

TOWN PLAN

IRA, VERMONT

ADOPTED BY THE SELECTBOARD

May 4, 2015

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IRA TOWN PLAN

Introduction

The Vermont Planning and Development Act enables the legislative body of all municipalities to create a Town Planning Commission which may consist of not less than three nor more than nine members. Members are appointed by the Ira Selectboard and must serve without compensation. At least a majority of the Commission must be permanent residents of the community. In accordance with the Act, the Ira Planning Commission is given the authority to prepare a Municipal Development Plan and to implement this document by the development and adoption of bylaws. The Ira Planning Commission is comprised of 5 members.

Statutory Authority

The Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act (Chapter 117 of Title 24, Vermont Statutes Annotated) guides the preparation of Town Plans and includes required and suggested elements and adoption procedures. The Vermont Statutes (24 VSA §4382a) require that all plans contain twelve required elements: a statement of objectives, policies, and programs; a land use plan; a transportation plan; a utility and facilities plan; a statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas; an educational facilities plan; an implementation program; a statement indicating how the Plan relates to development trends in adjacent communities; an energy plan; a housing plan; an economic development plan; and a flood resilience plan. While all twelve elements must be included, communities are not prohibited from combining closely related elements.

The Ira Town Plan

Responsibility for the preparation of the Town Plan rests with the Ira Planning Commission. In the course of developing the Plan, the Planning Commission and Town contracted for technical assistance with the Rutland Regional Planning Commission. A Town Plan or Municipal Development Plan must be approved by the Ira Planning Commission and duly adopted by the Town. It is the official policy of the community with regard to future growth and development. It states the goals, objectives, policies, and priorities for action that guide the community towards its vision for the future.

There are many ways to implement the goals and action items of this Plan, which fall into two general categories: regulatory and non-regulatory options. Regulatory options consist of zoning regulations and other town ordinances. Non-regulatory implementation options include, but are not limited to capital planning, special studies, advisory commissions. Adoption of the Plan is the only means available for the Town to legally establish growth and development policies. It is intended that the Plan be used in a positive manner; as a tool in guiding the direction of growth in a way that is both economically feasible and environmentally acceptable. The Plan, by identifying unique and fragile areas, or those regions of high scenic, natural, or historic value, seeks to guide development by respecting both the potentials and constraints offered by nature, balancing these as well as the current and long term needs. It promotes equity and efficiency and the recognition of the public interest in the resources and investments that are found in the Town. As required by law, it should also serve as a foundation for local land use controls such as zoning, subdivision, and health regulations. Furthermore, the Plan should be given full effect in all appropriate regulatory proceedings, such as Act 250 and the Section 248 (Certificate of Public Good) process. Finally, the Plan and its technical reports

should be used as a source of local information. All contain information that can be valuable to citizens, businesses, and members of local boards and commissions.

Because Town planning has been characterized as a flexible, continuing process, the Ira Town Plan may be reviewed from time to time and may be amended in the light of new developments and changed conditions affecting the municipality. The Town Plan shall expire and have no further force and effect on the date five years from the date of adoption. The Plan may be readopted in the form as expired or about to expire, and shall remain in effect for the next ensuing five years or until amended.

History of the Plan

For the first time in over fifteen years, the Town of Ira adopted a comprehensive Town Plan on September 21, 1989. Three times since then the Plan was revised with the assistance of the Rutland Regional Planning Commission and a State grant, commencing in 1993 with the preparation of the first technical reports. This 2014 Plan represents a revision of the 2009 Plan, incorporating 2010 U.S. Census data and information. This update, as required every five years, complies with State requirements for municipal plans.

The Rutland Regional Planning Commission prepared for the Town various maps, which were relied upon in preparation of this Plan. They are: General Soils, Transportation Facilities, Land Resources, Water Resources, Slope Classes, Septic Suitability, Wildlife Habitats and Future Land Use. Attached and made a part of this Plan are the following maps, prepared by the Rutland Regional Planning Commission: Transportation, Community Utilities, Facilities and Education, Natural Resources Ira Map 1 of 2, Natural Resources Ira Map 2 of 2, and Future Land Use.

Community Profile

History

Ira's first settlers are said to have arrived from southern New England in the 1760's. The first annual Town meeting was held in 1779, and in the following year, residents petitioned the legislature for a charter. To a large extent, the patterns of land use and development seen today reflect those which existed two hundred years ago. The Town's development reflects an economy which was based, since the Town's founding, on agriculture - - principally farming, and to a lesser extent, logging.

The early development took place not only in the valleys flanking Ira Brook and the Castleton River, but at higher elevations as well. Much of Ira's early development was represented in the establishment of hill farms, and today five of the six remaining operating farms are hill farms. In the more remote or steep sloped areas in Town, logging has been productive and may represent the highest and best use of such lands. Throughout the Town's history, less accessible or developable lands have lent themselves to other activities including maple sugaring and recreation (including hunting and fishing).

Aside from farming and logging, there were other trades conducted which were largely interdependent with the agricultural-based economy. In the 1800's, Ira had sawmills, blacksmith shops, wagon repair shops, a tannery, a wool-carding mill, a shingle mill and a cheese factory. In addition, there were several taverns or inns, which provided meals and overnight lodging to stage travelers. Several small gold and silver mines were also operated in Ira in the 1800's.

In the early 1900's, the focus of farming shifted from the raising of sheep and wool production, to dairying. The population of Ira, which peaked at 519 in 1810, declined to below 300. Presumably, residents were drawn to the Rutland region by jobs, a trend which continued to the point where Ira became a bedroom community. Today, most residents work outside of Town.

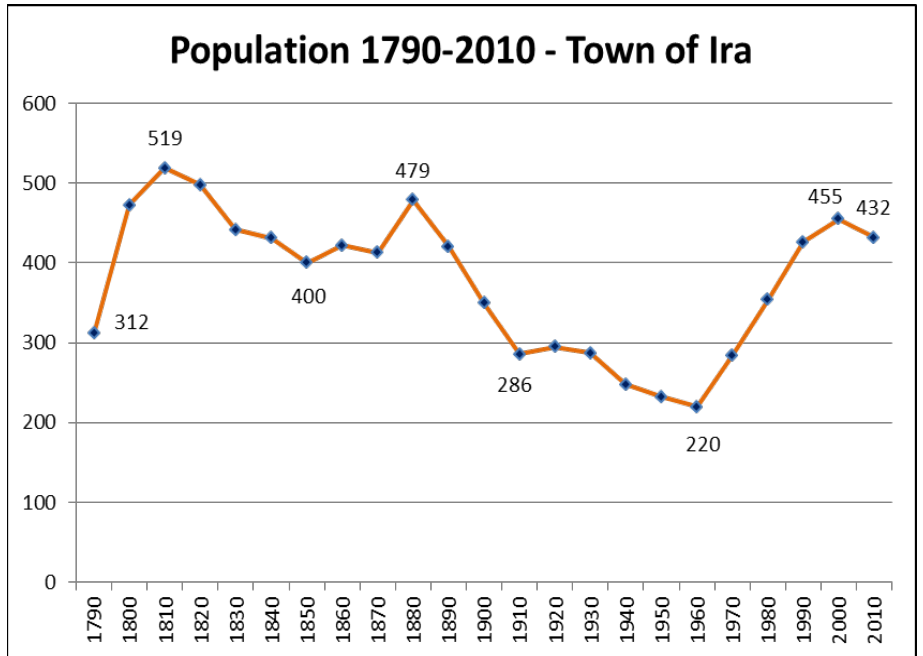
A general decline in farming in the 1900's brought with it several changes. The carding mill and tannery ceased operation. A commercial lime kiln was constructed and successfully operated near the base of Herrick Mountain for many years. A small ski area was operated in the 1960's on the north face of Bird's Eye Mountain in the Towns of Ira and Castleton. The lime kiln and ski area ceased operation years ago, and the remaining businesses in Town represent small home or cottage industries -- there are six operating farms, an auto body repair shop and a radio-communications shop. Much of the land no longer used for crops or pasture has reverted to wood land.

From a historical perspective, development patterns in the Town reflect a healthy respect for significant physical limitations. Much of the Town is ringed with high mountain peaks and ridges, which have never been settled. Historically, there have been two settled areas in Town. One is in North Ira in the Castleton River valley, and the other is near the Town Hall, in the Ira Brook valley. Travel from one settled area to the other within Town is practically impossible, and can only be accomplished by traveling through abutting Towns. There has never been a village, downtown or concentration of residences as may be found in neighboring communities. The Town's meeting hall (C. 1810) and Town clerk's office (formerly a one room

school house) (C. 1860) and the Baptist Church (C. 1852) are centrally located in Ira valley and continue to provide the Town's only civic focal point.

Population

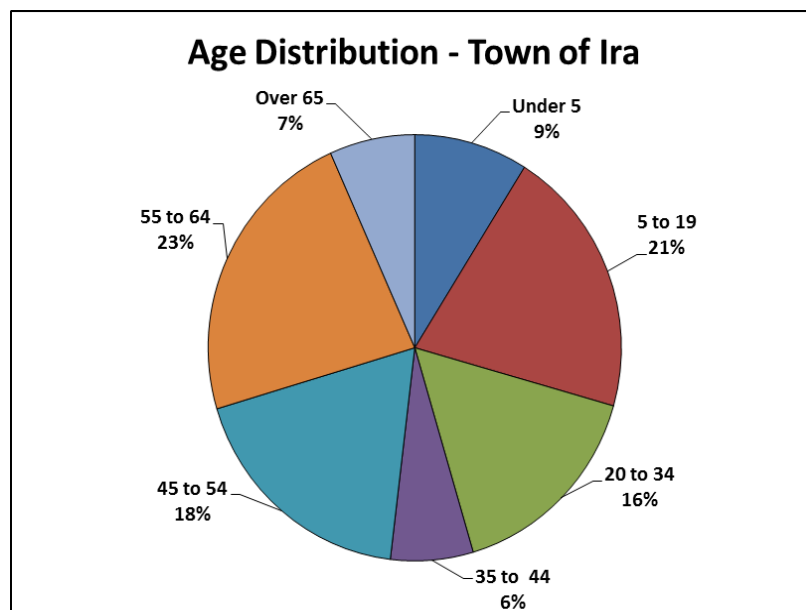
As of the 2010 Census, there were approximately 432 residents living in Ira, making it the third smallest town in the Rutland Region. From 1960 to 2000, the Town's population more than doubled, however in the past decade Ira's population decreased 5.1%; the Town's population level has not returned to the high of 519 people set in 1810. The density of Ira is 20.3 persons per square mile. Currently, there are about 92 school age children in Ira, who attend public school for whom the Town pays tuition for their education in the school systems of neighboring communities.



Source: 2010 US Census

Age Distribution

Two significant demographic shifts have taken place in Ira over the past two decades. While much of the population base has remained relatively stable, there has been a clear increase in the median age from 31.1 in 1990, to 37.6 in 2000, to 42.8 today. In 2010, residents age 45 to 64 made up 41.4% of the total population, and those over age 65 represented 9.7% of the total. Ira, as elsewhere across the country, will likely continue to see its population age in the future. The combination of general growth and an aging population will also likely serve to increase demands on services.



Ira, as elsewhere across the country, will likely continue to see its population age in the future. The combination of general growth and an aging population will also likely serve to increase demands on services.

Source: 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates

Households

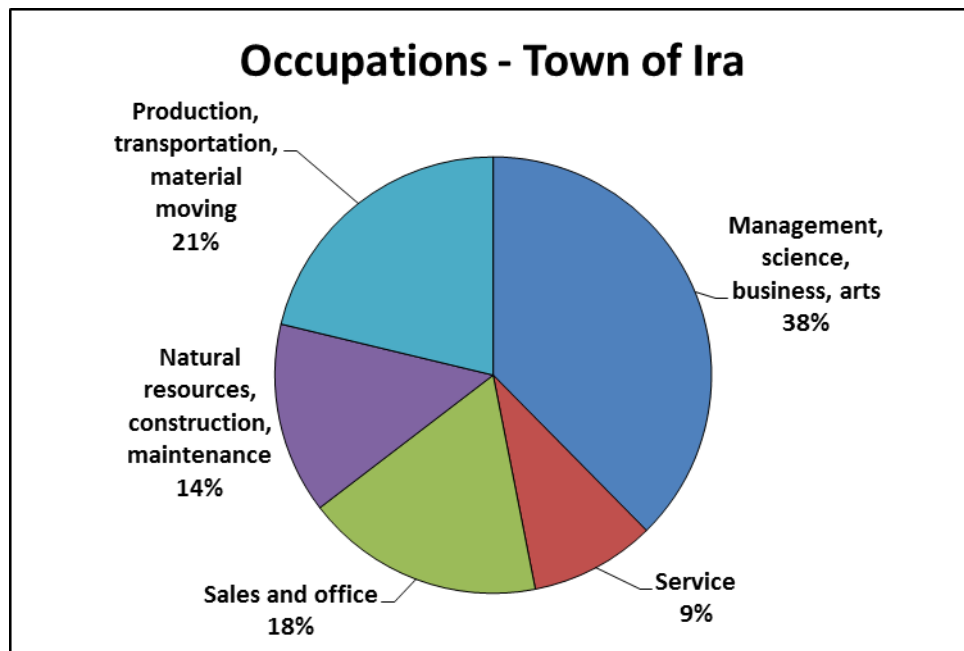
According to the 2010 Census, Ira was comprised of 171 households. The average household size decreased over the last decade, from 2.79 persons per household in 2000 to 2.53 persons in 2010. This is consistent with a downward trend in household size in both the Region and State. It is interesting to note that although Ira ranked 25th out of 27 towns in the number of households, it ranked first in the Region in household size for 2010.

Income and Poverty

The median household income in Ira from 2007 to 2011 was estimated to be \$60,000, placing Ira eighth in the ranking of towns of the Rutland Region. The median family income from 2007 to 2011 was \$68,542. Roughly 3% of families (12) in Ira are living below the poverty level.

Employment

Management, science, business, and arts accounted for over one third of the occupations of Ira residents at the time of the 2010 Census (see chart below), while production, transportation, and material moving occupations represented nearly one-quarter of the employed population. Meanwhile, education, health care, and social services, followed closely by manufacturing, were the primary *industries* that employed Ira residents in 2010.



Source: 2010 US Census

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Introduction

Community facilities and services contribute to the health, benefit, safety, and enjoyment of the general public. They include water supply, waste disposal, general town administrative services, and police and fire protection. Community facilities and services have a significant effect on the municipality's ability to grow in an orderly and healthy way. Careful planning is essential for community facilities and services in order to meet local health, safety, and welfare needs and community goals for future growth. Community facilities in Ira are generally centered along the transportation corridor of Route 133.

Water Supply

There are three methods or systems by which residents in the Town of Ira obtain potable water. The source most commonly found is the surface or groundwater well. These wells are penetrated to the water table by drill or other mechanical means and are then incased in metal or concrete for containment. This type of water system is less expensive than an artesian well, but can prove unreliable at times. In dry seasons, when the local water table lowers, these wells fail to provide water in sufficient quantity for normal residential uses. In wetter seasons, these wells can be subject to contamination from foreign matter introduced to the well through runoff.

