



COMPREHENSIVE TOWN PLAN

FOR THE

TOWN OF BENSON, VERMONT

www.bensonvermont.gov

Benson Selectboard
Benson Planning Commission

Adopted XX/XX/2026

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

In 1972, the Selectboard of the Town of Benson (“Benson” or the “Town”) established the Benson Planning Commission (the “Commission”). The Commission consists of five members appointed by the Selectboard. The Commission was directed to develop a comprehensive plan (the “Plan”) to help direct the future growth and development of Benson.

In June of 1988, the Commission drafted its first Town Plan, which the Selectboard adopted. That Plan was a substantial effort by the Commission and involved significant community involvement. At that time, the Town wanted to encourage certain types of growth, at an appropriate rate, such as single-family homes, vacation homes, agricultural activities, small businesses, light industry, and professional, educational, and health services. The 1998 Town Plan built on the work done to develop the first Plan and was amended in 1999 to obtain approval from the Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC). Subsequent revisions were made in 2004, 2008, 2013, and 2017, each time adopted by the Selectboard and approved by the RRPC.

Statutory Authority and Requirements

Implementation of the Municipal Plan is a local responsibility. It can only be accomplished by following the provisions for adoption, maintenance, and implementation as provided for in the Vermont Planning and Development Act: Chapter 117 of Title 24, Vermont Statutes Annotated (the Act). This section of the law specifies not only what a Plan may or must contain, but also how a Plan must be adopted.

It is important to understand that a Town Plan is not a zoning ordinance. The Town Plan has many uses, including outlining areas of community concern and priorities that require attention. It can also help the Town or other organizations within the Town secure funding and support for activities listed in the Plan as supported by the community. A Town Plan also allows the Town to voice its position in state land-use permitting proceedings. The Town Plan serves as the basis for the zoning and subdivision ordinance and other land-use ordinances. Any such ordinances are based on the goals outlined in the Plan. The 2008 Plan made minor adjustments to the 2004 Plan to align with recently adopted zoning and subdivision bylaws and to incorporate updated data and statistics. The 2013 Plan was an update of the 2008 Plan and includes 2010 Census Data. The 2026 Plan builds upon the goals and objectives of previous versions, with expanded content and updated data throughout. The Energy section has been developed, and additional content has been included to address topics such as forest fragmentation, wildlife corridors, and flood resilience. These updates support the state’s goal of 90% renewable energy by 2050 and reflect Benson’s evolving priorities. The Plan also incorporates 2020 Census data, revised goals, and new content to reflect recent infrastructure improvements, updated emergency management planning, and grant-funded initiatives such as the Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP) and broadband expansion.

Preparation of the Plan

In preparation for this revision to the Town Plan, the Planning Commission has consulted the Act, the relevant census data, Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC) information, the most up-to-date Vermont Statutes’ revised requirements for Town Plans, and Town land records and maps.

Hearings and Public Participation

The process of adopting the Town Plan has several steps: the Planning Commission issues a warning. It holds a public meeting, followed by a vote after incorporating any changes to the plan. The plan is then sent to the Selectboard. The Selectboard holds a hearing, and after the hearing, adopts the Town Plan after making any required changes.

This is an update to a previously approved Town Plan, with moderate changes to goals and objectives. There was extensive citizen participation in developing the 2004 plan and the land use regulations, which involved numerous public meetings and newsletter articles. Public involvement in the update has been invited through a survey, the local newsletter (the Benson Bulletin), planning commission meetings, a public informational meeting, and the hearings. Public participation in the 2026 update was encouraged through a variety of outreach methods, including:

- A community-wide survey, which received 51 responses
 - The survey was distributed via mail and email to households on the Benson Bulletin list (nearly 400 in total), the Town website, and in person at the Town Office.
 - The survey was available from May 8, 2025, to July 1, 2025
 - Completed surveys were collected by mail, returned to the Town Clerk, and via the secure drop box at the Town Office.

The survey was promoted through announcements on the Town website, social media, and direct mailings. The raw survey results are included in the Appendix and referenced throughout the plan. The Planning Commission has interpreted the results and incorporated key findings into relevant sections, including housing, energy, childcare, transportation, and land use. These results reflect current community priorities and provide a foundation for future planning decisions.

BENSON: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Location

Benson is a small Town in the northwestern corner of Rutland County. It is bounded on the west by Lake Champlain, which separates Vermont from New York. It is bounded on the North by Orwell, which is the Addison-Rutland county line; bounded on the east by Sudbury, Hubbardton, and Castleton; and on the South by West Haven and Fair Haven. The Town covers 45.6 square miles (29,210 acres).

History of Benson

Historically, Benson was a farming community. Our Town Charter was signed on May 5, 1780, and by 1790, the village was a prospering market center. The Town was supported in part by traffic and trade that traveled on the Whitehall to Vergennes Stage Road (Stage Road) and the road to the lake and Benson Landing (Lake Road).

The importance of Benson Landing increased after the completion of the Champlain Canal. The canal connects Lake Champlain with the Hudson River. Benson Landing served as an access to the lake and connected the Town to lucrative markets that used Champlain to transport goods. Farmers were close to the transportation hub, and their goods didn't have to travel as far by land, giving them an advantage. In the early nineteenth century, Benson was home to many profitable sheep farms. Wool traveled by way of Lake Champlain and the Hudson River to the markets of New York.

Traffic was diverted from the Village and the Stage Road when the Fair Haven Turnpike, now Route 22A, was completed in 1810. By the 1840s, sheep farming had reached its peak of prosperity. The lowering of tariffs on Australian wool at this time was a decisive factor in the decline of sheep farming.

In the 1850s, railroads were built within the State, leading to a decline in lake traffic and trade patterns. Town merchants and local farmers adjusted to the change by diversifying their economic activities. Herds of dairy cows became more common and eventually replaced sheep flocks as the primary agricultural activity.

For most of its history, Benson was a community of small hamlets that sustained as many as 11 elementary school districts and one two-year high school. With improvements in roads and transportation, Benson became more centralized.

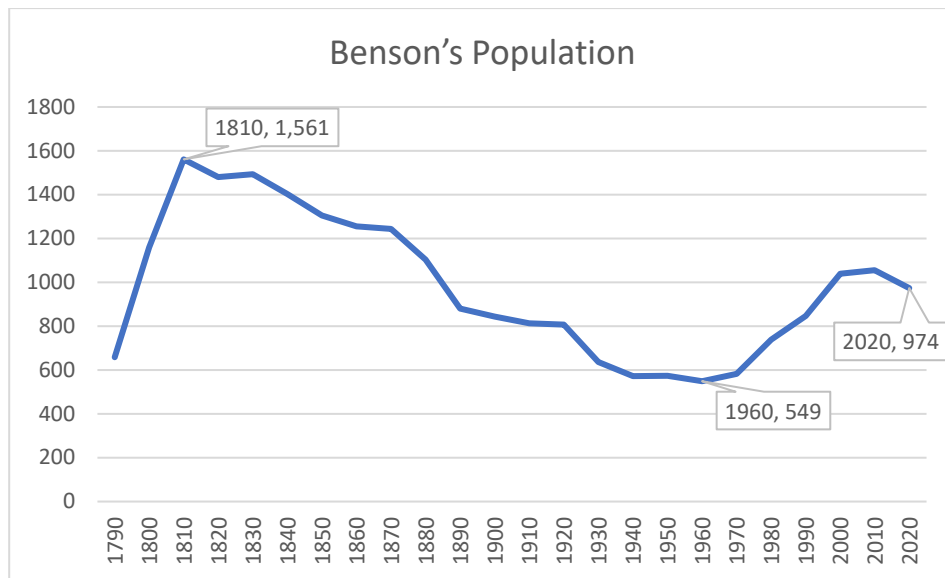
The Village has retained much of its historic character, with many buildings appearing much as they did during the Civil War era. Benson is honored to be included in the National Register of Historic Places. To this day, the Town still has residents who are descendants of early settlers of Benson. In 1980, Benson celebrated its 200th birthday, and our museum was founded at that time. The museum is in the Town Office Building.

A historic photograph of downtown Benson is included below to reflect the Town's early character and built environment. The image serves as a visual reminder of Benson's longstanding identity and complements the Village's written history.



Population and Growth Projections

974 people lived in Benson in 2020, according to the Decennial Census.



U.S. Census Bureau (1790-2020)

Benson has had a growth pattern similar to that of the Rutland Region and Vermont as a whole. Benson's population has fluctuated from over 1,500 residents in the 1800s to around 1,000 residents in the 2000s. It is estimated that Benson's population will remain around 1,000 residents or grow slightly in the next decade.

Age Distribution

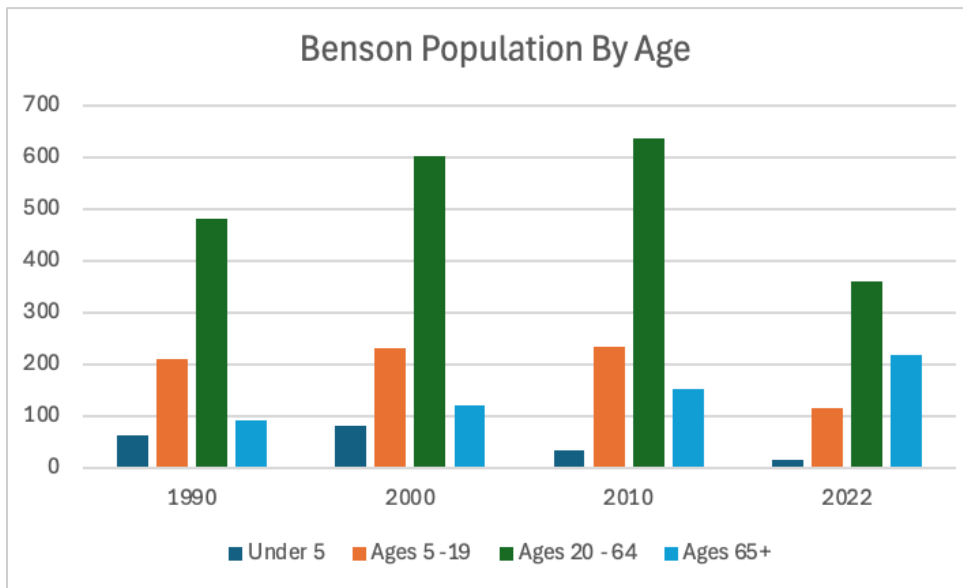
Estimates of age distribution help anticipate the level of municipal services demanded by different age groups in Benson's population, particularly schoolchildren and the elderly.

The number and percentage of children under five have significantly decreased since 2000. The number of children in the 5 to 19 age group – those children most likely to be in the Town's school system – has decreased substantially since 2010. In-migration can alter the age distribution of the

population, making it essential to conduct regular censuses of pre-school-age children in the Town to track school-age populations.

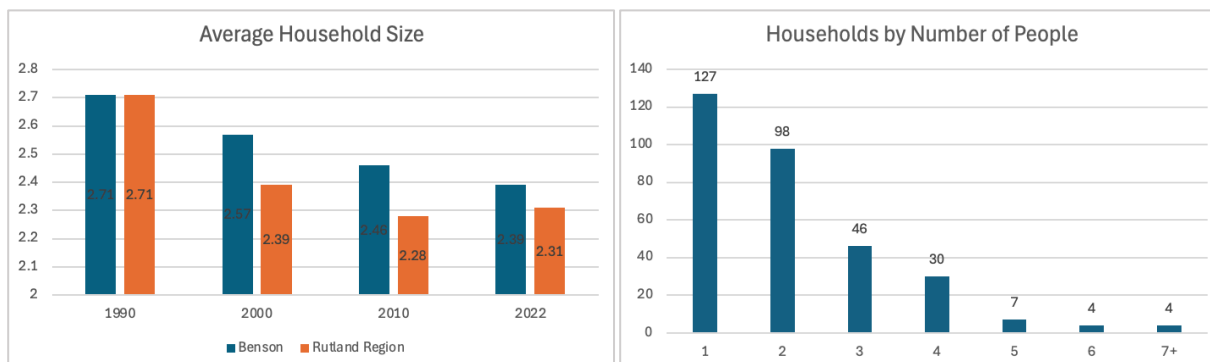
In the 20-64 age group, both numbers and percentage of the population have leveled off since 2000. In the 65+ group, numbers and percentages have increased slightly. The median age of Benson’s population (48.9 years old) has been steadily rising faster than in the rest of the county and the state. While in 1990, 2000, and 2010, Benson had a median age lower than Rutland County’s, in 2020, Benson’s median age is higher.

These numbers are significant because the services required by Benson residents will change as the population ages, including the need for adult day care and other senior services, as well as a more walkable community for residents who are no longer able to drive.



Households and Household Size

There were 438 households in 2020. The average household size in Benson is estimated to be 2.39 in 2022, slightly above the regional average. As shown below, household size is shrinking in Benson and the Rutland region. This, combined with population growth, may result in an increased need for both housing and educational services.



Goals of the Town of Benson

Given this history and current trends, the future will require careful planning. To further the needs identified by the Commission, the Plan has been drafted to:

- Encourage compact development in Benson Village and existing settlement areas to preserve the town's rural and agricultural character.
- Promote the maintenance and preservation of historic buildings and original architectural features, while discouraging the presence of dilapidated structures within the village core.
- Support small businesses, home occupations, and tourism that complement Benson's landscape and community values.
- Maintain safe and efficient roadways and explore practical pedestrian/bicycle connection improvements near village destinations.
- Support a mix of housing options, including affordable and ADUs, while preserving rural and town character.
- Ensure public utilities and community facilities meet current and future needs for emergency services, waste management, and energy efficiency.
- Reduce energy costs and improve community resilience by promoting weatherization, energy efficiency upgrades, and compact land use patterns, while supporting appropriately sited renewable energy projects.
- Protect and support agricultural and forestry uses through land conservation and zoning.
- Promote water quality, wetlands, wildlife habitats, and scenic resources through responsible land use and stewardship.
- Avoid development in flood hazard and river corridor areas and support emergency preparedness and infrastructure upgrades.
- Revitalize and strengthen the village center as a hub for community life, economic activity, and public services.
- Encourage investment in infrastructure, beautification, and mixed-use development to support a resilient and welcoming village core.
- Protect the Town from development that puts undue burden on the capacity of Town roads, water, sewer, and other infrastructure, and the capacity of the environment to support these developments.

These Plan Goals are consistent with the planning efforts of adjacent communities. They can only be accomplished through the coordinated use of our human and natural resources and the commitment of the Town and other affected governmental agencies and authorities. The goals of adjacent Towns also support maintaining the rural character of their communities, which are comparable to Benson. The Plan outlines recommended actions, or concrete activities, taken in whole or in part by the municipality to achieve the Goal. A monumental action occurred in 2006, when the Town adopted unified zoning and subdivision regulations. These regulations have been amended four times, most recently in 2018. At the time of this Town Plan update, the Planning Commission is currently reviewing the Unified Zoning and Subdivision Regulations.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Benson Town Office

Benson's Town Office is in the historic old schoolhouse on Stage Road in the Village center. It was renovated in the early 1990s to house the Town Clerk and Selectboard's office, the Town's records vault, and the Town Museum. The Planning Commission, Listers, and other committees also use these facilities.

Adjacent to the Town Office is a concrete pad that marks a portion of the former Benson School site. Today, this space hosts community events and offers potential for future public use. The Town and Planning Commission should continue exploring ways to make the most of this space. A playground next to the town office adds to the area's value as a welcoming spot for residents and families.

In 2025, the Town received planning and design assistance through the Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP), which supported conceptual plans for handicap parking, landscaping, and a gazebo for outdoor events. No funding was provided for the implementation of the plan. RRPC staff are continuing to assist the Town in identifying potential funding sources to support future phases of the project.

Benson Public Library

Benson's Public Library is next to the Town Office. It is open to the public three times a week for a total of nine hours. The library has one administration computer and one desktop computer, as well as two copiers. The library collection includes adult, children, and reference sections, plus books on tape and CDs. The library is not currently a member of the inter-library loan program. The Reading Group meets monthly. In 2025, the town was able to update its free community Wi-Fi when fiber was connected through GoNetspeed.

The Plan encourages the expansion of the Library collection and hours.

Community Hall

The Community Hall serves as a central municipal facility used for Town Meetings, social gatherings, recreational activities, and other public events. It also functions as Benson's official polling place. The plan encourages continued improvements to the space and further exploration of additional community uses.

Post Office

Benson's post office used to be located in the Benson Village Store. The post office closed in 2019 when the Benson Village Store burned. There is currently no active USPS post office in Benson. Residents rely on nearby post offices in Orwell and Fair Haven for postal services.

In 2023, residents formed the Benson Village Trust, Inc., to rebuild the historic store. The trust has secured \$1.9 million in grants, raised \$45,000 in donations, and launched a capital campaign, with plans to break ground in 2026 with a target fund of \$2.5 million. While it's unclear if postal services will return, the effort reflects a strong push to restore key services and community space in the village center.

The 2017 Town Plan emphasized the importance of maintaining and expanding postal services in Benson, particularly within the Village area. While the future of local USPS access remains uncertain,

this Plan continues to support the efforts to restore or reintroduce postal services should opportunities arise.

Child Care

The availability of childcare for Benson residents is a key factor in the community's affordability and livability. Parents of young children need safe, affordable, and accessible childcare options; otherwise, they must make choices about where to live and what to do for work.

Ensuring accessible and affordable childcare is an integral community need. The number of children under the age of five has fluctuated over the past decade (33 in 2010, 27 in 2015, and 51 in 2020), indicating a potential increase in demand.

Currently, only two registered providers offer formal childcare options in Benson. While these providers offer important services to local families, the demand for childcare likely exceeds the availability in Town. There is also a growing need for before and after school care, which families often seek outside of Benson. Exploring additional childcare options could help meet these needs and support working families in the community.

It may be difficult to assess the exact need for child care facilities in Benson because some adults commute to other communities to work and choose to have their children near their workplaces, potentially reducing the need for facilities in Benson.

Survey responses suggest that childcare needs in Benson are highly targeted rather than widespread. Most respondents indicated the question did not apply to them or were unsure on the matter, which aligns with Benson's older median age. Among those with an opinion, more leaned toward the need for additional, more affordable childcare, though the share was modest relative to overall responses. This indicates that childcare capacity and affordability are important issues for a smaller segment of households, warranting targeted strategies rather than broad-scale changes. Follow-up with parents, school officials, and childcare providers should be conducted to further quantify the current need for childcare services in Benson. Any change to Benson's zoning should not add unreasonable limitations on childcare facilities, such as permitting childcare centers as accessory uses for educational institutions, churches, and places of employment.

