

Town of Ripton Planning Commission
P.O. Box 10
Ripton VT 05766

December 19th, 2023

Dear Sir or Madam:

Report on Revision of the Ripton Town Plan

The Ripton Planning Commission is holding a public hearing to receive public comment on the revision of the Ripton Town Plan. The hearing will take place at 7 pm on Tuesday, January 23rd, 2024 at the Ripton Community House, 1283 Route 125.

The enclosed text and maps revise the 2015 Ripton Town Plan. Slight changes and updates to the layout and section content were made to the plan. Four maps were added.

A. Changes to layout of the Town Plan

The 2023 Town Plan has been modified as follows:

- Each article or section is introduced with goals, followed by policies, and support text. In the 2015 Town Plan each article or section was introduced with goals, followed by support text, and concluded with policies; otherwise the plan was kept similar to the 2015 plan.

- Some Articles have been split to allow for more cohesion and easier reading.
 - *"Article VI Population and Housing"* was split into:
 - *Article III Population*
 - *Article VIII Housing*
 - *"Article IV Energy, Utilities, Services and Community Facilities"* is no longer a stand alone document and was split into:
 - *Article V Energy*
 - *Article VI Utilities, Services and Community Facilities*

B. Substantive changes to elements of the Town Plan

Substantive changes were made to the town plan in Article II, Natural, Historic, Scenic, and Recreational Resources which was updated to address forest fragmentation and flood resiliency; Article III Population has been updated with slight changes to the layout; Article V Energy has been added to the plan and is no longer a stand alone document, updates were made to it to reflect the current status; Article VII Education had a complete rewrite to update to the current status of the Elementary School; Article VIII Housing was updated to reflect the current housing status of the town of Ripton.

The maps appended to the Town Plan were updated by the Regional Planning Commission in 2023. Four new maps added to the 2023 Town Plan are; 11a Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors, 11b Forest Blocks and Fragmentation, 12 Flood Hazards, and 13 Landslide Risk.

C. Compliance with the specific goals of Section 4302(c) of the Planning and Development Act.

The Town Plan provides a comprehensive framework to guide decisions by this municipality as well as regional and state entities. Goals and policies that initiate each section or subsection provide a summary of the framework. Meetings to discuss this plan have been open to all residents. A number of residents contributed to portions of the revision. The public will have the opportunity to present its views at the hearing on Tuesday, January 23rd, 2024 and at a subsequent hearing on the Town Plan by the Ripton Selectboard.

The following summarizes compliance of the Town Plan with the 13 goals of 24 VSA Section 4302(c):

1. The Ripton Historic District and the concentric pattern of Ripton's zoning districts (see map 9) concentrate development toward the town center and protect historic village structures, settlement patterns, and the wooded rural countryside. Commercial development is a by-right use only in the Neighborhood Commercial District (NC-1 acre), but appropriate commercial development is possible with conditional use approval in any residential district. Home occupations are encouraged in all residential districts. In the summer of 2023 fiber optic cable for high speed internet was made available to residential customers. Small-scale agriculture and forest product based businesses are encouraged. Public transport is available through Tri-Valley-Transit (formerly known as ACTR) to job centers in Middlebury and beyond.

2. Recreation, tourism, education, diverse home occupations, forest industries, construction trades, small-scale agriculture, and a retail establishment all contribute to a range of local opportunities. A majority of Ripton residents commute daily to Middlebury for employment.

3. The Ripton Elementary School provides elementary education. Students in grades 6-9 may attend Middlebury Union Middle School. The private North Branch School, founded in 2000 and with an enrollment of 27 students from Ripton and surrounding towns, offers some students an alternative in grades 7-9. Ripton students in grades 9-12 attend the Middlebury Union High School (see Article VII). Ripton benefits from the presence of the Middlebury College Bread Loaf Campus. A variety of educational and recreational opportunities are available to Ripton residents through the year. For example, Ripton elementary students receive Cross Country ski lessons at the Rikert Outdoor Center. Also, see Article I C, Land Use and Middlebury College.

4. Tri-Valley-Transit TVT, formerly known as ACTR, provides public transportation between Ripton and Middlebury. Route 125, which provides vehicular access to the Champlain Valley and the Route 100 valley, underwent significant repair and repaving in 2023 after heavy rains caused significant structural issues to the road in multiple locations. Damage to the pavement of Route 125 was found above and below Ripton village, but most Ripton residents fared well compared to other communities across the state. See Article II G: Flood Resilience.

