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# REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENTS

BCRC

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Prepared For: Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies

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REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT  
INTRODUCTION

**Why were the regional plans assessed?**

The Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA) requested this outside assessment of the 11 regional plans. The assessment was completed with support from the Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs), the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and the High Meadows Fund.

This project is a continuation of VAPDA's efforts to evaluate and improve upon the effectiveness of regional planning initiated by the 2010 Challenges for Change. In 2011, VAPDA hired the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) to conduct a statewide strategic assessment to evaluate the capacity and potential of the RPCs to serve as a resource for state government and their communities. One of the findings of the NADO report identified a need to “establish a higher level of consistency and performance across the entire statewide network of RPCs.”

This assessment is intended to examine the consistency, completeness and effectiveness of the regional plans in regard to meeting statutory requirements, implementing the state’s planning goals, and fulfilling their prescribed roles.

**How were the regional plans assessed?**

This Regional Plan Assessment used 28 criteria including the 10 plan elements required by 24 VSA § 4348a(a) and the 13 statewide planning goals established in 24 VSA § 4302(c). The remaining five criteria were the planning process described in 24 VSA § 4345a(5), the requirement to define substantial regional impact found in 24 VSA § 4345a(17), the use of the plan in Act 250 proceedings, the use of the plan in Section 248 proceedings, and the plan’s overall user-friendliness.

The plans were given a letter grade (A+ to F) for each criteria equivalent to points on a 0-10 scale. The points were totaled

for all 28 criteria to assess the overall grade for each plan. Generally, the grading system indicates:

GRADE	POINTS	
	PER CRITERIA	ENTIRE PLAN
A+	10	266-280
A	9	238-265
A-	8	210-237
B+	7	182-209
B	6	154-181
B-	5	126-153
C+	4	98-125
C	3	70-97
C-	2	42-69
D	1	15-41
F	0	0-14

- A** The plan fully addresses the criteria. All of the required components of a plan element are complete, the rationale is well-considered and built on a solid planning foundation, and the desired outcomes are well-articulated. The plan includes policies, strategies, recommendations or projects that are specific, directive and would make substantial progress towards furthering statewide planning goals if implemented.
- B** The plan mostly addresses the criteria. Most of the required components of an element are complete and there is evidence of a solid planning foundation for the associated policies. The plan includes policies, strategies, recommendations or projects that align with statewide planning goals, but as stated they may not be adequately specific or directive to ensure their implementation.
- C** The plan partially addresses the criteria. Some of the required components of an element are incomplete or the evidence of a solid planning foundation for associated policies may be lacking. The plan may include policies or recommendations that align with statewide planning goals, but they are expressed in broad, general terms that do not provide specific guidance for implementation measures that would achieve the desired outcome.

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- D** The plan only superficially addresses the criteria. Most of the required components of an element are incomplete and there is no evidence of a solid planning foundation for associated policies. The plan may re-state a statewide planning goal, but it does not offer any more specific policy guidance on how that goal should be implemented in the region.
- F** The plan does not address the criteria. The required element is essentially incomplete or missing, and there is no evidence of a solid planning foundation for associated policies. The statewide planning goal is not referenced or supported with policies or recommendations.

For the 10 required plan elements, the assessment considered:

**(1) Statement of Basic Policies.** Does the plan express a clearly articulated vision and guiding principles for growth and development in the region? Is the language used directive ('must' or 'shall') or suggested ('may' or 'encourage')?

**(2) Land Use Element.** Does the plan contain a land use element and a future land use map? Is there a written description of the desired future land use pattern for the region, including the appropriate location, intensity and character of development? How was the map created and what does it represent? Does the written statement and map recognize the hierarchy of the regional settlement pattern (ex. downtowns, village centers, suburban neighborhoods, hamlets, rural and working lands, and remote or undeveloped lands)? Does the written statement and map reinforce Vermont's traditional settlement pattern of compact centers separated by rural countryside? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local land use plans and regulations?