Senior Citizen Services

Seniors have access to the Castleton Community Center, which is open to seniors in the greater Castleton area, including Benson, offering education, recreation, communication, health, and social events and opportunities.

Health Services

Benson has a Town Health Officer. Sewage and water questions should be directed to the Health Officer. Benson has no doctors or medical clinics. Several nearby health organizations and services are available to Benson residents. The Rutland Area Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice of the Southwest Region provides service to Benson residents. The Marble Valley Regional Transit District ("The Bus") includes transportation to medical appointments; see the transportation section for more information.

The Plan encourages the Town to work with regional institutions to ensure continued access to health care and explore opportunities to attract medical providers or mobile services. Telemedicine services have become increasingly important for rural communities like Benson, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Residents are encouraged to explore the virtual care options offered by

providers. The town may also consider partnering with health clinics or networks to provide periodic mobile services in town, such as immunizations, screenings, or wellness visits.

Rescue Services

Benson First Response provides Basic Life Support and now coordinates closely with the Fair Haven EMS team serving Benson, Hubbardton, West Haven, and Fair Haven. A Benson representative participates with Fair Haven EMS, and Benson currently has two active local individuals trained to deliver Advanced Life Support (ALS) care. ALS capabilities include advanced airway management, cardiac monitoring/defibrillation, IV/IO access, and administration of critical medications – services that go beyond basic life support (BLS) and can stabilize life-threatening conditions before hospital arrival. Recruitment and training of additional volunteers remain a priority to maintain coverage and manage daytime demand. Even with ongoing staffing and funding pressures typical of rural EMS, the combination of regional ALS support and local responders provides a pragmatic, resilient framework for Benson residents.

Emergency Management

The Town of Benson has a Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP). The LEMP outlines positions, duties, and contact information of various emergency management officials, available municipal resources, and local and regional emergency shelter locations. The Local Emergency Management Plan is updated in May each year.

The Town has a FEMA-approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) that the Selectboard adopted on October 21, 2019. In 2025, the Town began updating its LHMP with technical assistance from the Rutland Regional Planning Commission. The update, as of early 2026, has entered the public comment phase. The updated LHMP will help Benson remain eligible for FEMA funding and meet state emergency planning standards.

Some factors that should be addressed in these plans include:

- A source for generators for the school, Community Hall and Town Office so that the school and Community Hall and Town Office can serve as emergency shelters during prolonged electricity power outages. (The Community Hall and Town Office have generator hookups.) The Fire Department has a vehicle with a portable generator that can be used for one building.
- The possibility of a prolonged electricity power outage, such as during the ice/snow storms of January 1998 and December 2014.
- An evacuation plan that considers the possibility of a hazardous materials spill on Route 22A. (The most serious hazard that could affect Benson would be an accident on Route 22A, which is traveled by many trucks at great speed carrying potentially dangerous chemicals.)
- Ongoing training for Town officials in emergency response and management procedures. Town officials are encouraged to complete ICS 402 and other relevant training offered through Vermont Emergency Management's Learning Management System. The Emergency Management Coordinator and at least one additional Town official should participate in regional emergency planning with the Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC) and attend Emergency Management Director Roundtables.

- A sufficient quantity of basic medical supplies, toilet paper and food at each shelter location. The town should assess current shelter supply levels and restock as needed to ensure readiness.
- Major elements of the hazard mitigation plan should address; (1) corrective action to minimize damage to roads, bridges and culverts by heavy rains and flooding, and (2) improvements to Route 22A to reduce accidents and the possibility of hazardous materials spills.

Updates and implementation of all emergency management-related plans should be a Town priority.

Public Safety & Police

Benson no longer has an elected Constable. Vermont State Police and the Rutland County Sheriff’s Department provide service to Benson. At the time of this Plan update, Benson is also contracting with the Town of Fair Haven for limited coverage in the village. The Selectboard appoints the Animal Control Officer, but historically has difficulty keeping the position filled.

Fire Protection

Benson is served by a municipal Volunteer Fire Department that responds to fires, accidents, and other public safety hazards and participates in the Rutland County Mutual Aid system. Neighboring departments – such as Hubbardton, Orwell, West Haven, and Fair Haven – regularly work with Benson under established mutual-aid protocols. The Town has installed multiple dry hydrants over the years, and the department is taking a cost-conscious incremental approach to updating equipment to match the variety of calls it receives. Recruitment, especially for daytime availability, remains essential. Like many small towns, Benson faces the challenge of finding enough volunteers willing to commit to training and become effective firefighters, resulting in low enrollment numbers. While budgets are tight, the combination of local readiness, mutual-aid depth, and targeted capital planning continues to provide dependable protection for the community.



Telecommunication Services

GoNetspeed currently serves Benson for both voice and broadband internet. GoNetspeed completed its fiber-optic buildout in Benson in May 2025 as part of a district-wide initiative led by the Otter Creek Communications Union District (OCCUD). OCCUD now offers fiber broadband to over 3,500+ households across its 18 member towns, including Benson. VTel Wireless provides broadband wireless service in Benson from sites within and just outside of town. Benson is also served by DSL and satellite for internet access. The Town will work with providers and regional

partners to identify remaining service gaps and improve reliability where needed. The Town will also promote the use of broadband to support education, telehealth, AI-enabled services, emergency communications, and small business activity.

Wireless Telecommunications Facilities

There is currently one wireless communications tower in Benson for emergency services. Our fire/rescue is on this repeater tower. Additional towers or upgrades may be needed to improve cellular connectivity and support emergency communications. The Town should work with providers and the Vermont Department of Public Service to identify coverage gaps and explore infrastructure improvements.

The plan encourages service providers to expand infrastructure in a manner that aligns with Benson's land-use regulations, scenic preservation goals, and community input. Co-location and low-visibility designs should be prioritized.

Wastewater Treatment Facility

Benson has a municipal waste treatment facility, built in 1970, located on Stage Road, south of Benson Village. Sewer lines feeding the facility are limited to Stage Road and Lake Road within the Village only. The plant's permitted flow is 17,700 gallons per day. Presently, the plant is operating at near capacity.

There is a fee for sewer service for connected dwellings. The facility's discharge permit was last issued in 2019 with an expiration date of June 30, 2024. However, the permit has been administratively extended by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) following the Town's timely renewal application. As of December 6, 2023, the permit remains in effect until formally renewed.

The stream into which the municipal waste treatment facility discharges has been listed as impaired for E. coli by the Agency of Natural Resources. The Town should ensure that its wastewater treatment facility does not contribute to water quality degradation.

While the 2017 Town Plan recommended a scoping study for wastewater facility expansion, current conditions do not warrant immediate expansion. However, the town should revisit this recommendation if future development pressures or regulatory changes arise.

The Plan encourages efficient use of the Town's wastewater treatment facility by promoting compact development in the village area and supporting water-saving devices. Any significant expansion of the Town Wastewater Treatment Facility's Collection District should be at the builder's or developer's expense.

Impact fees, as found in 24 V.S.A. §5200, "enable municipalities to require the beneficiaries of new development to pay their proportionate share of the cost of municipal projects which benefit them and to require them to pay for or mitigate the negative effects of construction." 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117 requires that if a municipality levies impact fees, they must be levied as a condition of the issuance of a zoning permit or subdivision approval. The formulae and procedures for levying impact fees may be adopted within the zoning regulations or as a separate ordinance.

The remainder of Benson's residences (outside the Village area) depend on on-site treatment systems, for which the State has enacted wastewater treatment rules and has jurisdiction over all permits.

Water Supply

Presently, Benson Village does not have a municipal water system. A public municipal water system serves the Benson Heights complex, and there are three non-community public water systems in Benson. Water is obtained from wells and springs located on residents' properties throughout the Town. The density of the Village area, combined with shallow soil and ledge, has created water problems that result in summertime water shortages for some residents and businesses, and year-round shortages for a few.

State permits are required for all water supply systems. The quality and quantity of water obtained from these sources vary greatly. Community input highlights the importance of protecting and preserving Benson's water resources, including Sunset Lake, Lake Champlain, and local ponds. Survey responses consistently supported water quality protection as a priority to health, recreation, and environmental resilience. This should remain a central theme in long-term planning efforts.

Solid Waste Disposal

Benson currently participates in the Solid Waste Alliance Committee (SWAC), which coordinates hazardous waste collection events annually. Benson contracts with Hubbard Brothers LLC for the transportation and disposal of solid waste and the hauling of recyclables from the Town's transfer station located on Glenn Road.

There are multiple dumpsters at the transfer station, including ones for metal, construction and demolition (C&D) debris, trash, and single-stream recyclables. Electronics can also be dropped off at no charge. Residents are required to purchase a yearly permit to use the facility and a sticker for each bag of trash; recyclables listed on the official disposal guide, available at the town office and transfer station, may be disposed of free of charge in the designated recycling dumpster.

Vermont's Universal Recycling Law (Act 148), effective July 1, 2020, prohibits the disposal of food scraps in the trash or landfill. Residents may choose to compost in their backyards, bring food scraps to drop-off facilities like the Benson Transfer Station, or use curbside food scrap haulers.

Each spring, Benson participates in Vermont's Green Up Day program, when volunteers collect roadside litter throughout the town. This effort helps keep Benson's roadsides clean and fosters a strong sense of community pride. Collected trash can be disposed of free of charge at the Transfer Station during the event.

The town has recently completed improvements to the Transfer Station, including extending electrical services to the site. These upgrades enhance the facility's function and support ongoing waste management needs.

Facility Needs and Improvements

The Town is continually evaluating the needs for new facilities, upgrades to existing infrastructure, and ongoing maintenance and repairs.

The Town completed a study using Municipal Planning Grant funds to evaluate options for new facilities for the Fire Department and Town Garage. While no final choice for the Fire Department has been selected, the Town continues to assess long-term facility needs.

In 2024, the Town completed construction of a new 3,800-square-foot municipal garage on Hulett Hill Road. The project included significant infrastructure upgrades: a potable water supply system, municipal sewer connection, floor drains with oil/grease/sediment traps, and site grading and drainage improvements. The garage now serves as the central facility for highway equipment and operations.



In addition, the Town funded maintenance improvements for the Fire Department buildings, repainting the Community Hall, and improvements to the library space.

Improvements have been made to the Community Hall and Town Office to reduce energy consumption by following building energy audits. At the time of this Plan update, energy efficiency upgrades are underway at the Town Office and Library, including HVAC replacement, air sealing, insulation, and ADA improvements, based on prior energy audits and funded through MERP. The town is also working on roof repairs at the Town Office and conducting a study to reorganize the space for separate functions.

Several years ago, the Town appropriated \$10,000 to be set aside for future salt/sand storage facilities which the selectboard is still working on. In addition, the Town annually appropriates money for the replacement of highway and fire equipment. The Town will prioritize incremental grant-ready improvements to existing facilities. Near-term priorities include: accessibility and site improvements near the Town Office/Library, long-term Fire Department facility needs, and continued maintenance and energy upgrades to municipal buildings.

Community Facilities and Services Objectives & Policies

Objectives

- Maintain essential municipal facilities and services at a scale that fits Benson's needs and resources

Policies

- Prioritize improvements to existing facilities rather than major new construction.
- Keep emergency planning current and maintain coordination with EMS and fire services.
- Support energy efficiency upgrades for municipal buildings before considering larger capital projects.
- Ensure wastewater and water systems remain safe and cost effective, evaluate expansion only if clearly needed and funded.

- Maintain reliable solid waste and recycling services and promote community clean-up programs.
- Encourage zoning that supports small, home-based childcare facilities and explore partnerships for affordability.
- Evaluate impacts of state childcare funding programs (Act 76) and share information with local families and businesses.
- Explore partnerships or grant opportunities to provide financial support for childcare expansion.
- Promote water conservation and efficient use of the wastewater system through outreach and simple standards.
- Support voluntary strategies to improve water supply reliability in the village if shortages persist.
- Continue community engagement programs like Green Up Day and provide clear information on hazardous waste disposal.

ENERGY

The Town of Benson recognizes the importance of Energy Planning in support of community resilience, affordability, and sustainability. As a small rural town with limited infrastructure and services, Benson faces unique energy challenges, including high heating costs, limited transportation options, and an aging housing stock. This chapter outlines the Town's current energy priorities with a focus on conservation, efficiency, and renewable energy development. While Benson is not currently pursuing Enhanced Energy Planning under Act 174, the Town remains committed to supporting energy-related efforts that align with local values and capacity.

Current Use and Needs

Benson's energy use reflects its rural character and limited infrastructure. Most homes rely on fuel oil (62%), propane (16%), and wood (12%) for heating, with electricity provided by Green Mountain Power. The Town does not have access to natural gas, and there are no district heating systems in place. Benson's housing stock includes older homes that may benefit from weatherization and energy efficiency upgrades.

Transportation is a major energy use in Benson, where most residents rely on private vehicles to access jobs, services, and shopping in nearby towns.

These conditions contribute to higher energy costs and limited options for reducing fossil fuel use. The Town is committed to lowering energy burdens and improving efficiency for all residents. Benson supports outreach and education efforts that connect households, especially low income and older residents, with weatherization services and energy assistance programs. In recent years, local organizations such as NeighborWorks of Western Vermont's HEAT Squad program, often in collaboration with regional housing partners, have offered outreach events including home energy audits and guidance on efficiency upgrades, helping residents identify practical ways to save energy and reduce costs.

Energy Conservation and Efficiency

Benson supports efforts to reduce energy consumption through weatherization, efficient appliances, and public outreach. The Town encourages residents to take advantage of programs offered by Efficiency Vermont, NeighborWorks of Western Vermont, and Green Mountain Power. These programs provide resources for home energy audits, insulation upgrades, and heating system improvements.

The Town helps connect residents to these programs by sharing information through the Benson Bulletin and supporting regional energy initiatives. The Town has previously weatherized municipal buildings and installed efficient lighting, demonstrating a commitment to energy conservation.

Benson's land use regulations do not include energy standards for new development, but the Town provides energy efficiency information to permit applicants and encourages voluntary compliance. The Planning Commission will continue to promote conservation efforts and coordinate with the Town's designated energy representative on the Selectboard to lead energy-related outreach efforts.

Renewable Energy Development

Benson supports the responsible development of renewable energy projects that align with the Town's rural character, land use goals, and scenic values. The Town encourages small-scale solar

and other renewable energy projects designed for residential and agricultural use. Larger projects may be supported if they are appropriately sited and consistent with community values.

The Mill Pond Solar Project, a 500kW facility approved by Green Mountain Power, is an example of a renewable energy project that meets these criteria. The Town recognizes that additional grid upgrades may be necessary before more projects of this scale can be connected.

Small-scale solar and wind systems under 15kW are permitted without restriction. The Town also supports the development of hydroelectric generation at the one identified site in Benson, provided environmental and permitting requirements are met. While large-scale wind, biomass, or methane projects are not anticipated due to infrastructure and siting limitations, the Town will evaluate any proposals individually.

Transportation

Benson currently lacks a formal public transit system. The Marble Valley Regional Transit District provides limited medical transportation, but most daily travel is by private vehicle.

Survey responses indicate limited demand for shared transportation options like carpooling or Park & Rides, with most respondents noting the question was not applicable. This is consistent with Benson's rural geography and travel patterns. Targeted, corridor-specific solutions may be more practical than a large, centralized facility.

While EV ownership appears low, many respondents support exploring a charging station near the Town Office if costs are covered by grants, sponsorships, or user fees. Any future EV charging consideration should focus on partnerships and funding strategies to avoid local tax burdens.

The Town's municipal fleet is small and primarily diesel powered. Energy efficiency is considered when replacing equipment, and the Town enforces a no-idling policy to reduce fuel use.

Land Use and Energy

Benson's land use policies support compact development in the Village Center while preserving the surrounding rural and agricultural landscape. This pattern helps reduce energy use by encouraging development near existing infrastructure and limiting sprawl. To further support housing needs without increasing sprawl, the Town encourages the creation of ADUs within existing homes or on developed lots, providing residents with options while maintaining the community's rural character. The Town Plan designates four land use districts: Village, Agricultural and Rural Residential (ARR), Lake Shore, and Lake Champlain Shoreline. Of these, the Village and ARR districts are most relevant to energy planning.

Survey results show strong community support for maintaining Benson's rural character. Over 66% of respondents agreed that future development should align with the Town's agricultural identity, and more than 80% supported conserving open space and working lands. These preferences reinforce compact, village-focused growth and small-scale uses, which in turn reduce energy demand for transportation and infrastructure.

While infrastructure constraints, such as limited sewer capacity and challenging soils, naturally limit growth, the Town's land use approach also contributes to energy conservation by focusing development where it is most efficient. Benson anticipates a modest increase in the coming years, with one or two new homes or camps permitted annually.

