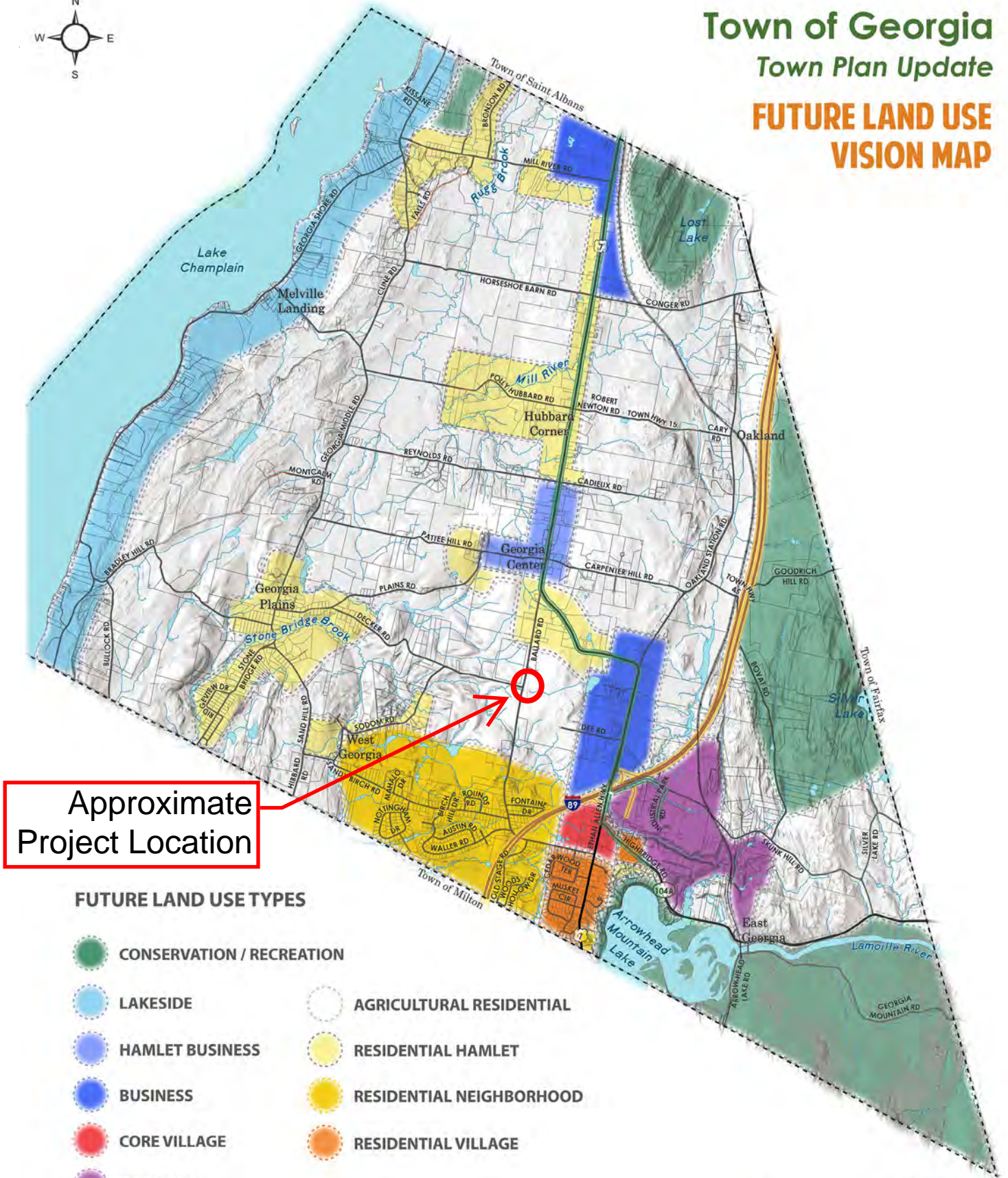
**Agricultural Residential.** The Agricultural / Residential character area largely covers the areas currently zoned as “Agricultural / Rural Residential” (AR-1), covering a significant percentage of town. This character area largely defines the natural and rural residential character of Georgia as an agricultural community. Future development within these areas should continue to be relatively low density residential growth. Disruptions to existing agricultural lands and natural features should be minimized by strategically clustering new housing or avoiding these areas entirely. Land should be developed so that large contiguous expanses of agricultural, forestry, significant geological areas, wildlife habitat, scenic areas, and other important open space land will be protected. Development may be phased in order to meet the purposes of this district. Strip development is strongly discouraged, and as the town continues to grow and develop, long-term growth is encouraged to be directed away from this character area and instead located in other areas designated for denser living where possible.