Artesian wells are deep wells, drilled into the subterranean aquifer and are the most reliable, and often the most preferred, sources of water. In Ira, the artesian well is second to the surface well in popularity of use. This type of system is the most expensive to construct and in Ira is more so, because of a greater average depth to the aquifer than in neighboring communities. Artesian wells in the southern half of Ira range in depth from under 100 feet to over 1,000 feet. There have been attempts on certain properties, mostly in the southern half of Town, to obtain useable delivery rates of water through artesian wells, without success.

When accessible and of good quality, ground springs are used by Town residents as the third water system of choice. Springs generally are regarded as a high quality water source, in many cases are, but they can be subject to the same problems as are experienced with surface wells.

All or nearly all residences in Ira are supplied with water by use of electric pumps. Generally, a submersible pump is used when the source is an artesian well or surface well, and self-priming above-ground pumping systems are used with surface wells and ground springs. Some older homes with surface water wells or ground springs use gravity flow to transport the water, and to provide a head of pressure, which would otherwise be generated by an electric pump.

Ira has limited watershed. In contrast to some neighboring communities, there are no lakes, and there are very few ponds or other bodies of standing water such as marshes or bogs. Ira Brook, which flows north through the southern half of Town, and the Castleton River located in North Ira, are the two rivers in Town and account for the majority of wetlands indicated on the Town's land use map. The Town of West Rutland has a municipal forest of several hundred acres located in a remote area off Clark Hill Road, which tract serves as the primary watershed for that community's municipal water system. The topography in Ira is such that the mountain-

ous and mostly wooded areas in the outlying areas of Town serve to channel precipitation, in the form of runoff, to the lower lying and settled regions in Town which are dependent upon such water for residential uses.

Sewage Disposal

The Town adopted an on-site sewage ordinance that was substantially revised on June 14, 1990, incorporating State standards for acceptable on-site septic disposal. Because of recent changes to the Environmental Protection Rules for Wastewater System and Potable Water Supply Rules (adopted by the State, Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation) construction of new disposal systems and repairs or changes to existing ones will require a State permit, so the Town no longer needs to regulate wastewater systems.

Solid Waste Disposal

The Town is a member of the Rutland County Solid Waste District, which is the primary regional entity administering and addressing solid waste disposal problems on a regional level on behalf of its constituent municipalities. The District operates a transfer station located on Gleason Road in Rutland, which is available to Ira residents who pay an annual fee for use of the facility. The facility currently accepts household wastes, including glass, paper and metal. Continued use of the existing center and any other centers as may become available in the future, should be encouraged.

In 2012, Act 148—Vermont's Universal Recycling Law—was passed. The intent of the law is to divert recyclable items, leaf and yard debris, and food scraps from landfills. By July 1, 2015 recyclables will be banned from landfills; by July 1, 2016 leaf and yard debris and clean wood waste will be banned from landfills; and by 2020 food scraps will be banned. Facility owners and trash haulers will need to collect and manage these wastes accordingly. The Town will have to work with the District to ensure compliance with Act 148. Based upon the Town's sparse settlement patterns and population, it is anticipated that the future needs for disposal of solid waste will be met through continuation of the existing recycling and private contract haulage methods.

Electric Service

The Town of Ira is located entirely within the service territory of Green Mountain Power, which provides electric service to all currently settled areas in the Town. Along the U.S. Route 4A corridor in North Ira, there are two high-tension transmission lines which serve to carry electricity through the Town for eventual use or distribution at destinations outside Ira. One line is a 46 kv line owned and maintained by Green Mountain Power, and the other is a 115 kv line owned and maintained by Vermont Electric Power Company. A third transmission line is owned and maintained by Green Mountain Power in the northeast section of Ira. Like the transmission lines located in North Ira, this 46 kv line does not serve local needs in Ira.

The extension of existing distribution lines to new locations in Town is addressed on a case-by-case basis by Green Mountain Power, and the costs of line extensions as may be required are borne by the new customer or customers in accordance with the company's applicable tariffs. The existing distribution lines are located either within Town highway rights of way, or on private property with land owner permission and/or easements. The responsibility for maintenance of transmission and distribution lines rests with the utility, and not with the Town.

With respect to line extensions and any new distribution lines, decision making on location, construction and maintenance will likely remain with the involved land owner(s) and the utility.

Telephone and Television Services

Fair Point Communications (formerly Verizon) and Vermont Telephone Company provide local calling service. Long distance calling plans are provided by a variety of regionally and nationally based companies. Existing lines are located within Town highway rights-of-way, or on private property, with landowner permission and/or easements. The responsibility for maintenance of lines rests with the utility, and not with the Town. There is one cell tower in Ira, located near the peak of Herrick Mountain, but cell service within many parts of the town is quite limited.

Cable television service is available in some parts of Ira.

Internet

Internet services in town are available through Comcast, VTel, and satellite. As a result of rapid industry growth, emerging technologies, and industry permit leasing requirements, Vermont towns will see a sharp increase in applications for telecommunications towers over the next several years. Given the industry's plans to increase its presence in Vermont and the sometimes highly sensitive nature of telecommunications tower proposals, it has become increasingly urgent that every Vermont town adopt regulations specifically addressing siting and application requirements for these towers. Thoughtful regulations balance the desire for better communications facilities with the desire to preserve scenic landscapes and ensure safety in each community.

The Public Service Board regulates the siting, construction and modification of towers and cellular structures. Traditional tools that towns use to participate in the siting of cellular facilities is planning, adopting reasonable bylaws, and focusing on aesthetics, safety concerns (other than radiation) and character of the neighborhood.

Town Office

The town office building was built in 2010 and replaces a one-room schoolhouse which had served as the town clerk's office. The building provides space for the land records, town clerk, listers and selectboard.

Town Hall

A landmark red brick building, the Town Hall has been restored with the efforts of the Ira Selectboard and Ira Senior Go-Getters. It was constructed around 1800 and has served as the location for municipal functions such as Town meetings, public hearings, and other civic functions.

Emergency Management

Having emergency services available is among the basic needs of residents in Ira. The Town strives to be active in all four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Mitigation- Mitigation means taking action before the next disaster to reduce losses of life and property. In 2004, the Town adopted an Annex to the Rutland Region All Hazards Mitigation Plan. The Annex identifies the natural and human-caused hazards that affect Ira, and outlines mitigation actions and projects that the Town will undertake to reduce damages from future incidents. The Annex was approved by FEMA, however since the plan only lasts 5 years it is expired at this point. The Town should update its Annex, or create a new single jurisdictional local hazard mitigation plan. Having a FEMA approved hazard mitigation plan increases the Town's funding level from the State Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund, and allows the Town to access Federal Hazard Mitigation Assistance.



Credit: Taino Consulting Group

Preparedness- Preparedness involves activities and measures—such as training, plans, procedures, and equipment—taken in advance of an incident to ensure effective response. The Town has an appointed Emergency Management Coordinator, who is responsible for coordinating the various components of the emergency management system. One of the EMC's core functions is to maintain an up to date Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP). Ira's LEOP was last updated and adopted in May of 2014, and it replaces previous Basic Emergency Operations Plans and Rapid Response Plans. The LEOP identifies three emergency shelter sites: Ira Town Hall, Ira Baptist Church, and the Town of West Rutland School. Also listed in the plan are high risk populations, vulnerable areas, emergency contacts, local emergency operations center sites (Ira Volunteer Fire Department and Ira Town Office), etc. The Local Emergency Operations Plan should be reviewed annually, and updated and readopted as necessary by May 1st.

Response- Response activities address the short-term, direct effects of an incident and seek to save lives, protect property, and meet basic human needs. In Ira response services include fire protection, rescue, and public safety/police.

Fire Protection- Fire Protection is provided by the Ira Volunteer Fire Department, a private organization formed in 1975. The fire department is a volunteer department and presently has ten members on the roster. It is funded by annual town taxes and periodically through fundraisers. The department is housed on a one acre tract of land and operates out of a three-bay garage which includes a meeting/training room. Since the 2009 Town Plan, the building is now designated as being in the flood plain. The equipment on hand consists of:

- 1) 1984 Pierce pumper (750 gallons of water and 1000 gpm pump) which is 30 years old and is outfitted with a four-man cab. The rear two seats are open to the elements.
- 2) 2004 American LaFrance rescue pumper which was purchased in 2011. The cab seats four firefighters and is climate controlled. The truck has a

1500 gpm pump, 900 gallons of water, on board scene lighting system, generator and a hydraulic pump unit which powers the extrication tools.
3) 1976 three-quarter ton 4WD Ford pickup purchased for a dollar in 2013. It is outfitted with a 100-gallon water tank, small pump, and is set up for fighting brush fires. There is no room in the firehouse for this truck so it is stored outside which is a problem in winter.

The firefighters are outfitted with pagers and the department is dispatched by the Rutland County Mutual Aid Association (State Police). The Mutual Aid System provides backup equipment and manpower from the surrounding communities 24 hrs/day. The IVFD has worked with the VT RC&D and has identified all the water sources for fire protection in town. There are two wet hydrants and one dry hydrant in operation and a grant in 2014 has been awarded for a hydrant in North Ira. The IVFD firefighters meet one to two times per month for training. Ira has a modified shipping container which is used for live fires and training. Typical call volumes run between 24-30 calls per year. If the population (460) or number of houses increases, the department would have to be assisted in terms of manpower, water sources, and fire equipment. Likewise, houses built off the town roads with poor access create a challenge overall, but worse in winter and mud season. Four-wheel drive firetrucks in our mutual aid system typically have limited pump capacity and limited water volume.

Rescue- Ira is a member of the Regional Ambulance Service, Inc., which has six ambulances with trained personnel capable of responding round-the-clock. If all regional ambulances are in use, Poultney and/or Middletown Springs will respond to an emergency in Ira as a part of mutual aid. In the event of a disaster, Vermont E.M.S. District #10 has a disaster management plan which would involve State Police and as many as 10 ambulances.

Public Safety / Police- Ira has no police department. There are two elected Town Constables. Generally, all police services are provided by the Vermont State Police and the Rutland County Sheriff's Department upon request or, for special events, on a contract basis. While crime has increased over time, it does not appear to be a major issue in Ira.

Recovery- Recovery is the process of rebuilding, restoring, and rehabilitating the community following an emergency. The town maintains records of cost incurred in the recovery from disasters, including road and culvert repairs. This information is reported to Vermont Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, and the local Agency of Transportation. The district office helps the state to apply for presidential declarations of disaster in larger events and can make the town eligible for substantial reimbursement of costs.

Cemetery

Ira's cemetery, managed by a three-person committee is an asset of the Town. It is financially managed by the Town.

Educational Facilities

The Town does not have any public educational facilities, nor does the Town own any school buses or vans, and the Town does not currently provide transportation of students to any schools.

All elementary, secondary and high school students are transported to other, neighboring communities for education, the costs of which are borne by the Town's residents in the form of tuition payments made to the other school systems. Ira is in the Southwest Supervisory Union, with budgetary functions residing with the Town's School Board, which is comprised of three people. Residents have access to post-secondary educational opportunities and facilities in the region, including those at Green Mountain College, College of St. Joseph, Community College of Vermont, and Stafford Technical Center. The Ira Town Hall is available for events or presentations that involve ongoing education.

Libraries

There has never been a library in Ira; neighboring communities, including West Rutland and Rutland, have library facilities available to the public. The Town allocates funds to support the Rutland Free Library.

Recreation

There are limited recreational facilities provided by the Town or others and located in Ira. The State of Vermont owns several large tracts located on either side of Route 4 in North Ira, and although these parcels are undeveloped, they are part of the State's wildlife management areas and are open to sports enthusiasts. For those students tutitioned out to neighboring communities, recreational facilities are generally available as parts of the neighboring school systems. These facilities would include gymnasiums, playing fields, etc. The Vermont Achievement Center and Castleton State College have swimming pools open to the public.

Health Services

A full spectrum of health services is available in the Rutland Region, although no services (with the exception of services performed in connection with ambulance calls) are performed in Town. The Rutland Regional Medical Center provides a broad range of services to the Region and residents of Ira on in-patient and out-patient bases. In addition, there are a number of services available from physicians with offices or professional associations not directly linked with the Rutland Regional Medical Center. Many of these professionals maintain offices in Rutland, and to a lesser extent, some maintain offices in the Castleton Region. The Town contributes to Rutland Area Mental Health, Rutland Area Hospice, Inc., and the Visiting Nurse Association, and the services provided by both entities are available to the residents of Ira. Currently, health service needs of Ira's residents are adequately fulfilled, and it is anticipated that in the future, such needs will continue to be met through the use of these available health services.

Child Care

Ensuring accessible, affordable, quality child care is integral to sound economic development planning. Many families lead lives that require some type of child care outside the home. Recognizing this reality, child care is a critical community need. Investments in the child care infrastructure, like investments in the infrastructures of transportation, public works, affordable housing and education, can have direct positive effects on the growth and vitality of the community.

Children in Ira

Age	Population
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Under 5 years	23
5 to 9 years	29
10 to 14 years	29
15 to 19 years	34

Source: 2010 Census

While Ira is home a to a number of children as shown in the table above, it is among a handful of towns in the Region with no registered home care providers or license child care providers. It is difficult to assess the need for child care facilities in Ira because of the high proportion of adults who commute to other communities to work. For instance the 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates showed that for Ira residents the mean travel time to work was 24 minutes. It is expected that many parents choose to have their children near to their places of work, thus potentially reducing the need for facilities in Ira. Parents and any unregistered child care providers in Ira should be asked to provide input on the need for additional child care facilities.

Throughout the Rutland Region there are 85 registered home care providers and 69 licensed child care centers, which include early childhood and school-age care programs. Rutland City accounts for nearly half of the capacity of the region's providers, with 30 registered homes and 27 licensed centers. To improve the quality of services, Vermont has established the STep Ahead Recognition System (STARs) program to recognize regulated child care, preschool, and afterschool programs that take measures to exceed state standards in providing services to children and families. STARs ratings range from 1 to 5 stars, based upon their success in five areas of performance (e.g. staff qualifications). As of January 2014, 72 child care providers in the region were participating in STARs. Sixteen of those providers achieved the highest rating of 5 stars, and 18 had a rating of 4 stars.

There are critical issues regarding child care that should be considered in Ira even with the current lack of child care facilities in Town. First, low income families have difficulty accessing child care and afterschool programs, due to financial constraints, lack of transportation, and the demands placed on working parents. Middle income families also struggle to pay for child care. Statewide from 2003 to 2012, market rates for a preschool age child in a licensed child care center increased \$140 per week to \$200 (43.9% increase), and rates for a preschool age child in registered home care increased from \$106.25 to \$150 per year (41.2% increase) (2012 Vermont Child Care Market Rate Survey). Another deficiency is specialized child care services for infants as well as children with special needs. Lastly, child care providers struggle financially due to insufficient state and federal funding, and workers are paid relatively low wages.

Administrative Services

The provision of administrative services through a local government is basically done through two groups. A three member Selectboard oversees and administers the general day-to-day affairs of the Town. Under State law, the Selectboard is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the Town's roads, municipal properties and general affairs. The School Board is responsible for all matters pertaining to the education of the children residing in Town. The Ira School Board, consisting of three residents, administers the educational system, and the Vermont Department of Education regulates numerous aspects of the education provided to Ira's children. The School Board annually proposes a budget for the operation of the school

system, and proposes an amount for approval in the Town's Annual Report. At the annual Town Meeting, the budgeted sum is placed upon the ballot for approval or rejection by the voters of Ira. The Selectboard and School Directors' positions are filled by volunteers. To date, the provision of administrative services by the Selectboard and School Board members has served the Town well, due in large part to the low population in Town and to the willingness of volunteers to serve in these positions.