Energy Objectives & Policies

Objectives

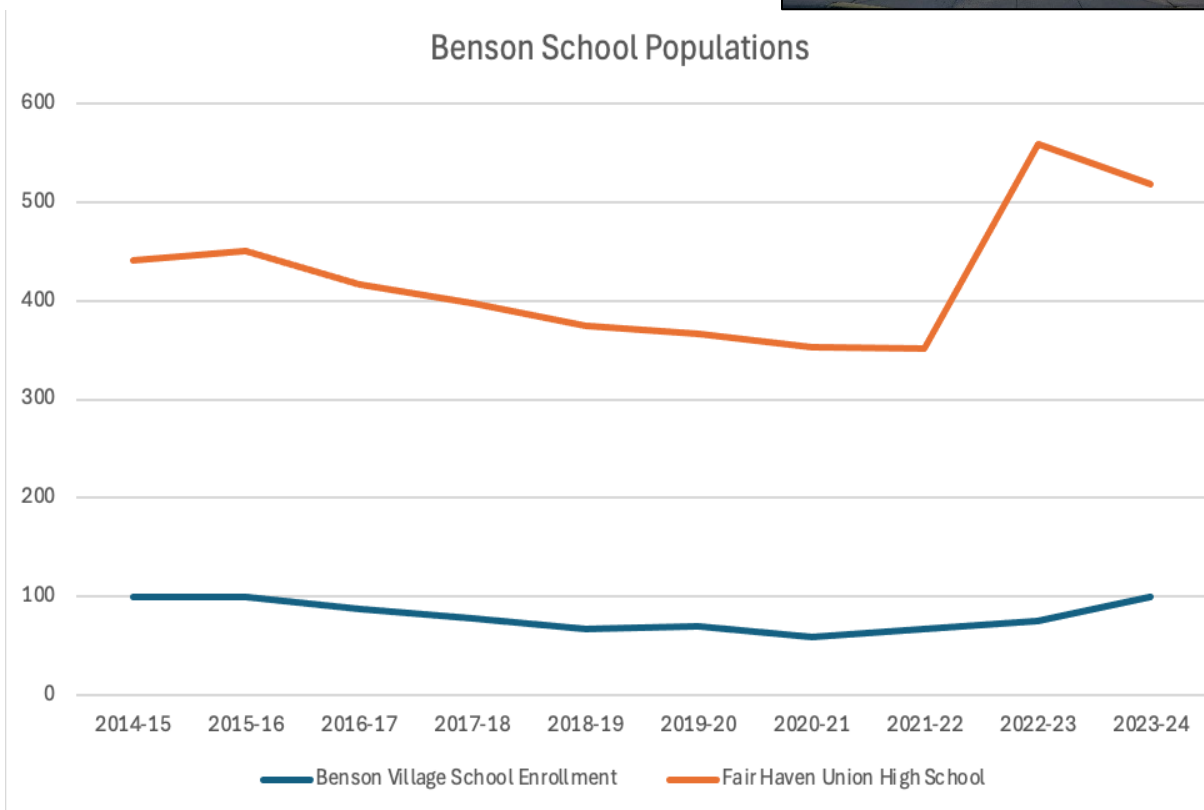
- Reduce energy costs and improve resilience through efficiency and locally appropriate renewable energy.

Policies

- Prioritize weatherization and energy efficiency upgrades for municipal buildings and encourage residents to use existing programs.
- Support small scale renewable energy projects that fit Benson's rural character, evaluate larger projects individually for siting and community compatibility.
- Explore EV charging if outside funding covers costs and operations remain tax neutral.
- Promote compact land use patterns that reduce energy demand and transportation costs.

EDUCATION

To meet growing demands for elementary education and to resolve building code and accreditation issues, the Town opened its Village School on School Street in 1993. It serves students from kindergarten through sixth grade in an approximately 10,000-square-foot wood-framed building. The facility includes 10 classrooms, a library, an art/music room, a kitchen, a mezzanine, and a multipurpose room used for physical education, lunch, and other programs. Outdoor amenities include a baseball field, basketball court, and playground equipment. The Community Hall is occasionally used for educational programs and is part of the school's emergency evacuation plan.



In the 2025-26 school year, 73 children were enrolled at Benson Village School (Kindergarten through Grade 6). Middle and high school students (Grades 7-12) attend Fair Haven Union Middle High School (FHU-MHS) in Fair Haven, which now serves as the district's consolidated secondary school. As of fall 2025, 40 students from Benson are enrolled at FHU-MHS. The town provides transportation to and from the school.

Benson Village School is a significant employer in the community. The school operates with an annual budget of \$1,760,420. Benson has a relatively large special education population. While federal and State programs provide support, they do not fully fund the cost of special education, which remains a variable and significant part of the school's budget.

A small number of families in Benson choose to homeschool their children. The relationship between homeschoolers, the school, and the broader community is generally cooperative and respectful.

For safety reasons, children do not walk to school. All students are either bused or driven by parents. Benson Village School contracts with Betcha Transportation for two buses. Schedule and route consolidation has limited overall service coverage, resulting in reduced transportation access for some households. The Town supports exploring opportunities to expand bus route coverage in the future to better accommodate the transportation needs of all students. There has been ongoing discussion about creating a pedestrian path between the school and the village center, and the Town may consider participating in the VTrans Safe Routes to School Program to help fund such a project.

Beyond the Benson Village School, students have access to regional education opportunities. These include Stafford Technical Center in Rutland and Castleton University, now part of Vermont State University. The Community College of Vermont (CCV) also offers flexible online and in-person programs. Green Mountain College and the College of St. Joseph both closed in 2019 and are no longer operating. With the expansion of high-speed internet access in Benson, more residents can pursue remote learning and online education opportunities.

Education Objectives & Policies

Objectives

- Support high quality, accessible education and lifelong learning opportunities without creating large new municipal costs.

Policies

- Coordinate with the Slate Valley Unified School District to align school programs and community needs.
- Support efforts to maintain and, where feasible, expand student transportation service coverage to improve access for Benson families, while coordinating with Slate Valley Unified School District (SVUSD) and transportation providers.
- Encourage practical, place-based learning initiatives and partnerships with regional education providers.
- Support Benson Public Library as a community learning hub for digital access and multigenerational programming.
- Explore safe pedestrian connections between the school and village center when feasible.
- Provide the latest tools in education and technology.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Town of Benson has a wealth of naturally occurring resources that enrich our lives. These natural resources include a broad spectrum of everything around us, such as water, soil, forests, wildlife, and scenic landscapes. It is our responsibility to identify these resources and maintain and create an environment that doesn't interrupt the balance of their existence.

In the past, there was a unique woodland in Benson and in other towns in the Champlain Valley. The remnants of this natural community have been called Clayplain Forest. This forest is identified by its history as an ancient lakebed, its soil, local climate, vegetation types, and the animal populations it supports.

The fertile clay soil and the warmth of the Champlain Valley allow this area to support several tree and shrub species at the northern extent of their ranges. Four different oak species, as well as hickory, beech, maples, and a host of other trees and shrubs, make this the most diverse woodland in the Northern Hardwood Forest. This forest was very productive, supporting a large population of animals.

Since this area of Vermont has fertile, clay-based soil, it was and is prized for agriculture. Forest clearing was completed in the 1850s, and today we have no examples of old-growth forest in the Champlain Valley. Today, rare examples of natural regeneration remain in a highly altered and fragmented landscape. Many fragments of this forest type are confined to areas of less than 100 acres. This fragmentation limits the long-standing viability of this forest.

Within Benson, restoration efforts are underway to restore this forest. Since 2002, the Southern Lake Champlain Valley Program of The Nature Conservancy and the Poultney-Mettowee Watershed Partnership have been working together to supply native plants grown from local seed sources for local ecological restoration and vegetative buffer plantings. Several landowners in Benson have signed up for federal cost-share programs to address natural resource concerns by restoring riparian areas to their natural vegetative condition. These federally funded stream bank protection programs include the Partners for Fish and Wildlife and the Conservation Reserve Program.

The goal of this restoration project is to mitigate the adverse impacts of adjacent land uses on fish and wildlife habitat, thereby improving water quality. At the same time, we can work to restore Clayplain forests in some areas where they once existed. The restoration effort will also expand the wooded corridor along our local rivers, stabilize riverbanks, reduce erosion, and reduce sedimentation that is adversely impacting our water quality. Game and non-game animal species will benefit from these efforts, sustaining and increasing their populations.

The Nature Conservancy and the State have identified several significant natural and fragile areas in Benson. The Nature Conservancy has conserved several parcels, and the State either owns or has participated in conservation efforts. The Town, for the most part, relies on The Nature Conservancy and the State to identify those areas that meet significant criteria and should be conserved. In addition, Benson has been identified as an essential wildlife corridor between the Green Mountains and the Adirondacks. While our plan does not explicitly protect specific areas,



our policy of supporting The Nature Conservancy, Land Trust, and State conservation efforts, our land use regulation requirements, and our publicizing the importance of maintaining wildlife corridors have this effect. One of the most notable examples is Shaw Mountain, a Nature Conservancy preserve located in Benson. The Shaw Mountain Natural Area reflects the Town's commitment to protecting rare forest fragments and wildlife corridors.

Some of the significant areas protected also include Lake Champlain shorelands in the southern part of town, parts of Mill Pond shoreline and marsh, Pond Woods Wildlife Recreation Area, and Benson lands in Bomoseen State Park. Efforts are underway, with Town support, to conserve additional significant land along the Lake Champlain and Sunset Lake shorelines.

Climate, Topography, & Geology

Benson has a favorable growing season (according to the State of Vermont, Fish and Wildlife Department's Nongame and Natural Heritage Program). However, it gets very cold in winter due to air drainage from the surrounding higher areas. Benson has slightly less rainfall than much of the state and is well-suited to agriculture. Maps included in the Appendix section depict agricultural soils, wetlands, and other topographic features relevant to land use and conservation.

Benson has incredible biodiversity, both in species diversity and in the genetic diversity of individuals within species, due to the unique climate and soil types here. These conditions make Benson a priority area for conservation and ecological restoration efforts.

Agriculture, Forestry, and Mineral Resources

Benson's forestland is vital to the Town in many ways. Commercial timber production has been operating for many years. This timberland has also served as a source of habitat for wildlife, recreation, aesthetics, and watershed protection. The wealth of wild game that has supported hunting in this area is mainly due to this forestland. There are operating sawmills in Town.

There are several active gravel pits and areas where shale is surface mined, as well as other mineral deposits. They have been critical in supplying materials for Town roadwork and private driveways.

The soil on which our farming industry is based has been mapped, and areas that are classified as prime agricultural land have been identified. Benson has transitioned from a community of many small dairy farms to a smaller number of active operations. As of 2025, there are two operating dairy farms remaining. Active farms use some of the remaining open lands, but we have seen the loss of agricultural land due to a reduction in overall farming.

Today, Benson is seeing a transition to small-scale beef farming, alongside a growing diversity of agricultural uses. These include vegetable farms, sheep operations, hay production, farm food stands, honey production, and maple syrup operations, all of which are essential to the local farming economy. The economic value of forest and agricultural products remains a significant component of Benson's financial base. The emphasis on Benson's land-use regulations and Town Plan on maintaining the landscape is the primary method for ensuring a continuing agricultural and forestry industry in the Town.

Water Resources

Lakes, ponds, streams, and wetlands have been placed on topographic maps. These water features support a wide diversity of plant and animal life, offer recreational opportunities, and contribute to Benson's scenic and ecological value. The various waterway floodplains are critical areas that also

require attention. These are locations along streams and rivers that, due to low elevation, can flood easily and are identified on the Natural Resources maps included in this plan.

Watersheds

Watersheds are geographic areas bounded by topographic features that cause water to drain to a single destination. Not only does a watershed drain, it also captures precipitation, filters and stores water, and determines its release. A watershed, therefore, is a drainage basin that divides the landscape into hydrologically defined areas. Within the watershed, there are many distinctive biotic and abiotic components whose functions are interrelated. It is essential to protect watershed areas in Benson to preserve water quality. Proper management of a watershed controls the quality and quantity of water flow, whether it is from roads and their maintenance, septic systems or other human activity within the watershed. Since water travels downhill, any activity that affects water quality, quantity, or rate of movement at one location can change the characteristics of the watershed at locations downstream. Thus, everyone living or working within a watershed needs to cooperate to ensure good conditions.

Surface Water

Benson is home to many lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. Ultimately, these all flow into Lake Champlain. The Hubbardton River grows from a small stream to a good-sized river in Benson and passes through many fragments of the Clayplain Forest. In the very northern part of Benson, most streams flow into the East Creek watershed. Lake Champlain is the western border of Benson and of Vermont. The quality of Lake Champlain is affected by land-use and water-management practices across many towns in both Vermont and New York. Surface water features in Benson are mapped in the Natural Resources section of this Plan.

Ground Water

Nearly all Benson residents use groundwater for potable water and other household uses. The quantity and quality vary throughout the Town, and many residents experience issues with either quantity or quality, or both. Most homeowners obtain their water from wells, but there are also many natural springs located in Benson. While aquifers in Benson have not been mapped or quantified, the town does have mapped Groundwater Source Protection Areas (SPAs) to safeguard public drinking water supplies. These areas help protect wells and springs from contamination and guide land use decisions near critical water sources.

Threats to Water Quality

There are many threats to water quality in Benson. Agricultural practices are among the non-site-specific sources of pollution and sedimentation in streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes. Dirt roads and impervious surfaces, such as paved roads, driveways, and rooftops, are other sources of stormwater, sediments, and potentially toxic nutrients. By educating farmers and the public about the threats to water quality, they can be encouraged to create buffer strips between plowed, grazed, and pesticide and/or herbicide treated areas. Buffer strips will slow the flow of water from agricultural areas and filter contaminants before they reach waterways. Reducing impervious surfaces and designing yards to promote greater stormwater infiltration will also improve water quality.

Benson's wastewater treatment facility discharges into a stream that has been listed as impaired for E. coli by the Agency of Natural Resources. The stream eventually flows into the Hubbardton River.

Upgrades have been made to address the situation, but efforts should continue to ensure that the Town's facility is not responsible for the stream's degradation.

The effects on Lake Champlain's water quality come from many sources. It is important to consider how lake pollution may be affecting not only the water supply of Benson's households on its shore, but also the possible effects on the health of Town residents who use the lake and who eat fish from the lake. Water quality issues may also affect future tourism and recreation opportunities in Benson, particularly if the waterfront is developed into a community gathering space.

Wetlands

Benson's wetlands support a diversity of wildlife. Wetlands are defined as areas inundated by surface or groundwater with a frequency sufficient to help plants and animals that depend on saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth or reproduction. These areas are commonly known as ponds, bogs, fens, marshes, wet meadows, shrub swamps, and wooded swamps. Wetlands in Benson provide essential public benefits, including floodwater storage, erosion control, wildlife habitat, and water quality protection. Preserving Benson's wetlands is also vital for climate resilience and scenic value.

Many of Benson's wetlands are located near Mill Pond, Pond Woods Wildlife Management Area, and along the Lake Champlain shoreline. East Creek, particularly towards Mill Pond, is a significant natural waterway that supports diverse wetland habitats and contributes to regional ecological connectivity. These areas support both game and non-game species and are part of larger ecological corridors. The Town should continue to support wetland protection through land use regulations, conservation partnerships, and public education.

Water Resource Protection

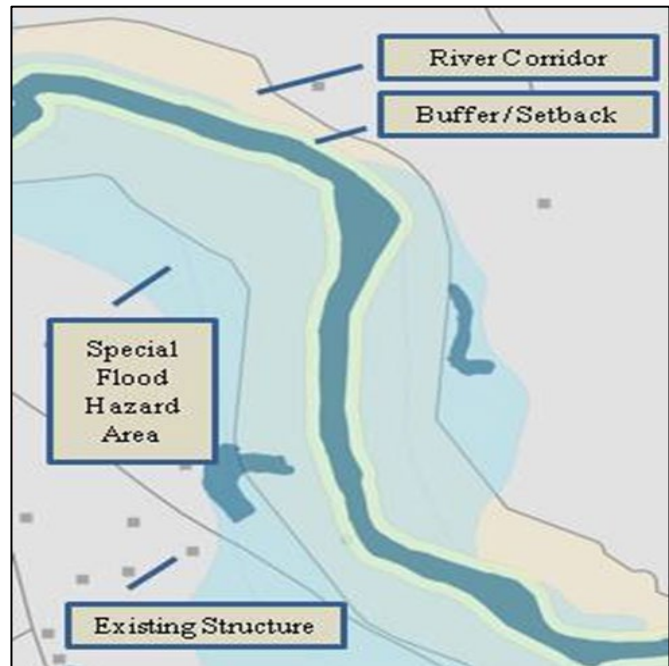
Benson's major surface waters include the Hubbardton River, Mill Pond, Sunset Lake, and Lake Champlain, all of which are protected through land use regulations and conservation efforts. The Town relies on State regulations to protect other resources, such as wetlands, groundwater, and small streams. While Benson does not currently have designated "Outstanding Resource Waters," its surface waters are generally clean and support recreation, wildlife, and local agriculture. Continued protection is necessary to maintain these conditions, especially as development pressures and climate impacts increase. The Town should consider updating its water resource policies to better address runoff, erosion, and long-term water quality.

Flood Resilience

Flood events are Vermont's most frequent and costly natural disasters. Two types of flooding impact communities like Benson: inundation and flash flooding. Inundation is when water rises onto low-lying land. Flash flooding is a sudden, violent flood that often involves fluvial erosion (streambank erosion). The combination of flash flooding and fluvial erosion causes the most flood-related damage in the state.

To meet the new state requirement to identify flood hazard and fluvial erosion areas and designate protected areas, maps are an essential aid. The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) was created by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to address inundation hazards. Flood insurance rates are based on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) or Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (DFIRMs), which delineate areas of the flood plain likely to be inundated during a flood. These are identified as Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs) or as areas with a 1% chance of flooding (100-year flood). Town participation in NFIP is voluntary.

However, in Vermont, two thirds of flood damage occurs outside federally mapped flood areas. Vermont's River Corridor and Floodplain Management Program, developed by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR), delineates areas subject to fluvial erosion. River corridor maps are designed with the recognition that rivers are not static. Because the methods of mapping inundation and fluvial erosion corridors differ significantly, flood maps and river corridor maps differ to some degree.



This plan includes a map that combines Benson's Special Flood Hazard Area and River Corridor and watershed resources, such as wetlands, riparian zones, upland forests, and impervious surfaces, and structures in flood hazard areas.

Benson is committed to making informed, strategic decisions on how best to protect, manage, and restore watershed resources and minimize flooding. Riparian buffers reduce flood hazards and stabilize stream banks, attenuate floods, provide aquatic and terrestrial habitat and wildlife corridors, filter runoff, absorb nutrients, and shade streams to keep them cool. Wetlands also prevent flood damage and are a vital component for maintaining the ecological integrity of land and water. In addition, upland forests moderate and attenuate flood impacts. Steep slopes, on the other hand, can be a detriment during flooding by amplifying water volume and velocity in rivers and streams.

History of Flooding

Flooding is a relatively low hazard risk for Benson. Because of the Town's system of east-west roads and north-south orientation of its waterways and proactive actions by the road foreman, the Town experiences relatively minimal damage during flooding events. Damages from Tropical Storm Irene were minor compared to neighboring towns. The Town received \$153,494.59 in FEMA Public Assistance for damages from that storm. However, in 2013, there was more flooding in Town, resulting in \$104,211.22 in FEMA funds.

In Benson, road damage due to flooding and fluvial erosion typically involves damage to roads and culverts. Areas prone to flooding include Benson Landing, Money Hole Road, Park Hill Road, Pleasant Valley Road, Root Pond Road, East Road, and Stony Point Road.

