

Vermont Healthy Community Design Resource

Active Living & Healthy Eating



Active Living & Healthy Eating

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is available online at www.healthvermont.gov

Active Living & Healthy Eating

Introduction

As Vermonters, we take great pride in our quality of life, strong communities, natural places and commitment to healthy living. We share a common goal: to ensure that our state continues to be one of the healthiest and best places in the U.S. for all of us to live, work and play.

Despite our reputation for good health, over half (60%) of Vermonters are above a healthy weight, and therefore at risk for serious chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea and some cancers. Communities that are built to support physical activity, safe walking and biking, use of public transportation, and easy access to fresh and healthy foods help people lead healthier, more active lives.

Healthy community design:

- Links traditional concepts of planning (land use, transportation, community facilities, parks and open spaces) with health themes (physical activity, public safety, access to nutritious food, air and water quality, mental health and social equity).
- Influences the overall health of a community by making the healthiest choice the easiest and most accessible choice for all — regardless of age, ability and income.

Implementing healthy community design strategies requires strong engagement, understanding and action by a wide variety of community partners. It requires us to find opportunities to connect our shared visions for the best future of our communities. Working together, we can succeed in improving health through healthy community design.

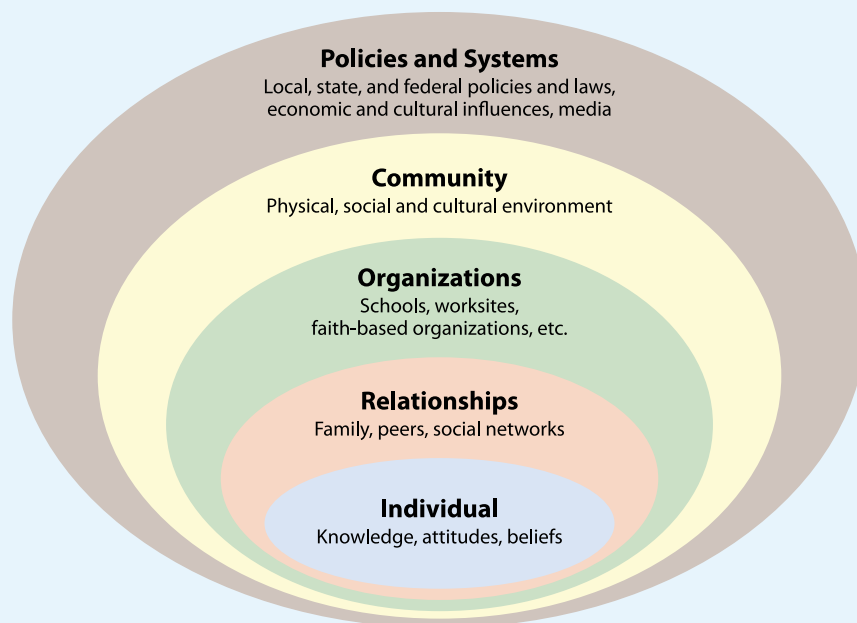
About this Guide

This guide is for health professionals, planners and anyone seeking to make their community a place that supports active living and healthy eating. People who are new to healthy community design will want to begin with Chapters 1, 2, and 3. Readers with an understanding of the planning process, who are ready to take action, will find the information in Chapter 4 and the Toolkit section useful for making your plans a reality.

In the following pages you will find information, tools and resources to successfully navigate the worlds of land use planning and public health — and help communities enhance concentrated mixed-use development, create bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly pathways, and improve access to parks, recreational facilities, open space and healthy foods. Here you will find:

- key concepts, rationale and evidence for healthy community design (Chapter 1)
- overview of Vermont's land use planning process (Chapter 2)
- steps you can take to create healthy communities (Chapter 3)
- action strategies (Chapter 4)
- tools and resources to support your work (Toolkit)

The Vermont Prevention Model



Vermont's Prevention Model, based on a five-level Social-Ecological Model, describes multiple levels of interventions aimed at improving health. This model recognizes that, although individuals are ultimately responsible for making healthy choices, behavior change is more likely and more sustainable when the environment supports individual efforts. Comprehensive prevention and health promotion programs, to be most effective for the long term, and to reach the largest number of people, should address multiple levels of the model.

The ultimate goal is to implement interventions that make it easier for people to make the healthy choice, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing community and policy/system level strategies.



Healthy Community Design

Healthy community design means planning and designing communities to make it easier for people to live healthy lives. Researchers and community members recognize that an environment that supports active living, and expands access to healthy and affordable foods, is essential for good health. Healthy community design changes the physical environment, community infrastructure and local policy to create such an environment.

Recommended Community Strategies for Obesity Prevention from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) describes a range of strategies that communities can use to support physical activity and healthy eating. Of these, the following four are most relevant for Vermont's population, rural character and framework for local planning.

Concentrated Mixed-Use Development

Building residential, retail, industrial, medical and educational facilities close together creates walkable communities, and encourages people of all ages and abilities to make physical activity a part of everyday living. Concentrated mixed-use development can also create a greater market for healthy foods, resulting in greater access to healthy food choices. It also concentrates infrastructure investments (e.g., sidewalks and bike paths), creates options for public transportation, maintains green space, reduces air pollution, and promotes greater social interaction.

Fast Fact:

- People who live in walkable, mixed-used communities are more than twice as likely to be physically active 30 minutes or more each day, compared to those who live in communities oriented to motor vehicles.¹

Bicycle- and Pedestrian-Friendly Communities

Well-designed, interconnected bicycle and pedestrian networks and facilities support an active lifestyle. Bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly communities take into consideration safety, comfort and aesthetics by providing bicycle lanes and parking, sidewalks, crosswalks, shared use paths, lighting, benches and trees along the street.

Fast Facts:

- Studies show a 35% increase in physical activity among people who live in communities that have inviting, safe environments for walking, exercise and play.²
- Safety measures, such as traffic calming or clear street crossings, encourage exercise: 43% of people who live within 10 minutes of a safe place to walk meet physical activity recommendations.³
- Narrow streets and slower speeds provide safety — drivers move faster on wider roads.⁴
- Slowing traffic from 30 to 20 mph reduces injuries to pedestrians by more than 70%.⁵
- Slowing traffic from 40 to 20 mph improves a person's chances of surviving being hit by a car from 5% to 85%.⁶

Parks, Recreational Facilities and Open Spaces

Access to recreational facilities (such as parks and green spaces, outdoor sports fields and facilities, walking and biking trails, public pools and playgrounds) supports active and healthy living with safe places to play and socialize. Access to these places is affected by distance from homes or schools, cost, hours of operation, and available transportation.

Fast Facts:

- Increasing access or creating new places for physical activity can raise the percentage of residents who are physically active by 25%.⁷
- People who live within one-quarter mile of a park are 25% more likely to be physically active.⁸
- Having a network of well-connected trails to community destinations removes some barriers to physical activity.⁹

Fresh and Healthy Foods

Fresh and healthy foods are essential for a healthy diet. Lack of access to affordable fresh produce and nutritious foods contributes to obesity and associated health problems. Key strategies for expanding access to healthy food and local food production include use of public spaces for farmers' markets and community gardens, support for community-based agricultural enterprises, incentives for retailers to offer healthier foods, and zoning and other actions that attract food markets and restaurants.

Fast Facts:

- Rural, low-income and underserved communities are less likely to have larger food markets with a variety of fruit, vegetables and other healthy foods.¹⁰
- Having a grocery store in the community is linked to higher fruit and vegetable consumption and lower prevalence of overweight and obesity.¹¹

All of these strategies promote health at the same time as they promote economically and socially vibrant communities. This guide provides tools, tips, resources and examples to help identify which of these strategies are best for your community, and to make implementing your chosen strategies a reality.



Vermont's Land Use Planning Process

Understanding Vermont's land use laws and local government planning processes, and learning the language of land use planning, will help you more effectively engage in promoting healthy community design. Since each community is different, be sure to connect with officials in your town to better understand how your local government is structured.

Local Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibility for planning is shared by elected officials (selectboards, village trustees and city councils) and appointed boards, including the planning commission.

Many of Vermont's smaller communities rely exclusively on elected and appointed bodies of local volunteers, rather than professional staff, to provide the expertise for setting local land use and other policies.

Volunteers provide the leadership, time and resources to create much of the local infrastructure for healthy communities, and they are often the leaders in creating trails, community gardens and farmers' markets. These volunteers may serve on formal town committees — such as a conservation committee — or organize themselves around community-based efforts, and then seek limited government support. Community members are often more effective than government staff in garnering the support needed for significant community investments and changes in policy.

Vermont also has 11 regional planning commissions (RPCs), charged with helping communities determine how and where development will go, providing technical assistance to local planners, coordinating local and regional mapping projects, and participating in state-level reviews, such as under Act 250, 10 V.S.A. §§6001 et seq. State law requires each regional planning commission to prepare and update a regional plan every five years, and to coordinate local plans with the regional plan.

Toolkit ▶ *Who's Who in Local Government*

Toolkit ▶ *Recommended Resources: Introduction to Planning in Vermont* (for links to RPCs)

Vermont's Land Use Law

The Vermont Legislature has established the framework for land use planning through the Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act, also known as the Vermont Planning and Development Act (24 V.S.A. §§4382 Chapter 117). Chapter 117 encourages a coordinated planning effort among state and regional planning agencies and municipalities, and requires citizen participation at all levels of a planning process.

The aim of the state planning goals are to preserve traditional town centers, protect working landscapes and increase economic vitality. They seek to help existing places thrive through investments in historic downtowns, infrastructure, and places that the community values, while building vibrant, enduring neighborhoods and communities that people, especially young people, don't want to leave.

Healthy community design strategies contribute to these planning goals. For example, development must be planned to:

- Maintain historic settlement patterns of compact village and urban centers, separated by rural countryside (*concentrated mixed-use development*).
- Provide safe, convenient, economic, and energy-efficient transportation systems, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclists (*bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly*).
- Maintain and enhance recreational opportunities (*access to parks, recreation facilities, outdoor spaces*).
- Encourage and strengthen agriculture (*access to healthy food*).

Toolkit ▶ *Land Use Planning Terminology*

The Municipal Plan

Municipalities are not required by state statute, but rather enabled and encouraged, to develop and adopt a municipal plan. The municipal plan, generally referred to as the town plan, is the principal policy document that guides many municipal government decisions. It establishes the vision and goals of the community, and determines the means of achieving goals. The plan is the foundation for local land use regulation, the capital budget, natural resource conservation strategies, and a range of community and economic development programs.

Health-promoting language in the town plan lays the foundation for future community decisions and investments.

Toolkit ▶ *Sample Language for Town Plans*

The Municipal Planning Process

If your town has a municipal plan, it must be updated and readopted every five years. Towns generally use a continuous cycle of planning and evaluation. Towns are required to seek input from citizens and landowners. This opens the process for community members to suggest options for addressing health concerns and incorporating healthy design principles and features into the town plan.

Municipal planning involves a series of steps:

- collecting and analyzing information
- defining a vision for the community
- establishing goals and objectives
- selecting an implementation program
- adopting the plan
- implementing the plan
- evaluating the plan and planning program

Note: *Changes and updates can be offered and made at any time. They do not need to conform to the five year cycle for updating the town plan.*

Adoption of the town plan:

Planning Commission > Public Hearing > **Selectboard** > Public Hearing > **Selectboard/Town Meeting**
drafts plan **considers plan** **votes for adoption**

Health-promoting language in town plans is essential, but words alone are not enough to ensure action. To truly achieve change, the goals from the planning stage must be brought to reality through projects or regulations.