The land records and other documents pertaining to the Town are kept by the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk's office is located in the newly renovated town office building. The Town Hall, which was constructed around 1800, has served as the location for municipal functions such as Town meetings, public hearings, and health clinics. It has also served as the location for civic functions such as pot luck suppers, and other community based uses.

As the Town grows, it may be necessary to share in the administration of certain services through joint efforts with neighboring municipalities or through regional entities such as the Rutland Regional Planning Commission.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

Preserve and continue the rural character of the physical and social resources in Town.

Objective

Prohibit local land filling or disposal of solid waste.

Objective

Support continued use by residents of private solid waste haulers, and encourage recycling.

Objective

Maintain membership in Rutland County Solid Waste District.

Objective

Provide adequate emergency services including fire and ambulance.

Objective

Continue municipal support for the maintenance of the Fire Department.

Objective

Continue membership in Rutland Regional Ambulance Service.

Objective

Keep municipal costs and taxes within the affordability of taxpayers.

Objective

Channel new construction and residential growth in accordance with the land use plan in the rural residential district.

Objective

Continue the process of budgeting for the Town's general expenses and school expenses.

Objective

Acquire property or obtain rights of first refusal on property which the Town considers necessary or appropriate as potential sites for municipal uses.

Objective

Encourage maximum flexibility for parents to have access to quality child care providers. Permit the use of single family homes in Ira for small-scale family child care facilities. Meet with current child care providers and parents of young children to determine if there is a need for additional child-care capacity in Town.

Housing

Introduction

National and regional trends regarding housing reflect smaller households, increasing auto ownership, and working a distance from one’s residential community, as well as a decline in farming in recent decades. Ira’s residential growth will be tempered by physical constraints to development including steep topography, limited transportation infrastructure, the availability of adequate water supply, and the capabilities of the ground to accommodate on-site septic disposal. Generally, Ira’s development is characterized by low-density housing, located away from steep slopes, wetlands and floodplains.

Ira’s residents live, for the most part, in single-family housing located along the few roads that traverse the Town. There is a slight, but by no means large, concentration of housing at the junction of Route 133 and Cross Road. There were 193 housing units in Ira at the time of the 2010 Census. Housing units in Ira are predominately single-family detached homes. According to the 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 85% of housing units are single family, and 13% are mobile homes. Additionally, 2.5% of units are 2- to 4-apartment structures (usually duplexes).

Most housing units are owner-occupied—73% in 2000—with the remaining 27% renter occupied. In 2010, the number of owner-occupied units increased to 86% while the renter occupied housing units decreased to 14%.

Ira has a number of seasonal housing units. The 2010 Census showed 15 seasonal units out of 193 total housing units. Seasonal housing units typically have fewer rooms than year-round housing units. The number of seasonal units decreased in the past decade, which indicates a changing housing market in Ira.

	2000		2010		% Change
	Units	% of Total	Units	% of Total	
Total Housing Units	192	100%	193	100%	0.5%
Total Owner Occupied	141	73%	147	76%	4%
Total Renter Occupied	22	11%	24	12%	-1%
Total Seasonal, Recreational, Occasional Use	24	13%	15	8%	-38%
Total Vacant Units (excluding seasonal)	5	3%	7	4%	40%

Source: US Census 2000 and 2010

Ira has experienced a slight downward trend in population, consistent with the region as a whole. According to the US Census Bureau, Ira’s population decreased by 5% between 2000 and 2010, while the Region experienced a 3% population decrease. At the same time Ira has seen a 5% increase in number of households, greater than the household increase within the Region of only 1%. The increase in number of households despite the downward population trend can be attributed to a steady decrease in household size. While the number of housing units in Ira grew significantly in recent decades, from 2000 to 2010 there was only an increase

of one housing unit. In 2010 there were 193 housing units in Ira, compared to 107 units in 1970 and 184 units in 1990.

Households

Ira is composed predominately of family households. According to the 2010 Census, there were 171 households in Ira and a total population of 432 persons. Families made up 71% of the households. The average household size has continued to drop, from 2.79 persons in 2000 to 2.53 in 2010. While Ira has one of the lowest number of households in the region, it has the largest household size. However, the household size is still decreasing, which will have an impact on the future housing needs of the community.

The overall proportion of married couple families with children under 18 years of age in Ira is dropping in Ira as it is elsewhere in Vermont. Between 2000 and 2010, the proportion of married couple families with children compared to total number of households in Ira dropped from 34% to 24%. This is consistent with the aging population in Ira, where the number of children 19 years old and younger decreased from 137 to 115.

Non-family households are predominantly one-person households (80%), the remainder consisting of two-person households.

The table below suggests that the rate of growth of households in Ira matches the construction of new units. At the same time, the overall population of the town is decreasing while the number of households is increasing (due to smaller household sizes). There seems to currently be an adequate amount of housing units in town for the population.

	2000	2010	% Change
Housing Units (excluding seasonal)	168	178	6%
Households	163	171	5%
Population	455	432	-5%

Source: US Census 2000 and 2010

Housing Conditions

The National Housing Act of 1949 defined an adequate house as a “decent, safe and sanitary” dwelling. This refers to both the external and internal condition of housing. The US Census Bureau uses three measures to gauge housing condition:

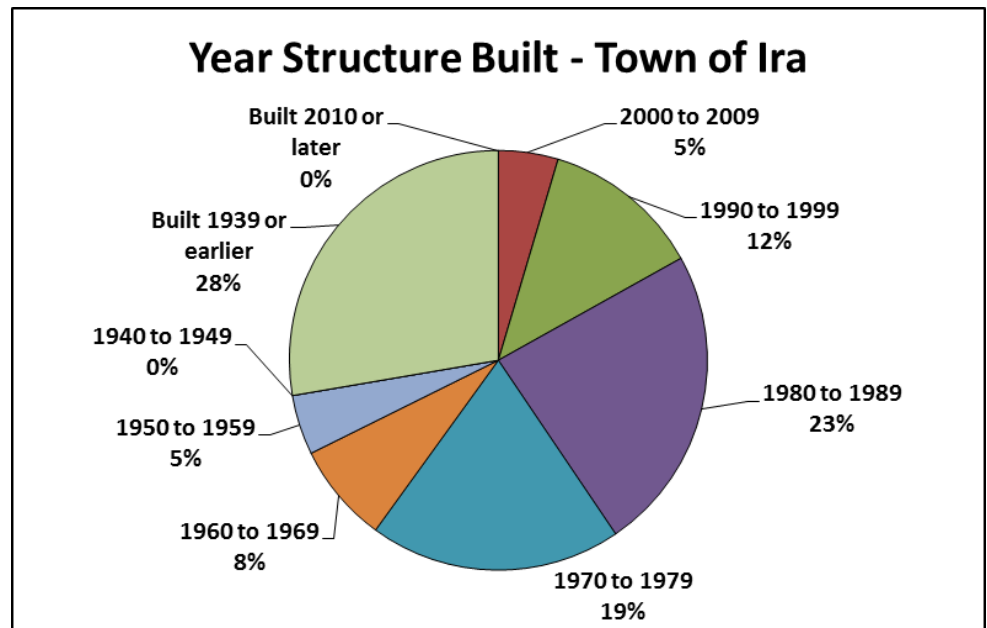
1. Overcrowding – units where there are more than one person per room
2. Age of housing – Housing structures built before 1939 are considered by the Census Bureau to be structurally/physically unsafe. Since this is cited for the nation as a whole, and not specifically Vermont, where much of the housing stock is older and some, or even many, of these structures may have been renovated and maintained, this may be an invalid measure. Also, it is difficult to get this information without conducting a site survey of the actual units in a given community.
3. Sub-standard units – Those units that have partial or no plumbing as well as units that have some or no kitchen facilities are categorized as substandard.

Overcrowding

In Ira, the 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates showed there were only 2 housing with more than one person per room. Generally, overcrowded housing is not an issue in Ira.

Age of Housing

The age of structures is often associated with housing conditions. Ira's housing stock, like its neighbors', continues to age. Over 25 percent of all structures in the Town were built prior to 1940 (see chart below). These units require attention to ensure they remain in good structural form. A number of older homes are on the State list of historic places, and many have been maintained or restored to meet modern usage and safety requirements. Homes built in the last few decades are generally safe, adequate and in good repair.



Substandard Units

Only 2 housing units were listed as lacking complete plumbing facilities according to the 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. All housing units were found to have kitchen facilities. Overall Ira has little problems concerning the livability of its housing units.

Special Needs Population

The special needs population, for the purposes of a housing analysis includes single parent households, physically and mentally impaired persons, elderly and the homeless.¹ In addition to requiring certain services that differ from typical single-family households (i.e. physical accessibility, assisted living) these groups also tend to be in the lower income category.

The 2010 Census indicated that Ira had 8 single parent households with children less than 18

¹ Planning for Affordable Housing. Department of Housing and Community Affairs, February 1990, pg. 11

years of age (5% of all households in town). Ira also had 14 residents over age 65 living alone (8% of all households). Recent Census information regarding Ira residents with disabilities is not available.

As noted above, the proportion of single parent households and elderly persons living alone is relatively low in Ira, compared to other towns in Rutland County. However, these groups, along with many 'traditional' families, have been facing an affordable housing shortage. There is currently no subsidized housing in Ira.

Housing Affordability

Nationwide, a trend toward fewer persons per household has changed the type of housing needs and increased the demand for housing, especially affordable housing, even with stable or declining populations. Identification of housing needs requires an evaluation of housing demand, housing supply, and buying power. Housing affordability is a regional issue. High rental and sale prices of homes in one Town do not only affect households currently residing within the Town. Unaffordable housing costs can also restrict those households wishing to move into the area but lack the household income to afford to live there. Discussion of Ira's affordability recognizes the lack of employment and educational opportunities and public transit service in Ira, necessitating an additional cost of travel by vehicle to these.

The 2014 *Out of Reach* report by the National Low Income Housing Coalition shows that the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Rutland County is \$825. This requires an hourly wage of at least \$15.87, or an annual income of \$33,000.² A household would need to work 1.8 full-time minimum wage jobs to afford that two-bedroom apartment. In Ira, the 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate showed that the median income for renter households was \$33,750 (compared to the Rutland County median of \$27,131). While rental units are generally more affordable in Ira, an accurate count of the number of rental units and their availability is lacking, and the number of units may not be able to accommodate the elderly and low-income households looking for smaller, less expensive living situations.

Homeownership in Vermont is also difficult for many credit-worthy households due to the high up-front costs of purchasing a home and the increase in median home values in recent years. The median monthly cost for homeowners with a mortgage was \$1,200, and 25% of Ira homeowners spend at least 30% of their household income on housing costs. Median home values in Ira rose from \$102,500 in 2000 to \$180,800 in 2007-2011 (American Community Survey). The current median home value is unaffordable to a household earning the regional median income of \$48,968. However, Ira's buying power has increased disproportionately in the past decade, with the median household income rising from \$46,875 to \$65,417, or 40%.³ This means that either higher income people live or moved to Ira and lower income people have either relocated or choose not to live in Ira.

An analysis of Ira's situation indicates that the need for different housing types is increasing—the number of elderly householders living alone (4.7% of all households) and single parent households (6.4% of all households) are increasing, and overall household size is decreasing. These trends affect affordability as well.

² A unit is considered affordable if rent plus utilities cost no more than 30% of the renter's income.

³ Source: US Census 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Ira, like every community in the Region, is home to low-income households for whom affordability is especially difficult. The majority of these households are comprised of young adults or elderly community members, indicating the need for housing types that fit the unique needs of these groups.

The Town recognizes the need for, and the demands placed upon, affordable housing for all income groups. Two area agencies provide services that assist in the acquisition and/or rehabilitation of residential units for affordable housing. NeighborWorks of Western Vermont is located in West Rutland, and the Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council has an office in Rutland. The Town supports the assistance provided by these organizations, and encourages homeowners and prospective homeowners to avail themselves fully of their services. There are other State and federal programs that address rehabilitation of existing residential units.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

	2000	2007-2011	% Change
Median Household Income			
Ira	\$46,875	\$60,000	28%
Rutland County	\$36,743	\$48,190	31%
Median Home Value			
Ira	\$102,500	\$180,800	76%
Rutland County	\$97,200	\$175,200	80%
Affordable Home Value⁴			
Rutland County	\$73,485	\$96,380	31%
Affordable Monthly Costs (Rent or Mortgage)⁵			
Rutland County	\$735	\$964	31%

Source: US Census 2000 and 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, income figures not adjusted for inflation

Housing and Land Use

In Ira, housing and overall land use are closely linked. Most of the development is residential structures. Given Ira's character, future construction in the community is likely to follow this pattern. It is therefore important to consider the impacts of new single family housing on the Town's overall landscape. As the Town's remaining farms continue to be divided into smaller, residential parcels, the need for an overall strategy for maintaining the Town's resources and uses is apparent. The Future Land Use element examines this issue in greater detail.

Future Housing Needs

Because of Ira's position as an outlying town, many households seeking to move into the area have the ability to look for less expensive housing in neighboring towns if Ira's housing is not affordable. The housing need in Ira is driven by the need for a diverse range of housing to accommodate present residents and those households that specifically wish to reside in Ira.

⁴ This value obtained by multiplying 80% of the county median income by 2.5.

⁵ This value obtained by multiplying 80% of the county median monthly income by 30%, the standard affordability formula.

Ira's population is not likely to grow significantly in the next ten years. Between 2000 and 2010, the Town saw its population decrease by 5% from 455 to 432. This is not to suggest that there is no demand for housing, at an affordable rate, among Ira residents—especially given that the number of households is increasing as household sizes become smaller. This means that small single family and multi-family units, as well as rental units, will be needed to accommodate a changing population.

Much of the slow housing and population growth over the past decade can be attributed to the lack of land suitable for development given the topography and soil for septic systems. Recent changes in the statewide water supply and wastewater rules, however, combined with Vermont's increasing popularity as a residential environment suggest that there may be an increased demand for new housing.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

Safe, decent and affordable housing shall be available in a variety of types that meets the needs of diverse social and income groups.

Objective

Maintain a diverse mix of housing options available to the complete spectrum of household incomes and household types.

Objective

Encourage construction of new and/or rehabilitated housing in appropriate locations, in particular located conveniently to transportation networks.

Objective

Cooperate with not-for-profit housing organizations, government agencies, private lenders, developers and builders in pursuing options and meeting the housing needs of local residents.

Goal

Households with individuals with special housing needs, including the elderly, those with physical or mental disabilities, single parent households, as well as low and moderate-income households are able to attain suitable and affordable housing.

Objective

Encourage accessory apartments within or attached to single-family residences.

Objective

Encourage improved access for all housing types to appropriate services.

Goal

Maintain and promote the historic character and development pattern of housing in Ira.

Objective

Encourage home ownership and property upkeep efforts of Ira residents.

Objective

Ensure that new and rehabilitated housing is constructed to meet safety and sanitary minimum standards.

Housing Implementation Strategies

The following strategies suggest ways that Ira's housing goals and objectives should be implemented. The Town should:

Encourage the preservation and rehabilitation of the Town's existing housing stock by various measures, including supporting applications for grants.