**Residential Hamlet.** The Residential Hamlet character area largely covers the areas currently zoned as “Residential Medium Density” (AR-2) and is proposed to be added to the Hubbard Corner hamlet and along northern Route 7. This character area is intended to provide a location around historic hamlet areas of the town for residential development



# Town of Georgia Town Plan Update

## FUTURE LAND USE VISION MAP



Approximate  
Project Location

### FUTURE LAND USE TYPES

- CONSERVATION / RECREATION
- LAKESIDE
- HAMLET BUSINESS
- BUSINESS
- CORE VILLAGE
- INDUSTRY
- AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL
- RESIDENTIAL HAMLET
- RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD
- RESIDENTIAL VILLAGE

0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles

Map is for conceptual planning purposes only



Data Sources: Municipal Boundaries, Roads, Transit lines and Bus Stops: Vermont Center for Geographic Information

MAP 4.1 - Future Land Use Vision Map

# PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Town Plans will often have a long list of aspirations which they seek to pursue, and it is not uncommon for the list to exceed the town's ability to complete everything desired before it is time once again to update the plan. For this reason, it is often beneficial to identify a short list of the most important priorities which it should tackle, even if those items may take years to implement. The following list of overall priorities was put together in consideration of the priorities identified by the public in the Community Survey in combination with Planning Commission assessment on what is truly important for the long-term health of the town. While these priorities may need to change due to outside factors, it is recommended that the Town of Georgia use them as a starting point to get moving. We have a lot to accomplish..

- » **South Village.** The realization of South Village as a concentrated core settlement of commercial, governmental, mixed-use and residential uses in a traditional Vermont village setting is paramount to the future financial health of the community, as well as addressing the local needs of housing diversity and additional shops and services which serve the population. The town must work in earnest to leverage the support of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission to establish this area as a sub-regional growth area through a Village Center or New Town Center designation available through the State of Vermont to unlock funding for necessary water and sewer systems, either through the existing designation process or the upcoming revised process. This work should be done in parallel with necessary zoning updates and cooperative discussions with property owners and potential developers interested in helping the town realize this vision.
- » **Protection of Town Character and Resources.** A top priority and theme emerging from this planning effort was the desire to protect and maintain the existing rural character which defines much of Georgia. The town should begin by considering regulatory options for the protection of important local viewsheds, utilize the Landscape and Ecological Priorities maps to provide enhanced development review in areas of sensitive natural resources, promote land conservation strategies and pursue the creation of a Transfer of Development Rights program to support this goal.
- » **Police Presence.** The town must continue to pursue and negotiate updated service contract(s) with the County Sheriff, State Police or other town police departments, including through potential cooperative partnership arrangements with other municipalities.
- » **Roadway Maintenance & Traffic.** The town should review and revise roadway maintenance procedures to improve the overall quality and condition of local roads, as well as coordinate with the State of Vermont on potential improvements along Route 7 and 104A in South Village to improve conditions.
- » **Development Regulations Update.** Lastly, many of the goals and policies of this plan are dependent on updates to the local development regulations. This is importantly one topic where the town has direct control over the results, unlike many other desired goals in this plan which we do not have control of the progress. It is also required by State statute that our local regulations are in compliance with the goals of the plan. For this reason, these updates should begin within the first year of adoption of this plan.

# A Historic & Cultural Resources

## Goals & Policies, Continued

The following pages list the goals and policies of this Town Plan. Many of the policies were developed as part of past town plans and have been carried forward to this 2024 update because they continue to be relevant. Other goals and policies are new, reflecting newly identified planning goals.

# A Historic & Cultural Resources

**GOAL: Ensure that Georgia’s noteworthy historic and scenic cultural resources remain intact.**

### POLICIES:

- |     |   |                                   |         |
|-----|---|-----------------------------------|---------|
| A1. | Places of outstanding historical, educational or cultural value shall be protected from development that would unreasonably impair their character or quality.                        | Planning                          | ONGOING |
| A2. | Encourage the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historic structures.   | Planning<br>Historic              | ONGOING |
| A3. | To encourage innovation in design and layout of development so that the visual impact can be minimized.   | Planning                          | ONGOING |
| A4. | To encourage the use of vegetative buffers and other screening methods to reduce the visual impact of development.  | Planning<br>Zoning<br>DRB         | ONGOING |
| A5. | Update and regularly maintain a list of all historic sites and structures within the town.  | Historic                          | 2 YEARS |
| A6. | Work with the Vermont Department of Historic Preservation to assess the current Historic Sites and Structures Survey and determine if additional sites or structures should be added. | Historic<br>Planning              | 2 YEARS |
| A7. | Encourage the use of names which reference local historic elements in the vicinity when considering the naming of a new public or private road, trail, park or similar destination.   | Selectboard<br>Historic<br>Zoning | ONGOING |