See Chapter 4, *Action Strategies: Enhance Concentrated Mixed-Use Development* for detailed information about the tools available to implement the town vision and policies, as expressed in the town plan.



Steps to Creating Healthy Communities

Implementing healthy community design is not a short-term project. These changes require engagement, understanding and action on the part of many people in the community.

To be successful, you must be both strategic and alert to opportunities. Developing new connections among community members is an essential first step in bringing the public health perspective, together with new approaches, skills and resources, into the community design process.

Vermonters generally care about health, active living and healthy eating. As a leader in the community, you are in the best position to articulate a compelling new rationale for effective land use planning and community design.

- **You can share relevant information**, data and evidence to support healthy community design decisions relating to bike paths, sidewalks, concentrated development, access to healthy food and a strong agricultural economy.
- **You can bring skills** in planning and grant writing to secure additional funding.
- **You can apply your organizational experience** to help engage community members, and to ensure follow-through on decisions and enforcement of local regulations and standards.

Toolkit ▶ *Key Messages*

The Vermont Prevention Model (depicted on page 2) outlines steps to create strategic and successful prevention programs. This process, described in this chapter, is helpful in assessing existing conditions and choosing best practices that fit the interests, energy and leadership in the community.

Assess

Begin by identifying the assets in your community, as well as areas for improvement, by conducting an assessment.

The *Healthy Community Design Assessment* in the Toolkit provides a set of broad questions directly related to the strategies in this guidebook. These questions can be used to:

- assess town plans and policies
- conduct assessments of the existing environment and resources
- evaluate public or private sector development/redevelopment projects
- consider municipal investments and budgets for public facilities and infrastructure

Tips for conducting your community assessment:

Gather health data that makes the case for change, and can be used to track the impact of adopted policy and changes in the community infrastructure over time. Health data is available through the district offices of the Vermont Department of Health and at the Health Department's website: www.healthvermont.gov.

Particular data to consider related to the built environment:

- Diabetes
- Heart disease and stroke
- Respiratory diseases
- Health problems that limit normal activity
- Overweight and obesity
- Physical activity
- Nutrition
- Traffic-related injuries

Identify existing community efforts that fit with some of your goals or strategies. Programs such as Safe Routes to Schools, growth center and downtown designations, Farm to Plate, and Farm to School initiatives may provide the foundation for collaborative action. It is far easier to join an existing effort than to start a new one. Address existing community concerns and needs first, in order to build trust, relationships and good will for future efforts.

Assess community capacity and readiness for investments, and infrastructure for active daily living and healthy foods. Determine signs of your community's capacity and readiness.

Review existing local plans and policies to determine how well they support health, active daily living and access to healthy food. This can be done by reviewing existing inventories and maps or conducting walk, bike and community food audits.

Toolkit ► *Healthy Community Design Assessment*

Toolkit ► *Signs of Readiness*

Toolkit ► *Recommended Resources: Tools for More In-Depth Assessment*

When reviewing a local plan or policy:

- Is there explicit language to promote and protect human health?
- Does it give priority to increasing opportunities for physical activity, walking and biking?
- Does it aim to increase access to fresh and healthy food?
- How could additional health language be added?

Key documents to review:

Town (municipal) plan establishes the comprehensive, long term vision and goals of the community, and determines the means for achieving those goals. Health-promoting language in the town plan sets in place an essential foundation for future community decisions.

Supplementary plans provide additional detail in support of the town plan. Your town may have a park and/or recreation plan, a trails plan, a bicycle or pedestrian master plan, or an energy plan that addresses non-motorized transportation.

Town bylaws, ordinances and codes are all forms of local regulation to implement local plans. Zoning and subdivision regulations cover growth, development, and associated impacts. Road policies and ordinances are key in creating safe places for biking and walking.

Town budgets allocate funding for municipal projects and demonstrate priorities for investments in community infrastructure. The yearly budget covers expenses for operations and management — e.g., snow plowing, road re-stripping and sidewalk repair. The capital budget is dedicated to future improvements in physical infrastructure (not maintenance) and a strategy for funding them.

Participate in development review as part of the public comment period or public hearing process to ensure that healthy community design is considered. Alternatively, share a basic project review checklist in advance with developers, site planners and local officials to help ensure that health issues are considered in the design of a proposed project.

Conduct health impact assessments (HIAs) for priority projects such as the siting of schools, grocery stores and housing. A health impact assessment (HIA) is a tool used by public health practitioners and local planners to evaluate the potential health impacts — both positive and negative — of a proposed municipal project, development proposal or local policy. Through the HIA process, current health data and epidemiological evidence of potential health impacts are brought into the discussion of alternatives. Instituting the use of HIAs as a standard practice would provide a means through which health outcomes are continually considered as town development decisions are made.

Toolkit ▶ *Recommended Resources: Health Impact Assessment Resources*

Tips from the field

- Trust the results of the community readiness assessment. Don't skip community organizing and capacity building, even if you think you have a great idea.
- Start small and slow: proposing projects that require large financial investments in a community with a low level of readiness will be counterproductive. Educate the community, and propose small, "do-able" projects to start.

Build Capacity

Community change is based on relationships and trust. Build relationships among health practitioners, planners and other public officials. Reach out to potential partners to form or strengthen personal relationships and mutual understanding.

Determine how public health staff or community partners can contribute time to attend meetings, provide public health data, assist with community assessments, and conduct public outreach.

Establish personal relationships with local officials who champion health issues, mixed-use development, walking, biking or recreation, or access to local foods.

Identify allies and partners who can assist with community assessment, outreach and action. Obvious key partners are staff with the Vermont Department of Health district offices, community health prevention coalitions or partnerships, hospital community team members, local planning officials, and downtown program managers. Community champions and volunteers provide critical leadership in local decisions and actions.

Offer time and assistance to engage community members, and find health resources to further the community's efforts.

Present the case for change to the community by providing data on the connections between health, land use and community policies to promote daily physical activity and increase access to healthy foods. Ideally, a presentation will combine:

- the benefits of walking and biking for chronic disease prevention
- the importance of traffic safety for injury prevention
- data on current population health status
- information on reported levels of physical activity
- an inventory of community infrastructure for walking and biking, physical activity and access to healthy foods

Prepare materials that articulate the connection to public health interests. These materials can be used in a variety of community education and outreach efforts.

Toolkit ▶ *Key Messages*

Toolkit ▶ *Vermont Health Facts*

Toolkit ▶ *Potential Partners*

Tips from the field

Find the “in” door with new partners:

- Find out what community members are interested in — what topics are creating a buzz in the community?
- Meet with leaders and brainstorm ways to align your goals for improving the health of the community.

Conduct broader outreach to engage community members in collecting accurate information, identifying opportunities for change, and influencing community decisions. Many healthy community design strategies will require political will, cooperation of local elected officials and private property owners, and community volunteer efforts.

Plan

Collecting data is important, but using data to inform decisions and actions is essential. Strategic planning uses data to identify opportunities and barriers, set priorities, and determine resources needed to take action. It's important to identify which of the action strategies best align with existing community dynamics, interests and opportunities. Efforts can then be strategic, using the results of your assessment and acting on opportunities that present themselves. Help your team prioritize all of the strategies you identified to work on.

Toolkit ▶ *Prioritizing Actions*

Implement

Once you have identified your strategies, you are ready to take action. See Chapter 4, *Action Strategies*, for ideas.

Monitor/Evaluate

Throughout this process, you will be identifying gaps, assets and goals. From the start, note what kind of changes you want to see in one, two, five, and even 10 years.

Set realistic short-term and long-term goals and identify how you will be able to tell when you've reached those goals.

Types of activities you may want to track:

- community assessment for health-related infrastructure completed
- funding for local recreation path secured
- town playground upgrades completed
- changes to town plan
- land secured for community garden site
- counts of people using new sidewalk, community garden, farmers' market sales

Once you begin implementing, monitor changes along the way. After one, two, five years — note your successes and celebrate!

Tips from the field

- Show up at town planning meetings and events — get yourself known.
- If invited to a planning commission or other committee, share health data and best practices.
- Organize a community presentation or training on the topic of the built environment and health.
- Publish articles or write letters to the editor that link healthy community design to current events — e.g., updating the town plan or getting ready for the new school year and pedestrian/bike safety.

A person is running away from the camera on a dirt path that winds through a forest of tall, mature trees. The path is flanked by green grass and the sunlight filters through the leaves, creating a dappled light effect. The runner is wearing a red tank top and dark shorts.

Action Strategies

Once you have enlisted partners, completed an assessment, and have decided on an implementation strategy, you are ready to take action to help realize your goals related to:

- enhancing concentrated mixed-use development
- creating bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly communities
- improving access to parks, recreational facilities and open space
- improving access to fresh and healthy foods

Enhance Concentrated Mixed-Use Development and Smart Growth

Communities can promote mixed-use development and smart growth when creating a town plan that supports health, offers economic incentives for healthy community development, and employs community design criteria to evaluate development decisions.

Create a Municipal Plan that Supports Health

Offer language that supports health. Including strong health-promoting and protecting language in the municipal plan sets in place a framework for future community investments and development decisions.

The Toolkit provides sample language from a variety of Vermont communities that promotes health, physical activity, and access to fresh and healthy food in connection to the required elements of the town plan.

An important consideration is whether health language would be more effectively incorporated into existing elements of the plan, better addressed by a stand-alone chapter of the plan, or adopted as a supporting plan — to be incorporated by a reference or as an amendment to the town plan. Vermont communities have approached health in all three ways.

Toolkit ▶ *Sample Language for Town Plans*

Ask questions. Simply attending meetings and raising questions about health can put health on the agenda. Any of these questions will help start the conversation:

- How could health goals and concerns be addressed?
- What are the potential impacts on health — positive and negative?
- How would this affect people with lower incomes, children, older people, or people with disabilities?
- How does it increase access to healthy food?
- How does it increase opportunities for physical activity for everyone?

Monitor implementation of the town plan as supplemental plans, regulations, standards and budgets are developed to ensure that the intent of the health-promoting language in the town plan is carried out.

Toolkit ► *Recommended Resources: Introduction to Planning in Vermont — Vermont Land Use Planning Implementation Manual*



Vermont Examples

- **Brattleboro** suggested health-promoting language for each required element of the municipal plan.
- **Wolcott** created a separate health chapter for its town plan.
- **Morristown** drafted a supporting wellness plan that supplements the town plan.

St. Johnsbury creates a healthy community

St. Johnsbury began with a vision for a healthy community, which serves as the primary organizing framework for the 2011 update of the town plan, rather than required elements.