**(3) Energy Element.** Does the plan include an inventory and assessment of the energy being produced and consumed in the region? Does the plan consider how the region's planned

growth and development will affect energy demand? Does the plan include policies on energy conservation that are specific enough to direct action to reduce energy consumption? Does the plan make clear connections between land use patterns and energy consumption? Does the plan offer guidance on the appropriate siting or scale of renewable energy projects in the region? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local energy planning and programs?

**(4) Transportation Element.** Does the plan include an inventory and assessment of the region's transportation infrastructure, facilities and services? Does the plan include a transportation map showing existing and any planned transportation features? Does the plan include a prioritized list of transportation improvements that will be needed to accommodate planned growth with estimates of timing and cost, and identification of potential funding opportunities? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local planning for transportation improvements?

**(5) Utility and Facility Element.** Does the plan include an inventory and assessment of the region's utilities, facilities and services? Does the plan include a map showing existing and any planned infrastructure and facilities? Does the plan include a prioritized list of improvements that will be needed to accommodate planned growth with estimates of timing and cost, and identification of potential funding opportunities? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local planning for infrastructure and facility improvements?

**(6) Statement of Preservation Policies.** Does the plan express clearly articulated guiding principles related to the preservation of significant natural, scenic and historic resources? Is the language used directive ('must' or 'shall') or suggested ('may' or 'encourage')?

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(7) **Implementation Program.** Does the plan identify specific actions or projects that would implement its policies, including priorities, timing, cost estimates, funding opportunities, lead agency or organization, and potential partners?

(8) **Compatibility Statement.** Does the plan include an assessment of the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region? Does it include an assessment of how its plan for growth and development may affect adjoining regions? Does it identify shared resources that require coordinated planning?

(9) **Housing Element.** Does the plan include an assessment of the region's housing needs? Is the assessment based on the best available data, and forecasts of demographic and economic trends? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local planning around housing issues?

(10) **Economic Development Element.** Does the plan include an assessment of the region's economy? Is the assessment based on the best available trend data and forecasts? Is there a description of desired future economic development in the region, including the appropriate location, type and scale of development? Does the plan recommend specific projects or programs to implement its economic development policies? Can municipalities use the plan to inform local planning for economic development?

Regional plans must be consistent with the 13 statewide planning goals listed in 24 VSA § 4302(c). The statute goes on to define consistency as requiring "substantial progress toward attainment of the goals." Substantial progress implies that there will be measurable or perceptible change from the current condition to a condition that is closer to what is envisioned by the goal. This assessment examined the policies, programs and projects recommended in the regional plans with the following questions in mind:

*Are there policies or projects in the plan, that if implemented, would result in a measurable or perceptible change?*

*Are the policies stated clearly and specifically enough to ensure the desired outcome?*

*Do the policies do more than state the desired outcome, do they describe how to get to the desired outcome?*

The determination of a plan's level of consistency with the planning goals was significantly influenced by the language and phrasing of the policy statements, in addition to the specificity of their content and the support for the policies expressed elsewhere in the plan.

A number of the plans primarily format their policies as action verb statements. The strength of the verb (encourage, support, promote, require, etc.) and the specificity of the statement determine the level of consistency the policy exhibits.

*“Keep agricultural land and forested lands in profitable and productive use.”*

*“Support the growth and vitality of working farms and managed forests.”*

Other plans primarily format their policies in standard sentence format. This frequently leads to use of the passive tense, which is perceived as weaker expression than the action verb statement even if the wording is otherwise essentially the same. The strength of the policy is also dependent on the verb selected (should, may, shall, must, etc.).

*“Agricultural land and forested lands should be kept in profitable and productive use.”*

*“The growth and vitality of working farms and managed forests must be supported.”*

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A few plans include some policies phrased in the future tense, which are perceived as stronger and more active than those expressed in the passive tense.

“Agricultural land and forested lands will be kept in profitable and productive use.”

“The growth and vitality of working farms and managed forests will be supported.”

Several of the plans phrase many policies as recommendations for municipalities. This may be an appropriate format for a subset of the policies, but when used too frequently, the regional plan is perceived to be avoiding its responsibility to set regional policies.

“Municipalities should encourage the profitable and productive use of agricultural land and forested lands.”