**B** Scenic & Natural Resources

**GOAL: Protect the quality of Georgia’s water resources, including groundwater and surface water.**

**POLICIES:**

- |   |                         |                |
|---|-------------------------|----------------|
| <p><b>B1.</b> Following the use of required agricultural practices and best management practice is essential to protect water resources. Accepted forestry practices and/or best management practices are encouraged as a way to protect water resources.</p>   | <p>Vermont</p>          | <p>ONGOING</p> |
| <p><b>B2.</b> Impacts to prime agricultural soils due to land development shall be mitigated to ensure the future viability of agricultural uses in Georgia.</p>  | <p>DRB</p>              | <p>ONGOING</p> |
| <p><b>B3.</b> Future development near surface waters should be low density and low impact.</p>  | <p>DRB<br/>Planning</p> | <p>ONGOING</p> |
| <p><b>B4.</b> As much as reasonably possible, streams, ponds, rivers, and wetlands should be maintained in a natural state and protected from pollutants so they can provide their natural functions. Buffer areas shall be encouraged so as to protect these natural functions.</p>  | <p>DRB<br/>Planning</p> | <p>ONGOING</p> |
| <p><b>B5.</b> Consider impacts to Public Source Water Protection during the development review process.</p>   | <p>DRB<br/>Vermont</p>  | <p>ONGOING</p> |
| <p><b>B6.</b> Development shall be prohibited on wetlands and hydric soils.</p>   | <p>DRB<br/>Vermont</p>  | <p>ONGOING</p> |
| <p><b>B7.</b> Development within shoreland and streambank areas shall, where reasonable, maintain existing vegetation, prevent soil erosion, prevent pollution of the water body, and be set back in accordance with established buffers so as not to detract from the natural beauty or cause harm to the environment.</p> | <p>DRB<br/>Planning</p> | <p>ONGOING</p> |
| <p><b>B8.</b> Encourage the use of naturalized stormwater methods in future site plan development which is in harmony with the Vermont landscape, such as rain gardens, bioswales and retention ponds.</p>  | <p>Planning</p>         | <p>ONGOING</p> |

# B Scenic & Natural Resources

## Goals & Policies, Continued

**GOAL: Protect fragile, unique and sensitive natural resources, including those which contribute to Vermont’s high priority inventory for ecological integrity.**

- B9. Buffer areas shall be encouraged to prevent harmful effects of development from affecting these areas. DRB ONGOING
  
- B10. Carefully review development proposed in areas identified in the Landscape Priorities map and the Ecological Priorities map to reduce unnecessary impacts to these resources. DRB ONGOING
  
- B11. Work to promote and pursue a variety of conservation strategies in areas identified in the Landscape Priorities and Ecological Priorities maps for eventual protection. Conservation Selectboard ONGOING

**GOAL: Protect the existing open spaces, agricultural lands and scenic views which define Georgia’s rural character.**

- B12. Investigate regulatory alternatives for protecting the view of Lake Champlain along Georgia Shore Road, as well as the view of Georgia from the lake, in a way that balances the protection of the viewshed with private property owner rights. Planning Selectboard 4 YEARS
  
- B13. Conduct a study of specific scenic resources and viewsheds within the town to identify locations and potential protection options. Planning Selectboard 4 YEARS
  
- B14. Site planning should try to take into consideration the preservation of unique or sensitive site features such as old growth trees, historic stone walls, hedgerows, streams, viewsheds and similar elements to design with the land. DRB ONGOING
  
- B15. Establish a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program which would allow high-priority conservation areas to be permanently protected in exchange for higher density development where it is more appropriate. Selectboard Planning 4 YEARS

# B Scenic & Natural Resources

## Goals & Policies, Continued

**GOAL: Maintain and preserve the quality of important soils, such as agriculture and forestry soils, when considering the future development of the town.**

- B16.** The Town shall require proof of a State wastewater permit as a condition of local Zoning Permits, where applicable. DRB ONGOING  
Zoning
- B17.** Slopes in excess of 8% may be highly subject to erosion, depending on soil type, and consideration should be given to the use of acceptable soil erosion control measures. Vegetative cover shall be established and maintained after construction. DRB ONGOING
- B18.** Development on poorly drained soils shall be avoided. DRB ONGOING

**GOAL: Protect private and public investment and maintain the natural environment by considering topography and geology when determining land use.**

- B19.** Geologic factors should be considered in planning to insure the proper use of land. DRB ONGOING
- B20.** Development on ridges and hilltops shall be discouraged and their adverse aesthetic and environmental impacts should be prevented. DRB ONGOING
- B21.** Site modifications necessary for a particular project should be allowed but there should be no substantial change to natural drainage ways. DRB ONGOING
- B22.** Land development on slopes in excess of 25% shall be prohibited and every effort shall be made to maintain a suitable cover of natural vegetation to reduce erosion. DRB ONGOING
- B23.** Development shall be performed so as to prevent runoff and soil erosion. Vegetative cover should be maintained or established and erosion control measures shall be undertaken at the time of construction. DRB ONGOING

# F Town Services & Infrastructure

## Goals & Policies, Continued

- F13. Consider the development of a Trails Master Plan which would identify long-term goals for on and off-road bike and trail connections, including the infill and connection of missing segments in the network.