The creative process:

- 2002 - Selectboard creates Community Health Advisory Committee due to concerns about a proposed needle exchange and mobile methadone clinic
- 2004 - Fit & Healthy Coalition established as a sub-committee of the Community Health Advisory Committee to tackle obesity
- 2008 - Area local food alliance created, renewed advocacy for Three Rivers Recreation Path (ongoing)
- 2008–2009 - Ice rink shack repaired, community garden created in Lincoln Street neighborhood, Town Forest gate upgraded
- 2010 - Complete Streets Survey done (AARP funded) and bike racks purchased and placed in key locations in town (Health Department funded)
- 2011 - Town plan update uses vision for healthy community as organizing principle

Key ingredients to success:

- leaders who start with an issue that the community cares about — safety and drug use — and find opportunities to advance public health
- strong working relationships between the Town Selectboard and members of the Fit & Healthy coalition led by Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital and district office of the Health Department, with many community volunteers
- long-term vision and commitment by local officials and community volunteers
- funding from local business contributions, Safe Routes to School, Health Department, BCBS, AARP Vermont

Tools to Implement Municipal Plans

Municipalities have jurisdiction over the zoning and subdivision ordinances that determine the character of development.

Regulatory tools to implement the town plan can be used to promote health. Zoning ordinances, trail plans, subdivision regulations, local road design standards, or enactments negotiated as part of project development approval are examples of regulatory tools. These tools are often more influential than the municipal plan itself.

Other tools that may be used to implement the municipal plan:

Supplemental plans – community wellness or health action plan, physical plans that convey a vision for future development and improvements such as a village growth plan, downtown master plan, or public improvements plan (street network, sidewalks, paths, parks, public buildings, etc.).

Capital Budget, Capital Plan and Associated Reserve Funds – to schedule and fund physical improvements and infrastructure, including land acquisitions, parks, playgrounds, sidewalks, trails, etc. When the Capital Plan is designed to support a vision for public investments in a compact center, this can be a powerful tool to support smart growth, as well as the livability and health of existing neighborhoods and villages.

Zoning and subdivision regulations – include allowed uses and activities, densities of development, subdivision and settlement patterns, infrastructure requirements (e.g., sidewalks), and could include health impact assessment for some development.

Design review standards or form-based codes – regulate the physical form of development, including streetscapes, building design, signs, lighting and landscaping to produce a better built environment.

Land acquisition/conservation measures – such as purchase of land and easements to enable recreational use and community gardens.

Official map – depicts the location and planned public facilities, new roads, trails, parks and playgrounds based on a vision plan. This is a regulatory tool that can be used to require any new development to incorporate the public streets and other features depicted on the map into the development plan.

Tips from the field

If you have never participated in the municipal plan process, these action steps will get you started.

Call or e-mail your town manager or selectboard member and ask:

- Does our town have a municipal plan?
- Where/how can I see it? (It may be online.)
- How and when is it reviewed?
- What is the process for public input?
- Who would I talk to if I had questions about the plan? How is it being implemented?
- How can I be involved in the next round of planning?
- What suggestions do you have for me if I am interested in working on a plan for our town that helps to create a safe and healthy place for all community members?

Stay informed:

- Check the town's website for notices and activities.
- Show up at town meetings that relate to land use, budget and planning decisions and ask these same questions.
- Read your town's local paper for postings of upcoming meetings and decisions under consideration. Submit articles or op-eds.
- Subscribe, read and post to your town's Front Porch Forum or Facebook page.

Non-regulatory tools – Municipalities can also use non-regulatory tools and actions to promote healthy community design and land use. State law encourages Vermont municipalities to support smart growth principles through growth center legislation passed in 2006 (24 V.S.A. §§2790-91). This law allows towns to designate appropriate growth areas and provides incentives for compact growth.

Use Economic Development Incentives

A town can use economic development tools (taxes, fees and subsidies) both as incentives to shape healthier development patterns, and as a source of funding for health-supportive infrastructure, programs and policies.

State law encourages Vermont municipalities to support smart growth principles through Growth Center legislation passed in 2006 (24 V.S.A. §§2790-91). This legislation built upon the Vermont Downtown Program first established in 1998, and allowed towns to designate appropriate growth areas. It also provides incentives to municipalities and private owners of income-generating properties to create development patterns that support health. Communities can pursue official state designation as Downtown Development Districts, Village Centers and Growth Centers to access financial incentives for developing health-supportive infrastructure, programs and policies.

Toolkit ► *Recommended Resources: Introduction to Planning in Vermont — Vermont Land Use Planning Implementation Manual*

Assess and Evaluate Development Decisions

Development decisions, from the design of private projects to the siting and financing of municipal facilities, are critical. These decisions should conform to the town plan and standards adopted in the local zoning, subdivision or unified development ordinance. Towns can amend local bylaws or ordinances to create health-promoting standards, if needed.

Policy & Project Steps

Creating physical improvements in the community to support active living through walking and biking involves a series of policy and project steps, and coordination of local and state officials.

Policy Steps:

- Adopt the vision in the municipal plan.
- Detail infrastructure in a master plan.
- Adopt town zoning ordinances and standards. Adopt town road standards that include sidewalks, shoulders and bike lanes.

Project Steps:

- Conduct a feasibility study
- Secure financing
- Implement the changes

Create a Bicycle- and Pedestrian-Friendly Community

Walking, biking and public transportation as part of everyday living are supported by Vermont's Complete Streets legislation, passed in 2011, which requires that state and local transportation plans and projects be designed and operated so that the needs of all users of the state's transportation system — including motorists, bicyclists, public transportation users, pedestrians of all ages and abilities — are considered, and that all users can travel safely. This is a great foundation for the changes that support public health.

Note: *Many, if not most, transportation-related projects take years of community organizing, town planning and financial investment to become a reality. Town and transportation officials go through many steps to create physical improvements to town roads. Patience and persistence are necessary.*

Action Strategies to Create Safe and Inviting Places to Walk and Bike

Find out who owns the road. Whoever owns the road — the town or the state — is responsible for maintenance and changes. The town, through the selectboard, road commissioner, highway department and public works, is legally responsible for town roads and can regulate them through locally adopted road policies or ordinances. Town roads include seasonal roads, rights-of-way, sidewalks and legal trails. Many of our major roads are state-owned and managed, which requires a different level of planning.

Organize a walk or bike audit. Identify inconvenient or dangerous routes, and urge that priority be given to infrastructure improvements in areas where this is most needed. Audits can be a great community organizing tool.

Toolkit ► *Recommended Resources: Tools for More In-Depth Assessment*

Slow down motor vehicle travel.

- Posted speed limits should fit the character of the area.
- Street design should provide equal access and safety for all modes of transportation, with an emphasis on pedestrians.
- Use traffic calming measures to slow down drivers.





Create safe and convenient crossings.

- Add signs and crosswalks where needed.
- Focus lighting on walkways, rather than on cars.

Build more and better sidewalks.

- Create sidewalk networks that are complete from point to point to provide access to common destinations.
- Widen sidewalks in downtown areas to accommodate more pedestrians and make room for landscaping, sidewalk cafes, etc.
- Ensure that sidewalks meet ADA requirements.



Make streets more inviting to pedestrians.

- Add shade trees and plantings.
- Provide benches and areas for resting or visiting with others.
- Install lighting for safety.

Make streets and roads more bicycle-friendly by providing:

- paved bike lanes and marked curb lanes on existing roads in urban and suburban locations.
- wider shoulders in rural areas with painted strips to delineate the shoulder.
- bicycle access to and from transit stops.
- secure bicycle parking.
- proper maintenance of paths and roads with regular sweeping and repairs.



Create more paths, separate from roads and streets.

- Reserve shared use paths (paved or unpaved) for non-motorized use by bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Create rail trails in unused rail beds.

Identify potential allies for a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly community. Many schools and communities have joined the Safe Routes to School effort to make it safe, convenient and fun for children to bike and walk to school. Other communities have established bicycle and pedestrian coalitions.

Review maps. Review the town road maps and maps of paths and trails to understand existing and planned infrastructure for walking, biking and public transit.

Assure Complete Streets is included in town plans and policies to conform to new state Complete Streets legislation.

Include health-promoting language in the town plan to promote bicycle, pedestrian and trail facilities in the objectives, land use, transportation plan, program for implementation and official map. Each of these sections can speak to the needs of all users, including motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists and wheelchair users.

Create a bicycle and pedestrian master plan to specify future plans and qualify for state and federal funding. Master plans include an analysis of the community needs for bicycle and pedestrian facilities and maps of existing trails and sidewalks. Develop a plan for a network of streets, trails and other improvements. Rough cost estimates and strategies for implementation can be incorporated into the Capital Plan Improvement Program reserve fund allocations, and the official map.

Adopt pedestrian- and bike-friendly provisions in local land use regulations and ordinances, in particular zoning and subdivision regulations. State statutes enable towns to review development projects for adequate bicycle and pedestrian facilities under the site plan review, planned unit development (PUD) and subdivision review processes. Local road or public works ordinances may also be relevant for new development, and in determining how existing roads, sidewalks, etc. are maintained. The Vermont League of Cities and Towns has model ordinances for local adaptation and use, including:

- Regulating Local Speed Limits on State Highways
- Regulating Speed Limits on Unpaved Town Highways
- Regulating Stop Signs and Other Traffic Control Devices
- Highways Traffic Ordinance
- Vermont Local Roads Model Highway Ordinance

Establish design guidelines for rights-of-way, driveways, curbs and sidewalks, signs, landscaping and lighting to improve safety for walking and biking. Resource: The Vermont Agency of Transportation, *Pedestrian and Bicycle Facility Planning and Design Manual*. http://vtransengineering.vermont.gov/sites/aot_program_development/files/documents/ltf/PedestrianandBicycleFacilityDesignManual.pdf

Plan for financing so that resources are available when they are needed:

- Incorporate facilities for walking and bicycling into existing budgets, including the town highway budget, capital budget and program, and reserve funds.
- Incorporate bicycle and pedestrian facilities in scheduled municipal infrastructure projects such as roadway, municipal utility, and conservation projects.
- Collect special municipal funds through development impact fees, special assessment districts, or property owner tax to fund maintenance and spot improvement projects.
- Use permitting provisions to require developers to either construct the facilities shown on the official map, or put money in escrow to build such facilities at a future date.
- Apply for state grants. Examples:
 - *Transportation Enhancement Grants* through the Vermont Agency of Transportation (<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/>) provide funding to expand transportation choices to increase opportunities for recreation, accessibility, and safety beyond traditional highway programs. Non-profits and municipalities are eligible.
 - *Downtown Transportation Grants* provide financing to municipalities for eligible transportation-related capital improvements that support economic development within or serving a designated downtown district. http://accd.vermont.gov/strong_communities/opportunities/funding/downtown_transportation_fund



Improve Access to Parks, Recreation Facilities and Open Spaces

Local land use planning and policies can be used to increase access to areas for walking, biking, and playing as part of active daily living. The primary strategies are: preserving open space, establishing trail networks, creating recreational facilities and safe public parks, and accessing school grounds and facilities for community activity.

Offer health-promoting language in the town plan that supports access to parks, recreational facilities and open space for people of all ages and abilities, ideally within walking distance of most homes.

Consider users of all abilities. Give special attention to the needs of youth, elders, people with low incomes, and people from a variety of ethnic groups who may not be using existing recreational facilities and areas.

Partner with community members to create new infrastructure.

Local infrastructure often is the result of community organizing and volunteer leadership, with support from local government officials. For example, new playgrounds at community schools are created through parent-teacher organizations. New trails are created and maintained through mountain biking associations and local naturalist societies. Swimming pools are created through community organizing and fundraising.