“Municipalities are encouraged to support the growth and vitality of working farms and managed forests.”

The policies that exhibit the highest level of consistency with the statewide goals are those that offer more specific guidance on how to implement the goal.

“Keep agricultural land and forested lands in profitable and productive use by: encouraging expansion and development of value-added enterprises; promoting the region’s agritourism destinations and local products...”

For each of the 13 statewide planning goals, the assessment looked for specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, would result in substantial progress towards attaining the goal. General, broad statements of support or encouragement - examples would be “promote pedestrian-friendly village areas” or “maintain water quality” - were not considered adequate to result in substantial progress. Provisions like “construct or upgrade sidewalks when roads are built or repaired in villages” or “restore or maintain naturally-vegetated

buffers of at least 50 feet along all surface waters” were considered adequate to result in substantial progress.

With regard to the planning process, the assessment considered whether there had been an opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan, as well as what background studies or data serve as a foundation for the plan.

The assessment examined how each plan defined ‘significant regional impact’ and how that definition influences the regional commission’s participation in state regulatory proceedings.

To assess the plan’s effectiveness in Act 250 and Section 248 proceedings, the directness and specificity of the language used to express policies was considered (use of directive or obligatory terms rather than discretionary or permissive terms).

The final criteria is not a statutory requirement, but relates to the overall readability and user-friendliness of the plan. Is it effectively communicating its message? Is it well-organized and structured? Does it use plain language or is it full of poorly explained planning jargon? Who is the target audience for the plan?

### How is this report organized?

Following this introduction is a statewide summary of the major findings by criteria. Finally, there is an individual summary report for each regional plan.

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**§4348a(a)(1)** A statement of basic policies of the region to guide the future growth and development of land and of public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.

**Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to manage future growth and development in the region?**

The plan begins within an introduction that includes a purpose statement and a statement of basic policies, both of which express guiding principles for the region. These broad principles could be strengthened by using more direct language.

**Score:** B+ (7 out of 10 points)

**§4348a(a)(2)** A land use element, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses.

(A) Indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi-public uses, open spaces, and areas which require special consideration for aquifer protection, wetland protection, or for other conservation purposes.

(B) Indicating locations proposed for developments with a potential for regional impact.

(C) Setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.

(D) Indicating those areas that have the potential to sustain agriculture and recommendations for maintaining them.

**Does the plan establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region, as shown on a land use map and described in a written statement?**

The plan's land use element does not establish desired land use patterns and the appropriate location, intensity and character of future development in the region. The plan discusses the region's land development issues and sets forth policies that could guide future land use and development. However, these do not form a comprehensive plan for desired growth and development, as well as resource protection, in the region.

Primarily, this is because the land use concepts are discussed broadly and not applied to specific locations in the region. The plan does not include a future land use map. The plan does

include a map that shows zoning by town, but that map is not directly referenced in the land use element. The land use element includes a policy that calls for the preparation of a regional land use map that "incorporates the developing land use plans of its municipalities and displays locally or state designated growth centers."

**Does the plan identify any proposed development that has potential for regional impact?**

There are no specific development projects that are identified as having the potential for regional impact, but the plan includes a specific set of criteria to be used to determine whether a project would have significant regional impact.

**Does the plan include recommendations for maintaining farmland?**

The plan recognizes preserving and promoting a viable agricultural economy, culture and land base as a primary goal for the region. The plan does recommend creative approaches to development such as PUD, cluster or open space designs, and discourages infrastructure extensions that would facilitate development of farmland. The plan includes a map that shows primary agricultural soils, but does not specifically identify high priority farmland that should be protected from development.

**Score:** F (0 out of 10 points)

**§4348a(a)(3)** An energy element, which may include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs, and problems within the region, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources, and a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use and control devices likely to result in conservation of energy.

**Does the plan identify and assess the region's energy resources and needs?**

The plan does not inventory and assess the region's energy supplies and demand. The energy element includes general information about different types of energy generation and some

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state-level data regarding energy use. Most of the discussion in the chapter is not specific to the region.