Planning
3 YEARS
- F14. Proactively coordinate with adjacent municipalities to plan for shared community and recreational amenities so that each community does not need to rely on constructing their own facilities.

Selectboard
EACH YEAR
- F15. Explore the use of GEMS buildings and grounds, outside of school hours, to enhance the availability of local community activities and services.

GEMS
Events
Town Staff
3 YEARS

**GOAL: Public utilities and services should be enhanced in ways that improve economic development opportunities and quality of life, but that do not jeopardize public health, the environment or scenic resources.**

- F16. All commercial telecommunication facilities, utilities, solar and wind energy systems shall be located in appropriate areas, respecting the integrity of residential areas, aesthetic concerns, and natural resource issues. As noted elsewhere in the Plan, the protection of scenic and natural areas is very important to the Town of Georgia.

Selectboard
DRB
Planning
ONGOING
- F17. New telecommunications facilities shall be co-located on or near existing structures, unless the Planning Commission determines that separate facilities will create less visual and aesthetic impact.

Planning
DRB
ONGOING
- F18. Locate infrastructure facility and service improvements in existing development areas and areas that are designated for future growth.

Planning
DRB
ONGOING

**GOAL: Continue to expand local availability of cellular and high-speed Internet communications services.**

- F19. Continue to lobby and coordinate with regional service providers and groups such as the Northwest Vermont Communications Union District (Northwest

Selectboard
Planning
ONGOING

**H** Future Land Use

**GOAL: Support the goals of the Vermont Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act with the conservation of important natural areas and critical biodiversity lands.**

H1. Encourage the preservation of land in an agricultural, wooded or open state, particularly in areas of the town which are important scenic viewsheds and not well connected to service systems.

Conservation  
Planning  
Selectboard  
ONGOING

**GOAL: Concentrate residential, commercial and industrial growth in the Village Center and the South Village area to protect the Town’s rural character and resources.**

H2. Apply for Village Center or New Town Center designation in the South Village and Georgia Center areas to promote more compact and efficient growth.

Planning  
Selectboard  
2 YEARS

H3. Avoid strip development in town by requiring developers to use techniques such as clustering along highway corridors. Strip development along highway corridors shall be strongly discouraged.

DRB  
Planning  
ONGOING

**GOAL: Strengthen and support existing local agricultural industries.**

H4. Review and revise land use regulations to reduce potential obstacles to the growth of local agricultural industries, and encourage supportive uses such as value added agricultural products, ag-related services and industry diversification as well as the importance of locally grown food products.

Zoning  
Planning  
2 YEARS

H5. Support Vermont’s “right-to-farm” statute.

DRB  
Planning  
ONGOING

H6. Support the preservation and protection of open land agricultural fields and forests through programs that encourage farming and forestry such as the current use tax program and land conservation easements.

Conservation  
Selectboard  
ONGOING



# Future Land Use

## Goals & Policies, Continued

H7. Georgia’s rural landscape shall continue to be characterized by open land agricultural fields and forests. Agriculture shall be the predominant use in the Agricultural/Rural Residential District (“AR 1”).

Planning  
DRB

ONGOING

H8. Recognize that important resource lands such as prime and statewide agricultural and forest soils are a unique and limited resource, which are essential for food and fiber production.

Planning  
DRB

ONGOING

H9. Consider mitigations or protections for residential neighborhoods from the potential impacts of keeping livestock in areas outside the Agricultural/Rural Residential (AR-1) district.

Planning  
DRB

1 YEAR

**GOAL: Update land use regulations to comply with this plan, including diversified housing, smart growth principles, emerging uses and resolving outdated or confusing standards or code organization.**

H10. Use the site plan review process to encourage innovation in design and layout for improved traffic flow, pedestrian access, parking, landscaping and screening, lighting and aesthetics.

DRB

ONGOING

**GOAL: Regulation of land development in Georgia should not negatively impact the availability of safe and affordable child care and adult care services.**

H11. Review and revise land use regulations to reduce potential obstacles to the siting and availability of childcare and adult care operations.

Planning  
Zoning

1 YEAR

**GOAL: Broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities for all ages, sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of current and future residents.**

H12. Review and revise land use regulations to reduce potential obstacles to the siting and availability of local trade school and vocational training operations.

Planning  
Zoning

1 YEAR