Preserve Open Space

In Vermont land use planning, preserving undeveloped land in a community as “open space” is a primary goal for the purposes of land conservation, wildlife protection, public access and recreation. Open space must be addressed in a municipal plan’s goals, resource protection and land use sections. Some municipalities have adopted a separate, more detailed Open Space Plan with additional information to guide public and private conservation strategies.

Land use regulations, local standards and incentives for public dedication of lands are additional strategies used by communities to preserve open space.



Establish Trail Networks

In municipal and state planning, a trails network means both formal and informal trails used by the public for recreation and active transportation. Trails have a broad array of uses and users, from hikers, bicyclists, back country skiers, and horseback riders, to snowmobilers and ATV users. Some of the trails may be formally designated on town or state land, while others are made possible by local land owners who grant access to the public.



Vermont Examples

Collaborative leadership is key in creating the Sharon Trail

The Sharon Town Trail Connector, located on the grounds of the Sharon Elementary School, was initiated by the Town of Sharon and Health Connections of the Upper Valley, and is funded by the Health Department (Fit & Healthy Vermonters), the Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation (Recreational Trails Program), and the Office of the Attorney General. The work to clear the path was done by the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps. The trail head is the starting point for the yearly Sprouty — a 5K Run/Walk and a 10K Run event that raises money to support purchasing locally grown food for the Sharon Elementary School, and to support recreation programs for all ages in the community.

Swanton supports action to build trails, letting community lead

In 2009, Swanton opened the Fit & Healthy Swanton Recreation Path, a converted rail-trail, after unified action by community volunteers and local government to create a safe place for families to be physically active together. This is a classic community organizing story that begins with an assessment of community assets, needs and interests. While the original thought had been to reclaim an underused park, concerns about safety on one hand, and identification of engineering plans for the rail-trail on the other, led to building the recreation path. The effort used Fit & Healthy Swanton funds, along with volunteer time and contributions of both materials and equipment. The trail was originally projected to cost the town's taxpayers \$35,000 in matching funds for the completed project. In the end, the project cost only a small amount of staff time.

Key ingredients:

- small group of motivated community leaders responsive to community needs and alert to opportunities for finding potential solutions
- small amount of funding — far less than the \$350,000 path initially proposed for the site, and less than the \$35,000 match originally required from Swanton taxpayers

Key actions:

- collecting data about community assets, needs and interests
- talking to the right people to determine best action
- garnering support for the idea through community forums
- gathering community donations of time, materials and equipment
- mobilizing volunteers for two community clearing festivals
- coordinating additional volunteer groups, such as high school honor society and Ben & Jerry's employees, to clear, build and plant

Towns can promote open space and trails in the town plan and subdivision ordinances, require incorporation of open space and trails in new developments, and provide easements to the town for use and maintenance.

Organize a trails committee to create a trails map as part of the Official Map, which lays out the planned future road and street network of a town, shows possible future trails linkages, and encourages landowners and future developers to allow for trail linkages. For funding sources:

Toolkit ▶ *Recommended Resources: Access to Parks, Recreational Facilities and Open Space*

Create Recreational Facilities and Safe Public Parks

Public recreational spaces foster active living and community connections. Many Vermont towns operate public facilities for recreation — including ball fields, indoor and outdoor tennis courts and ice skating rinks, skate parks, swimming pools, tracks, and public golf courses.

Public parks tend to be less formal, and concerns about safety can be a barrier to their creation and use. Planners can work together with public safety officials to consider low-cost ways to increase safety. Good lighting, trees, benches, and other aesthetic qualities encourage more people to frequent an area.

Promote access for all potential users. Funding, hours of operation and location, and safety all affect use of public recreational facilities.

Assist community efforts to create new recreational facilities by offering essential skills in planning, grant writing and community organizing.

Use School Grounds and Facilities

Schools are a community asset and public resource that should be available to everyone. Vermont statute (16 V.S.A. §563) permits a school board to make school facilities and equipment available at all times, including beyond regular school hours, for community use for physical activity. School grounds are often used for team sports and community events. Some schools, however, are hesitant to allow indoor use of the facilities due to concerns about costs, vandalism, security, maintenance, and liability in the event of injury.

Communities can establish agreement on the use of school property.

Informal agreements between the school and a sponsoring community group are often enough. In some cases, a formal memorandum of agreement or joint use agreement that sets clear expectations is useful to allow school districts to share the cost, responsibility and risk incurred by opening their facilities. The local YMCA or another group that uses school facilities for afterschool care may be able to offer a sample agreement.

"Agricultural land is not simply 'land in waiting' for development as housing, commercial or industrial uses. Agriculture is a land use. Too often, agricultural land gets a second-class status that isn't appropriate."

– Sylvia Jensen, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets

A joint use agreement is a formal agreement between two separate government entities, often a school district and a city or county, setting forth the terms and conditions for the shared use of public property.

Increase Access to Fresh and Healthy Food

Strategies for increasing access to healthy food in communities:

- Adopt critical language to support access to healthy foods in the municipal plan.
- Plan for healthy retailers, farmers' markets and community gardens within village centers and downtowns.
- Use public spaces for community gardens and farmers' markets.
- Support farms and preserve farm land.
- Support Farm to School programs and school gardens.
- Support agricultural enterprises.
- Support Farm to Institution efforts.

Many Vermont communities are already active in Vermont's Farm to School program and the Vermont Farm to Plate initiative. The focus here is on additional opportunities to work with municipalities to increase access to healthy foods through municipal policies, plans and investments.

Conduct a community food audit to assess access to healthy foods through a variety of community policies and programs.

Create an inventory of available public and private land for farmers' markets, community gardens and small-scale agriculture.

Burlington Urban Agriculture Task Force was convened to address community interest in and concerns about appropriate "urban agriculture." The Task Force's mission is to develop a cohesive urban agriculture policy and best practices for raising food, keeping livestock, producing compost and promoting agriculture in Burlington, from small greenbelt plots to large commercial farms in the Burlington Intervale.

<http://burlingtonfoodcouncil.org/our-projects/uatf/>

Towns can include health-promoting language in the town plan to expand access to healthy foods through retailers, community gardens, farmers' markets, to support agriculture enterprises and to protect primary soils.

Toolkit ▶ *Recommended Resources: Tools for More In-Depth Assessment*

Toolkit ▶ *Sample Language for Town Plans*



Town plans should be consistent with state planning goals to strengthen agricultural and forest industries, and encourage:

- strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural and forest lands and maintain low overall density.
- manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products.
- use of locally-grown food products.
- sound forest and agricultural management practices.
- public investment planned to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

Towns can adopt municipal policies to require that only healthy food and beverage options are offered in municipal venues (e.g., town offices, recreational fields) and at municipal events (e.g., sporting events, meetings).

Expand Healthy Retailers and Retail of Healthy Foods

The more the better, when it comes to healthy foods. Communities can work to expand the number of retailers of healthy foods in grocery stores, country stores and farm stands. Existing retailers can be encouraged to offer healthier options.

Join the *Healthy Retailer Small Changes/Big Impact* initiative, which focuses on partnerships with independent retailers to support healthy choices related to tobacco, alcohol and food. Check out the tips and tools available through this effort to encourage healthier options at the Vermont Department of Health's website: www.healthvermont.gov.

Support Community Gardens and Farmers' Markets

Community gardens and farmers' markets expand access to healthy local foods — especially in areas that lack larger markets and grocery stores. Community gardens and farmers' markets bring people together, strengthening the fabric of the community and social capital. Farmers' markets also educate citizens about the diversity of healthy and local food products. Most importantly, farmers' markets can have economic benefit to the community and the farmer.

Towns can:

Draft a community resolution to set the stage for later policy changes and local action that supports community gardening. <http://www.burlingtongardens.org/GardenResolution.html>

Make public facilities and spaces available for markets and gardens. This will cost the municipality little, while reducing the initial start-up costs for markets and gardens.

Provide operational support to farmers' markets and community gardens, such as:

- signage for the market on municipal land that will comply with local ordinances.
- parking assistance, including blocking off spaces or parking lots.
- garbage collection.
- promotion in municipal newsletters, publications and websites.
- safety audit of foot traffic and vehicular flow to ensure safety. In areas with public transportation, advocate for a bus stop to make it more accessible to residents who don't drive.
- community gardens will also need water supply, fencing, management structure, and security.



Vermont Examples

Rutland Farmers' Market

The Rutland Farmers' Market is center stage in downtown Rutland's economic revitalization. The market is located in Depot Park during the spring, summer and fall, and then moves inside for the winter.

The goals of the market are to:

- promote local agriculture and cottage crafts
- create a direct producer-to-consumer marketplace
- provide the consumer with the assurance of quality that is expected in Vermont produce, baked goods and crafts
- provide a setting where the rural and urban qualities of Rutland County blend in harmony
- provide a festive marketplace, adding color and diversity to the city that benefits local merchants and townspeople

Thetford Community Garden

The Thetford Community Garden is located on the Thetford Center village green. The site was originally identified by the recreation department and conservation commission as a place to preserve and be put to better use in enhancing community connections. The garden provides a source of fresh and healthy foods for gardeners and the community as a whole, as it includes individual plots and a teaching/production plot to grow produce for the Thetford Food Shelf. The community garden is run by volunteers, with minimal yet essential support from the town.

Volunteers:

- solicited donations and grants for start-up
- recruit and coordinate gardeners
- support teaching/production plot

Town leaders (Parks & Recreation, Conservation Commission and Selectboard):

- provide water for the garden
- provide and maintain fencing
- serve as fiscal agent for grants

Support Farms and Agricultural Enterprises

The Vermont Legislature recently commissioned the Farm to Plate initiative to develop a 10-year strategic plan. Its purpose is to strengthen Vermont's food system in order to increase access to healthy foods, support the working landscape, and strengthen the agricultural economy. This statewide strategic planning effort has the potential to significantly shift thinking about municipal land use planning.

Communities can plan for the future of farming by passing local policies and regulations that limit the loss of farmland, provide incentives to farmers to conserve land, protect finite agricultural soils, and support agricultural enterprises.

Communities can reevaluate zoning options to allow small agribusiness activities such as expanded or centrally located food-processing facilities. Changes such as this encourage farms to diversify and become more viable, allow agritourism and other non-traditional farm-related activities where appropriate, protect farmland and allow a buffer between farms and non-farm uses.

Supporting farmers and promoting the development of agricultural enterprises protects essential land, improves the local economy, and contributes to health by increasing access to healthy foods and open space.

It Takes a Village

Obesity (physical inactivity and unhealthy eating) is the second leading cause of preventable death in our nation. To combat this epidemic will take the efforts of all of us, working together, to change the way we live, work and play.

Your efforts will help to create communities where physical activity and healthy eating will become the easy choice and the norm, keeping Vermont one of the healthiest states in our nation and a great place to live!

Vermont Healthy Community Design Resource

Active Living & Healthy Eating

TOOLKIT

A large, stylized sun graphic is positioned on the left side of the cover. It features a large, solid orange semi-circle on the left, which transitions into a series of pointed rays extending towards the right. The rays are made of overlapping, semi-transparent orange triangles of varying shades, creating a layered, sunburst effect. The entire graphic is set against a solid, light orange background.