**Does the plan establish policies related to energy conservation, including guidance on approaches to land use and development that could conserve energy?**

The plan is clearly supportive of energy conservation. A more detailed assessment of current consumption trends would provide a stronger foundation on which to base more specific policies, such as goals or targets for reductions in energy use, for example.

The plan does make connections between energy conservation and land use and transportation policies. However, the lack of a well-articulated land use plan limits the plan's effectiveness at guiding land use in a direction that would result in energy conservation.

**Does the plan establish policies related to renewable energy projects, including guidance on project siting or scale?**

The plan includes policies that are generally supportive of renewable energy. However, the plan contains conflicting policies on the issues that surround large-scale energy projects, particularly commercial ridgeline wind farms. It would be possible to find policy statements to both support and oppose such a project in the plan. While this conflict is acknowledged to some extent in the energy element, it is neither resolved nor is it clear how the benefits and impacts should be weighed. Two specific locations - Worcester Range and Camel's Hump - are identified as inappropriate locations for industrial turbines. This is a difficult issue that likely lacks a regional consensus, but the plan could provide a stronger framework for the determination of what, where and how energy projects will be sited in the region.

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

**§4348a(a)(4)** A transportation element, which may consist of a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities.

A map showing existing and proposed highways, including limited access highways, and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, anticipated points of congestion, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.

Recommendations to meet future needs for such facilities, with indications of priorities of need, costs, and method of financing.

**Does the plan describe and assess the region's transportation infrastructure and needs?**

The Regional Transportation Plan is adopted by reference into the Regional Plan. The Regional Transportation Plan provides a thorough inventory and assessment of the region's transportation system, which is presented through written description, maps, and supporting data. A brief summary of key findings from the Regional Transportation Plan is included in the Regional Plan.

**Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed transportation improvements?**

The Regional Transportation Plan recommends needed transportation improvements. While the projects are generally not prioritized and information about cost and financing is not included, the region does have a methodology for prioritizing projects that is described in an appendix to the Regional Transportation Plan.

The Regional Transportation Plan is very detailed and thorough, but it could be strengthened by formatting and organizing the information and recommendations in a more consistent and user-friendly manner. The recommendations, in particular, are not as prominent in the document as they could be. The project recommendations could be more directly linked to the goals and policies, which would answer the question of how those goals and policies should be implemented. Specific references from the Regional Plan and to the Regional Transportation Plan could help



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users navigate the plans and highlight important information and recommendations.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

**§4348a(a)(5)** A utility and facility element, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective local and regional community facilities and public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned, showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including public schools, state office buildings, hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, wireless telecommunications facilities and ancillary improvements, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage, and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for those facilities, with indications of priority of need.

**Does the plan describe and assess the region's community/public utilities and facilities, including their ability to meet future demand?**

The plan does describe, and to a limited extent assess, the community facilities and public utilities in the region. It includes a series of maps that locate utility and facility sites and service areas. However, it does not fully analyze the ability of public utilities and facilities to meet future demand. The plan recognizes the lack of infrastructure as one of the primary obstacles to smart growth, but it does not propose strategies for addressing this problem. The plan could be strengthened by a more thorough and detailed assessment of the ability of the region's infrastructure systems, facilities and services to accommodate growth that would identify needs and gaps and recommend projects.

**Does the plan recommend and prioritize needed improvements to community/public utilities and facilities?**

The plan generally does not identify needed improvements to community facilities and public utilities.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

**§4348a(a)(6)** A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.

**Does the plan include a set of guiding principles that could be effectively used to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources?**

While the plan clearly supports and encourages strategies to preserve natural, scenic and historic resources, there are relatively few specific or actionable statements. The policies are primarily statements of support and encouragement. A more well-articulated land use element would reinforce the policies related to resource preservation.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

**§4348a(a)(7)** A program for the implementation of the regional plan's objectives, including a recommended investment strategy for regional facilities and services based on a capacity study of the elements in this section.

**Does the plan describe how its recommendations will be implemented, including strategies for funding needed facilities and services?**

Generally, the plan does not describe specific actions or projects that will be needed to implement the policies. The Regional Transportation Plan does include recommended projects.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

**§4348a(a)(8)** A statement indicating how the regional plan relates to development trends, needs and plans and regional plans for adjacent municipalities and regions.