Increase public awareness of the Town's affordable housing needs and policies making information on various assistance programs available and by offering technical assistance to those in need.

The Town should work with non-profit agencies to pursue low interest rehabilitation loans for affordable housing units:

Whenever housing units are offered for sale, bring the offers to the attention of non-profit housing organizations such as the Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council or Rutland County Community Land Trust. These organizations can look into the possibility of acquiring these housing units and thereby ensure they will remain affordable and in sound condition.

Ensure that Town regulations actively support the rehabilitation and construction of moderately priced housing that maintains and enhances the Town's character. Tools may include

- Encouraging development to take place in a clustered form
- Permitting the conversion of larger homes and structures to multi-family housing where feasible under septic laws.

Identify units that can be rehabilitated to meet some or all of the unmet needs.

Natural Resources

Ira is located at the northern edge of the Taconic Mountain Range, which greatly influences its landscape. Much of the Town consists of steep, rugged terrain that ranges in approximate elevation from nearly 3,000 feet to less than 500. Ira's waterbodies, roadways and development occur in the few lowland valleys in Town. The natural communities that develop in a region are highly influenced by underlying geological and topographical characteristics. From the summit of Herrick Mountain to the floodplains of the Castleton River, many varied natural ecosystems such as mixed hardwood forests, high elevation spruce-dominated forests and wetlands are supported.

Topography

The Town of Ira is dominated by the northern edge of the Taconic Mountain Range. The steep and rugged terrain of the Taconic Mountains characterizes most of Ira's landscape. Approximately sixty five percent of the land in Ira has a slope exceeding fifteen percent. This is the maximum slope allowed under State subdivision laws for residential construction on tracts less than ten acres in size. Approximately twenty percent of the land in Ira has a slope between eight percent and fifteen percent, while about fifteen percent of the land has a slope of less than eight percent. Most of the existing residences in Ira are located in areas with slopes less than eight percent, and there are very few located in areas where the slope exceeds fifteen percent. Herrick Mountain and several neighboring peaks exceed 2,500 feet in elevation, and are therefore subject to the State's land use law, Act 250.

Elevations range from 2,726 feet at the summit of Herrick Mountain to 480 feet along the Castleton River. There are only two lowland areas in Ira, through which the two major stream systems flow. Ira's waterways, namely the Castleton River, paralleling Route 4 near the northern boundary of the Town, and Ira Brook, paralleling Route 133 along the eastern edge of Town are the only significant surface waters in Town. The Town consists of 14,400 acres and is approximately ten miles long by four and one-half miles at its widest point.

Geologically, most of the rocks belong to the Taconic Sequence, which consist largely of slate and phyllite with only minor limestone intrusions. Only in the southeastern portion of the Town do rocks of the Valley Sequence occur. These rocks are either siliceous or graphitic phyllite with frequently occurring limestone beds. Although rocks of the Taconic Sequence are considered to be older than those of the Valley Sequence, they generally overlie the younger rocks.

Much of Ira is mixed hardwood forest, largely dominated by sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), and at the drier sites by oak-hophornbeam forest with red oak (*Quercus rubra*) and hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) the co-dominants. At the higher elevations, red spruce (*Picea rubra*) becomes an important component of the canopy. Wetlands are largely restricted to the two major stream systems in Town. Although no floodplain forest remains, the area along the Castleton River supports a large wetland consisting of shrub and emergent zones. There are few wetlands remaining along Ira Brook.

Soils

Ira is made up of many different soil types, and the different qualities associated with each directly affect the capabilities and possibilities of the landscape to support varying uses. The most common soils in Town are generally unsuited for agriculture or development due to a shallow depth to bedrock, steep slopes and prevalent rock outcroppings. Other soils, found at the foothills of the Taconics are suitable for crops, pasture, and in areas characterized by glacial till, development is also appropriate.

There are four general soil associations found in Ira. The most prevalent, the Taconic-Macomber-Hubbardton Association is found on mountains, hills and ridges overlaying slate and schist bedrock. This soil association is common to areas with 15 to 50 percent slope and is generally unsuited for hay, pasture and cultivated crops because of slope, rock outcroppings and a very low available water table. The slope and depth to bedrock are also limitations on sites for sewage disposal systems, dwellings with basements and local roads and streets.

The Dutchess-Bomoseen-Pittstown Association occurs along Ira's side slopes and foot slopes. The steeper areas where this soil association occurs are often wooded. These soils occurring at the foot slopes are suitable for cultivated crops and pasture. Slow to very slow permeability and seasonally high water tables at the base of hills limits sewage disposal capacity.

The Paxton-Georgia-Amenia Association occurs sparingly in Ira, and can be found in the east central part of Town. These soils are moderately well drained on glacial till plains, foot slopes and side slopes of hills and mountains and have formed in glacial till. Gently sloping areas have few development limitations, while depressed areas are limited by the seasonally high water table and slow permeability.

The Hinckley-Warwick-Windsor Association accounts for a small area in the northern part of Ira running parallel to Route 4. These soils are generally gently sloping and very deep. On slopes, this soil association is often excessively drained and has a poor filtering capacity, limiting onsite sewage disposal. In depressions and low areas near streams, this association is very poorly drained. These soils are generally suited to cultivated crops and to hay and pasture.

Agriculture Resources

Agriculture is an important economic activity; one that permits the production, manufacture, and distribution of a wide range of locally produced farm commodities. Agriculture is also the foundation of highly valued rural lifestyle and a significant factor in the appearance of the Vermont landscape.

"Prime" agricultural soils have a high agricultural potential and are considered by the Soil Conservation Service to be of national importance. "Prime soils have the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods"(Agricultural Value Groups for Soils, Rutland County, Vermont. p. 12). Prime agricultural soils make up only 6% or 750 acres of Ira's landscape.

A second grouping of agricultural soils are classified as "statewide agricultural soils" and have

good potential for growing crops, but have one or more limitations which restrict the choice of crops. They require more intensive management than prime soils. Statewide agricultural soils constitute about the same acreage - 755 - also 6 percent of the total land.

Because few tracts of land in the Town consist entirely of Prime or Statewide soils, most farms must also rely on lower quality soils to support their operations. Marginal agricultural soils make up a considerable area of grazing lands and pasture, which are of particular importance to dairy farmers. Lands consisting of marginal agricultural soils are also used for farm woodlots and sugaring.

In addition to soils, other factors influencing how well land will support agriculture are land use, parcel size, slope, and access. To the benefit of agriculture, little land in Ira is developed, although steeply sloped land and land with poor access both limit the viability of agriculture throughout much of Ira.

Forests

Local forests provide benefits as farm woodlots, sugar bushes, recreation areas, and wildlife habitats, as well as being a resource for the forest product and fuel-wood industries. The extent of high quality forest soils is modest and scattered throughout the Town, occupying only 3034 acres or 22 percent of the Town's 13,634-acre land base. Many soils classified as high agricultural potential also have high potential for forestry. Many of the physical and chemical characteristics that make land productive for annual crops are also desirable for tree growth.

Factors affecting the capability of land to provide forest-related values include: parcel size; contiguous acreage; attractive natural features; accessibility; and land use, the presence of unique habitats; size and distribution of forest openings; and the presence of wildlife food sources.

While Vermont is 80% forested, forest fragmentation is a growing concern throughout the state. The overall number of parcels in Vermont has been increasing and the amount of undeveloped large forest parcels is decreasing. It generally starts with the division of a parcel into two or more smaller lots, which leads to more parcel owners, new housing, and infrastructure development—ultimately fragmenting the landscape. Fragmentation may not be noticeable on a day-to-day basis, but it nonetheless has a lasting impact on the ecological and economic viability of forests.

Mineral Resources

The extraction and processing of mineral resources is also a significant economic activity in Vermont and Rutland County, although one which has only a minor presence in Ira.

Although no formal mapping or inventory has been undertaken, some sources of sand and gravel are likely to exist in Ira, as well as sources of aggregate (crushed rock). Potential sand sources make up just over one half of one percent (0.7) of the Town's total land area. Seven percent (7.0%) of the Town's total land area consists of potential sand and gravel sources. In many cases the same land area is also prime agricultural soils. None is in use today, but there was a gravel pit located where the development at Sunrise Place is now located, and gravel has been excavated from a small site on the north side of the West Road west of the bridge.

Commercial sand and gravel excavation from streambeds is now prohibited by State law.

Statewide, sand and gravel resources are increasingly in short supply. Certain grades of gravel such as that used in leach fields for subsurface sewage disposal systems and for some types of sub-base in roads are particularly in short supply. The Town of Ira purchases sand and “shur-pack” for its roads, annually. The Town should identify potential sources of material not in Ira’s Highland Conservation District which are of sufficient quality, and for which the impacts of extraction can be successfully mitigated.

Conflicts concerning the impact of trucks, crushing operations, and other nuisances are more likely when a significant gravel deposit is surrounded by residential uses. Because sand and gravel operations frequently extract material within a few feet of the water table, concerns are raised about the potential impact of fuel spills, compaction, and degradation of groundwater aquifers.

Wildlife Habitats

The benefits provided by wildlife habitats and other natural and fragile areas are numerous. They contribute to the economy by attracting travelers, recreation seekers, and wildlife admirers as well as add to the community's character and sense of place. Ira’s varied landscape is host to many different wildlife communities. The highland areas of the Town contain “fragile areas,” identified by the Nongame and Natural Heritage Program of the Vermont Department of Fish and Game. The continued presence of Ira’s many plant and animal communities is directly related to the health of the ecosystems upon which they are dependent. Therefore, decisions regarding use of the land should consider the impact on these natural resources.

Wildlife habitats and other natural and fragile areas are mapped by the state and include deer wintering areas, bear habitat, migratory staging areas for waterfowl, fisheries, and sites of rare plants and animals. A number of these features are depicted on Ira’s Natural Resource Map. There are ten mapped deer wintering areas in the Town, located primarily in the northern and southern parts of the community. The deeryards are predominately located in areas of low, south facing slopes and along watercourses. They cover 1,619 acres, or twelve percent of the Town’s land area. Vermont is near the northern limit of white-tailed deer range in North America, and adequate food and shelter must be available if deer are to survive the deep snows and cold temperatures.

The Nongame and Natural Heritage Program of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife conducted a comprehensive assessment of rare and endangered species and habitats in western Rutland County in 1991. This effort resulted in an inventory being provided to the Town, which identified areas in Ira deemed to be of State and local significance. Six fragile areas in Ira were identified, all of which lie in the Highland Conservation District. Several of these areas are located on private lands, and while the areas are not subject to Town regulation, it is the Town’s policy that future development should not disturb such areas and/or species.

A significant type of wildlife habitat is large intact forested tracts capable of supporting larger mammals and wildlife corridors. A wildlife corridor is an area of land used by wildlife to travel

from one large block of habitat to another. In our area, the two blocks are the Green/Taconic Mountains and the Adirondacks, with a number of smaller “stepping stones” in between. While most animals do not cover the entire distance between the mountain ranges, maintaining a continuous network of habitat from one to the other allows for genetic flow between animal populations and lets individuals range as far as they need.

The State of Vermont, through the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), owns undeveloped lands located near Birdseye Mountain (the Bird Mountain Wildlife Management Area or WMA) and north of Route 4 (the Blueberry Hill WMA). In 2013, two large parcels of undeveloped lands located near Birdseye Mountain were acquired by The Conservation Fund, and are to be acquired by DFW by 2015 as part of the State’s long term plan to conserve lands that it regards as important to a north-south corridor for wildlife. These conserved lands are to be kept open for access by the public for hiking, hunting, fishing and other activities that do not include motorized vehicles. The State recognized the greater Herrick Mountain area as a rare and irreplaceable natural area (RINA) in 2010, and its expansion of the Bird Mountain WMA will serve to protect the RINA in harmony with the town plan.

Water Resources

Ira has limited water resources. The lack of significant surface waters in the form of ponds, wetlands, streams and rivers, coupled with a low water table in much of the Town, directly affects the capabilities of the land to support development. Ira Brook, which flows north through the southern half of Town, and the Castleton River located in North Ira, are the two rivers in Town and account for the majority of wetlands indicated on the Town's land use map. The Town of West Rutland has a municipal forest of several hundred acres located in a remote area off Clark Hill Road. This tract of land serves as the primary watershed for that community's municipal water system. The topography in Ira is such that the mountainous and mostly wooded areas in the outlying areas of Town serve to channel precipitation, in the form of runoff, to the settled regions in Town, which are dependent upon such water for residential uses.

Watersheds

A watershed is a distinct, topographically defined land area that drains into a single river, river system, or standing body of water. Because smaller tributaries join to become larger rivers, many watersheds may be considered "subwatersheds" of larger watersheds. As one would expect, the activities taking place in a watershed play a critical role in the quality of the water draining from it.

The Town is within three much larger watersheds. The northeastern corner of the Town lies in the Castleton River watershed; the majority of the rest of the Town lies in the Otter Creek Watershed; a small southwestern corner lies in the Poultney River Watershed.

Rivers and Streams and their Corridors

In Ira, significant rivers and streams include the Castleton River paralleling Route 4 near the northern boundary and Ira Brook paralleling Route 133.

The benefits provided by rivers and streams and their corridors are quite diverse. Historically, rivers and streams have served as important power sources and routes of transportation.

Other values commonly associated with rivers and streams and their corridors include recreation and wildlife habitat.

All surface waters in Vermont are categorized for management purposes (Class A or B), and the degree to which a body of water actually meets the objectives established by its classification is evaluated on an ongoing basis by the Agency of Natural Resources.

Both the Castleton River and the Ira Brook are categorized as Class B waters as they pass through Ira, and have management goals that include good aesthetic values, contact and non-contact recreation, public water supply, irrigation, and other agricultural uses.

Ira's water systems could be affected by a number of degrading factors such as nutrients, siltation, organic enrichment, thermal pollution, pathogens, and habitat alteration. Given the agricultural nature of the area, the production of crops could impact water quality.

Wetlands

Wetlands are land areas that are saturated with water at least part of the year. Although precise definitions vary, wetlands are normally identifiable by vegetation, soil type, and/or frequency of ponding. Wetlands include marshes, swamps, sloughs, fens, mud flats, and bogs. In addition to providing important wildlife habitat, functions of wetlands include storing stormwater, purifying surface and groundwater supplies, recharging aquifers, controlling erosion, providing areas for recreation, and serving as education and research areas. Wetlands play critical roles in the reproductive cycle of many threatened species. Wetlands support plants that can help purify water by taking up nutrients and incorporating them into plant materials while releasing oxygen.

Wetlands in Ira are not extensive, although some specific sites are noteworthy. The area occupied by wetlands, as identified by the National Wetlands Inventory, is just under 100 acres, or 0.7 percent of Ira's land mass. The National Wetlands Inventory assesses the degree to which wetlands are being lost on a national basis. Because this inventory is based on aerial photography, some areas that would qualify as wetlands under State or Federal law may not be included. It has been estimated that as many as 20 to 30 percent of the State's wetlands are not included in the inventory.

The majority of Ira's wetlands are found along the Castleton River in the northern part of Town and on the Ira Brook.

There are three basic categories of freshwater wetlands. The first two categories are deepwater wetlands that include rivers, lakes, and ponds. The third category - palustrine - includes swampy and marshy areas. The majority of wetlands in Ira are of the palustrine variety.