Key Messages

As Vermonters, we take great pride in our quality of life, our strong communities, our natural places, and our commitment to healthy lifestyles. We share a common aim: to ensure that Vermont continues to be one of the healthiest states in the nation and best places to live.

- **Why you are here:** Community design affects public health. The design of our communities should accommodate and encourage physical activity and access to healthy food as a regular, routine part of our daily lives. This will ensure that all Vermonters — regardless of age, ability and income — have access to healthy options that make the healthy choice the easy choice.
- **What you want:** The strategies for maintaining our quality of life and creating economically vibrant and socially connected communities are the same strategies needed for creating healthy communities: higher density mixed-use development; pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environments; access to parks, recreation and green space; and access to healthy foods.
- **What you can offer:** We all care about health, and together we have the ability to mobilize the public, new partners and volunteers. We can provide data related to the health benefits of bike paths, sidewalks, concentrated development and a strong agricultural economy. And we can bring skills in planning and grant writing to locate and secure additional health-related funding.

Note: *Obesity prevention may not be the best starting point in discussions about healthy community design. Obesity is commonly assumed to be a result of personal choices and therefore the assumed solution is to create programs aimed at individual behavior change (e.g., nutrition education, exercise classes). Suggesting a common goal, such as increasing options for all Vermonters to lead healthy lives, now and in the future, may be more effective than starting with the goal of preventing obesity.*



Vermont Health Facts

Despite our reputation as one of the healthiest states in the nation, Vermonters are growing more overweight — a trend that holds true for both adults and children:¹²

- The obesity rate for adults rose by 35% from 2000 to 2012.
- More than half (60%) of adults and almost one-quarter (23%) of children are overweight or obese.
- Highest rates of obesity are among people with lower incomes. Adults without food security must often compromise quality for quantity, buying less nutritious and higher-calorie, but lower-cost foods for themselves and their families.

Being overweight or obese greatly increases a person's risk for many serious health conditions, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea and certain cancers. The primary causes of weight gain are inadequate physical activity, unhealthy eating patterns, or a combination of the two. Poor diet and physical inactivity are the second leading cause of death in the U.S.¹³

According to Healthy Vermonters 2020 data, in 2010/11:

- 17% of youth in grades 9–12, and 30% of adults age 18+ eat three or more servings of vegetables each day.
- 36% of youth in grades 9–12 and 38% of adults age 18+ eat two or more servings of fruit each day.
- While 59% of adults meet physical activity guidelines of 150 minutes each week, 17% have no leisure time physical activity.
- 76% of youth in grades 9–12 do not meet physical activity guidelines of 60 minutes a day, every day.

Creating built environments that support healthy eating and active living is an essential strategy for good health. Peer-reviewed studies demonstrate a 35 percent increase in physical activity (e.g., number of walkers or percentage of active individuals) in communities with more inviting and safer outdoor environments for activity.¹⁴

Decisions made by government, businesses, and institutions have an important impact on shaping the conditions in the built environment. Transportation and land use, investments in commercial and residential developments, and the location of schools and worksites ultimately influence the distances people travel to work, the convenience of purchasing healthy foods, and the safety and attractiveness of neighborhoods for walking and using parks and trails.

Design of our communities so that physical activity and access to healthy food is part of our regular daily routine ensures that healthy options are available to all regardless of age, income and education.^{15, 16, 17, 18, 19}





Land Use Planning Terminology

The following are key terms used in this guidebook. For more information, see the glossary created by the Vermont Planning Information Center: <http://www.vpic.info/Publications/Reports/PlanningManual/AppendixC.pdf>.

Active Living is a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines. The goal is to accumulate 150 minutes (two hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate intensity physical activity. This may be done in a variety of ways, such as walking or bicycling (for transportation, exercise, or pleasure), playing in the park, working in the yard, taking the stairs, and using recreational facilities.

Active Living Community is a community designed to provide opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines. By encouraging people to be more active, communities may improve health by lowering risk for health conditions such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease.

Built Environment refers to the buildings, roads, utilities, homes, fixtures, parks and all other man-made features that form the physical characteristics of a community.

Bylaw, Regulation, Ordinance, and Code are terms used interchangeably when referring to local regulations such as zoning. "Bylaw" is used in the Vermont statutes in reference to zoning, subdivision, and the combination of the two — unified development bylaws. "Ordinances" usually refer to regulations adopted by the selectboard or legislative body. Municipalities can only impose regulations as enabled or allowed under the guidelines set forth by state statute.

Complete Streets principles are based on safety and accommodation of all transportation system users, regardless of age, ability, or modal preference. Complete Streets are roadways that are designed and operated so users of all ages and abilities — including bicyclists, pedestrians, public transit riders, and motorists — can safely travel along and across them.

Development Review Board is a single board that can be created to perform all the regulatory review functions for the town. It replaces the Zoning Board of Adjustment and takes over the subdivision and site plan review role of the planning commission. This permits the planning commission to focus on its planning function as a drafter of the town plan and land use regulations. [24 V.S.A. §4461]

Municipality for the purposes of planning includes towns, cities and incorporated villages.

Municipal Plan is a comprehensive plan adopted by a municipality that forms the basis for local bylaws, etc. Must be updated and readopted every five years, but can be amended at any time.

Official Map identifies and maps the locations of existing and proposed public lands and facilities and the connections between them, including utility corridors, roads, sidewalks, and trail networks. It provides a clear picture to property owners, developers, and the public of the municipality's intentions with regard to its future physical form and design.

Planning Commission may be created at any time by a selectboard, and its members are either appointed or elected by the voters. The majority of towns have appointed planning commissions. The planning commission has many responsibilities, including preparation of the municipal plan. As part of that process, the planning commission typically oversees the public outreach efforts, coordinates with other stakeholders, and may delegate some of the preparation process to committees or other entities. The commission may also undertake studies related to a wide range of topics. The planning commission is also responsible for certain aspects of the plan's implementation, including: preparation of land use regulations and making recommendations to the selectboard; preparation of a capital budget and program, recommending building, plumbing, fire, electrical, housing, and related codes and enforcement procedures, and construction specifications for streets and related public improvements. In some towns, planning commissions also conduct quasi-judicial site plan and subdivision review hearings on development proposals.

Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) serve every town in the state. Regional planning commissions play a critical role both in land use policy and implementation at the local, regional and state levels. They are staffed by professionals with training in land use, transportation, emergency management and watershed planning, as well as geographic information systems mapping, brownfields planning and other areas of expertise. Each commission is governed by a board of commissioners comprised of representatives from each participating municipality. The RPCs have multiple roles in the context of local planning. In order to qualify for some state grant funding, municipal plans must be approved by the regional planning commission. In addition, regional commission staff frequently provides extensive technical assistance to local planning commissions in drafting municipal plans and bylaws as well as other local regulatory and non-regulatory documents. For a link to each of the 11 regional planning commissions, visit www.vapda.org.

Selectboard is the legislative body at the center of Vermont's town government. This is the elected body responsible for the general supervision and control over the affairs of the municipality. The selectboard has the authority to adopt a municipal plan (unless the voters have opted to adopt a municipal plan by a vote of the municipality). The selectboard also is charged with a wide range of duties that relate to plan implementation, including: adopting a capital budget; proposing an annual budget to the voters (after a public hearing); overseeing the maintenance, operation, and improvement of most municipal buildings and facilities (excluding schools and, in some communities, other facilities such as libraries); authorizing a variety of grant applications; and adopting land use regulations (after a public hearing, unless the selectboard or voters opt to submit the regulations to the voters). In cities and some larger towns, the city council, aldermen, or village trustees serve as the legislative body instead of a selectboard.

Smart Growth refers to the pattern of land development that uses land efficiently, reinforces community vitality and protects natural resources. Smart growth strategies include efforts to maintain Vermont's historic settlement pattern, encourage concentrated development in and around downtown and villages while supporting Vermont's rural working land. Key benefits include the creation of diverse housing options, protection of farm and forest land, diverse transportation options and less dependence on the automobile,

greater social interaction with neighbors, lower cost for public services resulting in reduced taxes, and a higher quality of life. Smart Growth Vermont has some excellent information and tools for learning more: <http://www.vtsmartgrowth.org/>.

Traffic Calming Measures can include: street narrowing (reducing the number of lanes); the addition of speed bumps or speed humps; the addition of traffic circles or roundabouts; the addition of raised pedestrian crosswalks; the conversion of two-way streets to one-way streets; and the addition of curb extensions (also known as bulb-outs).

Vermont Farm to School Network provides statewide leadership, coordination, and advocacy to advance new and existing Farm to School efforts in Vermont classrooms, cafeterias and communities. <http://www.vtfeed.org/farmtoschoolnetwork>

Walkable Community is a community where people can walk safely. A walkable environment has the following characteristics:

- well-maintained and continuous wide sidewalks
- ramped curbs
- safe and easy street crossings
- level terrain
- well-lighted streets
- grid-patterned street design
- high street connectivity
- safety buffer between pedestrians and motorized vehicles (such as trees, shrubs, streetside parked cars, green space between pedestrians and cars)
- slow traffic pattern
- minimal building setbacks
- cleanliness
- land-use patterns characterized as mixed-use with high-unit density

Zoning is a type of land use regulation governing the location, type, and density of development within a community through the delineation of one or more zones or zoning districts, as depicted on a zoning map. Local zoning regulations must conform to the municipal plan, including the plan's land use goals and recommendations, and proposed land use map.

Zoning Board of Adjustment is purely quasi-judicial, and its responsibilities include considering requests for conditional use permits, reviewing decisions from the zoning administrator, and granting zoning variances. A municipality that has a municipal plan and zoning bylaws may choose to have either a Development Review Board or a Zoning Board of Adjustment.



Who's Who in Local Government

Conservation Commission Member (appointed) - Inventories the natural resources of a community and purchases and administers municipal lands for the purpose of conservation.

Health Officer (appointed) - Appointed by the commissioner of health to a three-year term after recommendation by the town selectboard; enforces the rules and regulations for the prevention and abatement of public health hazards.

Municipal Manager (appointed) - If the manager system has been adopted by the electorate, the town manager is the official administrator of local government and has general supervision of the affairs of the town.

Planning Commissioner (appointed unless town votes to elect) - Duties include preparing a municipal plan; making recommendations on matters of land development, conservation, and preservation; and participating in a regional planning program. Makes site plan and subdivision permit decisions unless there is a Development Review Board in town. Should have a good working knowledge of all aspects of the town and be able to listen to many sides of an issue.

Regional Planning Commission Representative (appointed) - Helps develop the regional plan and assess municipal land use plans

Road Commissioner (elected or appointed) - Has no independent authority, but can assist the selectboard in overseeing town highways at the request of the board. Should have experience with town highways and be a good communicator.

Selectboard Member (elected) - General supervision and control over town; enacts ordinances, regulations and policies for town; oversees town property and personnel; prepares, presents and manages budget; and oversees roads, including laying out, discontinuing and reclassifying roads. Sits on local board of health, liquor control commission and sewer commission. Should know the town well and be able to understand all sides of complex issues.

Town Administrator (appointed) - Sometimes called the administrative assistant to the selectboard, the town administrator is hired by the selectboard to assist in managing the business of the town. The town administrator has no independent statutory authority. The scope of his or her duties is determined by the selectboard.