Table 1: Existing Structures in the Mapped Flood Hazard Areas

E-911 Structures	1 % (SFHA)
Camp/bungalow	7
Mobile Home	1
Single Family	6
Total E-911	14

Current Conditions

Very few structures are built in the floodplain, so the risk of flooding to residences and other structures is minimal. E-911 mapping data indicates that 14 structures are within the Town’s SFHA (the 1% annual chance flood hazard area). The types of structures are listed in Table 1. An additional 97 structures are within 100 feet of the SFHA. There are three critical or public structures are in the 0.2% annual chance

flood hazard area.

In 2011, Benson adopted flood hazard regulations to reduce flooding and fluvial erosion by avoiding new development/fill/removal of wetlands in the Special Flood Hazard Area. Benson has been enrolled in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) since 1985 and has one NFIP flood insurance policy. As of 2026, Benson’s Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) is undergoing an update. Once finalized, the Town will regain eligibility for higher tiers of post-disaster funding. To qualify for the 17.5% ERAF reimbursement rate, Benson must adopt river corridor protection standards in addition to maintaining an approved LHMP.

Wildlife Habitats and Fragile Areas

The Vermont Natural Heritage Inventory, a program within the Agency of Natural Resources, has identified habitats of rare, threatened, and endangered species, as well as, critical wildlife habitat, and unique natural areas in Benson. Shaw Mountain is one of these unique areas that have received national recognition for the endangered species found there. The site is now a preserve under the Nature Conservancy’s management. Some species worthy of mention in Benson include the timber rattler, five-banded skink, and eastern rat snakes.

Forest Fragmentation, Wildlife Habitat, and Wildlife Corridors

Large blocks of wooded terrain located at various locations in Town support stable and diverse wildlife, including some of the state’s highest priority. These forest blocks can generally be described as creating a circular pattern along the Town boundary, except for Route 22A west to Parkhill Road on the south. This forest land is part of a much larger, connected forested landscape that includes the Fair Haven Town Forest, Bomoseen State Park, and the Pond Woods Wildlife Management Area, and extends from the Green Mountains in the east to the New York State border near the southern end of Lake Champlain.

Once fragmented, the movement of plants and animals is inhibited. This restricts breeding and gene flow, which can lead to long-term population declines. Besides long-term biodiversity loss, fragmentation can lead to increased invasive plants, pests, pathogens, and reduced water quality.

Connected forest habitats are a key component of forest adaptation and response to climate change, and fragmentation is a threat to this natural resilience.

Fragmentation of timberland into smaller holdings can make it challenging to use the forest in traditional ways. Silviculture and wood harvesting can become impractical and economically unviable, potentially resulting in a loss of biomass potential for renewable energy generation.

Functional connections among forest and wildlife blocks should be maintained to allow wildlife to disperse and move safely across large areas. Narrow habitat connections may function more like a

trap than a viable connection. Wooded habitat on both sides of the road for 1,000 feet or more is the model for optimal wildlife movement. Habitat connectivity can also be achieved in riparian zones along surface water and wetlands.

These Benson forest lands already exhibit a degree of fragmentation with limited connectivity, particularly due to public roads, some farm fields, and residences. The most significant barrier to a continuous forest landscape in Benson is Route 22A. There is a section of wooded habitat on both sides of 22A, adjacent to the Pond Woods Wildlife Management Area, and a shorter section south of Benson in West Haven. These two sections may be important to connectivity between the Green Mountains and the Adirondacks.

The Town is aware of the importance of its existing forest to its forest industry, treasured landscape, and wildlife. Preservation of forest land, preventing fragmentation, and maintaining connectivity are Town priorities. Lack of infrastructure, land use regulations, and natural constraints on development (access, subsurface conditions, and topography) have been effective for many years in meeting these objectives. The town will consider, and may adopt, additional land use controls or conservation strategies as necessary to protect its forest resources if future development pressures or ecological threats arise. Please refer to the Natural Resources 3 map on page 60.

Open Space and Scenic Resources

Protecting Benson's open spaces and scenic resources for the enjoyment of present and future generations is a priority. This priority must be balanced with highway maintenance, safety, and infrastructure needs. Benson's diverse landscape includes rich agricultural lands, scenic ridges and wooded hills, unique wildlife habitats, streams and lakes, historic areas, and tree-lined roads. A prime goal is to preserve and enhance Benson's uniqueness.

The Town has chosen not to designate scenic roads, waterways, and views individually, but rather to consider the Town as a whole, except for those identified in the Energy section regarding the location of solar generation facilities. Instead, the Town has chosen to protect these sites through the Land Use Regulations, which limit the number of potential home construction sites and preserve open lands and forests, and through the policy of no new roads and restrictions on significant development. In addition, infrastructure limitations also protect these resources. Benson is a Town with tight clay soils, and the cost of community water and waste facilities is prohibitive, which discourages development.

The Use Value Program was established by the legislature "to encourage and assist in the maintenance of Vermont's productive agricultural and forest land." Other stated anticipated outcomes include conservation, preservation, and protection of land and prevention of accelerated conversion to more intensive use. The Benson 2023 Use Value appraisal Lists 13,662 acres of land with Current Use exemptions.

The Vermont Land Trust has conserved many farms in Benson. Similarly, The Nature Conservancy and the State have purchased land in Benson and bought conservation easements on land in Benson. The Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District is protecting and replanting the Clayplain forest in Benson. The Town should continue to support such efforts, especially when they protect water quality, watersheds, wetlands, and ecosystems.

Conservation Commission

State statute enables Towns to establish Conservation Commissions of three to nine members. Conservation Commissions are advisory, not regulatory in nature. As of 2026, Benson has not

established a Conservation Commission but may consider doing so in the future to support natural resource planning and community engagement.

Natural Resources Objectives & Policies

Objectives

- Protect Benson's natural resources, including water, wetlands, forests, and scenic landscapes, while supporting a working agricultural and forestry economy and reducing flood risk.

Policies

- Maintain water quality and wetland integrity through responsible land use and vegetated buffers, discourage practices that degrade surface or groundwater.
- Support voluntary land conservation and restoration of Clayplain forests, wildlife corridors, and other fragile habitats.
- Avoid development in flood hazard and river corridor areas, enforce existing flood regulations and promote riparian buffers.
- Preserve open space and scenic views through zoning and conservation partnerships, balancing resource protection with rural livelihoods.
- Encourage sustainable agriculture and forestry practices that maintain soil health and provide local food sources.
- Promote strategies to reduce impervious surface coverage in new development and road projects to minimize runoff and flood risk.

RECREATION

Benson residents and visitors alike are provided with a variety of indoor and outdoor, passive and active, organized and individualized recreational opportunities for all age groups. In addition to the natural (trails and lakes) and man-made facilities (fields and playgrounds), Benson is also home to several recreational organizations. While Benson offers a range of recreational opportunities, there remains a need for continued investment and improvement.

Recreational facilities include, but are not limited to:

- Playground at the Town Office and on the Benson Village School grounds
- Indoor gymnasium at the Benson Village School
- Basketball courts behind the Community Hall and Benson Village School
- Baseball fields and athletic fields located at the Benson Village School, with limited accessibility to Town residents
- Nature trail and hiking trails on the Shaw Mountain Preserve owned by The Nature Conservancy
- Pond Woods Wildlife Management Area, a 2,100-acre preserve in Benson offering hunting, fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing, managed by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Picnic Area off Route 22A, which is six acres, includes a trail access point into the Pond Woods, and Benson Landing Access, a state-owned access point located off Lake Road, which includes a dock, boat launch, and portable bathroom facilities
- Small area of East Creek Wildlife Management Area
- Bomoseen State Park/Glen Lake – Although not accessible from Benson, this park extends into the southeast corner of the Town lakes' recreational accesses

Lake Recreational Accesses

Benson's main asset is its location, bordering Lake Champlain and encompassing some of Vermont's cleanest lakes: Lake Sunset, Lake Sunrise, and Perch Pond. These lakes contribute a significant source of income to the Town through vacation homes and other tourist activities. However, Benson residents have limited access to these lakes.

- Lake Champlain: Public access is primarily for fishing; swimming is not permitted. Non-fishing, recreation, and parking are allowed.
- Sunset Lake: Public access occurs near the outlet into Sunrise Lake. Approximately 1,200 feet of shoreline is within the Sunset Lake Road right-of-way. Parking is limited but permitted under the Town's Traffic Ordinance.
- Sunrise Lake: No public access.
- Perch Pond: Limited access via public fishing access.

Recreational Organizations

Include, but are not limited to:

- The Fish and Game Club has a skeet range located on Route 22A and is active with several Town activities.
- Ethan Allen Snow Travelers, a snowmobile club reorganized in 1997 and part of Vermont Area Snow Travelers (VAST), with approximately 180 members from Benson and the surrounding Towns of Orwell, West Haven, and Shoreham. This club maintains 50 miles of snowmobile trails, of which 12-14 miles are in Benson.
- Champlain All Terrain Sportsman, a private ATV club that has a network of trails combined with marked gravel roads and a section of paved roads, mainly on the westerly side of Route 22A. These are available for club members to use, and the Town traffic ordinance allows ATV use on Town gravel roads and on some sections of paved roads when properly posted.

Both the Snowmobile and ATV clubs have successfully negotiated permission to use private lands, greatly enhancing their trails. The safe use of both private and public land is essential to continued permission.

Benson Village Center Recreation Facilities

The Town received a 2007 Municipal Planning Grant to develop a plan for recreational facilities near the village center. The priority recreational facilities identified for the village area include, in order of priority: picnic tables, walking or biking trails, open grassy area, picnic shelter, gazebo or bandstand, sports fields (baseball, football, soccer, etc.), skating rink, sports courts (basketball, tennis, etc.), and a skateboard park.

Since then, the Town has made progress by upgrading the playground area in front of the Town Offices. Old and decaying equipment was removed and replaced with new structures, thanks to volunteer efforts and support from the highway department. However, additional improvements are still needed.

According to the Recreation Plan, there would likely be public support for projects to improve or expand upon existing facilities located on community lands. If existing facilities and land were fully utilized and well managed, there may be support for acquiring additional land for public recreation in the future.

Recreation Plan recommendations include:

- Fully utilize the school and Town office site lands for new facilities.
- Link the school and Town office sites with a trail or path.
- Seek and develop land within ½ mile of the village center for a Town park.
- Continue upgrading the playground area in front of the Town Office by adding new features and equipment. Consider adding a gazebo or bandstand in the same area to support community concerts and public events.

Recommended facilities and alternative site plans are included in the Recreation Plan, along with cost estimates and possible funding sources. While the Recreation Plan is not included as part of this Town plan, it informed the recreation goals and actions identified here and is available on the Benson Town Website (bensonvermont.gov)

Recreation Objectives & Policies

Objectives

- Maintain and enhance recreational opportunities that fit Benson’s rural character and community scale.

Policies

- Improve and maintain existing recreation facilities like playgrounds, fields, and lake access before considering new major projects.
- Support low cost, high value enhancements such as signage, trail connections, and volunteer stewardship programs.
- Protect and expand public access to lakes and ponds where feasible, balancing recreation with water quality and habitat protection.
- Coordinate with regional partners and local organizations to leverage resources for trail development and outdoor recreation.
- Inventory and Scope Sidewalk excavation and restoration. The Town could be interested in pursuing grant opportunities for this work.
- Creation of a path somewhere near the edge of Lake Champlain.
- Expansion of the public access to the waterfront at Lake Champlain (perhaps a swimming area, picnic area, or park).
- Creation of public access points to lakes and ponds in the Town.
- Development of snowmobile trails, ATV trails, biking trails, hiking and pedestrian trails, horse trails, and trails for other forms of recreation.
- Implement Recreation Plan recommendations.
- Pursue opportunities for funding the enhancement of recreational facilities and activities according to the recommendations of the Recreation Plan.
- Encourage maintenance and enhancement of recreation facilities.
- Explore opportunities for funding the improvement of existing recreational facilities.
- Continue efforts to improve the lake water quality.
- Encourage maintenance and improvement of public access areas and facilities on lakes.
- Provide improved access to Sunset Lake.
- Provide access to Perch Pond, Lake Sunrise, and expand access to Lake Champlain for uses beyond those permitted by Fish & Wildlife at the Benson Landing access point.
- Explore opportunities for the development of other, more individualized public recreation uses, including hiking, pedestrian, horse, and biking trails.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Historic Resources

The lower Champlain Valley played an essential part in the early history of the nation, and the area surrounding Benson includes numerous historical sites and facilities, including Fort Ticonderoga, Mount Independence, Crown Point, Hubbardton Battlefield, and the Skenesborough Museum. The Military Road from Mount Independence to Hubbardton passed through Benson. Other important aspects of local history, such as the birth of several critical religious sects and the once-flourishing commercial life of the Champlain waterway, are less conspicuous but still part of the region's ambience. Benson's role in this rich and tumultuous history is reflected primarily in its surviving architecture, rather than in prominent landmarks or designated historic sites. Many parts of the town retain their historic character, with buildings and streetscapes that have changed little since the Civil War era. Benson Village is included in the National Register of Historic Places, and several structures elsewhere in the Town are listed individually as historic places. [The Historic Architecture of Rutland County](#), published by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, describes these sites and their locations in detail.

While the Town does not currently enforce formal historic preservation standards, it recognizes the importance of protecting its cultural heritage and encourages voluntary preservation efforts. Protection and preservation are promoted through community outreach, including the Town newsletter, website, and the Benson Historical Museum. Some protection is also provided through Act 250 regulations and the Conditional Use Approvals required by the Land Use Regulations.

Historic Commission

Currently, Benson has not established a Historic Commission. The Town may consider forming a Historic Commission in the future to help identify and preserve historically significant sites, buildings, cemeteries, monuments, and other cultural assets throughout Benson and along the Lake Champlain shoreline.

Benson has an active group of volunteers whose most visible effort is seen in the Benson Historical Museum, located in the Town Office Building. The museum contains historical archives and records, as well as numerous artifacts relating to Benson's history and the role of its citizens in world affairs.

A Town history, "Remembering Benson," was published in September 2012 by a group of volunteers, a three-year project. In addition, the Selectboard has established a History Project Fund to fund worthy history projects.

Cultural Resources

While Benson has historically supported a variety of artists, artisans, and small businesses, several establishments have closed in recent years, including the antique shop, jewelry shop, and the Benson Village store, which burned in 2019. A local nonprofit has since formed to rebuild the Benson Village Store and restore its role as a community hub. The Town supports these efforts and recognizes the importance of revitalizing the village center.

The Community Hall continues to serve as a venue for local gatherings and events. The Benson Public Library, located adjacent to the Town Office, remains a valuable resource.

Each August, the Town hosts the Benson Burdock Festival and Family Day, which includes a theme-based parade, fire department barbecue, games, and vendors, and is well attended by the community.

Monument to Veterans

There is a permanent monument honoring Benson’s Veterans from the Revolutionary War onward, located on the green in front of the Town Office building. Veterans’ names are inscribed on the granite monument. This monument was constructed utilizing Town and donated funds. Future veterans’ names may be inscribed on the monument upon request and at the donor’s expense. The Town encourages continued recognition of local veterans and supports efforts to maintain and enhance the monument site.



Churches

There are two churches in the Town. The United Church of Benson holds regular services and continues to serve as a central place of worship and community gathering. The former Sun of Justice Church no longer has regular services but is now home to the Mercy Ecospirituality Center, run by the Vermont Sisters of Mercy, which is dedicated to environmental stewardship, spiritual reflection, and community healing. The Center offers programs in ecospirituality, gardening, beekeeping, sustainability, and retreat accommodations.

Cemeteries

Benson has a cemetery committee that maintains the Town’s cemeteries. The Town recognizes four primary cemeteries that serve the community: Fairview Cemetery, Old Benson Cemetery, Carter Street Cemetery, and Temple Cemetery. Fairview Cemetery, first opened in 1898, contains over 1,000 memorials and remains actively used for new burials. The Old Benson Cemetery, first used in 1789, contains 960 memorials and is located behind the Community Hall, it is no longer in use. Carter Street Cemetery (92 memorials) and Temple Cemetery (73 memorials) are historic cemeteries that are no longer active. While additional small family burial sites exist throughout Benson, these four cemeteries represent the main locations of significance. The Education and Community Facilities map found in the appendix reflects these primary cemeteries.



Historic and Cultural Resources Objectives & Policies

Although this Town Plan contains limited documentation of historical resources, it is intended to promote continued preservation of those resources through policies and objectives. While planning for Benson’s future, we must remain mindful that the character of the Town, although not always easily defined, remains one of its most important historical features and needs to be preserved.

Objectives

- Preserve Benson's historic character, cultural resources, and rural identity through voluntary stewardship and village-focused revitalization.

Policies

- Encourage maintenance and rehabilitation of historic structures, cemeteries, and monuments that reflect Benson's heritage.
- Support village center revitalization and cultural programming that strengthen community identity.
- Promote voluntary preservation efforts and partnerships rather than costly mandates.
- Maintain land use standards that protect scenic roads, historic streetscapes, and rural character.
- Encourage documentation and interpretation of local history through museums, archives, and community events.

HOUSING

Existing Conditions

Current information on the grand list and tax rate is available from the Town Clerk.

Table 2: Grand List

Parcel Type	2002	2012	2025	2002-2023 % Change
Residential parcels* under 6 acres	115	140	153	34%
Residential parcels on 6 acres or more	132	160	194	21%
Mobile Homes without land	40	18	16	-60%
Mobile Homes with land	58	71	53	-8%
Vacation Parcels under 6 acres	84	67	65	-22%
Vacation Parcels on 6 acres or more	28	28	24	-14%
Commercial Properties	10	16	10	0%
Commercial Apartments	3	1	1	-200%
Farms**	20	22	13	-35%
Woodland	15	14	3	-80%
Miscellaneous***	131	97	89	-32%

Table 3: Grand List Assessed Values 2002-2023

	2002 Average	2012 Average	2016 Average	2023 Average
Residential parcels under 6 acres	\$74,020	\$155,209	\$153,133	\$147,600
Residential parcels on 6 acres or more	\$139,652	\$234,319	\$239,619	\$250,042
Mobile Homes without land	\$11,240	\$15,639	\$17,039	\$15,660****
Mobile Homes with land	\$64,746	\$90,879	\$94,664	\$93,245
Vacation Parcels under 6 acres	\$56,379	\$152,534	\$153,860	\$151,648
Vacation Parcels on 6 acres or more	\$81,868	\$200,918	\$207,541	\$180,052
Commercial Properties	\$154,740	\$411,694	\$190,900	\$340,246
Commercial Apartments	\$195,467	\$745,100	\$754,500	\$754,500
Farms	\$260,087	\$1,140,365	\$603,872	\$729,476
Woodland	\$28,388	\$71,229	\$71,406	\$66,227
Miscellaneous	\$33,001	\$64,025	\$62,345	\$59,749

*A parcel of land is contiguous land that is owned by a single person or entity. Residential, vacation and farm parcels may have more than one dwelling.