Like other water resources, wetlands have been classified for management purposes by the state of Vermont. At the current time, all of the wetlands in Ira are Class Two. The Vermont Wetland Rules of 1990 established three classes of wetlands. Class one and class two wetlands are "significant" to the State and are protected by the state's rules.

According to the Vermont Wetland Rules, class one wetlands are wetlands considered to be

"exceptional or irreplaceable in their contributions to Vermont's natural heritage." The majority of wetlands mapped by the National Wetlands Inventory are designated by the State of Vermont as class two wetlands. Class two wetlands are less significant to the state as a whole and, when located near development, must be protected by a buffer zone of fifty feet rather than 100 feet.

State wetland rules control development in wetlands rather than prohibit it outright. Farming and forestry uses, "soft" recreation, utility poles, and incidental residential uses are allowed as long as the outlet of the wetland or its pattern of flow is not altered and dredge and fill restrictions are met. Federal law also governs the use of wetlands. Federal regulations are different from state regulations and are primarily implemented through the Federal Clean Water Act. The Clean Water Act regulates dredging and filling of all public waters, which include the nation's wetlands.

The majority of threats to wetlands come from development--be it agricultural, residential, commercial, or transportation related.

The 2002 Farm Bill's Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts. The NRCS goal is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. This program offers landowners an opportunity to establish long-term conservation and wildlife practices and protection.

Groundwater

Groundwater is a critical resource for Ira, as most residences, farms, and businesses depend on private wells drilled into underground aquifers. Aquifers are recharged through the infiltration of surface water. Pollutants introduced into areas of influence surrounding wells can contaminate the groundwater used in residences. In Ira, the limited amount of groundwater has direct development implications.

The main reasons for planning for groundwater are to protect the health of area residents and insure adequate supplies of water for the future. Without clean groundwater supplies, the community could incur significant costs in terms of health and/or in locating alternative supplies.

To understand and plan for groundwater, it is helpful to recognize that groundwater is a part of the hydrologic cycle (which involves the continual movement of water between the earth and the atmosphere). Groundwater is water that has infiltrated into the soil and filled the pores and spaces in sand, gravel, or rock. The areas where groundwater is stored are referred to as aquifers. An aquifer is a geologic formation containing enough water to yield significant quantities to wells and spring. Places where groundwater is replenished by surface waters are known as recharge areas. Water moves from the recharge areas through the aquifer and out at discharge areas such as streams. Groundwater is drawn from aquifers through wells. Areas surrounding wells are areas of influence. In some situations (such as when a well from an aquifer serves a public water supply), the entire area surrounding an aquifer and having an

influence on the quality of water in it is known as a wellhead protection area.

In general, there are two kinds of aquifers, unconsolidated and consolidated. Unconsolidated aquifers are mainly composed of materials such as sand and gravel. The coarse texture of these deposits typically allows for storage of large volumes of groundwater. Consolidated aquifers, also known as bedrock aquifers, are composed of fractured rock. These aquifers differ from unconsolidated aquifers because there are no spaces between individual grains of rock materials to store and transmit water. Instead, water is stored and transmitted in the fractures, joints, or faults in the rock.

Like other water resources, groundwater aquifers have also been classified for management purposes by the state of Vermont. According to the system used by the state, aquifers are assigned to one of four classes (I, II, III, or IV), which are based on existing and potential use as well as risk of exposure to contamination.

Class I aquifers are aquifers suitable for public water supply, with uniformly excellent character and no exposure to activities posing a risk to current or potential use as a public water supply. Class II aquifers are suitable for public water supply and have uniformly excellent character but are exposed to activities that pose a risk to current or potential use as a public water supply. Aquifers suitable as a source of water for individual domestic water supply, irrigation, agricultural use, and general commercial and industrial use are designated Class III aquifers. Class IV aquifers are not suitable as sources of potable water but are suitable for some agricultural, industrial, and commercial use.

All aquifers are initially classified as Class III aquifers. Individual aquifers may then be reclassified to prohibit activities or recognize influences within the area that threaten or affect its quality.

Scenic Resources

In the course of planning for Ira's future, it is important that the presence of high quality open space and scenic resources, broad scenic areas as well as scenic landmarks, are recognized and the integrity of such resources preserved. Scenic resources have aesthetic, historical and economic value. Siting of future construction, community facilities and infrastructure should always consider the potential impact on the aesthetic, as well as the physical health of the community. Wherever possible, development should be located and tailored to preserve the undisturbed integrity of Ira's quality scenic and open space resources. The undeveloped mountain peaks and ridgelines in Ira's Highland Conservation District, especially those close to municipal boundaries and described in the appendix to the Plan, define and frame the Town. They are prominent physical features which make up much of the Town's land mass and unique character, and are visible from many communities in the region. They provide the backdrop for a very rural and sparsely settled community that has no commercial land use and is therefore quite peaceful.

Scenic resources have aesthetic, historical and economic value, enhancing the quality of life of Ira's residents. There are many pleasing views and vistas available to travelers on the Town's existing highways. Route 133 extends lengthwise through Ira valley, which contains a large portion of the Town's open and agricultural low lands; the southern portion of the valley is flanked by steep, wooded ridges to the east and west. To the east is the ridge running along

the boundary with Clarendon, which includes Susie's Peak. To the west is Train Brook Ridge running along the boundary with Middletown Springs. The West Road also provides travelers with pleasing views of other working farms, yet from generally higher elevations, and in some places, with long-range views across neighboring towns to Killington, Pico and Shrewsbury peaks.

The Ira Birdseye Road in North Ira also affords travelers with excellent views of the steep mountains that flank that portion of Town. To the east is a long ridge extending from near Spruce Knob at the south end (where the boundaries of Ira, Poultney and Middletown Springs intersect) to Route 4A at the north end, which includes Herrick Mountain and the peak of Ben=s Slide. The undeveloped ridgelines lying along Ira's boundaries with Clarendon and Poultney are prominent viewsheds visible from many municipalities in Rutland County.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1

Protect and preserve the natural features in Ira, particularly the areas of high elevation, and promote land uses appropriate to the natural character of the land.

Objective

Keep the rugged and poorly accessible mountain and forest areas free from development and reserved for forestry and other suitable uses.

Objective

Further identify and map areas of particular scenic and ecological importance to the community and the environment.

Objective

Maintain or improve surface water quality to protect drinking water, aquatic habitat, and recreation.

Objective

Encourage pollution abatement in the Town's water sources.

Objective

Activities that are potential sources of non-point pollution, including but not limited to agriculture and silviculture, should be conducted as follows:

- (a) Logging practices should follow Acceptable Management Practices developed by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources or other practices recognized by public agencies or professional associations.
- (b) Agricultural activities should follow Best Management Practices for Agriculture.

Objective

Encourage development which will minimize run-off in vulnerable areas.

Objective

Continue to support the road crew in employing gravel road maintenance techniques that prevent soil erosion and road surface deterioration.

Goal 2

Maintain and enhance the quality of ground water resources and their resource protection areas from adverse development.

Objective

Encourage on-site sewage disposal systems to be installed in appropriate areas.

Objective

Land use activities, which potentially threaten ground water quality, should be carefully studied to prevent undue loss of groundwater quality.

Goal 3

Identify and protect all wetlands which provide significant functions and values in such a manner as to achieve no net loss of such wetlands and their functions.

Objective

Significant wetlands and other critical natural communities should be protected from development by encouraging the maintenance of an undisturbed buffer strip of naturally vegetated upland at least 50 feet in width around the edge and by preventing runoff and direct discharge into wetlands.

Objective

Encourage areas with rare, threatened, and endangered species to be protected to the greatest extent possible.

Objective

Encourage landowners to develop their property in a manner that retains the greatest possible amount of prime agricultural land for traditional uses.

Objective

Maintain agriculture and forestry as viable industries in Ira.

Flood Resilience

Flood events are Vermont's most frequent and costly type of natural disaster. There are two types of flooding that impact communities in Vermont: inundation and flash flooding. Inundation is when water rises onto low lying land. Flash flooding is a sudden, violent flood which often entails fluvial erosion (stream bank erosion). The combination of flash flooding and fluvial erosion cause the most flood-related damage in the state. According to the Vermont Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, with Tropical Storm Irene alone, the state incurred costs of more than \$850 million. Prior to and since Irene, Vermont has experienced more frequent and severe flooding and will likely continue to in the future.

Climate change will likely exacerbate flooding in Vermont. According to the Vermont Climate Assessment (2014), precipitation has and will continue to increase, particularly in the winter months. Since 1960, average annual precipitation has increased 5.9 inches; almost half (48%) of this change in rainfall has occurred since 1990. Because precipitation will likely occur in shorter, more intense bursts, it will likely produce precipitation that runs off the land rather than filters into it. Records across Vermont show that "flashy flows" are increasingly common in Vermont rivers.⁶ Also, the expected increase in precipitation during the winter may lead to added snowmelt and flooding in the spring.⁷

Mapping Flood Hazard Areas

To meet the new state requirement of identifying flood hazard and fluvial erosion areas and designating areas to be protected, maps are an essential aid. Because the methods of mapping inundation and fluvial erosion corridors differ significantly, river corridor maps are a critical addition to existing flood hazard maps.

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) was created by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to address inundation hazards. Flood insurance rates are based on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) or Digital Flood insurance Rate Maps (DFIRMs) which delineate areas of the floodplain likely to be inundated during a flood. These are identified as a Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) or with a 1% annual chance of flooding (100 year flood). Town participation in NFIP is voluntary. However, in Vermont, two thirds of flood damages occur outside of federally mapped flood areas.

Vermont's River Corridor and Floodplain Management Program, developed by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR), delineates areas subject to fluvial erosion. River corridor maps are designed with the recognition that rivers are not static. A certain amount of erosion is natural when it rains because of the town's relatively steep terrain and frequent storms. Development in the river corridor and stream channel engineering over time have increased channel instability. While these management practices may create the illusion of stability, these engineered channels when tested by a high flow, such as a flood, cannot be maintained.

⁶ Galford, Gillian et al. *Vermont Climate Assessment*. Burlington: Gund Institute for Ecological Economics and the Rubenstein School for Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont, 2014.

⁷ Betts, A.K., *Climate Change in Vermont*. Atmospheric Research Report, prepared for Agency of Natural Resources, State of Vermont, 2011.

Special mapping and geomorphic assessments can identify fluvial erosion hazard areas along rivers, more comprehensively defining high hazard areas.

Two rivers in Ira have undergone Stream Geomorphic Assessment (SGA); Gully Brook and Ira Brook. In the case of Gully Brook, a River Corridor Management Plan has been developed for the Castleton River. These studies and plans are vital in determining river and stream alterations, which affect water flows and could potentially lead to future flood damage. Unmapped River Corridors/Fluvial Erosion Hazard (FEH) Areas of the Town of Ira should be included in this Town Plan as they become available.

History of Flooding

The Local Hazard Mitigation Plan details the town's flooding as follows. The frequency of extreme weather events fluctuates from year to year. In the past Ira has experienced bad flooding at least once every 3 or 4 years. In January of 1996, countywide flooding resulted in a federally declared disaster that caused \$3,641 in damages in Ira. In December of 2000 another declared disaster due to flooding caused 19,336 in damages in Ira. More recently Tropical Storm Irene devastated Vermont in late August of 2011, and the town received \$49,840 from FEMA due to damages from flooding and fluvial erosion.

Areas most often affected by flooding include:

- Rt. 133—State road, but floods frequently because it follows Ira Brook all the way through the valley.
- Birdseye Road, Weaver Hill Rd., Pyka Rd., West Rd., Goodrich Rd., Toppin Rd.

All of the back roads in Ira are gravel, and most of them are extremely steep in some places. Damages, such as loss of gravel and culverts, are routinely experienced during heavy rain events on the steep areas of these roads. The flooding of the firehouse may have caused cracking of the concrete slab floor. In addition to physical damage to the firehouse, the ability of the fire department to respond to other emergencies could be complicated in the event of flooding. Fire Department aids residents in flooding events by pumping basements.

Rt. 133 near Perry Road could also be damaged in the event of a large flood. While none of the residential structures are within the floodplain, many accessory structures such as garages are. These are at the greatest risk. Some homeowners have seen Ira Brook reach the foundations of the residences as well.

The SGAs and River Corridor Plans for Gully Brook and Ira Brook suggest potential remediation actions that can be taken to reduce the risk of future flood damage, including: planting stream buffers, stabilizing stream banks, removing berms, removing structures and restoring incision areas.

Flood Hazard Area Regulations

The Town's Flood Hazard Area Regulations (adopted 2008) meet requirements for participation in the NFIP. The land use bylaws do not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion by avoiding new development/fill/removal of wetlands in the River Corridor or Special Flood Hazard Area. E-911 mapping from July of 2013 indicates that two structures in Ira are within the SFHA (1% annual chance of flooding) as identified on the Rutland County DFIRM dated 2008.

Local Hazard Mitigation and Emergency Operations Plans

The Ira Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) was adopted in 2004 as an Annex to the Rutland Region All-Hazards Mitigation Plan. Since the plan expires after 5 years, and since the Annex was not updated and re-adopted, the LHMP has expired. The Town should seek resources to prepare, gain FEMA approval, and adopt an LHMP. The LHMP identifies known hazard issues in town and allows the Town to seek FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance funds to reduce current risk levels.

The Town of Ira's Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP) was adopted in May of 2014 and is reviewed annually. The LEOP encourages flood preparedness and identifies a process for response planning.

NFIP Participation

The Town of Ira received a flood hazard boundary map in December of 1974 and joined the National Flood Insurance Program on September 18, 1985. The Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) and Flood Insurance Study were first published in September of 1985. The Rutland County DFIRM became effective in August 2008. The hydrology and hydraulics were updated in the DFIRM.

As of September of 2013, there are two flood insurance policies through the NFIP covering \$189,000 in value for properties in Town. Flood insurance is available for any structure in town regardless of previous losses or location. The cost of flood insurance premiums rises in areas identified at a high-risk level.

Lands that Minimize Flooding

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

Because impervious surfaces prevent the infiltration of water into the soil, these man-made surfaces exacerbate flooding by increasing the amount and velocity of stormwater runoff, particularly in areas where these surfaces are prevalent. For more connections between watershed resources and flooding, refer to the Natural Resources section.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

The citizens, property and economy, and the quality of the Town's natural resources are protected by using sound planning practices to address flood risks.

Goal

The Town is able to recover from flooding quickly and in a manner that improves flood resilience.

Goal

Development in the Town occurs in a manner that does not worsen flooding, and natural river functions are restored.

Objectives

Study River Corridors

To identify areas subject to normal channel erosion processes and avoid loss of floodplain functions, the Town should seek a geomorphic assessment of the Ira Brook and Castleton River to secure River Corridor Plans and River Corridor (FEH) delineations. The assessments should also collect data on the geomorphic compatibility of stream crossing structures.

Study Setbacks and Buffers

In the absence of field-based river corridor assessments, the community will use setback and buffer standards to address hazards, water quality, and habitat impacts using Vermont DEC setback recommendations. Keeping structures 50 feet back from the top of stream banks is the recommended state minimum.

Identify wetlands

Work to develop more consistent, accurate and thorough identification of wetlands areas through the use of best available data and the adoption of local wetlands regulations and updated maps.

Enhance flood hazard regulations to protect wetlands.