**Does the plan assess the impacts that growth and development in adjacent regions may have on the region?**

The land use element of the plan does make limited reference to the influence that growth and development in neighboring Chittenden County are having on some portions of the region. The compatibility statement could be strengthened by documenting the evidence of growth pressure in the region from Chittenden County and recommended approaches for mitigating the

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undesirable and maximizing the beneficial affects of the resulting development.

**Does the plan assess the impact the region's growth and development may have on adjacent regions?**

The plan notes that most of the region's boundaries are mountainous, wilderness, or very low-intensity areas, which limits the likelihood of land use conflicts. A more well-articulated land use plan would provide greater certainty that such conflicts would not arise.

**Score:** C (3 out of 10 points)

**§4348a(a)(9)** A housing element that identifies the need for housing for all economic groups in the region and communities. In establishing the identified need, due consideration shall be given to data gathered pursuant to subsection 4382(c) of this title. If no such data has been gathered, the regional planning commission shall gather it.

**Does the plan identify the need for housing in the region and its municipalities?**

The plan describes and quantifies the need for housing at both the regional and town level.

In response to a housing needs assessment and growth forecasts, CVRPC recognized a need to pro-actively plan for housing in the region. The strategy selected and incorporated into the plan was a Regional Housing Distribution Plan, which projected a 15-year demand for housing by municipality and required municipalities to demonstrate that they have planned to accommodate the anticipated housing growth. While the forecasts should be re-evaluated given changes in the market during the past 5 years, the underlying strategy provides a clear framework and direction for municipal planning.

**Is the assessment of need based on an analysis of current population and housing characteristics, projected growth, and demographic trends?**

The assessment of housing needs is based on several studies including a *2005 Housing Needs Assessment* and an *Economic and Demographic Forecast for 2000-2020*. Some of the data from those reports is directly incorporated into the body of the plan and some is included in the appendices.

**Score:** A+ (10 out of 10 points)

**§4348a(a)(10)** An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.

**Does the plan describe and assess the region's economy?**

The plan's Economic Element provides a limited description and assessment of the region's economy. It does present some statistics documenting current conditions, and identify economic development opportunities and challenges. A more thorough inventory and assessment would provide a stronger foundation for policies, programs and projects. The policies related to focusing economic development in existing centers, providing/improving infrastructure, and ensuring the availability of suitable sites for commercial/industrial uses would be strengthened if also supported by a well-articulated land use plan.

**Does the plan recommend economic development strategies, including specific policies and actions needed to support a healthy economy in the region?**

The economic development strategies recommended are consistent with and tie into policies found elsewhere in the plan - focusing development in existing centers, increasing the supply of affordable housing, utilizing the region's natural resource base. The plan would be strengthened by stating the policies more directly and identifying specific programs or projects that are needed to support a healthy economy in the region.

**Score:** C+ (4 out of 10 points)

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**§4345a(5)** Prepare a regional plan and amendments that are consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title, and compatible with approved municipal and adjoining regional plans. When preparing a regional plan, the regional planning commission shall:

- (A) Develop and carry out a process that will encourage and enable widespread citizen involvement;
- (B) Develop a regional data base that is compatible with, useful to, and shared with the GIS established under 3 V.S.A. § 20;
- (C) Conduct capacity studies;
- (D) Identify areas of regional significance. Such areas may be, but are not limited to, historic sites, earth resources, rare and irreplaceable natural areas, recreation areas and scenic areas;
- (E) Use a land evaluation and site assessment system, that shall at a minimum use the criteria established by the secretary of agriculture, food and markets under 6 V.S.A. § 8, to identify viable agricultural lands;
- (F) Consider the probable social and economic benefits and consequences of the proposed plan; and
- (G) Prepare a report explaining how the regional plan is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title.

### Was there opportunity for meaningful and broad-based public involvement in developing the plan?

The plan does not describe the planning process, so the level of public involvement cannot be determined.