**Farms are properties where income is derived from growing crops or raising animals, or from selling animals or animal products.

***A miscellaneous parcel is land with no dwelling that is not categorized as woodland.

**** 2023 data was unavailable, data was supplemented with 2022 data.

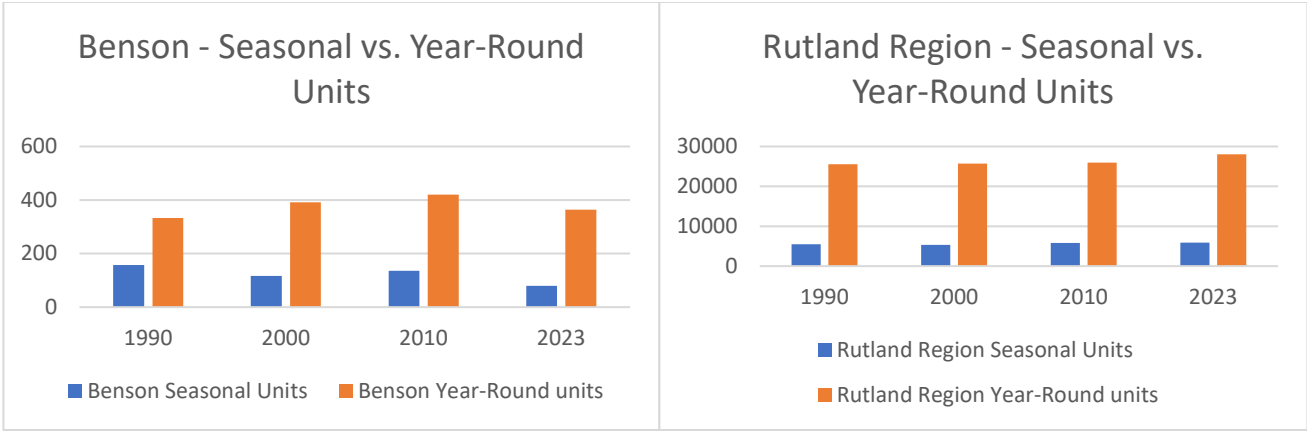


Table 4: Average Household Size

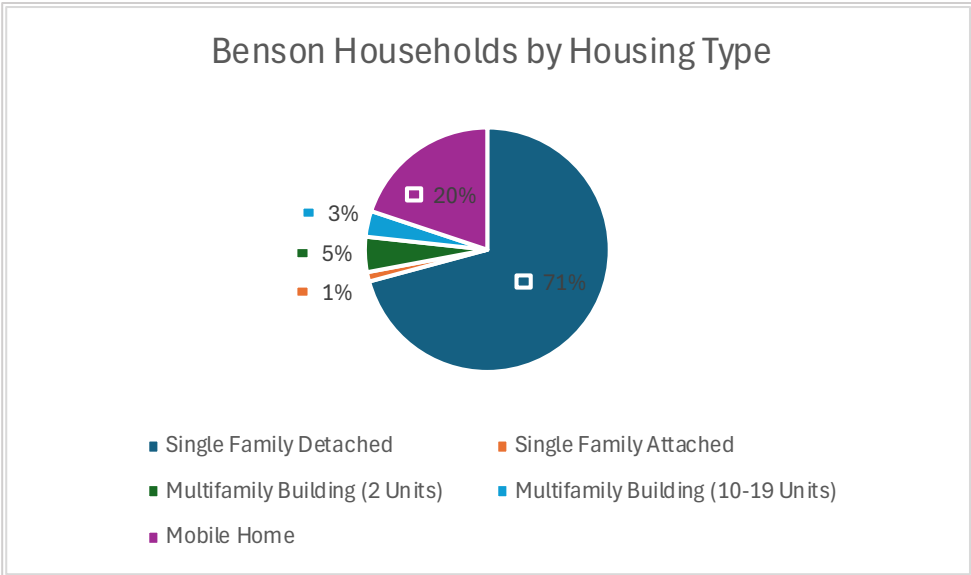
	1990	2000	2010	2023
Benson	2.71	2.57	2.46	2.06
Rutland Region	2.71	2.39	2.28	2.30

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 5: Housing Units by Owner / Renter Occupied

	Owner-Occupied Units # → % of Change	Renter-Occupied Units # → % of Change
Benson		
1990	229 → 27.32%	93 → 84.00%
2000	278 → 26.94%	113 → 21.51%
2012	325 → 17.1%	95 → 15.9%
2023	260 → 18.7%	65 → 30.1%
Rutland Region		
1990	16,111 → 15.04%	7,414 → 14.95%
2000	17,901 → 11.11%	7,777 → 4.90%
2012	18,147 → 1.36%	7,837 → 0.76%
2023	18,496 → 14.8%	6,952 → 0.06%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Housing Affordability

Benson has a wide range of residential buildings. There are options for low- and moderate-income households, and the Town has annually voted to allocate funds for affordable housing through our contributions to BROCC and the Vermont Council on the Aging. Some of the affordable housing is in the form of mobile homes in rural areas of the Town. Many of these may require upgrades to meet modern safety and health standards. Benson also has affordable single-family houses in the Village area, as well as Benson Heights, a federally subsidized housing complex that provides apartments for low-income individuals, families, and other residents in need of affordable housing.

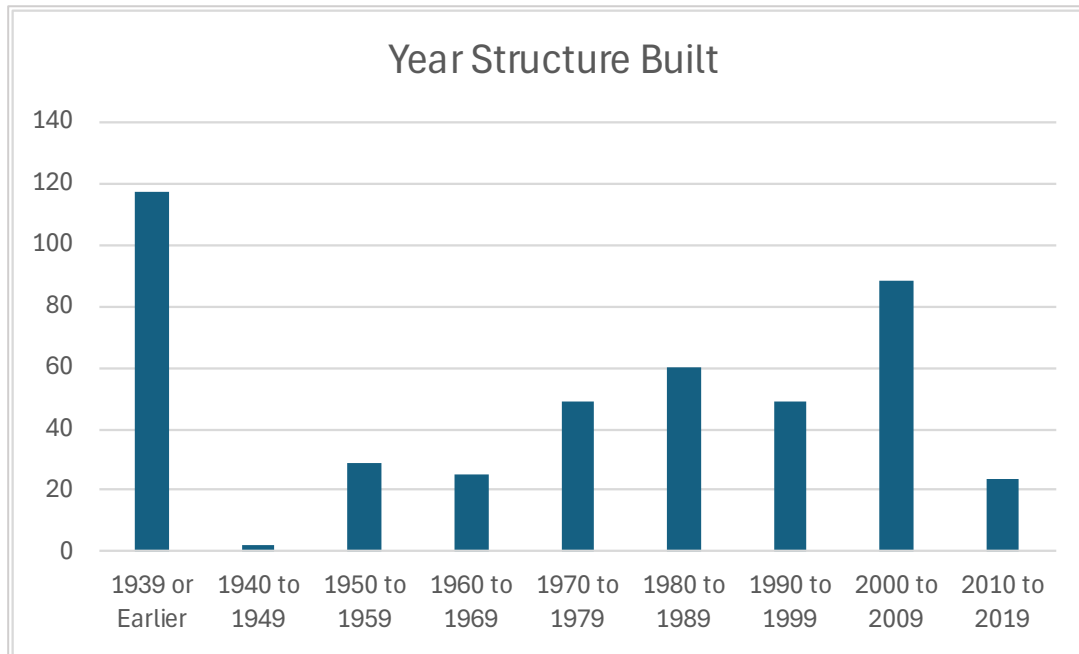
At Benson Heights, subsidized rents allow residents to live within walking distance of a restaurant, the library, the Town Office, and other amenities. Other forms of affordable housing permitted in Benson include accessory dwelling units (ADUs) attached to or contained within existing housing or in accessory structures. These units provide flexible options for families, caregivers, and individuals seeking lower-cost housing.

Affordable housing is a responsibility at the state and regional levels. Benson’s current inventory of residential buildings contains a large proportion of existing affordable structures. Benson should encourage a balance between affordable and other residential structures. The town supports regional efforts to address housing affordability and encourages the Rutland Regional Planning Commission to continue developing a region-wide affordable housing strategy.

Future Housing Needs

Benson’s population has remained relatively stable or declines slightly over time, while household sizes have become smaller, reflecting demographic changes like an aging population and fewer children per household. There are many second, vacation, and seasonal homes. In fact, 25% of all housing units are part-time residences. Since 1990, Benson’s housing growth rate has lagged behind that of Rutland County, according to U.S. Census Data. This trend, combined with limited new construction, suggests that future housing needs will focus on maintaining and improving existing homes rather than large-scale development. The town supports aging in place by encouraging accessible home upgrades, small-scale housing options in and near the village, and accessory dwelling units that can support caregivers, multigenerational living, or downsizing without leaving the community.

Looking ahead, Benson should assess which type of housing best meets the needs of its aging population, young families, seasonal residents, and those seeking affordable options. The Town may also consider strategies to encourage infill development in the village center and support rehabilitation of existing housing stock.



Housing Objectives & Policies

Objectives

- Provide safe, affordable, and energy-efficient housing options that fit Benson’s rural character and support aging-in-place.

Policies

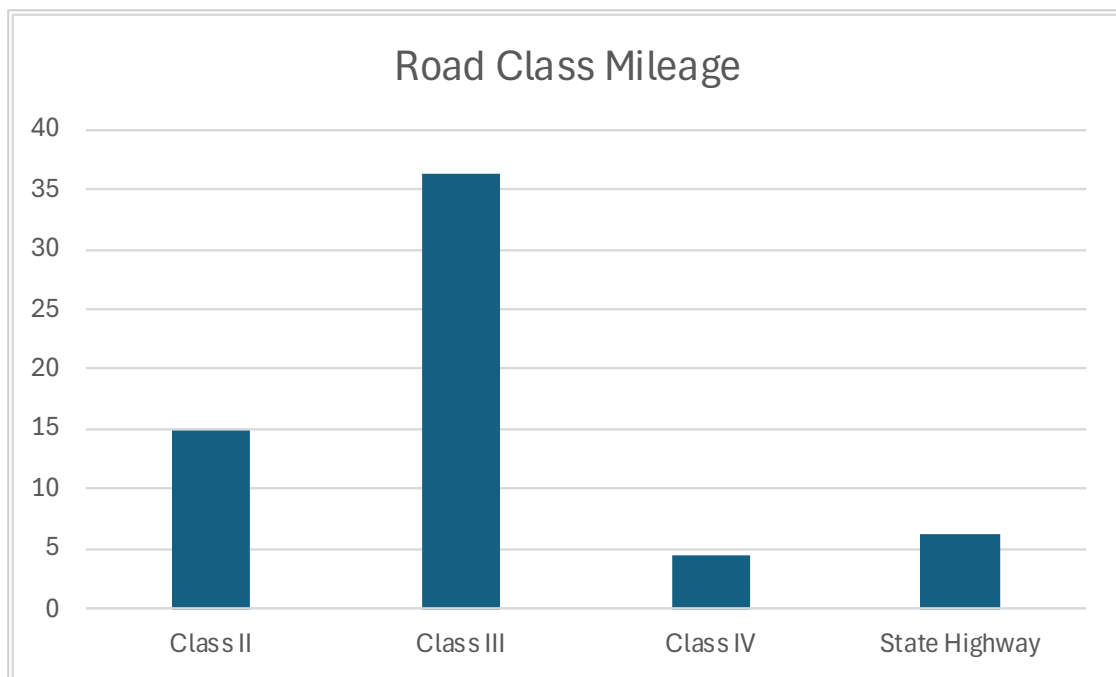
- Encourage rehabilitation and weatherization of existing homes as a cost-effective way to improve housing quality and affordability.
- Support accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and small-scale infill in the village and other service areas while maintaining low rural densities.
- Preserve historically significant housing structures through voluntary maintenance and adaptive reuse.
- Promote housing designs and locations that align with Benson’s rural character and avoid undue strain on municipal services.
- Encourage energy-efficient building practices for new construction and renovations.

TRANSPORTATION

The principal means of transportation within and through Benson is the private motor vehicle. To facilitate this type of transportation, Benson is served by two types of highways: a Vermont State Highway and Benson Town Highways (Classes II, III, and IV). While Benson’s current traffic volumes are modest, the highway system must be maintained and improved to meet safety, accessibility, and long-term resilience goals. Should Benson experience population growth, some additional highways and highway improvements may be required. The Town does not anticipate new roads but will evaluate needs as development occurs. Should any developments in Benson require new roads, the construction and maintenance of those roads should be the responsibility of the project’s developer.

It is the Selectboard’s policy not to accept or encourage new roads in Town. The Town has adopted State standards for access management of the Town’s streets. The State regulates access to Route 22A, but the Town’s land-use regulations include provisions to guide development along this corridor. The Town’s policy of restricting the construction of new roads and the implementation of several roadside ditching projects in recent years is reducing the negative impact of our road system on the environment.

A road classification system, primarily based on traffic types and volumes, and connections to other roads and communities, is used to group similar roads and allocate resources. Benson has no Class I roads; 14.87 miles of Class II roads; 36.43 miles of Class III roads; 4.07 miles of Class IV roads; and 6.276 miles of State highway (Route 22A) for a total of 63.852 miles of highways.



In 2008, the Town discontinued all roads not included on the Town Highway map. Benson’s transportation system is shown on the attached Community Facilities, Transportation, and Education map.

The surface conditions of Benson’s roads vary. Benson has mostly gravel roads and a few paved roads. The paved roads are Route 22A, Route 144, Hulett Hill Road, a portion of East Road, a portion of Lake Road, a portion of Sunset Lake Road, and Stage Road in and south of the Village area. The condition of these roads is good to excellent. The condition of gravel roads in Benson largely

depends on the weather and season. Generally, the streets are considered acceptable, and the Selectboard has created and updated a highway infrastructure report indicating conditions and areas for improvement. The report covers road surfaces, ditches, roadside trees, culverts, bridges and the 2,000 foot storm drain in Benson Village. The Selectboard is responsible for maintaining the Town's highways.

Generally, Benson is a rural Town, and the highways are scenic rural roads. Many are lined with trees, with full or partial canopy. Vistas and long views of Benson's rolling landscape help to enhance the Town's charm and character. Roadside trees and vegetation play a role in erosion control and in protecting the quality of our surface waters from road runoff. Protection of roadside vegetation is a consideration, as is maintaining safe visibility on Town Highways during highway maintenance projects.

Parking facilities in Benson are generally adequate currently, except for the lack of parking in the village and in public access areas, such as along Sunset Lake, and at the school. As the population increases, parking solutions need to be studied and recommendations considered for implementation. The Recreation Plan includes specific recommendations for additional parking in the area adjacent to the Town office and at the school. Parking on the edge of the traveled portion of the right-of-way is authorized by the Traffic Ordinance at Sunset Lake.

Minor Arterial Highways

VT Route 22A serves as Benson's only arterial highway and is a critical transportation corridor for the region. A part of the National Highway System, VT Route 22A bisects Benson connecting Vergennes to the north, with Fair Haven, to the south. Route 22A functions as Benson's primary access route and is a heavily trafficked highway used by both light and heavy trucks, passenger vehicles and farm machinery.

Traffic counts in 2010, 2012, and 2015 show adjusted average daily traffic (AADT) ranging from 3,900 vehicles on the northern section to 4,800 on the southern section. A corridor study completed in 2012 documented these trends and raised concerns about increasing truck traffic and safety. More recent VTrans data confirms continued growth, with an AADT of approximately 4,334 vehicles recorded in 2023 near the East Road intersection. The accident rate along Route 22A remains a concern for Benson residents, reinforcing the need for ongoing monitoring and safety improvements.

The Study report recommends several improvements to Route 22A in Benson, which include:

- Make Route 22A a minimum of 36 feet wide from West Haven to Orwell with adequate shoulders.
- An improvement project is scheduled to start in the spring of 2030-2032. The project will include shoulder widening, geometric, and intersection improvements.
- Reduce the speed limit to 40 mph between the southbound approach to Route 144 and the northbound approach to Lake Road.
- Install flashing beacons at the intersection of Route 144 with Route 22A as well as the intersection of Lake Road/Mill Pond with Route 22A.
- Install left and right turn lanes at the intersection of Lake Road/Mill Pond with Route 22A when warranted by traffic volume.

- Additional intersection improvements at Benson intersections.

The Town strongly urges the State to implement the recommendations of the Route 22A corridor study without further delay. Improving safety conditions in this critical corridor is a top priority for Benson residents and essential to protecting public health and supporting local transportation needs.

Connector

Due to Benson's rural nature, its highways are used by a mix of farm machinery, trucks, passenger vehicles, and horse traffic. Many of Benson's secondary roads serve to connect the Town's outlying areas to the village. They may also serve as connectors to the neighboring Towns of Orwell, Hubbardton, and West Haven. Primary east-west connections are afforded via State Highway 144, Benson Landing/Lake Road, and north-south via Stage Road and East Road.

These are classified as Class II and III roads. Recent VTrans data shows that Route 22A in Benson has three distinct segments with the following 2023 Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) volumes:

- West Haven Town Line to Lake Road: 4,344 Vehicles/day
- Lake Road to Benson Road (VT 144): 4,223 Vehicles/day
- Benson Road (VT 144) to Orwell Town Line: 3,844 Vehicles/day

Other Town Roads

These roads primarily serve residential and small-scale commercial uses. The majority of roads in the Town's inventory are classified as Class III and Class IV roads. There is a mix of paved and unpaved roads typical of community networks in Vermont. The Town maintains these roads and plays a critical role in local connectivity, especially for residents living outside the Village Center

Private Roads

Several roads in Benson are privately owned and provide access to residential properties. The Town permits these; private roads must meet Town construction standards to ensure safety and accessibility. The Town does not maintain these roads; responsibility for upkeep lies with the property owners or their homeowner groups.

Other Modes of Transportation

No railroads or airport facilities serve Benson. Rail transportation is available in Castleton, Rutland, and Whitehall, NY, and air transportation is available from Burlington, Rutland, and Albany, NY. The Public Transportation Program for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities provides transportation for such individuals, primarily for medical services. The Marble Valley Regional Transit District provides this through "The Bus" and the One-to-One Program of volunteer drivers.