- Require all wetlands which provide flood storage functions remain undeveloped or have compensatory storage constructed so as to achieve no net loss and, for the long term, restore and enhance additional wetlands to improve town's flood resilience.
- Prohibit structural development or intensive land uses in Class I or Class II wetlands unless there is an overriding public interest.

Identify other lands to prevent flooding

- Maintain vegetated buffer strips in riparian zones surrounding streams and rivers.
- Maintain upland forests and watersheds for predominately forest use.
- Require new development to preserve vegetated riparian buffer zones that are consistent with state riparian buffer guidelines.

Restore natural river functions

Work with RRPC, ANR, towns and landowners to lessen flood risk by reconnecting river channels to historic floodplains through berm or dam removal or intentional lowering of stream banks.

Discourage new fill, construction and infrastructure in flood hazard and fluvial erosion areas.

- Prohibit new buildings within river corridors.
- Require all new buildings, other than accessory structures, in mapped flood areas, to have the lowest floor at least one foot above base flood elevation.

- Consider moving or abandoning roads in flood areas when there are more cost effective solutions or other routes.
- Only rebuild/install culverts and bridges that are designed at least to VTrans Hydraulics Manual and ANR Stream Alteration Standards.
- Emergency services, wastewater treatment plants, power substations, and municipal buildings shall not be built in special flood hazard areas unless flood-proofed or elevated to at least two feet above the base flood elevation and designed to withstand erosion risk.
- Adopt road and bridge standards to the 50 or 100-year storm level for identified critical transportation routes.
- Work with VTrans for advocating for and improving the flood capabilities of state or town-owned transportation infrastructure.

Reduce percentage of impervious surfaces

Limit the number of rooftops and pavement, by using permeable surface materials, employing disconnection practices, by implementing Low Impact Development (LID) principles, and other methods to increase stormwater retention and infiltration.

Identify all flood areas

Areas not designated in FEMA's maps or in VT's ANR's maps, but which are flooded during a weather event, should be added to local flood regulations.

Update Flood Hazard Regulations

Update flood hazard area and river corridor standards to meet standards in the current Vermont flood hazard area regulation model #4. The Town should work with the RRPC to update its flood hazard regulations and secure geomorphic assessments and River Corridor data.

Augment municipal plans and zoning bylaws to reduce stormwater runoff volumes and velocity that can increase flood damage

Encourage green infrastructure techniques in stormwater regulations

Explore funding sources for stormwater management such as a stormwater utility

Consider regional watershed stormwater management with other area jurisdictions

Explore the removal or renovation of structures in flood areas

Existing homes and businesses at serious risk of flood damage should be identified and prioritized by the town for mitigation actions such as elevation/relocation or purchase and demolition.

Flood Damage Mitigation for Historic Structures

Establish clear guidelines to promote appropriate flood mitigation for historic structures in the Special Flood Hazard Area.

Hazard Mitigation Planning

Recruit and support a community committee to pursue flood hazard mitigation efforts.

Emergency Operations Planning

- Develop and maintain a Local Emergency Operations Plan annually.
- Work with first responders and the highway department to plan improved emergency response capacity (operations, training, and equipment) during natural disasters as identified in the Local Emergency Operations Plan.

Education

Establish and sustain a flood hazard area education and outreach effort to support flood damage mitigation and better insure community residents and property for future flood damage.

Economic Development

Economic development is a critical component of a town's planning goals. Once the sole province of the private sector, economic development is the process by which the community sets out to improve the climate for retaining old and attracting new businesses that support jobs and sustain tax revenues. Like many other municipalities in Rutland County, Ira derives most of its revenue from the taxation of local property in order to support municipal services. While the town budget is small and the town services are limited, they are no less affected by local, regional and national economics.

Ira, like other Vermont communities, will need to be active in managing economic growth to ensure the future of its tax base and quality of life. Economic growth should be targeted for certain areas of the town and discouraged in others to promote a vibrant village center, maximize existing infrastructure, utilize multi-modal transportation means and preserve the rural, working and forest lands that surround the town.

Agriculture

Agriculture is not only an important economic activity in Vermont, but is also the foundation of a highly valued rural lifestyle. The town has one dairy farm in operation. While Ira lacks continuous tracts of land capable of supporting much agriculture, soils classified as "Prime Agricultural Soils" are scattered throughout the Town. Combining the use of these soils with other agriculturally related operations such as grazing livestock or sugaring can help keep agriculture economically viable in Ira. Use of the land for forestry and mineral extraction are other activities that can supplement a farm's income.

The possibility of continuing Ira's traditional working landscape is dependent on factors outside of soil capability. Limiting factors such as highly variable and uncertain commodity prices, the loss of local markets, and the conversion of agricultural land to other uses such as residential development can work against the existence of farming related activities.

Supporting working landscapes means supporting the rural characteristics that help identify Ira. Many programs are available to aid in the continuation of farming. The statewide "Current Use" program helps alleviate undue taxation on large tracts of farmed land. The preparation of an agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) to identify important agricultural properties is another way of highlighting and assessing agricultural capabilities of the Town. The modification of land regulations that limit the ability to subdivide marginal farmlands, and programs that allow the transfer of development rights, can also help protect agricultural resources and Ira's open landscape.

Forestry

In Ira, significant forested lands continue to be logged. A working forest landscape provides goods and services through stewardship, management, and conservation. The forest-based economy includes all of the activities that go into harvesting forest products and turning them into usable products. Managing forests sustainably involves a recognition of the ecological, social, and economic systems necessary to maintain forest health while providing benefits for this and future generations. [Northeast State Foresters Association, 2013]

Sustainable forest management requires long-term commitment, while the economic returns on timber and forest products fluctuate with market conditions and available outlets. This combined with high property taxes can lead many landowners to resort to development in order to finance their continued ownership of working forests. [Vermont Natural Resources Council, 2013]

Maple Sugaring

Production of maple syrup, whether by hobbyists or commercial producers, has always been a part of the working forest landscape in Ira. There are no fewer than ten maple operations in Ira, all of which rely upon maple sap from trees tapped in Ira and several of which involve bringing sap in from neighboring towns. Because output is affected by weather and other variables, accurate numbers are hard to derive, but a fair estimate might be that 4,500 gallons of syrup are produced each year in Ira, with over 12,000 taps in town and the balance in neighboring towns. Hundreds of acres of woodlands in Ira are utilized in sugaring.

Goals and Objectives

1. Encourage development of home occupations and small businesses that do not disrupt neighborhood character;
2. Encourage existing and additional agriculture and working forests;
3. Discourage large scale commercial or industrial development that is inconsistent with the Town's rural and agricultural character; and
4. Support conservation of agricultural and forest lands through current use program, or through efforts of third party entities whose principal functions includes conservation of lands (e.g., Vermont Land Trust)

ENERGY

Introduction

Energy is critical to every aspect of our lives. Most of the energy we use, and have come to rely upon, is derived from “nonrenewable” fossil fuels and, to a lesser extent, nuclear fuels. This energy has been abundant and cheap, but supplies are becoming scarcer and oil, natural gas, coal and uranium ever more expensive to extract. Energy prices have been rising and will continue to rise at an increasing rate; eventually, procuring an adequate supply of these fuels to meet demand at any price will not be feasible. [Bennington Regional Energy Plan]

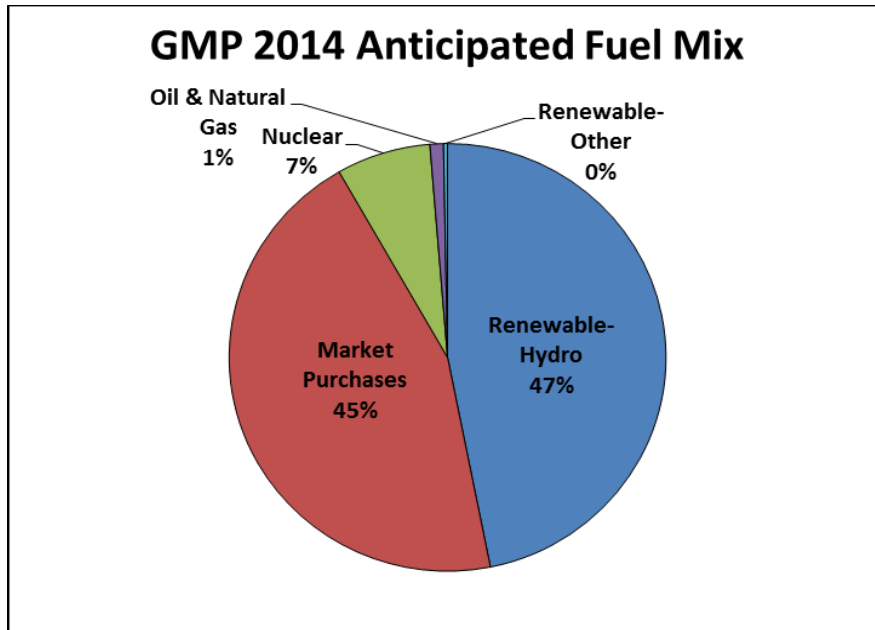
Energy use in the Town of Ira parallels patterns throughout other Vermont communities – the movement of goods and people, heating of buildings, and the lighting of homes, offices, stores, and factories are the primary draws on fuel and energy. While Vermont has the lowest per-capita energy use in the country, rising energy costs and the environmental impacts of energy production have made energy an important issue and a planning priority. The Ira Town Plan shall encourage energy efficiency and conservation, recycling, innovative house siting and design and renewable and alternate power and fuel sources within the Town of Ira and in cooperation with other organizations.

The Rutland Region is a net importer of energy. Electricity and the fuels for heating and transportation (mostly petroleum) overwhelmingly originate outside the Region’s boundaries. Although local sources of electrical generation have increased, and wood plays a growing role in heating buildings, the Region remains reliant on national and international energy delivery systems.

Energy Use: Electricity

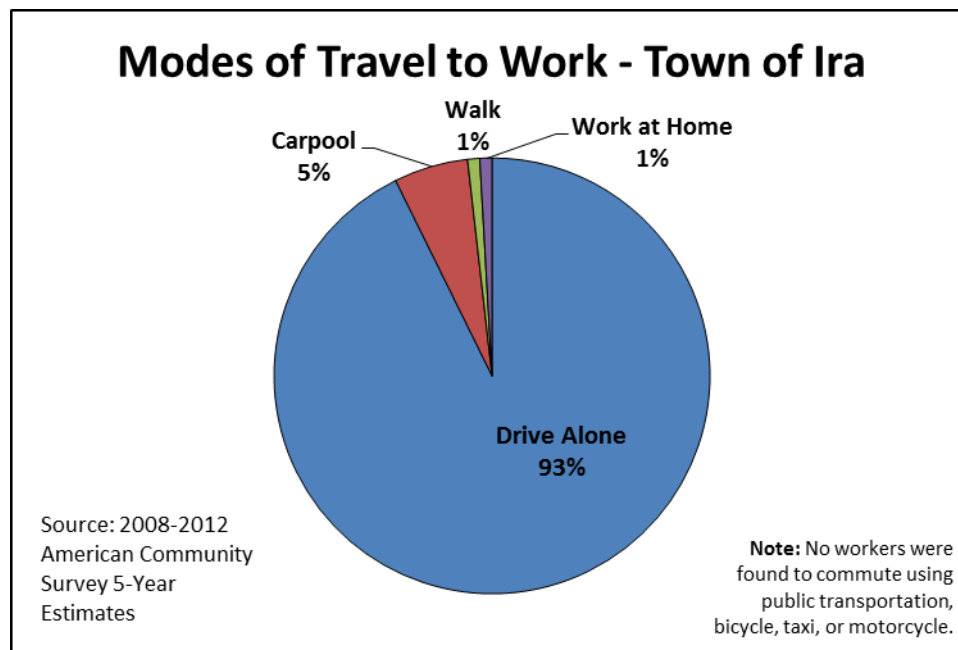
According to the Vermont Department of Public Service, nearly 40% of the energy consumed in Vermont comes from electricity. Electricity accounts for half of all energy use in homes, and for two-thirds of energy use by commercial and industrial customers. Despite increased efficiency of individual appliances, such as refrigerators and televisions, electricity usage has continued to rise.

Green Mountain Power (GMP) serves all grid-connected electric customers in Ira. Central Vermont Public Service (CVPS) previously served the Region before it merged with GMP in 2012. GMP relies not only on its own generation facilities but also on hydroelectric dams, natural gas turbines, nuclear plants, and transmission networks as far away as northern Quebec, Niagara Falls, and the coast of Maine. In the Rutland Region the few large sources of locally generated electricity include hydroelectric dams, solar panels, and small wind turbines. See the Community Facilities and Services section of this plan for information on electricity transmission.



Energy Use: Transportation

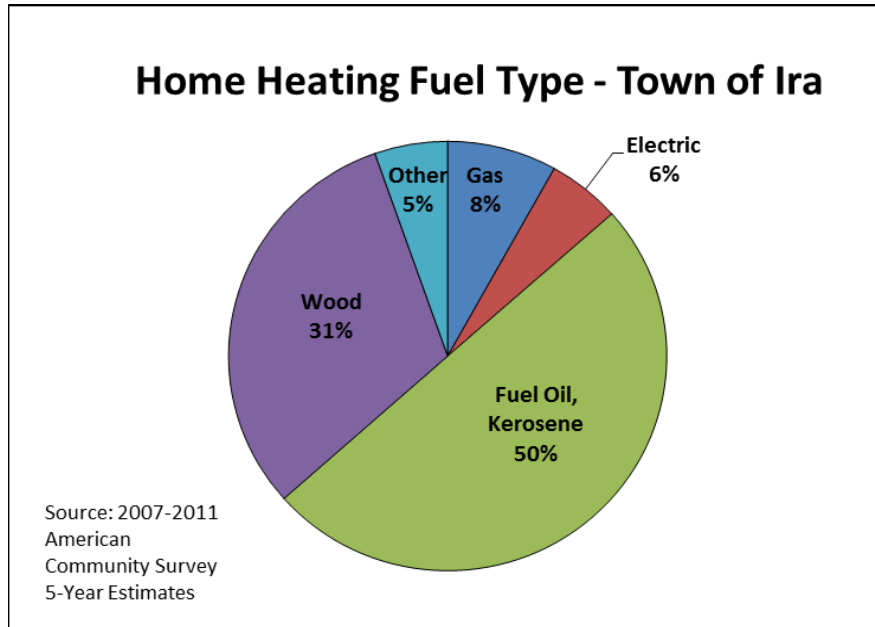
Transportation is a significant consumer of energy in the Rutland Region and Vermont as a whole, due to our rural nature. Private automobile use is the primary source. In Ira, the majority of workers commute to work by car, while a small number of workers utilize less energy intensive modes of transportation such as carpooling (see the chart below). The mean travel time to work for Ira residents is 24 minutes (2008-2012 ACS 5-Year Estimates).



Reducing energy for transportation will mean promoting use of more efficient vehicles and the development of compact village centers which support enough density to attract public transportation and encourage other modes of travel, such as bicycle and pedestrian. In comparison to outer-edge, suburban development patterns, compact development reduces vehicle miles traveled by 20-40% (Growing Cooler, Urban Land Institute).