Town Agent (elected) - The town agent used to prosecute and defend suits; the selectboard now has that authority. Thus, the town agent's duty consists of assisting when litigation is in progress at the request of the selectboard. (This is generally not a very active position.)

Town Clerk (elected) - Records, preserves and certifies the public records of the town. Issues dog, marriage, civil union, hunting and fishing licenses, and motor vehicle renewals. Runs the local elections, serves as clerk of the Board of Civil Authority, and hears tax abatement requests and tax appeals. This position serves as the public face and ambassador for the town.

Town Energy Coordinator or Town Services Officer (appointed) - Appointed on or before April 15th of each year. Assists individuals within the town who require emergency food, fuel or shelter assistance when state support is not available.

Zoning Administrator (appointed) - Appointed by the planning commission with the approval of the selectboard. Approves or denies applications for zoning permits. Administers the municipal bylaws literally. Enforces regulations pertaining to the zoning ordinance.

Zoning Board of Adjustment or Development Review Board Member (appointed) - Holds hearings and makes decisions on land use permit applications and appeals of decisions of the zoning administrator.

Excerpted from Vermont Secretary of State's Who's Who in Local Government, updated October 2008
<http://www.sec.state.vt.us/municipal/pubs/who%27swho.html>

Potential Partners

Use this checklist to help identify partners and allies who can assist with community assessment, outreach and action.

General:

- an existing champion for any aspect of health or healthy community who is already on the local selectboard or planning commission

Concentrated mixed-use development:

- town planner or zoning administrator
- community development organization or a downtown organization interested in creating economically vibrant and pedestrian-friendly downtown
- group working on traffic calming, sidewalks and other pedestrian improvements (e.g., Safe Routes to School, Bicycle and Pedestrian Coalition)

Pedestrian- and bicycle-friendliness:

- town liaison on transportation issues
- community development organization or a downtown organization interested in creating economically vibrant and pedestrian-friendly downtown
- group working on traffic calming, sidewalks and other pedestrian improvements
- Safe Routes to School committee working to promote biking and walking to school
- energy committee with members who might be interested in alternative transportation (e.g., biking and walking)

Increasing physical activity:

- parks and recreation department or committee
- trails committee
- town conservation committee
- community health and fitness group
- community members interested in expanding recreational opportunities for all ages
- active community organization or conservation land trust interested in preserving open land

Access to healthy foods:

- local conservation committee
- local food policy council
- community gardening group or garden club
- Farm to School initiatives
- local farmers interested in participating in a farmers' market
- active food shelf or hunger group in the town
- community supported agriculture (CSA)

Additional potential community partners:

- organizations that represent individuals who are at high risk for chronic disease, racial or ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, older adults, etc.
- health care system (e.g., insurers, hospitals, clinics, doctor's or practitioner's offices)
- nutrition experts (e.g., dietitians, nutritionists)
- other medical experts (e.g., dentists, physicians, nurses)
- health volunteers (e.g., AARP, American Diabetes Association, American Cancer Society)
- health and wellness centers (e.g., YMCAs)
- universities or colleges
- school officials
- business leaders
- faith communities
- local media
- land developers
- housing or real estate professionals, including non-profit housing organizations



Signs of Readiness

Identify existing efforts and community readiness for healthy community design.

For example, look for:

- residents who are active in municipal planning including developing the town plan, serving on community committees — e.g., trails, conservation, energy, neighborhood association
- community partnership, coalition, or advisory board on physical activity and healthy eating
- programs and activities that support physical activity — e.g., walking, biking, or other physical activity events, networks, or groups
- programs and activities that support healthy eating — e.g., healthy cooking clubs, educational gardens, farmers' markets, Farm to School initiatives
- local government dedicated full- or part-time staff who are responsible for long-term community planning and economic development
- community or local government dedicated full- or part-time staff who are responsible for suggesting and overseeing improvements to make healthy living opportunities more available
- community fundraising (e.g., passed bonds, allocated funds) to finance the building or enhancement of sidewalks, bike lanes, parks, trails, or greenways
- community fundraising (e.g., passed bonds, allocated funds) to increase availability and accessibility of healthy food and beverages through community stores, new grocery stores, gardens, and farmers' markets



Healthy Community Design Assessment

The following assessment tool reflects community design strategies that have been shown to promote physical activity and increase access to healthy food. These can be used to:

Assess town plans and policies including: the town (municipal) plan; supplementary plans; town bylaws, ordinances and codes; and the town operating and capital budgets.

Conduct community assessments of the existing environment and community resources through observation, walking or driving audits, or reviews of town maps.

Evaluate development and redevelopment proposals from the private sector and for new public infrastructure.

Consider municipal investments and budgets for developing and maintaining public facilities and infrastructure.

This tool can provide the basis for a broad assessment. For each area of inquiry, additional detailed assessment tools are suggested.²⁰

Healthy community design and land use

Does this community have:

- mixed-use development that includes public services, business, retail and housing development directed toward compact, mixed-use centers, at a scale of growth that fits the community and region?
- essential services (public and private) located in the village and community centers?
- public services, public buildings, parks and other common destinations within walking distance for most people?
- healthy food sources (healthy retailers, farmers' markets, community gardens) conveniently located near residential areas and workplaces?
- options for people who cannot drive (e.g., volunteer drivers or a medical transportation system) to provide transportation to major employers, medical facilities, schools, physical activity/recreation facilities and shopping areas with stores and other healthy food retailers?

For additional detailed information:

Use the Smart Growth Scorecard to assess the physical and policy supports in place to: preserve traditional settlement patterns, with a higher-density community center (or centers) surrounded by mostly open space; encourage mixed uses and a diversity of businesses in compact centers; offer a range of choices for housing and transportation; preserve working land and important natural, and historic, resources; involve citizens and interest groups in deciding the community's future.

<http://vnrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/SPRAWLscorecard.pdf>

Active daily living promoted through street design and infrastructure

Does this community have:

- streets designed to promote walking (e.g., sidewalks on both sides of the street, pedestrian signals, safe pedestrian crossings, appropriate lighting, trees to provide shade)?
- streets designed for bicycle safety and convenience (e.g., street markings, curb cuts and driveways, potential hazards identified, linked to other bike routes, bicycle parking)?
- connected areas of development to provide easy pedestrian and bicycle access from one development to the next via bicycle lanes, sidewalks or pedestrian paths?
- walking and biking routes that are accessible to people with disabilities, and are in compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements?
- key documents to review: the town road map, maps of pedestrian/bike paths, and street design specifications?

For additional detailed information, conduct a walk and bike audit to determine whether it is safe, easy and inviting to walk and bike.

Smart Growth Scorecard: Section II

<http://vnrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/SPRAWLscorecard.pdf>

Walkability Checklist, developed by The Partnership for a Walkable America (PWA)

<http://www.walkableamerica.org/checklist-walkability.pdf>

Bikeability Checklist, maintained by the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center

<http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/pdf/bikabilitychecklist.pdf>

Physical activity promoted through parks, recreational facilities and open space

Does this community provide access to:

- public parks and playgrounds?
- recreational facilities, such as baseball fields, soccer fields, indoor and outdoor tennis courts, skate parks, indoor and outdoor ice skating rinks, swimming pools, tracks, public golf courses?
- open spaces for recreation, such as conservation lands, paths and trails, bodies of water, forests and mountains, for hiking, mountain biking, hunting, fishing, nature observation, cross country skiing, etc.?
- parks, recreational facilities and open space for people of all ages and abilities?
- parks, recreational facilities, or open spaces within reasonable walking distance of most homes?

For additional detailed information:

Update the town recreational inventory. The Inventory of Resources Related to Health in Vermont Towns and Cities was created by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont.

<http://www.uvm.edu/crs/townhealthresources/>

Review the Official Map and inventory town rights of way that could be used for trails including ancient and historic roads, Class 4 roads and legal trails.

Access to healthy foods

Does this community:

- offer healthy foods and beverages as the main options served and sold at government sites, libraries, parks and recreational facilities?
- serve predominantly healthy foods and beverages at government meetings, events and conferences?
- use municipally-controlled land, including town greens, parks, and school grounds, for farmers' markets?
- use private vacant or under-utilized land (e.g., hospitals, schools) for community gardens or local food production?
- have retailers that offer fresh produce and other healthy food choices located close to where people live, work and play? Does the community have "Healthy Retailer" stores, farmers' markets, roadside vegetable and fruit stands, or farm stands?
- have public transportation, if needed, to retailers of healthy foods, including large grocery stores?
- accept EBT (3 Squares VT) and WIC debit cards at healthy food outlets?
- have local lands in agricultural production or used for agriculture-related enterprises?

For additional detailed information:

Conduct a community food audit with local leaders to assess community access to healthy foods through retailers, farmers and farmers' markets, and community gardens and to identify current sources of healthy foods. Use this process to collect both the data and community support to push for town policy and action. USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit; USDA, July 2002

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/efan02013/>



Prioritizing Actions

The following steps and questions will be useful in framing a discussion on developing an action plan that is based on the assessment of community interests, local policies, and physical design.

Review data gathered

- To what extent do our community's policies and funding support healthy living?
- To what extent does the community design support healthy eating and physical activity?
- What from the assessment leads us to this conclusion?

Decide what needs to be done

- Can we identify three areas where we could make improvements immediately?
- What about three priority areas that may take us longer to accomplish?

Prioritize and plan activities *(see Action Prioritizing Tool & Action Plan Worksheet, following pages)*

- Can we identify the areas where we are most ready to make changes and start from there?
- What barriers will we need to overcome to advance our priorities for change?
- How likely are we to be able to influence decisions and make improvements in these areas?
- What should we do first?
- Who else needs to be part of this process?
- What resources will be necessary to make these changes?

Action Prioritizing Tool

Once you have identified potential strategies or actions you would like to implement, list each one in the table below. Use the five-point scales defined below to rank each action on five dimensions (importance, cost, time, commitment, feasibility). Add the points for each action to get the total points. Higher scores should indicate the priorities. Use the total points to help you choose one, two, or three top-priority actions that you will recommend for implementation this year.

Importance **How important is the action to my community?**
 5 = Very important 3 = Moderately important 1 = Not important

Cost **How expensive would it be to plan and implement the action?**
 5 = Not expensive 3 = Moderately expensive 1 = Very expensive

Time **How much time and effort would it take to implement the action?**
 5 = Very little time or effort 3 = Moderate time or effort 1 = Much time or effort

Reach **How much of the target population would this action impact?**
 5 = Most of it 3 = Moderate amount 1 = Not many at all

Feasibility **How difficult would it be to influence the decision or implement the action?**
 5 = Not difficult 3 = Moderately difficult 1 = Very difficult

Actions	Importance	Cost	Time	Reach	Feasibility	Total Points	Top Priority

Action Plan Worksheet

Instructions:

1. In the first column, list, in priority order, the top **Actions** for implementation.
2. In the second column, list the specific **Steps** that need to be taken to implement each Action.
3. In the third column, list any **Materials or Resources** that will be needed.
4. In the fourth column, list the people **Who** will be responsible for each Step and **When** it will be completed.