### What supporting studies or other data form a basis for the plan?

The plan references several studies or other plans. Several of these are incorporated by reference (ex. Economic and Demographic Forecast, the Regional Transportation Plan), while others are referred to in the body of the plan (ex. Housing Needs Assessment, hazard mitigation plans, etc.). The plan presents data from a variety of sources and supplements the text with a series of maps.

### Does the plan identify areas of regional significance?

The plan does not explicitly identify “areas of regional significance” as described in this section of the statute although the land use element includes describes landscape features and areas that could be viewed as regionally significant.

### Does the plan identify viable agricultural lands?

The plan includes a map of primary agricultural soils and speaks to the importance of conserving farmland in the region. It does not identify specific agricultural land in the manner envisioned by the statute.

Score: C (3 out of 10 points)

**§4345a(17)** As part of its regional plan, define a substantial regional impact, as the term may be used with respect to its region. This definition shall be given due consideration, where relevant, in state regulatory proceedings.

### How does the plan define ‘substantial regional impact’ and how does that definition influence the RPC’s involvement in regulatory proceedings?

The plan defines substantial regional impact as a “substantial and ongoing impact on two or more municipalities” and cites a number of factors that are likely to trigger a substantial regional impact. This definition is found in a footnote to the compatibility statement and not within the main body of the text.

The plan notes that CVRPC has Act 250 Review Policies and has decided to limit their participation in Act 250 to only those aspects of a project found to have regional impact or to significant housing projects.

Score: B (6 out of 10 points)

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**§4302(c)(1)** To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.

(B) Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.

(C) Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

While the plan's policies clearly align with this statewide goal, the lack of a well-articulated land use plan limits the plan's effectiveness at guiding growth and development in the region in a manner that would maintain compact centers separated by rural countryside. The plan acknowledges as much by stating "Most municipalities support smart growth principles, but have not been able to put them into practice. In fact, most new development is occurring in low density zones."

Score: C- (2 out of 10 points)

**§4302(c)(2)** To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

The economic development strategies recommended are consistent with and tie into policies found elsewhere in the plan - focusing development in existing centers, increasing the supply of affordable housing, utilizing the region's natural resource base. The plan would be strengthened by stating the policies more directly and identifying specific programs or projects that are needed to support a healthy economy in the region.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

**§4302(c)(3)** To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

The goal and policies related to education and vocational training are not specific or actionable, and provide little guidance on how the statewide planning goal should be implemented in the region.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

**§4302(c)(4)** To provide for safe, convenient, economic and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.

(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

The plan includes a number of transportation goals and policies, which are primarily statements of encouragement or support. The Regional Transportation Plan, which is adopted by reference into the Regional Plan, lists specific transportation improvements that are needed in the region. The plans could be strengthened by highlighting how the identified projects will implement the goals and policies.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

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**§4302(c)(5)** To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:

- (A) significant natural and fragile areas;
- (B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands;
- (C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;
- (D) important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

While the plan clearly supports and encourages the identification, protection and preservation of natural and historic features, there are relatively few specific or actionable policies or projects. The plan would be strengthened by integrating the resource protection goals into a more well-articulated land use plan.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

**§4302(c)(6)** To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.

- (A) Vermont's air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a).

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

The plan's policies align with this statewide planning goal, but they are generally statements of support or encouragement, and not actionable or directive.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

**§4302(c)(7)** To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

The plan is generally supportive of energy efficiency and conservation, as well as use of renewable energy. However, the energy-related policies are primarily statements of support or encouragement.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

**§4302(c)(8)** To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

- (A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.
- (B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

It is clear that recreation is important in the region, contributing to quality of life and economic vitality. The plan recognizes that a more thorough recreation inventory and needs assessment is needed. The plan could be strengthened by incorporating more specific, actionable recommendations. Including specific projects within the plan that could help secure financing for their implementation.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

**§4302(c)(9)** To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

- (A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural & forest lands should be encouraged & should include maintaining low overall density.
- (B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.
- (C) The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.
- (D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.
- (E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

While preserving and promoting "a viable agricultural economy, culture and land base" is stated as a primary goal of the plan, there is relatively little guidance on how this should be achieved in the region. The economic chapter recognizes the importance of resource-based industries in the region, but also does not include specific or actionable policies or projects that would further this statewide goal.