Energy Use: Heating

Space heating is the largest use of energy in homes and a significant use in commercial and industrial facilities. Despite competition by new technology and new fuels, heating oil has remained the dominant fuel across Vermont since 1940. However the ratio of fuel oil utilized by Ira residents for home heating is relatively low compared to in other towns. Cognizant of fluctuating fuel prices, many homeowners now rely on a combination of heating appliances to mitigate exposure to one fuel type.



Many homes rely upon bottled or LP gas, on a private contract basis, for heating, cooking and similar uses. There is no gas pipeline in Ira, although a Vermont Gas pipeline is currently proposed to be extended from Addison County to Rutland County in the coming years.

Energy Efficiency

In the interest of limiting the overall demand for electricity and lowering individual bills, Green Mountain Power and other utilities in Vermont have created energy efficiency programs. The largest statewide initiative operates as Efficiency Vermont. Efficiency Vermont is the State's energy efficiency utility—the first of its kind in the United States. Efficiency Vermont represents an innovative approach to helping Vermonters save energy and protect the environment.

The Vermont Public Service Board ordered the creation of the energy efficiency program in response to a request from the Department of Public Service (the Department is the state's Public Advocate), all of the state's twenty-two electric utilities, and a dozen consumer and environmental groups. Through Efficiency Vermont, Vermont consumers, businesses, manufacturers, and farmers across the State can participate in the same seven energy- and money-saving programs.

Efficiency Vermont offers money-saving programs to homebuilders and buyers, low-income Vermonters, farmers, and residential, commercial and industrial customers. The programs

help consumers capture energy-saving opportunities available through the installation and use of efficient construction designs, products and equipment. For example, low-income Vermonters can receive assistance to convert from costly electric heat and hot-water systems to lower cost alternatives. Electric consumers can receive instant coupons or mail-in rebates for discounts on energy efficient lighting products and appliances.

Renewable Energy

Renewable energy as an alternative to energy generation with fossil fuel can provide for electricity needs while protecting the environment. Homeowners, businesses, communities, and energy developers are currently pursuing a variety of renewable technologies to generate electricity and to heat buildings. Many factors drive these choices, including interest in price stability, energy security, self-reliance, environmental impact, and simple economics.

Solar energy is an important renewable energy resource. The solar resources available to much of Vermont may not be enough to provide the total energy needs of a household, but can contribute significantly as a substitute to electric heat and hot water. Solar energy can be harvested through solar panels in the form of electric current, to power appliances, or as a passive energy used to heat a home. Passive solar design uses the sun's energy in heating a structure, so that the need for supplemental heat is greatly reduced.

Wood is also a renewable resource when managed sustainably, and is often used for home heating fuel. When a forest is managed so that for every tree cut there is a tree planted, a net carbon gain occurs. In this scenario, the use of wood as fuel wood is both renewable and environmentally benign.

The high ridgelines of the Taconic Mountains in Ira may have wind resources sufficient to power industrial-scale wind turbines. However, construction of large wind towers and related infrastructure such as roads, power lines and staging areas in the Highland Conservation District (shown on the Future Land Use map that is part of this Plan) would wholly undermine the specific goals and polices established for the Highland Conservation District, and should be strictly avoided.

Commercial or industrial-scale wind energy development also involves high potential for negative visual impacts and noise, which would directly conflict with provisions of the Ira Town Plan related to scenic resources. The character of the Town of Ira and surrounding communities is defined by the rural mountain setting, and the pattern of undeveloped highlands. Commercial or industrial-scale wind development in the Highland Conservation District would threaten the orderly development of the region because the effects upon the values sought to be protected in the Highland Conservation District in Ira, and those in adjacent communities necessarily affected by such development, would be profound.

Small scale wind turbines (not required to have strobe lights), appropriately sited and scaled for use by the residence or business located at the turbine, should be allowed in the Rural Residential District.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

Encourage the efficient use of energy sources in Ira.

Objective

Establish a strong and visible commitment to energy efficiency and increased use of renewable fuels in all buildings, especially new ones.

Objective

Work to create opportunities for walking, cycling, and other energy efficient, alternatives to the single occupant vehicle.

Objective

Encourage residents to utilize the resources of energy efficient programs such as "Efficiency Vermont".

Objective

Encourage the use of renewable sources of energy such as wind, solar, and wood.

Objective

Promote more energy efficient methods of land use and transportation.

Transportation

Introduction

Transportation is the basic service which allows people to go to work, to go shopping, and to access all the myriad opportunities and activities available to them. It also provides the basic mobility for goods and services people need and want in order to live. A good transportation system is therefore necessary to reduce the cost of and remove the burden of accessibility, so that people can live as well as possible.

At the local level we are concerned with the provision of safe and convenient accessibility, at a reasonable level, for all residents in a town, with the highest quality accessibility for concentrations of residents and businesses. Also accessibility to the regional or statewide transportation network is important.

Additionally, not all citizens have access to an automobile, so their needs must be addressed. This would imply a need to consider public transportation and bicycles, as well as other alternative means of transportation.

In addition to the movement of people, the movement of goods is necessary to sustain the economy of the Town. This implies that the highway system must be capable of handling truck traffic for much of its length, and that rail access be available for bulk goods.

The transportation plan cannot be considered in isolation. Land use and specifically housing, natural resources, community facilities and other elements of the plan are all related to the transportation network. Because of its rural nature and small, dispersed population, Ira's transportation system consists primarily of the roads.

History

The earliest transportation provided in Ira was by road, and the main outlines of the road system were well established by the 1800's. Railroads came to Vermont, and to Fair Haven, near Ira, in the 1850's. The Rutland and Washington Railroad, which ran from Rutland through Ira to Castleton and toward Poultney was completed in 1852. The railroad to Fair Haven and Whitehall was completed in 1853. Both of these eventually come under the control of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad. Currently, the section of railroad between Rutland and Whitehall, New York is owned by the Clarendon and Pittsford Railroad, a subsidiary of the State-owned Vermont Railroads.

Electric interurban railways, a phenomenon of the early twentieth century, served Ira as the part of a line between Rutland, Fair Haven, and Poultney until 1924. Traces of the line, in terms of embankments, cuts, power lines and abutments, still exist.

The automobile era and paved highways came early to New England and Vermont. VT 133 through Ira was paved in 1937. Route 4, a limited access highway, was constructed in 1968.

Road Network

Roads in Ira generally follow the topography, and settlement patterns have naturally followed roads in order to facilitate access and maintenance. The rural character of Ira, like many other

small Vermont communities, is supported, in large part, by its network of rural roads comprising the Town highway system. The road system is an integral part of the Town's scenic landscape, settlement patterns, and economic well-being. The network of highways and roads forms a system that provides for the efficient and safe movement of traffic and ease of access to individual properties, while at the same time maintaining the rural character of the Town.

There are 14.87 miles of roads in the Town, 7.25 miles of State highways (VT Routes 4, 4A and 133), which are owned and maintained by the State, and 7.62 miles of traveled Town highways (Class 3 and 4). Primary access to the Town is via Vermont Route 133, which stretches from West Rutland to Pawlet.

Ira has no Class 1 or Class 2 Town highways. Class 3 Town highways are all traveled Town highways other than Class 1 or 2 highways. The 4.24 miles of Class 3 Town highway are those that are most critical for the Town, in terms of their control. They are routes designed primarily for year-round, local use. They are characterized by lower design speeds and more open access for driveways and multi-use trails. The minimum standards for Class 3 highways are highway negotiable, under normal considerations, all seasons of the year by a standard manufactured pleasure car. This would include, but not be limited to, sufficient surface and base, adequate drainage and sufficient width capable to provide winter maintenance.

Class 4 Town highways are all other Town highways including trails and pent roads. The Selectboard determines which highways are Class 4 Town highways. These roads do not meet the minimum requirements for Class 3 roads, are seasonally traveled, and do not provide access to residences in Ira. There are 3.38 miles of Class 4 road in Town, consisting of portions of the Ira Birdseye Road, Clark Hill Road and Foster Hill Road.

The balance of existing roads are deemed to be trails or private roads, with the obligations of maintenance (including culverts and bridges, if any) resting upon the particular landowner(s) involved. The Town is under no obligation to maintain, repair or replace these roads.

Town road standards are necessary so that the Selectboard can determine whether or not the Town will take over maintenance of certain roads. A provision that Town road standards be met before a road is taken over, implies that the Town is not accepting substandard roads that will require substantial maintenance if the Selectboard votes to take a road into the Town system.

Given Ira's rural nature, there is very little need for public parking. Parking at public buildings such as the church, Town Hall and Town Clerk's office is generally adequate.

Volumes

There are two automatic traffic recorder (ATYR) locations in Ira, on VT 4A and VT133. The average daily traffic on VT 4A in 2010 was recorded to be 1,700 vehicles, and on VT 133, the most recent count in 2007 recorded 1,500 vehicles. These are relatively low volumes, and traffic volumes are well below design capacity. The use and volume of traffic on Route 4A has diminished with the addition of U.S. Route 4, the latter route serving primarily to move high volumes of traffic east-west through the western part of the State. Route 133 continues to serve as the major link between Rutland and communities to the south of Ira including

Middletown Springs, East Poultney and portions of Tinmouth.

Surface Conditions

In general, paved Town highways in Ira appear to be well maintained. Gravel roads in Ira are maintained by the Town to an adequate standard. In general, whenever gravel roads begin to carry heavy traffic, in the ADT range of 400 - 1,000, they should be paved, depending upon other factors, such as availability of funds, and provision of an adequate base and drainage.

The condition of highways in Ira is generally adequate for existing demands including the nature and levels of traffic. Secondary (gravel) road surfaces are prone to degenerate during the spring “mud season”, but with the addition of crushed stone on an as-needed basis, the occasional impassibility of such roads by passenger vehicles has been minimized. The bridges and culverts within the Town roads are generally good, several having been replaced or rebuilt in recent years. Many of the gravel roads represent farm roads that were laid out over one hundred years ago to serve as connectors between the Town’s many farms and State roads. Over the years, they have been maintained, but not improved significantly. The Town has traditionally lacked the tax base or resources to engage in capital improvements such as replacing the subsurface or base materials as necessary to overcome the mud season deterioration.

The traveled portions of several gravel roads do not permit two vehicles to pass one another in opposite directions, but again, given the modest level of local traffic on such roads, the Town has not seen fit to engage in a costly capital improvement program. In the event residential or other development of some significance takes place on or adjacent to such roads, the likely increase in traffic will cause problems for the roads themselves and for those who regularly use them.

Accident Locations

Another way to identify deficiencies in the highway network is to examine accident records to ascertain locations where there appear to be more accidents than would normally be expected. Such locations would be an indication of geometric features that are deficient and need to be ameliorated. The State of Vermont Agency of Transportation examines sections of highways and intersections for accident rates. Those which exceed a critical rate, determined statistically, are considered high accident locations.

The Agency of Transportation’s General Yearly Summaries of Crash Listings from 2008 through 2012 indicates that 8 accidents occurred in Ira on Route 4, 8 occurred on Route 4A, 21 occurred on Route 133, and 2 occurred on town highways (West Road). None of the roads in Town is considered to be classified as High Accident Locations (HAL’s) by the Vermont Agency of Transportation.

Rail

The C&P line runs through Ira although there are no on-line customers; all traffic is through traffic. A single track runs east-west through North Ira in the Castleton River - Route 4 corridor. There are no grade crossings or stops located within the Town. Access to freight and passenger rail service is in downtown Rutland, where an Amtrak station is located and the railyard is just to the south. Jurisdiction over the line lies largely at the state and federal level,

and it is not foreseeable within this plan's period that there will be any changes in the status quo with respect to the line.

Air

The nearest air service is found at Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport in Clarendon and Fair Haven Airport in Fair Haven. The Rutland State Airport is one of ten state-owned and operated public use airports in Vermont. The facility hosts one scheduled commercial operator, chartered flights, and general aviation. Air service is also available in Burlington and Albany.

Public Transit

The Marble Valley Regional Transit District provides paratransit services to members of the public, as well as to clients of area social service agencies but has no fixed route service in Ira.

Bike/Pedestrian

Bicycling and pedestrian travel are recreational as well as practical transportation modes. No formal cycling routes exist in Ira, though cyclists and pedestrians may use Town highways and any designated trails. Bicycling and pedestrian use of roads in Ira are primarily recreational. Because there are no stores or places of employment in or near Town, these modes are often not realistic substitutes for automobiles in commuting or shopping trips. Although it is not envisioned that bicycle use would ever be a mode for more than recreation purposes in Ira, local support should be given to adding wider shoulders to VT 133 to provide for safer bicycle use.

Road Budget

The Town should consider increasing its Town road budget to include an item for complete rebuilding by short section of the more heavily traveled Town roads over the period of several years. Roads that are chronically in need of repair should be rebuilt from the base up, and include provision for adequate drainage, including filter fabric, if needed. In selecting Town roads to be rebuilt, both condition and use must be taken into account. A road in terrible condition, which serves few, should not be as high on the priority list to be rebuilt as one which serves many, but is in better condition, but deteriorating. An objective, easily understood, and agreed upon rating system is needed to select Town roads for rebuilding so that residents can feel that Town funds are being fairly spent. The Local Roads Program, working with the Rutland Regional Planning Commission has a Road Surface Management System that can be used to assess local road conditions and prioritize road improvements.

Accessibility

The primary consideration in providing access is to insure adequate sight distance. Minimum driveway sight distance and driveway separation standards should be adopted. Subdivision regulations permit the Planning Commission to address roadway and intersection design considerations as well as access and circulation for subdivisions, especially of subdivision roads to be turned over to the Town for maintenance.

Speed Limits

Speed of travel in Ira is a problem yet no funds are available for local enforcement; the Town is dependent upon State Troopers for this.

Relationship between Transportation and Land Use

Transportation improvements provide greater accessibility to certain parcels of land, and consequently increase the likelihood of their development. As land use becomes more intense, the amount of travel generated increases, causing the need for transportation improvements. Because of the topographical constraints on Ira's road network, any development tends to occur in a strip-like fashion, along rights-of-way of roads and highways. Numerous "curb cuts" providing access to both homes and businesses increase the possibility of automobile accidents from entering and exiting traffic. As development proceeds, the value of these roads as transportation corridors is reduced. Traffic flow can be impeded, and the cost of snow removal may rise dramatically when secondary roads become settled. In effect, inefficient utilization of land results from development strung along road networks. Access controls and setback requirements can be effective in controlling this type of growth.

The transportation plan thus must serve the land uses planned, and the land uses planned must respond to the realities of what transportation service can be provided.

Another conflict that arises is that between transportation and the environment. In addition to problems of air pollution from vehicles, the most acute conflict in planning comes about changes wrought in the natural environment by highway construction and how this might be mitigated. Single points or areas of development can be modified or moved to avoid sensitive natural areas. In many cases, highways cannot because of their essentially linear nature. Therefore design must be carried out more carefully, and if damage is unavoidable, suitable mitigation measures must be found.

In a town like Ira, the interdependence of land use intensity and transportation capacity is much less pronounced, but nonetheless, must be considered. The issue becomes one of whether to provide accessibility at all, and the quality of that accessibility, e.g., whether roads are gravel or paved.

Recent and Future Projects

Locally managed projects consist of repairing the roads damaged in the 2000 storm with FEMA funds, on Weaver Hill and Toppin Road. Culverts have been replaced on West and Cross Roads. Additional culverts and ditching is an ongoing project. In 2014, with grant funding, the parking area next to the Town Hall was paved to enable commuters and others to park-and-ride.