Actions	Steps	Materials & Resources	By Whom & When

Sample Language for Town Plans

Element of Town Plan	General Health	Increase Physical Activity	Increase Access to Healthy Foods
<p>(A) A plan for a municipality may be consistent with the goals established in Section 4302 of this title and compatible with approved plans of other municipalities in the region and with the regional plan and shall include the following:</p>			
<p>(1) A statement of objectives, policies and programs of the municipality to guide the future growth and development of land, public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.</p>	<p>[Town] is committed to fostering the health and well-being of all residents.</p> <p>[Town] will consider community health when making decisions and setting policy.</p> <p>[Town] will build relationships and implement procedures that make community health a priority.</p> <p>[Town] will utilize health impact assessments in the evaluation of future land use decisions and projects.</p> <p>[Town] will integrate health and smart growth considerations, including in-fill development; compact, transit oriented development; mixed-use buildings; walkable, bikeable neighborhoods; and green building practices into general plans, area specific plans, and zoning decisions.</p>	<p>[Town] will encourage patterns of land use, population density, transportation strategies and street design to promote walking, biking and public transportation and support access to fresh and healthy foods for all — regardless of age, ability and income.</p> <p>[Town] will create and maintain recreational facilities and opportunities for all community users — with special attention to the needs of handicapped, youth, elders, those with low incomes, and people from a variety of ethnic groups, who may not be current users.</p> <p>[Town] will encourage or require new residential and mixed-use developments to include sidewalks, outdoor open space, recreational facilities, and community gardens.</p> <p>[Town] will incorporate shared-use trails in development planning to connect communities, schools, and other facilities, and to increase residents' options for physical activity.</p>	<p>[Town] will increase availability and access to groceries, farmers' markets and community gardens to expand healthy eating options for lower-income Vermonters.</p> <p>[Town] will have a vibrant local food economy to increase access to healthy foods.</p> <p>[Town] will provide incentives to food retailers to offer healthier food and beverage choices in underserved areas.</p> <p>[Town] will provide incentives for the production, distribution, and procurement of foods and other products from local farms.</p> <p>[Town] will support agricultural enterprises including processing and distribution facilities.</p> <p>[Town] will allow and encourage infrastructure and businesses that are necessary for thriving farm businesses such as machinery supply and repair shops, saw mills, bed and breakfasts, and other businesses that can help farm families improve profitability.</p>

Element of Town Plan	General Health	Increase Physical Activity	Increase Access to Healthy Foods
<p>(2) A land use plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses, indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, residence, commerce, industry, public/semi-public uses and open spaces reserved for flood plain, wetland protection, or other conservation purposes; and setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.</p>		<p>[Town] will adopt high-density mixed-use residential, commercial and office zoning with housing situated within walking and bicycle-riding distance of attractive, pedestrian-friendly commercial areas.</p> <p>[Town] will encourage in-fill development and density to increase walkability, potential for public transit and maximize use of town infrastructure.</p> <p>[Town] will protect open space for recreational use.</p> <p>[Town] will provide access to parks, shared-use paths and trails, or open spaces within reasonable walking distance of most homes.</p> <p>[Town] will incorporate shared-use trails to connect communities, schools, and other facilities, and increase residents' options for physical activity.</p>	<p>[Town] will support local zoning and other regulation that helps to preserve and protect agricultural land.</p> <p>[Town] will protect primary agricultural soils; work with agricultural specialists to assess exceptional soils and locations for local food production and distribution.</p> <p>[Town] will require gardening spaces in housing and commercial development projects where sufficient space is available. If space is not available on individual lots, make provisions for community gardens within walking distance of all new development.</p> <p>Open space [Town] will develop an open space plan that focuses on agricultural land preservation and identifying locations for market and community gardens.</p> <p>[Town] will establish a local land trust and/or a fund for conservation of key parcels identified in the open space plan.</p> <p>[Town] will allow select agricultural practices in open spaces set aside in permitting — e.g., community gardens or small agricultural enterprises in open spaces of cluster housing.</p>

Element of Town Plan	General Health	Increase Physical Activity	Increase Access to Healthy Foods
<p>(3) A transportation plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities showing existing and proposed highways and streets by type and character of improvement and where pertinent, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses, with indications of priority and need.</p>		<p>[Town] strives to create a balanced transportation system that provides for safety and mobility of pedestrians, bicyclists, those with strollers and in wheelchairs at least equal to that of automobile drivers.</p> <p>[Town] will use Complete Streets guidelines in the development of all new projects, maintenance and repair of roads, and zoning decisions.</p> <p>[Town] will work with regional authorities to improve transit services linking residents with destinations (jobs, retail outlets, health services, educational facilities) to decrease residents' reliance on cars and increase physical activity.</p> <p>[Town] makes every effort to create continuous bicycle routes and sidewalks.</p> <p>[Town] will improve the street, sidewalk, and street-crossing safety of routes to schools in order to encourage/allow students to walk or bike to school on a regular basis.</p>	

Element of Town Plan	General Health	Increase Physical Activity	Increase Access to Healthy Foods
<p>(4) A utility and facility plan, consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective community facilities and public utilities showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage and other similar facilities and services with indications of priority of need, costs and methods of financing.</p>	<p>Inventory should include local resources for active living:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hiking or walking trail(s) • biking path(s) • public park(s) • public swimming pool • river with canoe/kayak/boat • watersport access • skate park • ice skating rink • roller skating rink • town recreational center (e.g., YMCA or town recreational facility) • private fitness facility • playground(s) • playing fields or courts 		<p>Municipal Facilities: [Town] will model best practices related to promoting healthy communities at all municipal facilities and events (such as providing nutritious foods).</p> <p>[Town] will identify and make available town-owned empty lots and vacant fields for community gardens and/or farmers' markets.</p> <p>[Town] will identify all public vacant properties that could be used for community-supported agriculture, community gardens and farmers' markets.</p>
<p>(5) A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.</p>		<p>[Town] will protect natural, scenic and recreational areas so that they may be maintained as destinations for hiking, biking and other physical activities.</p> <p>[Town] will seek to establish public access to hunting and fishing and other outdoor recreation activities.</p>	
<p>(6) An educational facilities plan consisting of a map and statement of present and projected uses and the local public school system.</p>		<p>[Town] will work with the school board to renovate or rebuild schools located in neighborhoods that students can easily walk or bicycle to and from, or when building new schools ensure that they are located in areas that are easily accessible by walking, bicycling, and public transit.</p> <p>[Town] will pursue joint use agreements for community use of school facilities for physical activity and recreation.</p>	<p>[Town] will work with schools to establish school gardens open to both students and the community at large.</p> <p>[Town] will establish joint use agreements for using school sites for community gardens and farmers' markets.</p> <p>[Town] will work with school board to endorse Farm to School programs and provide procurement support.</p>

Element of Town Plan	General Health	Increase Physical Activity	Increase Access to Healthy Foods
<p>(7) A recommended program for the implementation of the development plan.</p>		<p>[Town] will develop a master bike and pedestrian plan and/or an alternative transportation plan.</p> <p>[Town] will provide incentives for developers to provide sidewalks, parks, bike paths, etc. (e.g., density bonuses, permit streamlining).</p> <p>[Town] will require that a portion of the transportation budget be apportioned for pedestrian and bicyclist amenities including street traffic calming measures, street lamps, sidewalks, bike racks.</p> <p>[Town] will maintain a network of walking routes.</p> <p>[Town] will maintain a network of biking routes.</p> <p>[Town] will enhance access to public transportation (e.g., bus stops, van pool services, park and ride).</p> <p>[Town] will maintain a network of parks.</p>	<p>[Town] will provide incentives to encourage food retailers to provide healthy foods.</p> <p>[Town] will provide incentives to stimulate establishment of new food retailers (e.g., shops and markets).</p> <p>[Town] will provide supports to agricultural enterprises and businesses.</p>
<p>(8) A statement indicating how the plan relates to development trends and plans for adjacent municipalities, areas and the region developed under this title.</p>			

Element of Town Plan	General Health	Increase Physical Activity	Increase Access to Healthy Foods
<p>(9) An energy plan, including an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs and problems within the municipality, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy, including programs, such as thermal integrity standards for buildings, to implement that policy, a statement of policy on the development of renewable energy resources, a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use likely to result in conservation of energy.</p>		<p>[Town] will support infrastructure for bicycle, pedestrian and transit links energy, land use and transportation planning.</p>	
<p>(10) An economic development element that describes present economic conditions and the location, type, and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.</p>		<p>[Town] will calculate and present the economic benefit to downtowns, housing developments, and residents, of creating and maintaining safe and attractive facilities that support active living (sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, recreation, open space).</p> <p>Safe and attractive facilities that support active living (sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, recreation, open space) support [Town's] economic growth and development.</p>	<p>[Town] will calculate the economic benefits to downtowns, housing developments, and residents, of creating and maintaining facilities and polices that support access to healthy food (farmers markets, community gardens, preserving agriculture lands).</p> <p>Facilities and polices that support access to healthy food (farmers markets, community gardens, preserving agriculture lands) support [Town's] economic growth and development.</p>
<p>(11) A housing element that shall include a recommended program for addressing low- and moderate-income persons' housing needs as identified by the regional planning commission. The program may include provisions for conditionally permitted accessory apartments within or attached to single family residences</p>		<p>[Town] provides a range of housing types and affordable housing units that are connected to schools, safe areas for physical activity and healthy food access via safe walking and biking routes and public transportation.</p>	

Element of Town Plan	General Health	Increase Physical Activity	Increase Access to Healthy Foods
<p>which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons.</p>			
<p>(B) The maps called for by this section may be incorporated on one or more maps, and may be referred to in each separate statement called for by this section.</p>		<p>[Town] will produce road maps that identify infrastructure and amenities for all road users — motorized vehicles, bicyclists, pedestrians and wheelchair users.</p>	
<p>(C) Where appropriate, and to further the purposes of Section 4302 (goals) of this title, a municipal plan shall be based upon inventories, studies, and analyses of current trends and shall consider the probable social and economic consequences of the proposed plan. Such studies may consider or contain, but not be limited to:</p> <p>(1) Population characteristics and distribution, including income and employment.</p> <p>(2) The existing and projected housing needs by amount, type, and location for all economic groups within the municipality or region.</p> <p>(3) Existing and estimated patterns and rates of growth in the various land use classifications, and desired patterns and rates of growth in terms of the community’s ability to finance and provide public facilities and services.</p>	<p>Review data available through the Vermont Department of Health to assess current community health status including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • diabetes • heart disease and stroke • respiratory diseases • overweight and obesity • physical activity • nutrition • traffic-related injury 	<p>[Town] will collaborate with interested parties to complete walkability/ bikeability audits to identify inconvenient or dangerous routes and prioritize infrastructure improvements to areas with the most need.</p>	<p>[Town] will collaborate with interested parties to complete a community food audit to identify existing access and future opportunities to increase access to healthy foods.</p>



Recommended Resources

Introduction to Planning in Vermont

Vermont Planning & Development Goals [24 V.S.A. §4302 - as amended by Act 200]

<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/statutes/fullsection.cfm?Title=24&Chapter=117&Section=04302>

Vermont Municipal Plan Requirements [24 V.S.A. §4382]

<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/statutes/fullsection.cfm?Title=24&Chapter=117&Section=04382>

Definition of Smart Growth [24 V.S.A. Chapter 76A Section 2791 (13)]

<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/statutes/sections.cfm?Title=24&Chapter=076A>

Vermont Planning Information Center

www.vpic.info

An on-line information clearinghouse on local planning and regulation.