Benson has historically been served by water transportation on Lake Champlain, and while this service has been significantly reduced, the lake remains a minor transportation route.

Benson has an abundance of snowmobile and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trails on private and public land, which are used as a minor form of transportation but are primarily used for recreation. The

In 2002, the Benson Selectboard was approached by a private group wishing to create a bike route the length of Lake Champlain. The Selectboard approved the proposed route on Stage Road from

Orwell to West Haven. Signs have been erected identifying the route. Most Benson roads are well-suited for recreational biking and walking.

There is a need for recreational paths and a path from the Benson Village School to the Village area for bicycle and pedestrian transportation. The Recreation Plan identified possible routes for this path. Additional regions should also be considered for such paths in the Town.

Highway Department

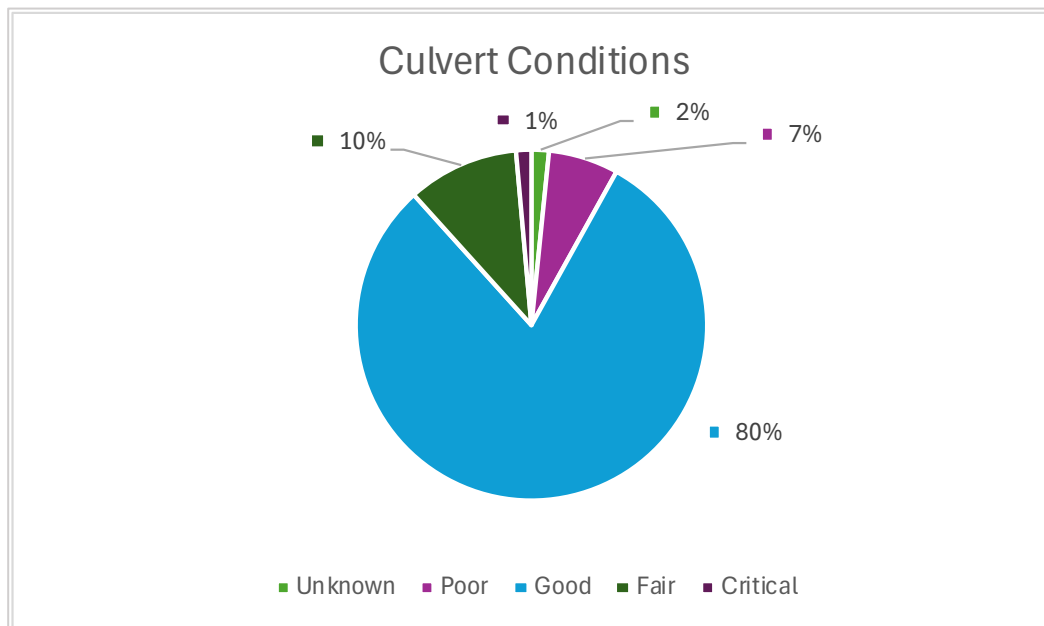
Benson’s Highway Department is in the Village area. The Town owns and maintains: three trucks, a grader, a loader, a backhoe, an excavator, a pickup truck. The Town’s highway equipment is housed in a municipal garage located on Hulett Hill Road, constructed in 2024. The facility supports highway operations and is equipped with modern infrastructure to meet long-term needs. The Town continues to assess long-term facility needs, including plans for a salt/sand storage structure.

Funding

The federal and state governments pay all costs for maintaining federal and state highways (VT Route 22A). The Town, with some federal and state financial assistance, is responsible for the repair and maintenance of Class II and III Town roads, and for any Selectboard- or voter-approved repair and maintenance of Class IV Town roads. Local funds can be extended by applying for State grants that are annually available through the Agency of Transportation. The Town can also apply to the Better Backroads program for funds. By maintaining a capital budget and active transportation planning program, in conjunction with neighboring Towns, the Town can anticipate highway needs and plan for them in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Infrastructure Inventory

Benson maintains a documented inventory of culverts throughout the Town, including size, material, condition, and location, in a graphic information system format. The last culvert inventory was completed in 2024; Benson has a culvert count of 574.



Transportation Objectives & Policies

Objectives

- Maintain a safe, efficient, and resilient transportation system that preserves Benson's rural character and supports practical connections for residents.

Policies

- Prioritize road maintenance, erosion control, and culvert upgrades to ensure safety and reduce long term costs.
- Support safety improvements on Route 22A and other high risk areas through coordination with state and regional partners.
- Maintain roadside vegetation and visibility in a way that balances safety with scenic character, encourage appropriate plantings where feasible.
- Discourage development that creates excessive traffic or imposes undue burdens on local roads and infrastructure, and consider fair cost sharing for necessary improvements.
- Encourage pedestrian and bike connections near the village center and explore opportunities for multi-use paths and trails that fit Benson's scale.
- Manage recreation trail use (snowmobiles, ATVs, biking, hiking, horseback) to balance access with noise, environmental, and safety concerns.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The economy of the Town of Benson is predominantly a component of the Rutland and Addison Counties' economies. It is both an agricultural and rural economy. Local employment is generally related to agriculture, forest products, and the commercial and service industries. A substantial number of residents commute to service-sector jobs outside the Town.

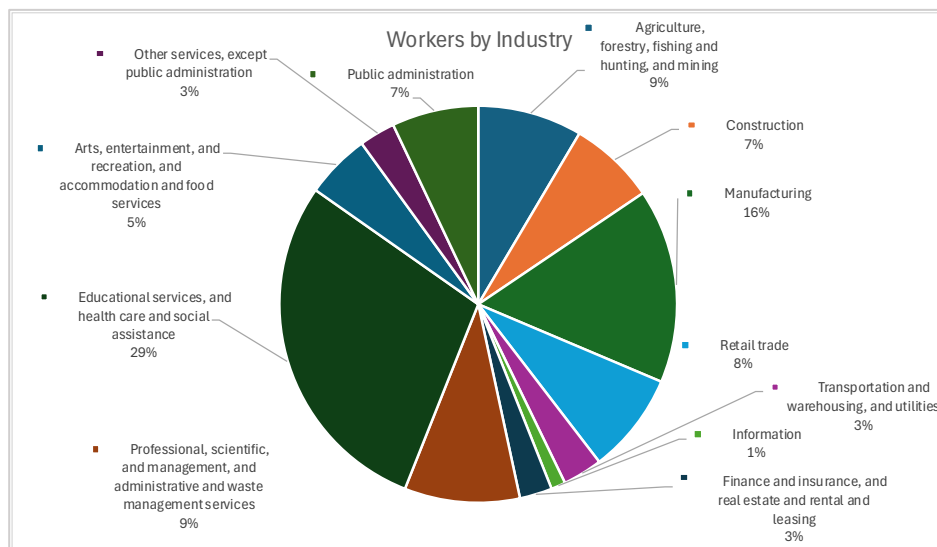
Village Area

The Village area is the social center of the Town because of the many activities that occur there. The Town Office, Museum, Community Hall, Fire Department, Library, and the United Church of Benson are in the village district, as well as a playground and several diverse businesses.

Benson received the State Village Center Designation in 2004 to support village revitalization efforts. Authorized by 24 V.S.A. §2793a, Village Center designation recognizes and encourages local efforts to revitalize Vermont's traditional village centers. In accordance with the State of Vermont's land-use goals, the designation encourages compact village centers surrounded by working rural lands. The Village Center designation is an essential tool for protecting and enhancing the characteristics of areas valued by the community. The designation can enhance Benson's vitality and livability by supporting the goals of this plan, including land-use goals. The benefits of village center designation include tax incentives to maintain and enhance buildings, as well as priority consideration for various state grants and programs such as Municipal Planning Grants and the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). The Town will support village revitalization through grant-seeking, coordinated site improvements, and encouragement of small-scale, village-compatible businesses. These include rebuilding the Village Store as a community anchor and strengthening the Village Center designation benefits through eligible projects. The village center delineation is depicted on the Community Facilities and Utilities map.

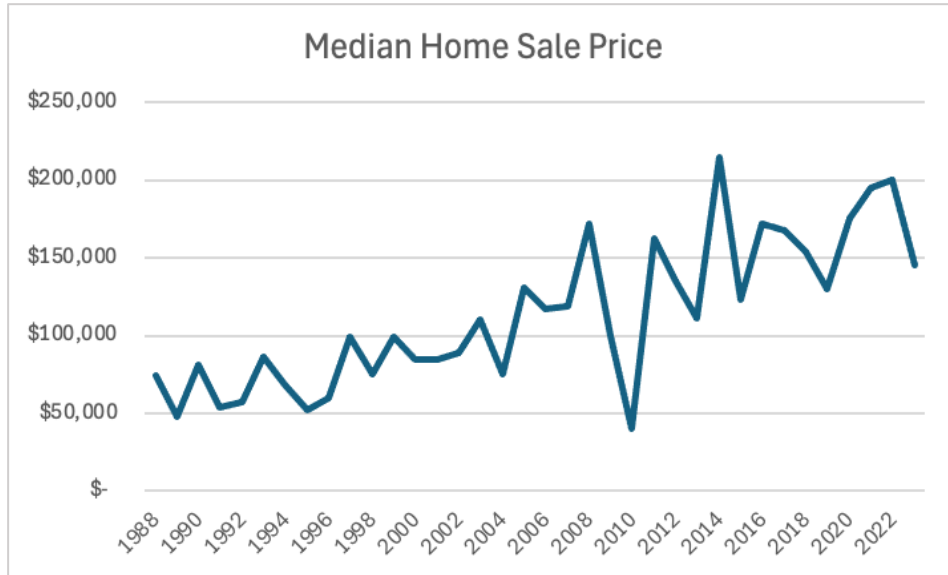
Commercial and Employment Activity in Benson

Benson is home to agricultural and silvicultural operations, a biotech firm, several small industries and commercial establishments, and many home-based businesses. Small enterprises are generally located in residents' homes or on other parcels that do not have adverse effects on the community's development. Benson has no significant industrial or commercial developments. The largest employers in Benson include The Wheel Inn, Benson Village School, Fyles Brothers Inc., The Binding Site, and Maple Ridge Meats.

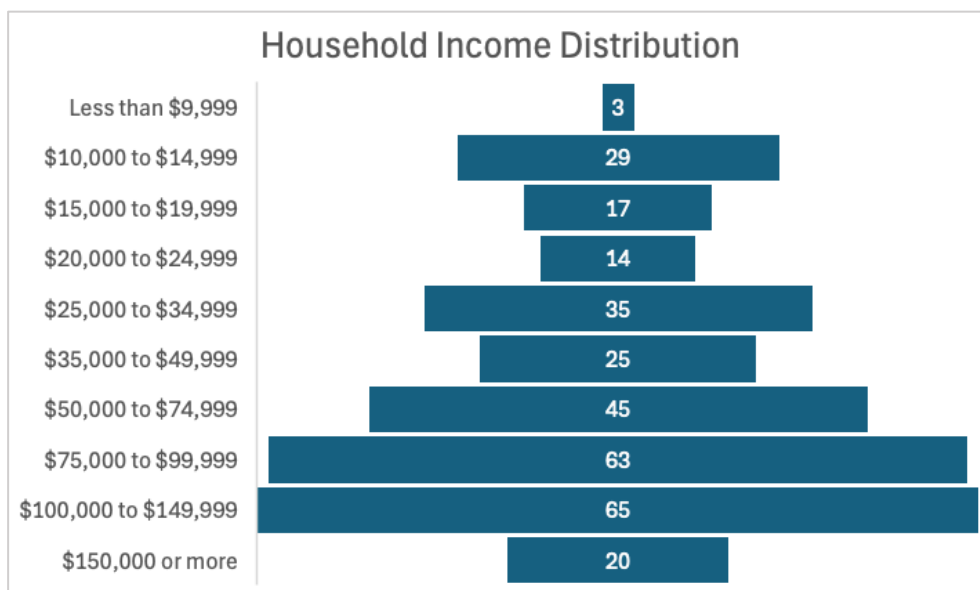


In 2023, the U.S. Census estimated that 115 people both live and work in Benson, while 227 live in Benson but work in a different town. This pattern continues a long-standing trend of Benson functioning primarily as a bedroom community with most residents seeking employment outside of town. With expanded broadband availability, Benson welcomes remote workers and home-based businesses that fit the Town’s rural character. The Town will support low-impact home occupations and share information on business assistance resources available through regional partners.

The median home sale price in Benson has been steadily increasing, comparable to both Vermont and the Rutland Region, but at a lower level.



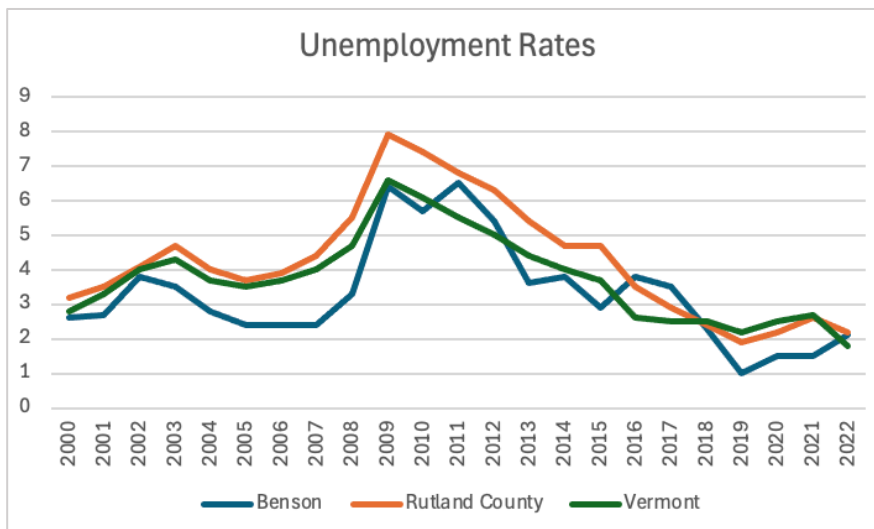
In terms of median household income, there’s a split between those who are on the lower end of the income scale and those who are on the upper end. 20% of residents earn less than \$25,000 a year, yet 61% earn \$50,000 or more, in some cases considerably more. That results in a relatively high median household income in Benson of \$72,727, higher than the Rutland County median of \$62,641.



Unemployment Rate

Unemployment is less of a concern than household income. Benson’s unemployment rate has been lower than that for Rutland County since 2000. In some years, it is comparable to the state unemployment rate, which is consistently lower than the county rate.

According to the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, of the approximately 669 residents of Benson aged 16 or older, 355 were in the labor force. There were 314 people in Benson aged 16 or older who were not in the labor force.



Year	Benson	Rutland County	Vermont
2000	2.6%	3.2%	2.8%
2001	2.7%	3.5%	3.3%
2002	3.8%	4.1%	4.0%
2003	3.5%	4.7%	4.3%
2004	2.8%	4.0%	3.7%
2005	2.4%	3.7%	3.5%
2006	2.4%	3.9%	3.7%
2007	2.4%	4.4%	4.0%
2008	3.3%	5.5%	4.7%
2009	6.4%	7.9%	6.6%
2010	5.7%	7.4%	6.1%
2011	6.5%	6.8%	5.5%
2012	5.4%	6.3%	5.0%
2013	3.6%	5.4%	4.4%
2014	3.8%	4.7%	4.0%
2015	2.9%	4.4%	3.7%
2016	3.8%	3.5%	2.6%
2017	3.5%	2.9%	2.5%
2018	2.3%	2.4%	2.5%
2019	1%	1.9%	2.2%
2020	1.5%	2.2%	2.5%
2021	1.5%	2.6%	2.7%
2022	2.1%	2.2%	1.8%

Source: VT Department of Labor

Economic Development Objectives & Policies

Tourism and agriculture are essential to Benson's economy. Tourism brings customers to many of the Town's businesses, and for this reason, the Town's rural and scenic character, as well as the well-preserved ambiance of its village, should be considered in land use decisions. There are 22 farms according to the most recent Listers' data, and 17 woodland properties in the Town of Benson.

While Benson is a farming community, the Town also supports a range of other businesses and pursuits. There are nine commercial properties and one commercial apartment in the Town of Benson, according to the most recent Listers' data. Business growth over the last decade has been steady, and additional businesses may move to the Town in the future. The most promising and undeveloped aspect of the local economy relates to tourism and recreation. The Town recognizes that tourism and agriculture are closely linked; and that the number of tourists will not increase if Benson's open and beautiful scenery is not maintained. The Town's economic goals are consistent with maintaining Benson's current landscape and maintaining environmental standards.

Objectives

- Strengthen Benson's economy by supporting agriculture, tourism, and small scale businesses while preserving the Town's rural character and scenic landscape.

Policies

- Encourage home occupations, cottage industries, and locally owned businesses that fit Benson's scale and character.
- Maintain and revitalize the village center as the hub for community life and economic activity.
- Support agricultural and forestry enterprises, including value-added products, while protecting working lands from fragmentation.
- Permit small commercial or light industrial uses only when they complement Benson's rural and agricultural heritage, and discourage large-scale or heavy industrial development.

LAND USE AND GROWTH

To incorporate the goals, objectives, and recommendations set forth within this Plan, attached to this Plan are a collection of land-use maps that identify current agricultural areas, public investments (including Town highways and Public Facilities), residential, recreational, forest, and commercial land uses. These maps also indicate floodplains, soils, topography, wetlands, critical wildlife habitat, conservation areas, designated village center, sewer district, and a future land-use map. The future land use map shows the intended land uses, which are consistent with the designated zoning districts.

The Plan anticipates using the appendix maps to guide the development of land within Benson. Consistent with the Plan, land uses are encouraged that will conform to the goals set forth below.

Existing Conditions

The Town consists of rural agricultural land and natural areas. The Village area is a mix of closely spaced commercial and residential uses. There are clusters of closely spaced residential structures in several other areas of Benson, including around Sunset Lake and Perch Pond, as well as along portions of Route 144, Howard Hill Road, and at Benson Landing.

Benson has adopted a zoning and subdivision bylaw, last amended April 16, 2018. In addition, there are ordinances about open burning, animal control, driveway installations, placement of junk motor vehicles, floodplain regulations, traffic, and the town has adopted the state's Road and Bridge Standards. Additional State land-use regulations exist, though the Town does not have the authority to enforce them; the Town has opted to be a 1-acre Town for commercial development under Act 250.