The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VAOT) maintains a One Year Capital program and a 4-year project development plan, which are lists of projects that are to be undertaken in the next five years on State roads.

There are no bridges on local roads in the Town that have been identified by the Agency of Transportation as warranting improvements.

Town officials have identified the need for a number of improvements to Ira's transportation network. No need for new roads has been identified by the Planning Commission or Select-board. Below is a list of a number of short-term transportation improvements / projects based on priority that would most serve the community. Included in the Technical Appendix is a list of more long-term improvements that will likely require outside assistance to complete.

1. Secure funds for the enforcement of speed limits.
2. Upgrade some Class 3 roads to Class 2 over a period of years as fiscal constraints allow.
3. Increase the Town road budget to rebuild the worst sections of roads on a rational priority basis.
4. Reclassify as Class 4 roads those Class 3 roads not now being maintained.
5. Adopt minimum sight distance and minimum separation requirements for driveways.
6. Adopt a policy regarding standards for development roads before adopting them.

Goals and Objectives

Goal

Provide an accessible, cost-effective, multi-modal transportation system that meets the need for local and through movement of people and goods.

Objective

Public investment in transportation should be based on need, energy efficiency, and cost effectiveness.

Objective

Ensure that VTTrans provides adequate funding and / or a satisfactory maintenance schedule for Ira's bridges and highways.

Objective

Research and pursue upgrading of Class 3 roads to Class 2, as fiscal constraints allow.

Objective

Maintain Ira's roads according to a systematic annual review of their condition and levels of usage.

Objective

Utilize the opportunities available through the Vermont Local Roads Program.

Objective

Identify those locations or road maintenance services that Ira residents feel are in need of improvement.

Objective

If speed limits are envisioned, carry out the appropriate studies, and plan to enforce them.

Objective

Reclassify as Class 4 roads those Class 3 roads not now being maintained.

Objective

Increase the Town road budget to rebuild the worst sections of Town roads on a rational priority basis.

Objective

The Town should adopt minimum sight distance requirements for driveways. The Town should also adopt minimum separation requirements for driveways.

Objective

The Town should require that development roads be brought up to Town standards before being taken over by the Town.

Objective

Ensure that all roads are safe for not only automobile and farm traffic, but allow for pedestrian, bicycle, horses and other shared uses.

Objective

Consider adopting site plan review, subdivision regulations and Town road standards.

Goals

Create a transportation system that promotes the other goals and policies of this plan and makes it easier - not harder - to direct efficient land use patterns and economic development.

Provide and maintain a transportation system that is safe and efficient.

Provide and maintain a transportation system that meets the needs of all segments of Ira's population.

Provide a level of public benefits from each component of the transportation system sufficient to outweigh the social, environmental, economic and energy costs.

Minimize transportation energy consumption and trips.

Objectives

Manage roads to meet community level demand and maintain a rural character.

Analyze and compare a reasonable range of alternatives before supporting any new transportation projects, policies or improvements.

Examine alternatives in terms of environmental costs, energy use or conservation, social costs, and public investment.

Compare the ability of each alternative to meet the goals and policies of the Town plan.

Support new transportation projects, policies or improvements if:

the public need and benefit outweigh public costs; and

they provide, on balance, the most efficient way to meet demonstrated public need.

Plan land use and take actions to avoid the need to increase the capacity of Town highways.

Promote energy conservation, public transportation and ride sharing programs.

Support bike lanes, greenways and pedestrian paths, particularly in conjunction with road improvement projects.

Over time, create and maintain shoulders suitable for use by bicycles and pedestrians.

Transportation Implementation Strategies

The following strategies suggest ways that Ira's transportation goals and objectives should be implemented. The Town should:

Coordinate with local, regional and state organizations.

Work with neighboring Towns to ensure that proposed developments in those Towns will not overburden Ira's transportation systems.

Work with the Vermont Agency of Transportation to ensure that policies for land along VT 133 and 4A balance the needs for safety and appropriate future development.

Develop a program that reduces energy spent for transportation and reduces excess automobile trips on Ira's roads.

Revise local regulations to promote Ira's transportation goals and policies in concert with future land use goals.

Adopt local standards for construction, improvements and maintenance of Town roads.

Develop criteria for reviewing proposed intersections of driveways or side streets with Town highways.

Adopt regulations to require that private development roads meet standards for Town roads.

Develop a program and budget for major capital investments in the community transportation system.

Assess the entire transportation system's current conditions, desired conditions, deferred maintenance that needs to be performed, and levels of routine maintenance needed to sustain desired conditions.

Complete and maintain an inventory database of culverts and bridges within the community.

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

Introduction

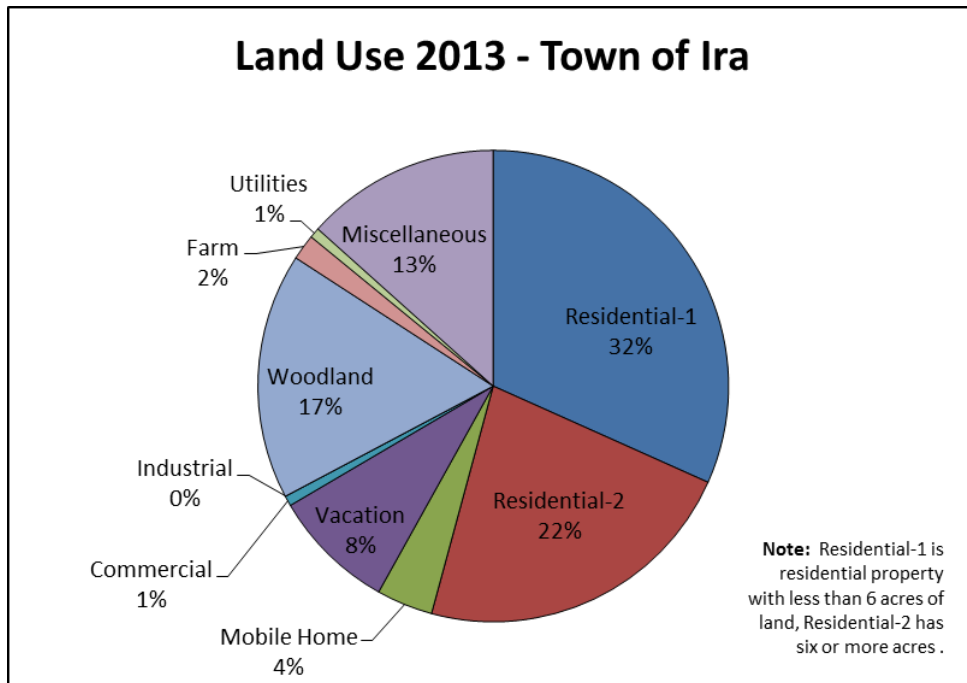
The Future Land Use Section is shaped by the findings and recommendations made in all other elements of the Plan. It translates and synthesizes ideas on a wide range of topics into a coherent policy on future development. The Future Land Use Section is where the Town "puts together all of the pieces" of the planning "puzzle."

While goals and objectives and maps help define the Town's vision for the future, the Future Land Use Plan serves as a guide for the creation or amendment of programs (including adoption and amendment of bylaws) that implement the Town's vision. Local land use controls, for example, translate the desired development concept into a clear, attainable, and enforceable land use program.

As required by state law, the Future Land Use Plan contains both text and a Future Land Use Map. The Future Land Use Map displays the desired future development patterns recommended by the Plan, while the future land use text explains the basis or logic for the pattern and the desired sequence of land development. The Map is intended to delineate those areas that are appropriate for specific land uses. The Map defines three districts in Town to serve as guidelines for future development. The Map is based upon information on the physical environment, such as soil depth, seasonal high water tables, slopes and overall capability to support potential development, as well as cultural information that recognizes Ira's historical land use trends, as well as existing land uses.

The Future Land Use Map in this plan is conceptual in nature. The lines showing the edge of districts are not intended to be definite, making it consistent with the generalized nature of the data and analysis used in preparing this plan.

The Future Land Use Plan for Ira contains three land use districts. The physical characteristics of the land in these three districts suggest different planning needs, issues, and community objectives. The districts shown on the future land use map are intended to establish basic guidelines for future land use and intensity. The districts were established in the Ira Town Plan adopted in 1988, and remain unchanged (except for slight changes to the flood plain mapping). The districts are shown on the Future Land Use map that is attached as part of this Plan.



Floodplains and Wetlands District

This district encompasses flood plains and wetlands. In 1988, the Town adopted Flood Hazard Area Regulations that restrict and regulate development within the areas designated on the Town's Flood Hazard Area Map. Those regulations were replaced with updated ones in 2008. The land use map reflects those flood hazard areas, and also includes other areas designated as wetlands, development on which would likely trigger federal or state review. Further reference may be made to the flood plain maps prepared by FEMA.

This District encompasses agricultural soils, as well as deer wintering habitat and sand and gravel resources.

Damage caused to homes, improvements and infrastructure by Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 was minimal, in contrast to the level of damage experienced in other Rutland County towns. This is attributable to an historical absence in Ira of development in or near floodplains, and in areas in the Highland Conservation District where slopes are steep and runoff risks are an issue. The Town should continue to discourage development in such areas to minimize risks to public safety, and property (public and private).

Specific recommendations for the Floodplains and Wetlands District include the following:

- Development should be minimized due to the erosion potential along Ira Brook.
- Setbacks from the brook are encouraged for any development.
- Riparian landowners should be encouraged to pursue bank stabilization projects.

Highland Conservation District

This District serves several purposes. First, it is to protect high elevations and steep slopes that have shallow soils and fragile vegetation, and that provide significant recharge to the ground and surface water supplies of the Town and neighboring communities. Second, the

District encompasses much of the land area in Town, which, in light of the physical criteria described above, is unsuitable for development. Third, the District encompasses areas that historically have supported activities or practices such as forestry, limited agriculture (e.g., maple sugaring or maintenance of apple orchards), and recreation including hiking, skiing, hunting, fishing and camping. The district also includes the ridgelines that frame the Town. The fourth purpose is to protect the natural resource value of lands that are undeveloped, lack direct access to arterial and collector roads, are important for wildlife and wildlife habitat (including deer yards), have high potential for forestry use, and include limited or significant natural, recreational or scenic resources. Within the Highland Conservation District lie the sites of five rare, threatened or endangered plants or animals. These important species are dependent on the continued health of their habitats and ecological communities.

Future Development

Historically, residential uses have not fallen within the Highland Conservation District, and there are currently no residences located within this District. Because of the fragile resources and limitations to development, no community facilities or services are anticipated to be developed in the Highland Conservation District. Limited, compatible land uses, such as outdoor recreational activities that do not involve structures, and forestry that does not create erosion problems or harm unique and fragile areas, should be permitted in this District. There are no roads in the Highland Conservation District other than Class 4 roads or trails. These will not be upgraded by the Town for the term of this Plan.

Specific recommendations for the Highland Conservation District include the following:

- All forms of development should be directed to other areas of the Town whenever possible;
- Development that does take place in the Highland Conservation District must avoid important natural areas;
- Public access to important resource areas should be retained as much as possible.

Development in the Highland Conservation District should be limited to very low impact uses. The Town and other major stewards within the district are committed to preserving and making public use of the unique natural environments of the Town in an unobtrusive manner.

Rural Residential District

The remaining portion of the Town falls in the Rural Residential District, which encompasses all existing residential properties, and all lands currently used for agricultural purposes. Historically, these uses have been compatible, and it is anticipated that continued residential, agricultural and commercial uses should take place in the Rural Residential District.

Future Development in this District, low-density residential development that utilizes existing facilities and that can adequately accommodate sewage disposal in compliance with the State law, and that is compatible with the District purposes and guidelines, should be permitted. Further development of new roads in the Rural Residential District is not planned.

The current transportation network of the Town lies entirely within this district. Further development of roads in the Rural Residential District is not planned. Land uses in this District

that do not remove the potential of the land for agricultural production such as open space, conservation and certain forms of outdoor recreation, are encouraged. Development should take place in such a way that any irreplaceable, unique or scarce resources or natural areas are not harmed.

The Rural Residential District encompasses some lands designated as unsuitable for development based upon considerations of slope, depth to bedrock and seasonal high water table. Development of such lands is not prohibited, but should be avoided. Development in the Rural Residential District is also likely to be limited by the availability of adequate on-site water supplies.

Specific recommendations for the Rural Residential District include the following:

- Future growth in Ira should be targeted for this district;
- A mix of housing types and affordability levels is encouraged;
- Lot layout and building design should enhance the area's character and help maintain the balance of agriculture, forest and residential uses;
- Water supplies should be protected through careful siting and design of septic facilities.

Development should occur at a density that reflects existing conditions in the district. Wherever possible, the Town encourages developments to use the least amount of land possible for private residential uses in order to help retain land for agriculture and open space.

Compatibility with Adjacent Towns

The Ira Town Plan is compatible with the plans of adjacent communities and with the regional plan. At the heart of any town's plan is its land use plan. A town's statements of values associated with land use including the designation of districts within the town, the enumeration of interests to be protected, encouraged or balanced, and the listing of goals and objectives provide additional insight into the specific land use plan.

A review of neighboring communities' plans reveals that their land use plans are in harmony with that in Ira. In no instance does a district in Ira abut a district in an adjacent town and contain conflicting values and objectives. Each adjacent community has through its town plan set forth a land use plan including districts, maps, policies and objectives compatible with the land use plan in Ira. Most land along Ira's boundaries with neighboring towns is located in the Highland Conservation District, and abuts lands located in similar districts in adjacent towns. Generally, each town acknowledges that areas characterized by higher elevations or steep slopes involve threats to water supplies and aquifers, wildlife habitat, scenic resources and aesthetics. Land in Ira located near municipal boundaries is generally characterized by steep slopes and high elevations, similar to the land lying over the boundary lines in neighboring towns.

Large scale development in the Highland Conservation District in Ira near municipal boundaries would have a negative impact upon adjacent communities, given the fundamental nature of such lands. They are characterized by steep slopes, so that development impacts including soil erosion and water runoff will result downhill from the developed areas, regardless of where municipal boundaries lie. They are also characterized by high elevations, such that visual and aesthetic impacts will likewise affect areas outside Ira. Large scale development in

the Highland Conservation District in Ira near municipal boundaries would conflict and interfere with the goals and objectives stated in the plans of the affected towns, and thus interfere with the orderly development of the region where the towns are located.

Goals and Objectives

Goals

Protect fragile areas and resources including the ridgelines and peaks in the Highland Conservation District.

Preserve agricultural land and open spaces.

Accommodate continued patterns of existing land use.

Support or encourage land uses that historically have been compatible with one another and are suited for particular areas.

Channel growth into areas where it can be accommodated without undue adverse impact on the environment, and municipal costs.

Avoid unplanned growth.

Objectives

Continue to enforce existing on-site sewer ordinance and flood hazard area regulations.

Within a given district, regulate to ensure compatibility of all permitted land uses.

Establish zones based on the land use map, and prescribe uses which are or are not permitted within such zones.

Within a given zone, regulate to ensure compatibility of all permitted land uses.

Establish zoning and /or subdivision regulations to permit and control compatible land uses and limit incompatibility of uses.

Encourage participation in the State Current Use Value program.

Encourage landowners and private land trusts to develop conservation easements and other methods to preserve lands.