Welcome Packet for New Board and Commission Members

<http://www.vpic.info/WelcomePacket.html>

Provides basic information on the roles and responsibilities of local officials and an easy-to-read overview of local planning and regulatory processes. The packet is organized around 10 questions and answers that new members often have before attending their first meeting.

Planning Manual for Vermont Municipalities - 2000 Edition

<http://www.vpic.info/PlanningManual.html>

A guide for the municipal planning commission in fulfilling its role and responsibilities as set forth in 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117, the Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act. Provides information that will help the planning commission with developing the municipal plan, from designing the planning program to adopting the plan.

Essentials of Land Use Planning and Regulation - 2nd Edition, May 2007

<http://www.vpic.info/Essentials.html>

A 50-page manual that provides an overview of municipal roles and responsibilities and the fundamentals of local planning and permitting in Vermont — what every board and commission member needs to know.

Vermont Land Use Planning Implementation Manual

<http://www.vpic.info/ImplementationManual.html>

A package of 30 topic papers introducing a wide range of concepts, tools, and techniques for helping communities achieve their planning goals. These materials were developed with oversight from the Vermont Land Use Education and Training Collaborative.

The Community Planning Toolbox

<http://vnrc.org/resources/community-planning-toolbox/>

The Community Planning Toolbox was developed by Smart Growth Vermont, which merged with the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) on July 1, 2011. The toolbox introduces users to the issues, techniques and resources for smart growth planning. It features case studies and sample tools that demonstrate how other communities have addressed similar challenges to those facing your community.

Growth Center Planning Manual for Vermont Communities - March 2007

accd.vermont.gov/sites/accd/files/Documents/strongcommunities/cd/designations/GrowthCenter%28hr%29.pdf

Vermont Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs)

<http://www.vapda.org/>

Vermont Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) provide municipalities in each region with a wide range of planning services and should be the first stop for local officials seeking planning assistance.

General Healthy Community Design Resources

Change Lab Solutions: Healthy Planning

<http://changelabsolutions.org/healthy-planning>

The ChangeLab Solutions team has extensive experience researching best practices, providing guidance, and developing land use plans to support community health and well-being in a diverse range of communities. Their work spans a range of health issues, including creating healthier food environments, increasing physical activity, making schools healthier, participating in the planning process, and redeveloping communities.

Design for Health

<http://designforhealth.net/>

Design for Health (DFH) is a collaborative project that serves to bridge the gap between the emerging research base on community design and healthy living, and the everyday realities of local government planning. The first phase of DFH (2006-08) created innovative, practice-oriented tools to help integrate human health into urban planning and environmental design in 19 communities. The second phase is focused on tool development and public education.

Design for Health and Policy

http://www.lgc.org/freepub/healthy_communities/index.html

The Local Government Commission (LGC) provides resources, technical assistance and networking opportunities to local elected officials and other dedicated community leaders for establishing healthy, walkable, and resource-efficient communities.

Leadership for Healthy Communities • Advancing Policies for Active Living and Healthy Eating • Action Strategies Toolkit - February 2011

<http://www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org/index.php/home-toolkitnav-161?task=view>

The toolkit is based on the most current research on childhood obesity and the most relevant policy approaches.

Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States - July 2009

http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/community_strategies_guide.pdf

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified evidence-based strategies for obesity prevention by increasing active living and healthy eating.

Guide to Community Preventive Services. Environmental and Policy Approaches to Increase Physical Activity: Community-Scale Urban Design Land Use Policies

<http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/environmental-policy/index.html>

The Guide to Community Preventive Services provides systematic reviews to determine program and policy interventions that have been proven effective. This section describes recommended environmental and policy approaches to increase physical activity.

Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities

www.icma.org/ruralsmartgrowth

Focuses on how to adapt smart growth strategies to rural communities through three central goals:

1) support the rural landscape by creating an economic climate that enhances the viability of working lands and conserves natural lands; 2) help existing places to thrive by taking care of assets and investments such as downtowns, Main Streets, existing infrastructure, and places that the community values; and 3) create great new places by building vibrant, enduring neighborhoods and communities that people, especially young people, don't want to leave.

Tools for More In-Depth Assessment

A number of tools offer a more in-depth assessment of the policies and infrastructure in place for active living and healthy eating. Once a community has identified its priority areas for action, these tools may be helpful in collecting additional data and engaging more community members in planning and action.

The Vermont Smart Growth Scorecard

<http://vnrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/SPRAWLscorecard.pdf>

Assesses the physical and policy supports in place to: preserve traditional settlement patterns, with a higher-density community center (or centers) surrounded by mostly open space; encourage mixed uses and a diversity of businesses in compact centers; offer a range of choices for housing and transportation; preserve working land and important natural, and historic, resources; involve citizens and interest groups in deciding the community's future.

Inventory of Resources Related to Health in Vermont Towns and Cities

<http://www.uvm.edu/crs/townhealthresources/>

Created in 2005 by the Center for Rural Studies at UVM in partnership with the Vermont Department of Health. Provides results of a survey of every city and town in Vermont that documents availability (or not) of assets such as miles of sidewalks and bike paths, town recreational facilities, and nutrition-related information, as well as town policies related to physical activity and healthy eating. The results can serve as a baseline; the questions can be useful in updating the inventory.

Community Healthy Living Index

<http://www.ymca.net/communityhealthylivingindex>

Created by the YMCA USA to help communities assess support for healthy living in six community settings: afterschool child care, early childhood program, neighborhood, school, work site, and community-at-large.

The Community Health Assessment aNd Group Evaluation (CHANGE) tool

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/change.htm>

Developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help community teams develop a community action plan for improving community health through policy changes that support healthy living strategies (e.g., increased physical activity, improved nutrition, reduced tobacco use and exposure, and chronic disease management). The section most relevant to healthy community design is the Community-At-Large Sector. This focuses on community-wide efforts that impact the social and built environments, such as improving food access, walkability or bikeability, tobacco use and exposure, or personal safety.

Walkability Checklist

<http://www.walkableamerica.org/checklist-walkability.pdf>

This tool was developed by The Partnership for a Walkable America (PWA), a national coalition working to improve conditions for walking and increase the number of Americans who walk regularly.

Walk Friendly Communities assessment tool

http://www.walkfriendly.org/WFCAssessmentTool_Nov2011.pdf

Create the Good: Sidewalks and Street Survey

<http://www.createthegood.org/sites/default/files/how-to/SidewalksStreets.pdf>

This straightforward how-to guide was created by the AARP to help small groups take simple “walkability” surveys and to take recommended actions for community improvements.

Bikeability Checklist

<http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/pdf/bikabilitychecklist.pdf>

Maintained by the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center.

The Rural Active Living Assessment (RALA) Tools

<http://www.activelivingresearch.org/node/11947>

Assess the physical environment features and amenities, town characteristics, community programs, and policies that could potentially influence levels of physical activity among residents in rural communities.

Community Food Audit – USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit - USDA, July 2002

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EFAN02013/>

This toolkit provides standardized measurement tools for assessing various aspects of community food security. It includes a general guide to community assessment and focused materials for examining six basic assessment components related to community food security. These include guides for profiling general community characteristics and community food resources, as well as materials for assessing household food security, food resource accessibility, food availability and affordability, and community food production resources.

City of Portland, Oregon – Diggable City Report

<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/42296>

Comprehensive report describing how the City of Portland Oregon addressed urban agriculture. Report includes methods, results and language used for comprehensive plans, zoning and resolutions adopted to support urban agricultural projects.

Health Impact Assessment Resources

Planning for Healthy Places with Health Impact Assessments

<http://advance.captus.com/Planning/hia2/home.aspx>

An online course, developed by the American Planning Association and the National Association of County & City Health Officials. Explains the value of conducting health impact assessments and the steps involved.

UCLA Health Impact Assessment Clearinghouse

<http://www.hiaguide.org/>

Administered by the University of California, Los Angeles. Includes links to dozens of HIAs conducted in the United States, as well as HIA guides, news, and academic research.

Human Impact Partners

<http://www.humanimpact.org/>

A nonprofit project of the Tides Center. Provides materials that are easy to understand and use for health impact assessments.

Increasing Physical Activity through Community Design: A Guide for Public Health Practitioners and Livable Community Advocates

http://www.bikewalk.org/pdfs/2010/IPA_full.pdf

Guidebook from the National Center for Bicycling and Walking. Describes problems and solutions for creating active communities. Includes ways to secure funding to support projects.

Access to Parks, Recreational Facilities and Open Space

Vermont Trails and Greenways Council

www.vermonttrailsandgreenways.org

A non-profit dedicated to maintaining and improving the Vermont Trails System.

Vermont Trails and Greenways Manual: Everything You Need to Know to Build and Maintain a Trail

<http://vermonttrailsandgreenways.org/resources/manual>

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC)

www.vycc.org

Provides work crews on a weekly or monthly basis to towns, agencies, or organizations in need of crew services.

Vermont Recreation Trails Grant Program (RTP)

<http://www.vtfpr.org/recgrant/trgrant.cfm>

Provides funding for the development and maintenance of recreation trails, trailside amenities, and trailhead facilities. Funds are available to municipalities, schools, and non-profit organizations.

Vermont Recreational Facilities Grant Program

<http://bgs.vermont.gov/formsandpublications> (scroll down to "Grants")

Provides competitive grants to municipalities and to non-profit organizations for capital costs associated with the development and creation of community recreational opportunities in Vermont communities. For each dollar requested, documentation must be provided to show that one dollar has been raised from non-state sources.

Sample Joint Use Agreements

<http://www.nplanonline.org/childhood-obesity/products/nplan-joint-use-agreements>

Opening School Grounds to the Community After Hours

http://www.phlpnet.org/healthy-planning/products/joint_use_toolkit

A comprehensive toolkit for increasing physical activity through joint use agreements.

Access to Healthy Food

Resources: Toolkit for Community and School Garden Organizers

<http://www.burlingtongardens.org/gardenorganizer.html>

Supporting Your Farmers' Market: A Guide for Municipalities

<http://nofavt.org/sites/default/files/FM-municipaloutreach.pdf>

Outlines ways in which farmers' markets benefit communities, and ways that municipalities can support and improve their local farmers' markets.

Organizing and Maintaining Your Farmers' Market - NOFA VT

<http://nofavt.org/node/764>

Farm to Plate (F2P) Initiative

<http://www.vsjf.org/project-details/5/farm-to-plate-initiative>

The Farm to Plate initiative, approved at the end of the 2009 Vermont legislative session, directed the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, in consultation with the Sustainable Agriculture Council and other stakeholders, to develop a 10-year strategic plan to strengthen Vermont's food system.

Smart Growth Vermont

<http://vnrc.org/resources/community-planning-toolbox/issues/productive-farms/>

An on-line reference detailing the tools available to communities to support the protection of farm land through land use planning and local economic supports.

Planning for Agriculture in NY: A Toolkit for Towns and Counties

<http://www.farmland.org/documents/PlanningforAgriculturePDF.pdf>

Contains a helpful checklist to assess the level of support for agriculture in town plans and policies, and offers tools for improvement.

Sustaining Agriculture: A Handbook for Local Action

The Vermont Agency on Agriculture is currently updating the 1994 edition, which outlines the connections between land use and agricultural planning in greater depth.



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Footnotes

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