Conserved Land

There is conserved agricultural land and natural areas in Benson. Conservation efforts are supported by organizations such as the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont Land Trust, and The Nature Conservancy. These entities hold development rights for agricultural and forest lands and, in some cases, ownership of ecologically sensitive areas. The natural resources map indicates land with restrictions, specifically conserved land and its ownership, and state-owned land.

The State's Current Use Program is used in Benson. The 2023 Use Value Appraisal list shows that 55 of the 626 parcels, representing 13,662 acres of the approximately 29,000 acres in Benson, are enrolled in this program for a total of \$9,490,300 (the total Grand List has a value of \$116,630,000).

Land Use Districts

Agricultural and Rural Residential District (ARR District)

To preserve the community's rural character and to provide a mechanism for viable agricultural, residential, and commercial uses with minimal adverse impact, ARR is intended to provide land area for low-density residential development, farming, forestry, recreation, commercial, and other rural land uses. Any such growth should be consistent with the area's rural character and site conditions. Conservation of open space, agricultural soils, and natural resources should be a high priority to maintain Benson's rural atmosphere and working landscape. Development should minimize fragmentation of farmland and forest blocks. The Town encourages traditional and diversified agricultural uses and activities in this district and supports the right to farm family farms. The Town

should promote activities that preserve scenic and agricultural lands. The goal of this district is to create an attractive, functional countryside.

Village District

To provide for mixed residential, commercial, and public uses in the area generally served by the municipal waste treatment facility. The purpose of the Village District is to allow residential housing and commercial enterprises of a scale that will blend well with existing residences and complement the “village” atmosphere preferred by Benson’s residents. All development in this district must include adequate parking, suitable landscaping, screening, lighting, and signage, and be designed to minimize traffic impacts to protect the character of the neighborhood. Low-traffic-flow businesses are to be encouraged. It is essential to preserve and promote the historic nature of the village district. Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and infill development are encouraged to increase housing options while preserving the village’s character. Development should comply with wastewater capacity limits and promote energy-efficient building practices.

Lake Shore District

To conserve and protect those lands adjacent to the ten lakes and ponds as indicated on the Lake Shore District on the proposed land use map, excluding Lake Champlain. The purpose of this district is to protect water quality, public access, and natural ecosystems. The land in this district is within 500 feet of the mean water level of lakes in the sections indicated on the land use map. Development in this district should comply with Vermont’s Shoreland Protection Act Standards, maintain vegetative buffers, and minimize shoreline disturbances to protect water quality, public access, and wildlife habitat while balancing limited development needs. The names of the lakes and ponds in this district are Lake Sunrise, Sunset Lake, Perch Pond, Doughty Pond, Parsons Mill Pond, Glen Lake, Mud Pond, Bullhead Pond, Beaver Meadow, and Root Pond (including the two unnamed lakes nearby).

Lake Champlain Shoreline District

This district should promote goals similar to those of the Lake Shore District, except it must recognize the special circumstances and opportunities presented by Lake Champlain. Development in this district should prioritize protection of scenic resources, public access, and compliance with flood hazard and shoreland regulations. Benson should encourage practices that maintain water quality and avoid shoreline habitat fragmentation.

Flood Hazard Area Overlay District

To promote the public health, safety, and general welfare, to prevent increases in flooding caused by the uncontrolled development of lands in areas of special flood hazard, and to minimize losses due to flooding. Benson has existing regulations that regulate flood hazard areas. These regulations are consistent with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and include elevation standards, no-build zones in floodways, and erosion control measures to reduce flood risk and protect public safety.

Future Direction of Benson Land Uses

The Planning Commission will periodically review and update the existing land use regulations and ordinances as appropriate to accomplish the goals of this Plan. It is hoped that this effort will protect water quality, limit the loss of agricultural land, preserve natural areas, safeguard forests and forestry, and encourage development that preserves the Town’s rural character and natural

beauty. For this reason, five land-use districts have been established, each with distinct objectives. It is not the goal to prevent development, but to direct development such that the unique social, environmental, and historical characteristics of Benson are preserved.

The Planning Commission's goal is to expand employment opportunities in Benson. Entrepreneurship is encouraged along with home businesses and cottage industries. It is not intended to specifically exclude any types of development from any district except as detailed under the district description below or in the zoning and subdivision bylaw.

Land Use and Growth Objectives & Policies

Through the administration of this Plan, the Town desires to continue orderly growth and development that protects community resources and ensures the appropriate use of all lands, while preserving open spaces, forests, conservation areas, and agricultural lands within the Town. In short, this Plan recommends that Benson take steps to protect its rural character and permit such growth and development as would benefit the general good of the Town.

Objectives

- Guide future growth to maintain Benson's rural character, protect natural resources, and support compact development in the village center.

Policies

- Encourage compact, mixed-use development in the village and other service areas while preserving open space and working lands in rural areas
- Support traditional and diversified agricultural and forestry uses and discourage fragmentation of productive lands.
- Maintain land use standards that protect streams, lakes, and scenic resources, and promote clustering in rural areas to reduce sprawl.
- Discourage development that would overwhelm municipal services or create excessive traffic through the village.
- Promote compliance with Vermont's planning goals under 24 V.S.A. §4302(c), including compact settlement patterns, resource protection, and energy efficiency.

MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL COORDINATION

The Planning Commission has attempted to coordinate the elements of this Plan with those of surrounding Towns and the Rutland Regional Plan. Benson has goals similar to those of neighboring Towns for maintaining a working landscape in the Lake Champlain basin.

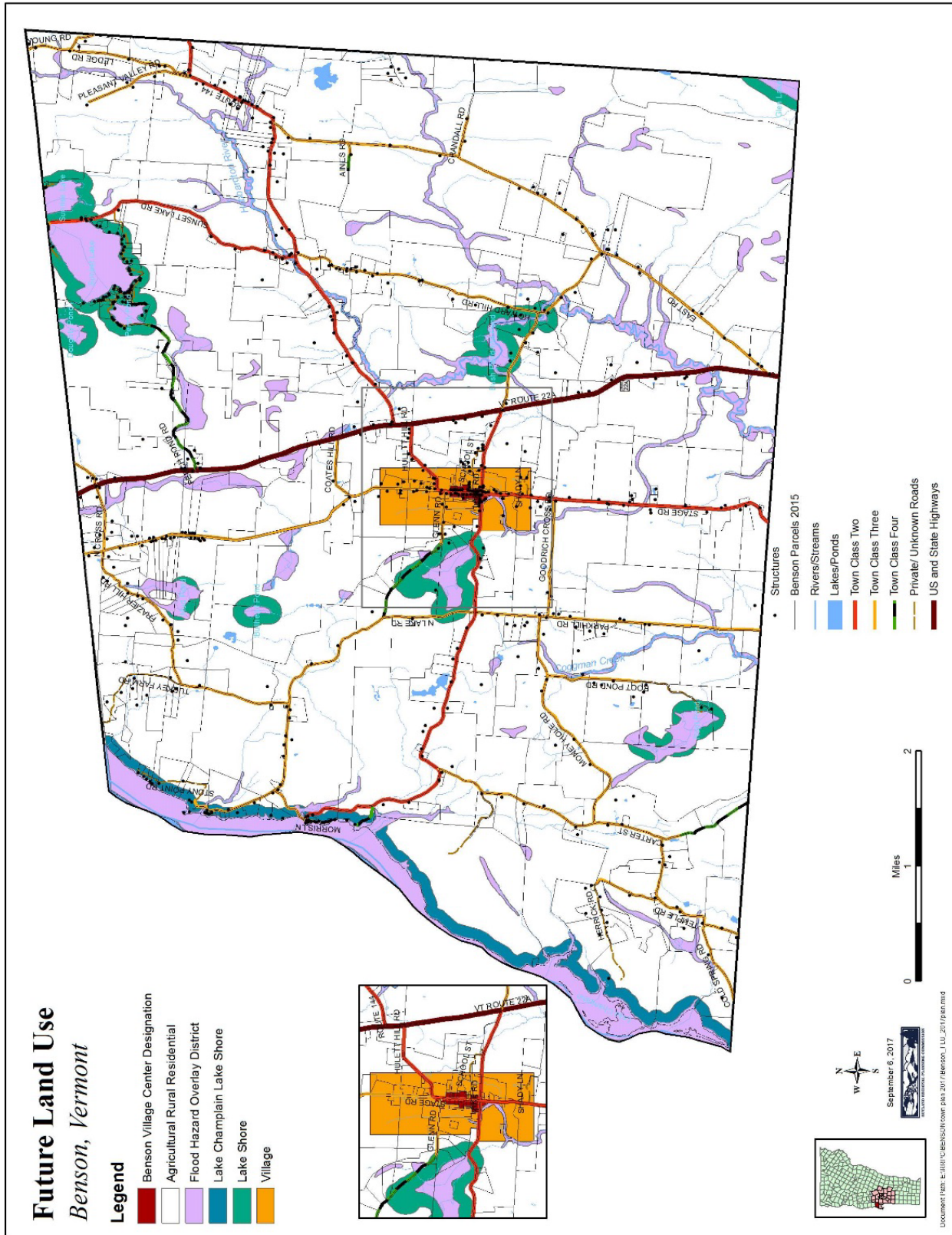
The Towns most affected by development in Benson are West Haven and Orwell. These Towns have landscapes like Benson and lengthy borders of rural developed property with the Town of Benson. There is less interaction with the Towns of Fair Haven, Castleton, Hubbardton and Sudbury. The Sudbury-Benson border length is minimal and the borders with the other three Towns are forested areas. Benson coordinates and cooperates with surrounding Towns on shared services and planning initiatives. The Route 22A Corridor Study was a cooperative effort of the Towns of Orwell, Benson, West Haven, and Fair Haven. Orwell and Benson share road equipment and assist each other with highway maintenance. All the Towns work together for fire protection and emergency response services. Orwell and Benson share school programs. Future coordination should also include housing, energy planning, and hazard mitigation efforts to meet Vermont's planning goals under 24 V.S.A. § 4302(c). Benson will continue participating in regional transportation planning and Act 174 energy planning through the Rutland Regional Planning Commission.

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

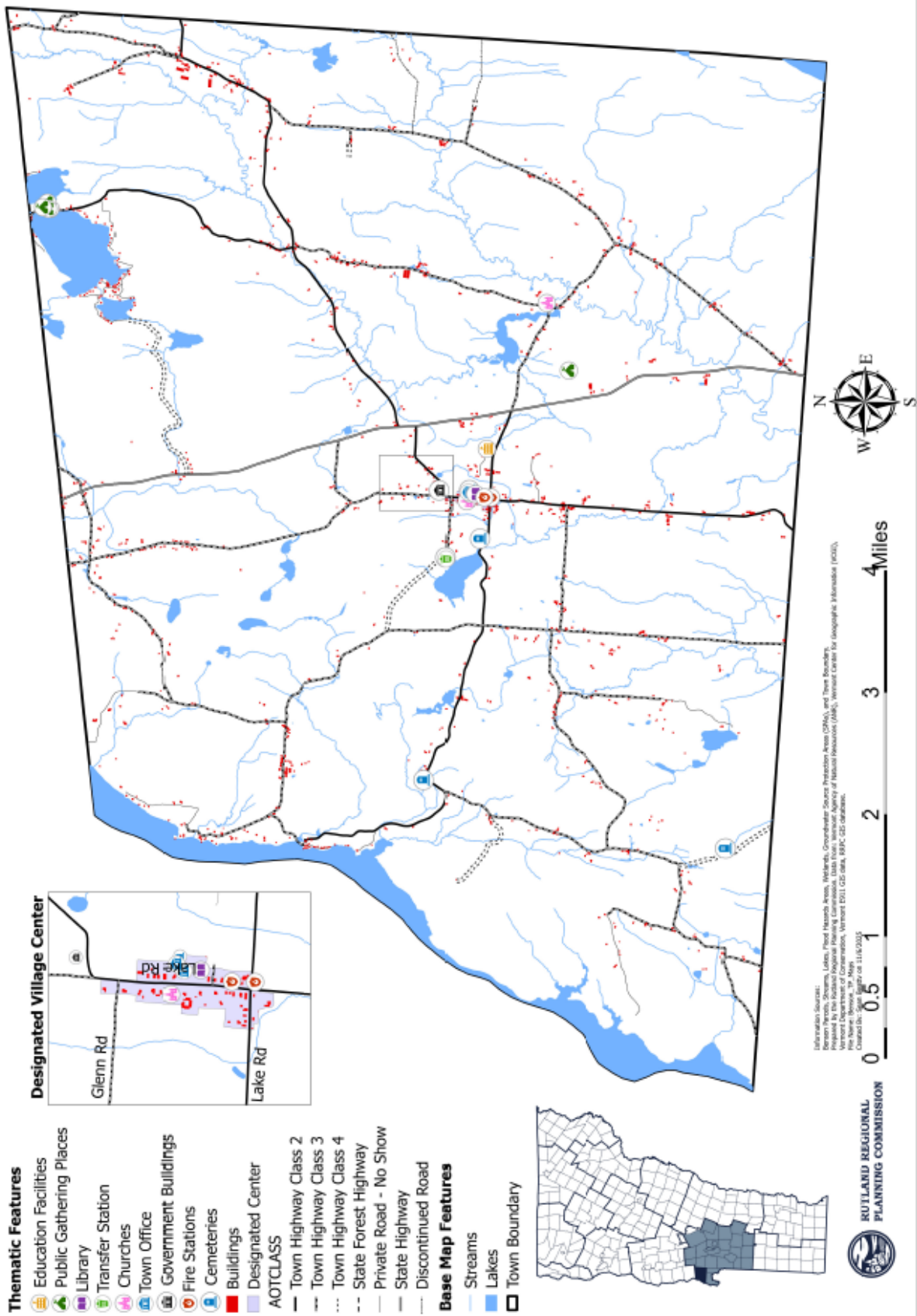
To give meaning to the goals and recommendations in this Plan, the Town, State agencies, and regional and local authorities are strongly encouraged to adhere to the Plan's objectives, policies, and programs. The Plan should be interpreted to the greatest extent possible to promote the Town's goals contained herein. The Benson Planning Commission certifies that this Plan promotes the best interests of Benson and its Townspeople. It is the goal of the Planning Commission to review and update the existing land use regulations and other land use-related ordinances to accomplish the objectives of this plan and to ensure that Benson enforces the Town's ordinances and regulations.

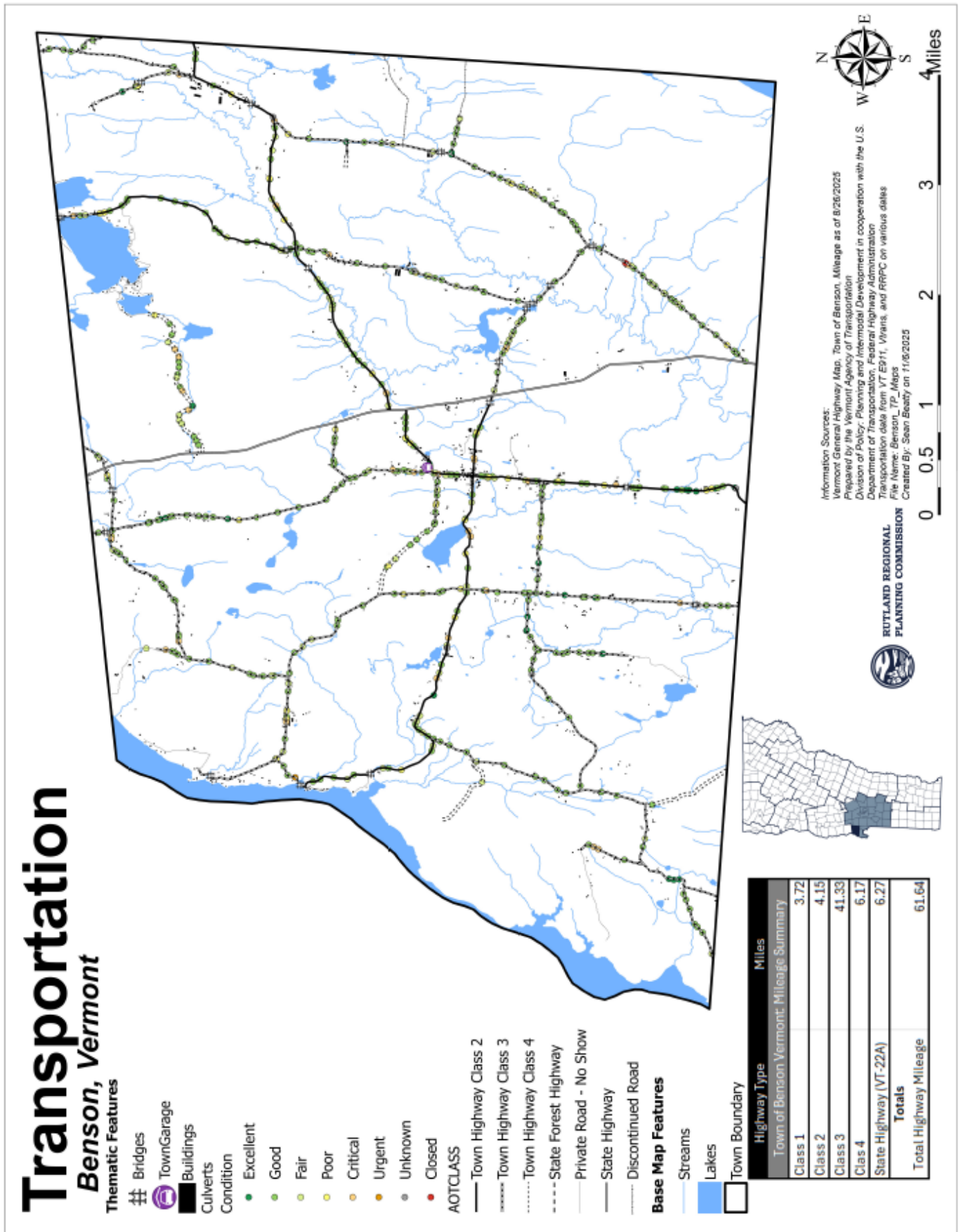
Implementation should include annual progress reviews on housing, energy, and flood resilience goals; updates to zoning bylaws to allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and energy-efficient development, and continued participation in regional planning initiatives. Benson should maintain eligibility for Village Center designation and state grant programs by meeting renewal requirements.