Score: C+ (4 out of 10 points)

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT  
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**§4302(c)(10)** To provide for the wise & efficient use of Vermont's natural resources & to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

The plan notes that the granite industry was once the foundation of the region's economy and remains a small, but important sector. Despite the earth resources and extraction ongoing in region, there is only a single, broad policy statement on the extraction of sand and gravel.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

**§4302(c)(11)** To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

- (A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.
- (B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.
- (C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.
- (D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

The Regional Housing Distribution Plan provides a clear direction to municipalities and a framework for assessing whether the region is making progress towards this statewide planning goal. The housing chapter also includes a list of actions to be taken by the RPC to address housing, most of which are related to encouraging or supporting municipal actions through local planning and land use regulations. This is the only plan chapter to include "actions."

The plan does an excellent job at defining housing needs, but is less effective at recommending and guiding the actions that will be necessary to meet those objectives. While clearly aligned

with this statewide goal, the plan's policies and actions could be expressed more directly and better supported through a well-articulated land use plan.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

**§4302(c)(12)** To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

- (A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.
- (B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community & the area to provide facilities & services.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

The plan does not assess the region's future need for public facilities and services, and therefore does not provide a strong foundation on which to recommend specific policies or projects. Most of the public facility- or service- related policies are general statements of support or encouragement and are not directive or actionable. There is no discussion of or strategies for financing public facilities and services.

There are some connections made between provision of facilities and services, growth management, and desired land use patterns. These concepts could be expanded upon to strengthen both the facility and services element of the plan, and the land use element.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

**§4302(c)(13)** To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

**Does the plan include specific policies or recommended projects that, if implemented, will result in substantial progress toward attainment of the goal?**

The plan restates the statewide planning goal and includes several related policies. The childcare policies are generally

REGIONAL PLAN ASSESSMENT  
CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

statements of support or encouragement, but the plan does recommend completing a regional childcare needs assessment.

Score: B- (5 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Act 250 Proceedings

10 VSA §6086(10) Is in conformance with any local or regional plan or capital facilities program.

**Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Act 250 proceedings?**

Nearly all of the policy statements in the plan are discretionary or permissive ('should' and 'encourage') rather than directive or obligatory ('must' or 'shall'). As such, the plan's policies may not be able to be effectively applied in regulatory proceedings.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

Effectiveness in Section 248 Proceedings

30 VSA §248(b)(1) with respect to an in-state facility, will not unduly interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, the recommendations of the municipal legislative bodies, and the land conservation measures contained in the plan of any affected municipality. However, with respect to a natural gas transmission line subject to board review, the line shall be in conformance with any applicable provisions concerning such lines contained in the duly adopted regional plan; and, in addition, upon application of any party, the board shall condition any certificate of public good for a natural gas transmission line issued under this section so as to prohibit service connections that would not be in conformance with the adopted municipal plan in any municipality in which the line is located.

**Are plan policies stated using directive or obligatory, rather than discretionary or permissive, language that could effectively be used in Section 248 proceedings?**

Nearly all of the policy statements in the plan are discretionary or permissive ('should' and 'encourage') rather than directive or obligatory ('must' or 'shall'). As such, the plan's policies may not be able to be effectively applied in regulatory proceedings.

Score: D (1 out of 10 points)

User-Friendliness of the Plan

**How is the plan organized and is it easy to navigate?**

The plan is organized with an introduction that is followed by 10 chapters, one for each of the statutorily required elements. Each chapter begins with a discussion and concludes with goals and policies. The structure of the plan is consistent and straightforward.

**Who is the audience and what is the purpose(s) for which the plan was primarily written?**

The plan appears to be written for a general audience. Planning concepts, when referred to, are usually explained. The introduction states that the primary purpose of the plan is to "enhance the lives of the region's residents," but that concept is not clearly carried through the remainder of the plan. This quality-of-life guiding principle could be highlighted and emphasized as a connecting theme throughout the plan.

Score: B+ (7 out of 10 points)

Overall Score: C+ (109 out of 280 points)