5. Town Plan Map 2, Article I B and Article II (A, D, H, J and K) consider the extensive land holdings of the Green Mountain National Forest in Ripton as well as the town's important natural and historic features. The Ripton Conservation Commission,

established in 2003, attends to scenic, historical and natural values in the town and participated in preparation of the Town Plan.

6. Article II (A, B, D, E, and F) address natural resources such as land, mineral, flora and fauna, air, and water. Article II G addresses flood resilience. The flood mitigation project of 2010 has helped protect the historic village area along Route 125 from flooding and erosion. Project funding came from FEMA, Vermont Clean and Clear Program, and the Town of Ripton.

7. The Town Plan deals with energy issues in Article V with the Enhanced Energy Plan. As of 2023, 68 percent of homes have upgraded to energy efficient airtight woodstoves, and 20-30 percent would like to upgrade to a more efficient furnace or hot water heater and own a heat pump, solar hot water panels or solar photovoltaic system. Ripton has a fuel assistance program that provides needy households with heating fuel or firewood.

8. Ripton enjoys bountiful outdoor recreation opportunities. Green Mountain National Forest land, comprising 68 percent of the town, is available to residents year-round (Article I B). Twenty-three miles of USFS roads (Article IV B) and dozens of miles of USFS, Middlebury College, and privately owned trails are accessible. Map 6 shows the location of these roads and some of the trails. Very little land in Ripton is posted. Ninety-four percent of Ripton is forested, which ensures excellent access for hunters, hikers and Cross Country skiers. Ripton's rivers, with one modest exception, are all free flowing, providing excellent fishing and kayaking opportunities. The Town Plan encourages the use of PUDs and enrollment in the Vermont Use Value Program as ways to provide open recreational space.

9. The USFS, Middlebury College, and private forestland owners harvest forest products on most of Ripton's acreage. The percentage of Ripton's land cover in forest has remained relatively constant for the past decade. The Town Plan encourages sustainable timber harvest based on the example provided by the USFS and which follows Vermont Accepted Management Practices. A forested landscape, with its unmatched water retention characteristics, is Ripton's best insurance against destructive flooding.

Several Ripton residents grow agricultural produce for sale in Middlebury and nearby outlets. Numerous Ripton families have home vegetable gardens and raise livestock, especially goats, sheep, and chickens. The Ripton School hosts the Ripton Community Garden.

10. Article II (A through K) plans for wise and sustainable use of Ripton's natural resources and the requirements for restoration. For example, the plan brings to residents' attention the current state regulations governing use of outdoor wood-fired boilers, points out that use of burn barrels is illegal and can result in a fine, and that the state government provides rebates for energy-efficient wood stoves and catalytic converters (Article II E). The plan specifies the requirements for extraction of earth resources and the restoration of affected lands upon termination of extraction Article II B.

11. Article III addresses population and Article VIII addresses housing in Ripton, describing the current housing stock, future housing needs, costs, affordability, and availability. Multi-family homes are permitted by right in the Medium Density Residential District (MDR-5 acre) and High Density Residential District (LDR-2 acre). Ripton's

modest area of privately-owned land, its frequently steep terrain (see Map 4), and extensive areas of soils unsuited for traditional septic systems (see Map 3) make provision of new housing nearly always expensive.

12. Ripton has an adequately equipped and supplied volunteer fire department. The Vermont State Police provides law enforcement. The Addison County Sheriff's Department provides routine patrols and speed enforcement. Ripton has a volunteer first response squad. The Middlebury Regional EMS (MREMS), formerly Middlebury Volunteer Ambulance Association, provides ambulance care (see Article VI B). A description of Ripton's schools is in Article VII A. Water supplies, including the five public water sources, are described in Article II F. Sewage is by private septic systems. Solid waste service is provided by privately arranged home pick-up or drop-off at the Town Shed twice monthly. Solid waste is delivered to the Addison County Solid Waste Management District, of which Ripton is a member. Recycling is managed by a volunteer program and collected under contract by Casella Waste Management. Ripton's population has experienced little or no growth since the 2004 Town Plan. The population is aging, and school enrollment is in a slow decline (see Articles III and VII A).

13. Article VII B addresses childcare in Ripton. Most Ripton residents arrange for childcare in Middlebury at present.

Sincerely yours,



Caroline Herzog and Michael Cummings, Co-Chairs
Ripton Planning Commission