APPENDIX
Future Land Use Map



Education and Community Facilities Benson, Vermont









Natural Resources 1

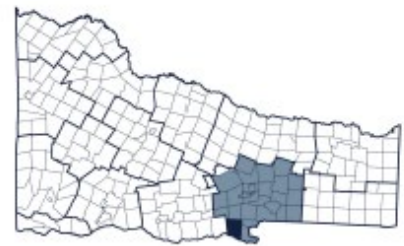
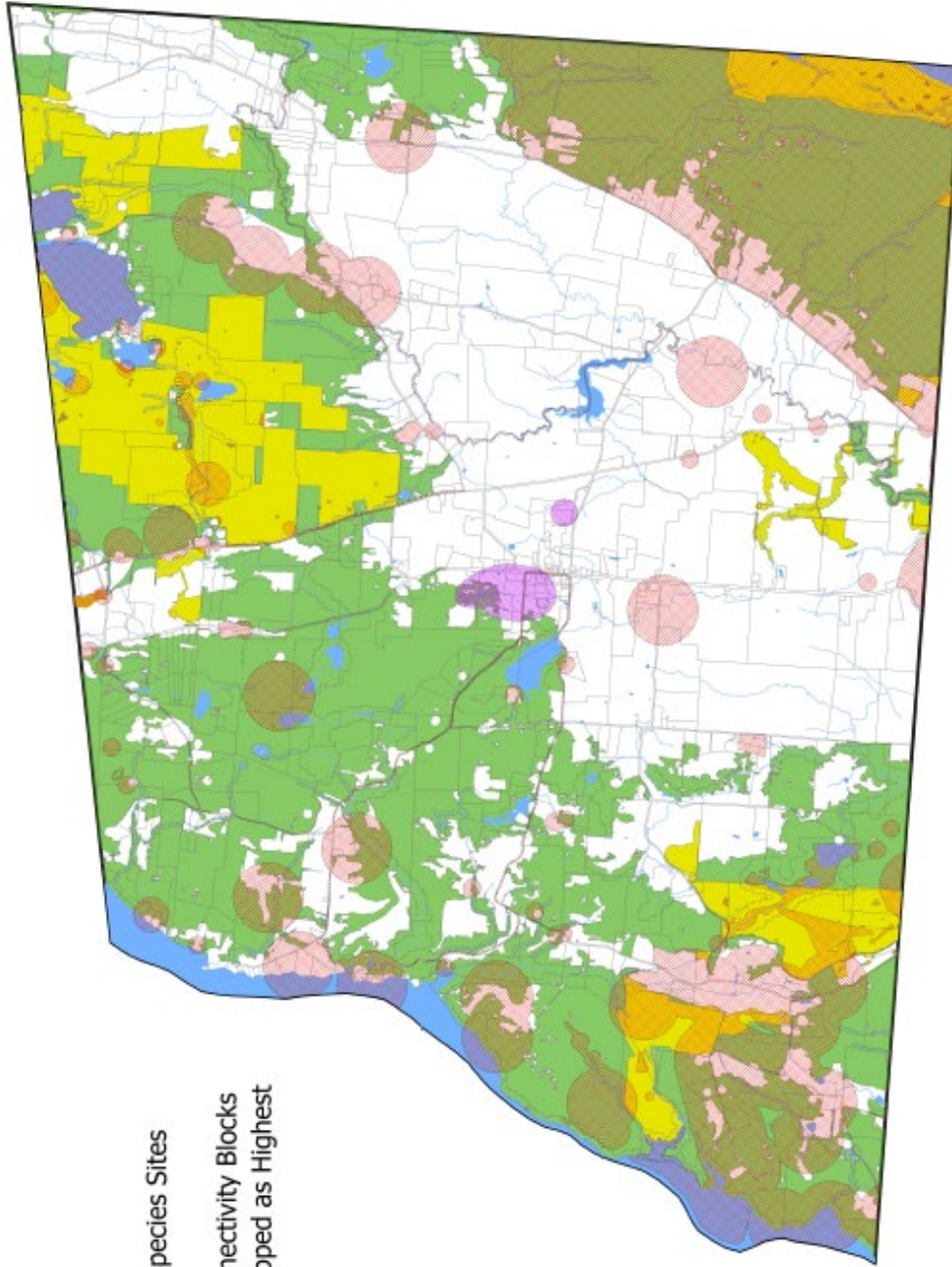
Benson, Vermont

Thematic Features

-  Threatened & Endangered Species Sites
-  Benson Groundwater SPAs
-  Benson Highest Priority Connectivity Blocks
-  Benson Protected Lands Mapped as Highest Priority Connectivity Blocks

Base Map Features

-  Benson Parcels
-  Streams
-  Lakes
-  Town Boundary



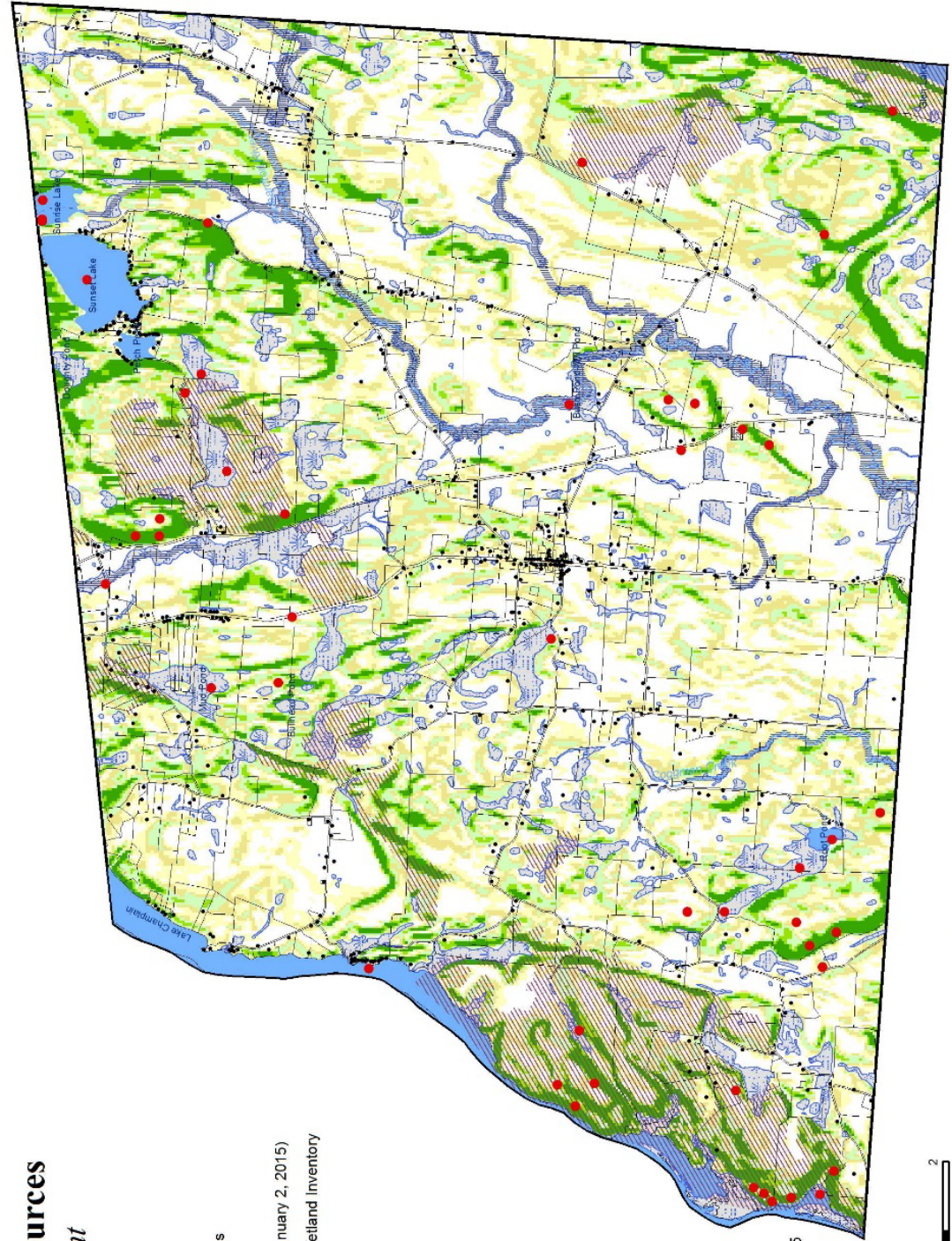
RUTLAND REGIONAL
PLANNING COMMISSION



Information Sources: Threatened and Endangered Species Sites: Vermont Agency of Natural Resources; Benson Groundwater Source Protection Areas (SPAs), Highest Priority Connectivity Blocks, Town Boundary, Protected Lands, and Connected Drainage Lands & Connectivity Blocks: Prepared by the Rutland Regional Planning Commission. Data from: Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Vermont Center for Geographic Information, Vermont Park & Recreation Department, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, SDC GIS Database
Created by: Anne Beatty on 11/16/2023

Natural Resources Benson, Vermont Map 2 of 3

- Legend**
- Rare Plant/Animal sites
 - Deer Wintering Areas
 - VT River Corridors (January 2, 2015)
 - Vermont Significant Wetland Inventory
 - Slopes 0 - 6%
 - Slopes 6 - 10%
 - Slopes 10 - 14%
 - Slopes 14 - 20%
 - Slopes 20 - 24%
 - Slopes Above 24%



- Structures
- Benson Parcels 2015
- Rivers/Streams
- Lakes/Ponds



November 14, 2016

SLOPE: Slopes generated from USGS NED based 7.5' DEM/21 data, 2002

DEER WINTERING AREAS: Ecologic/Habitat_DIERWV, taken from 1:24,000 and 1:25,000 USGS topographic quads, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, 2006.

ROADS: VT Center for Geographic Information.

SURFACE WATER: Vermont Hydrography Dataset using 1.5,000 digital orthophotos, USGS 7 1/2' quadrangles and 1:20,000 color infrared aerial photography and other data sources.

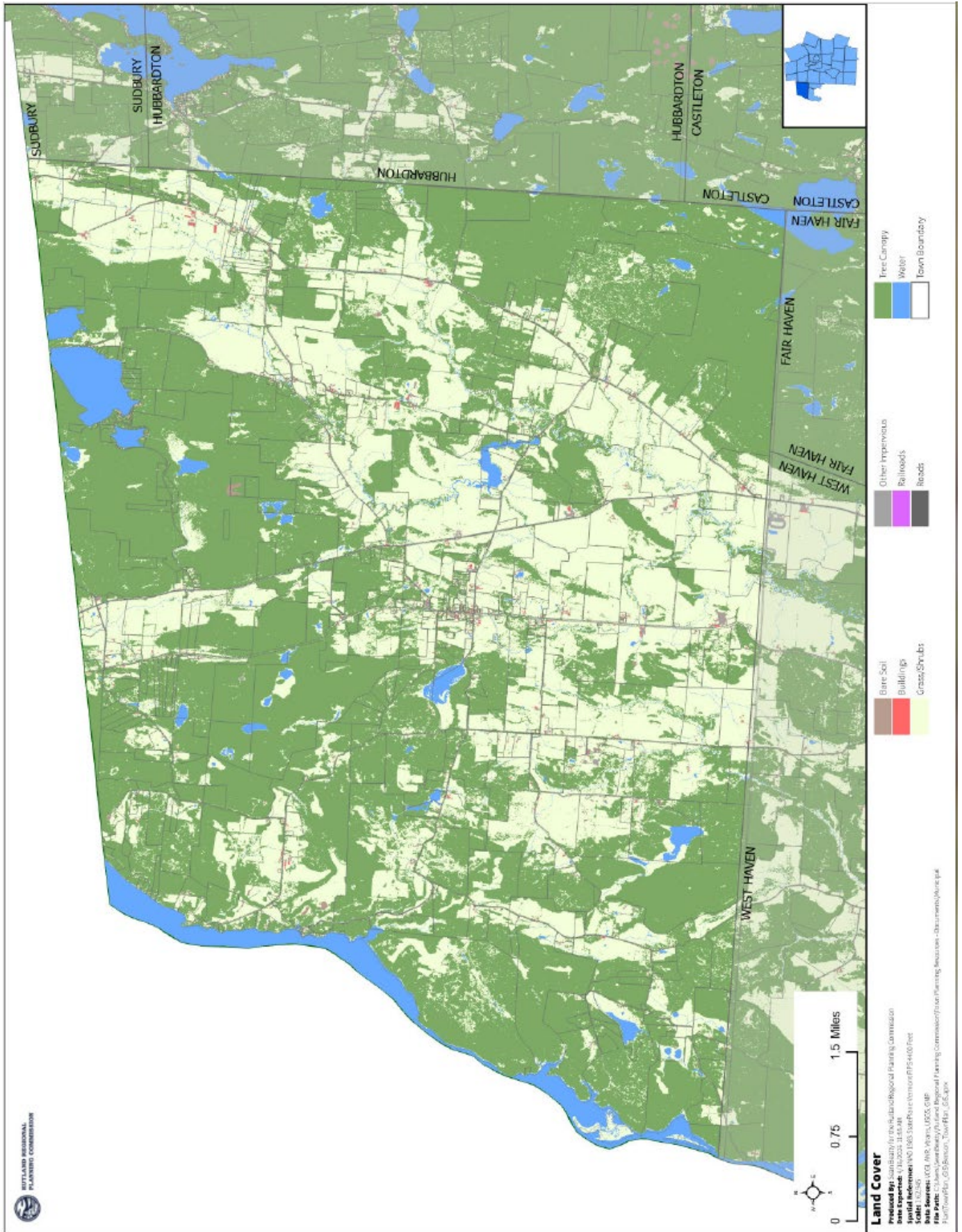
WETLANDS: boundaries are derived from National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) and the Vermont Significant Wetland Inventory (VSWI) and are approximate. Wetlands less than three acres in size may not be shown. We wetlands depicted are those regarded as regulatory by the VT Water Resources Board.

RARE PLANT/ANIMAL SITES: Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species & Significant Communities-24000, Vermont Nongame and Natural Heritage Program, VANR, 1997.

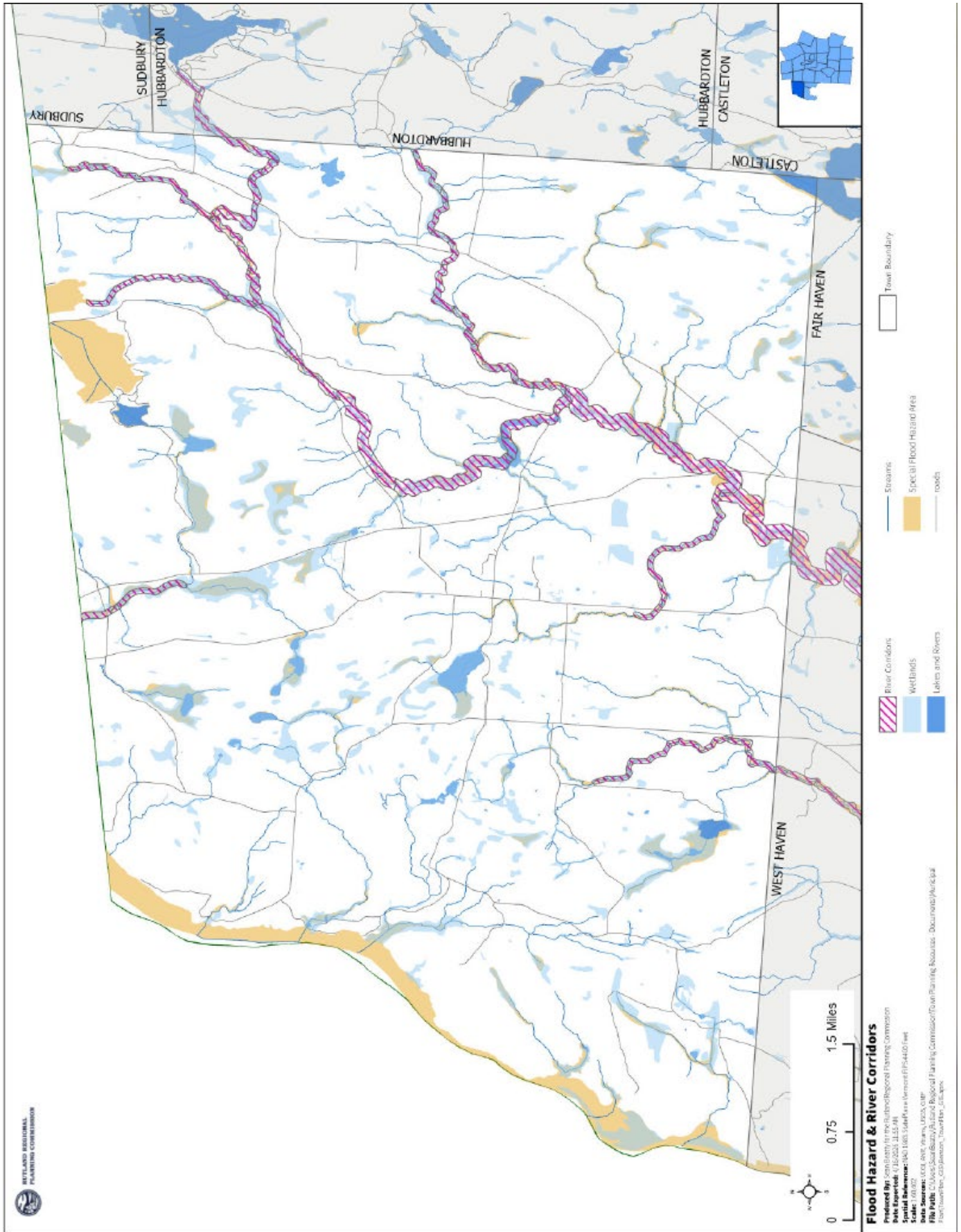
RIVER CORRIDORS: Data from VTANR, DEC, Rivers Program, Waterhygro_RIVERCORRIDORS data set, January 2, 2015 for a thorough discussion of the purpose, design and management of the Vermont River Corridors dataset, please see file: Vermont DEC Flood Data 5_2014.pdf, and River Corridor Protection Procedures http://www.vtwaterquality.org/rivers/docs/FHAKCP_12.5.14.pdf.

Document Path: F:\SHP\GIS\RES\Drawings\Map 2017\Resource_data\NaturalResources_2017\Map 2 of 3

Flood Hazard & River Corridor Map



Current Land Use



Technical Assistance by the Rutland Regional Planning Commission



The preparation of this plan was funded through the Municipal Planning Grant Program, administered by the Vermont Department of Housing & Community Affairs, Agency of Commerce and Community Development.