

# ***TOWN PLAN - 2011***

## **Town of Weston County of Windsor, Vermont**



Town of Weston in 1894

## **Vision, Goals, Objectives, and Recommended Actions**

Town Plan Adopted by Selectboard on xxxxxxxxxx  
Town Plan Approved by Windham Regional Planning on xxxxxxxxx

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## Introduction

The Town of Weston is a rural-residential community, located in the Green Mountains and noted for its open lands, natural forests and small compact village center. Although a majority of the residences in the Town are second homes, the people of Weston have a strong sense of community spirit.

### **Purposes of the Town Plan:**

This Plan has been prepared to set a direction for the Town's future that will sustain a vibrant and strong community. It represents a community vision of the future character of the Town, especially with regard to its priorities for land use and conservation of historical, cultural, social and natural resources.

A primary objective of the Plan is to formulate public policy for the effective and harmonious economic, environmental and social development of the Town. The underlying aim of the Plan is to promote the public health, safety, convenience, efficiency, economy, and general welfare of the community and its residents. In doing so, the Plan seeks to foster a proper balance for future growth in the Town, taking into consideration the desires of the people who live in Weston, community needs, the economic and environmental impacts of possible changes, and the physical and economic constraints to development.

This Plan will serve as:

- A policy framework for the Town to help achieve the objectives of its people, and to define the opportunities and limitations for prospective changes in the Town.
- The foundation for existing and future by-laws or ordinances.
- A guide for the Selectboard, Planning Commission and other town officials in their routine business, in implementing the actions recommended in the Plan, and in their consideration of proposals which would have an impact on the Town.
- A guide for the District Environmental Commission and Regional Planning Commission as they review any proposals for development and subdivision that come under their respective jurisdictions.

### **Compliance with State Requirements:**

The Weston Planning Commission under the requirements of Act 200, the State Planning and Development Act, 24 V.S.A., Chapter 117, has prepared this Plan. Act 200 requires that each town plan must include input from local citizens and organizations, be consistent with approved plans of other towns in the region and with the regional plan, be based, where appropriate, upon inventories, studies, and analyses of current trends and consider the probable social and economic consequences of the plan's contents.

As required by Title 24, Chapter 117, Section 4385, the Selectboard held a public hearing prior to re-adopting this Plan. Comments were solicited from bordering towns, Windham Regional Commission and the State Agency of Development and Community Affairs.

Under Vermont law, a town plan expires five years from the date of adoption. This Plan updates but does not substantially change the previous Town Plan adopted by the Selectboard in 2006. In 2016, the Town must review this Plan, revise it where necessary and readopt or replace it.

### **Implementation of the Plan:**

The Plan will be implemented through local, regional and state regulatory processes, through the work and action of Town commissions and boards, and through the activities of Town government. The Plan should serve as a basis for Weston's capital budget and program.

Upon re-adoption of this Plan, the Town's bylaws will be reviewed and revised, where necessary, to be consistent with the goals and objectives of this plan. It should be noted that as a result of statutory changes enacted in 2004 (Title 17, Subchapter 7, Section 4410), Vermont's planning law requires that local land use regulations be in conformance with local plans.

## **Town Plan Goals**

### **A Vision for Weston in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Town Plan Goals consist of statements of objectives, policies and programs to protect the built and natural environment and to guide future growth and development in the Town of Weston. The objectives of the Plan are:

1. To protect and preserve the rural nature, scenic quality and sense of community of Weston.
2. To encourage, support and maintain a community of residents and property owners with age, social and economic diversity.
3. To address the Town's changing needs through a continuous planning process involving input from members of the community.
4. To maintain the Town's historic development pattern with a compact village center (tight, cohesive settlement patterns without strip development or sprawl) within a rural setting surrounded by undeveloped areas.
5. To assure that basic needs of health, safety, education, employment and housing will be met and maintained at appropriate levels in accordance with the Town Plan.
6. To prohibit incompatible and uncoordinated development activity that would degrade the quality of the environment in Weston and jeopardize existing public and private investments. New development will be appropriately designed to fit individual sites as well as the community's overall visual character.
7. To maintain the Town's growth to be consistent with the Town's ability to provide and pay for satisfactory educational, highway, fire protection and other usual public services, and to discourage growth that will place an undue burden upon the Town's taxpayers or otherwise leads to excessive increases in the tax rate.
8. To encourage and preserve the use of lands for agricultural and forestry purposes in order to keep these resources productive and to preserve the rural character of the historic landscape outside the village center.
9. To encourage energy conservation and work to achieve a balance between the use of renewable energy sources and the aesthetic impacts of renewable energy facilities.
10. To assure that any project for increasing the capacity of any existing highway or developing any new highways will be consistent with the general character of the Town and to require that, where possible, public utilities and transmission facilities share the use of corridors in order to minimize the impact on the environment and to assist desired development patterns.
11. To protect significant natural areas and locations of special educational, scenic, historical, architectural, and archeological significance.
12. To encourage housing that meets the needs of a diverse population and will serve residents from all walks of life.
13. To maintain and support a strong, sustainable, diverse economy that provides employment and ownership opportunities for Town residents.

14. To balance the rights of individual property owners with the common good of the community.
15. To preserve the character of the village center with mixed uses at a scale appropriate to the architecture and historic character of Weston.
16. To encourage the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational endeavors.
17. To encourage the continuation of community spirit and service and to foster an atmosphere conducive to community endeavors.
18. To assure the availability of safe and affordable childcare and early childhood education.

## Community Profile

### History of Weston:

Weston was originally the "West Town" of the town of Andover, whose charter was granted in 1761 as part of the New Hampshire Grants. Over the years Weston became a thriving village with mills, inns, other enterprises, farms and houses. In 1799 Weston was separated from Andover and incorporated as a town by the Vermont Legislature. By 1840, Weston had a population of 1,032. (From Waters of the Lonely Way, 1761-1978, by Ernestine Dunaway Pannes.)

### Settlement Patterns:

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Village Center was the main commercial area of Weston, surrounded by lands that were predominantly dedicated to agriculture and forestry with many of the parcels in excess of 100 acres. Over time many of these operations became uneconomical, and their owners abandoned the farming or forestry, often selling to people who were not dependent upon or interested in these pursuits. Some of these large parcels reverted to their natural state; others saw a reduction in the acreage of fields.

In the 1930s, the H.C. Jacquith Co. sold significant acreage to the National Forest, further changing the future of Weston's landscape. At the same time, many part-time/second homes began to be built. Land that was once valued for its commercial and agricultural value became valuable for its "appearance", including open fields and quaint farmhouses and barns. Land that was not appropriate for agriculture or pasture became valued for its views and vistas.

Present land use in Weston is rural-residential in character and is still somewhat related to agriculture and forestry although not as much as in the past. Several hundred acres have been placed under conservation easements. Because of conservation efforts and the National Forest, the overall density of settlement is relatively low. The settlement pattern has been influenced by the physical composition of the land, especially its septic capacity.

At the center of Weston is the village center containing numerous residences and community facilities. These include the Town offices, the fire station, the Weston Playhouse/community center, two churches, a library, the post office, an inn and several retail establishments. The village center is very picturesque with a village green and many 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings that are on the National Historic Register. Today the village center is a "tourist attraction" with thousands of visitors flocking each year to visit the Vermont Country Store and the Weston Playhouse. All the old working mills are gone.

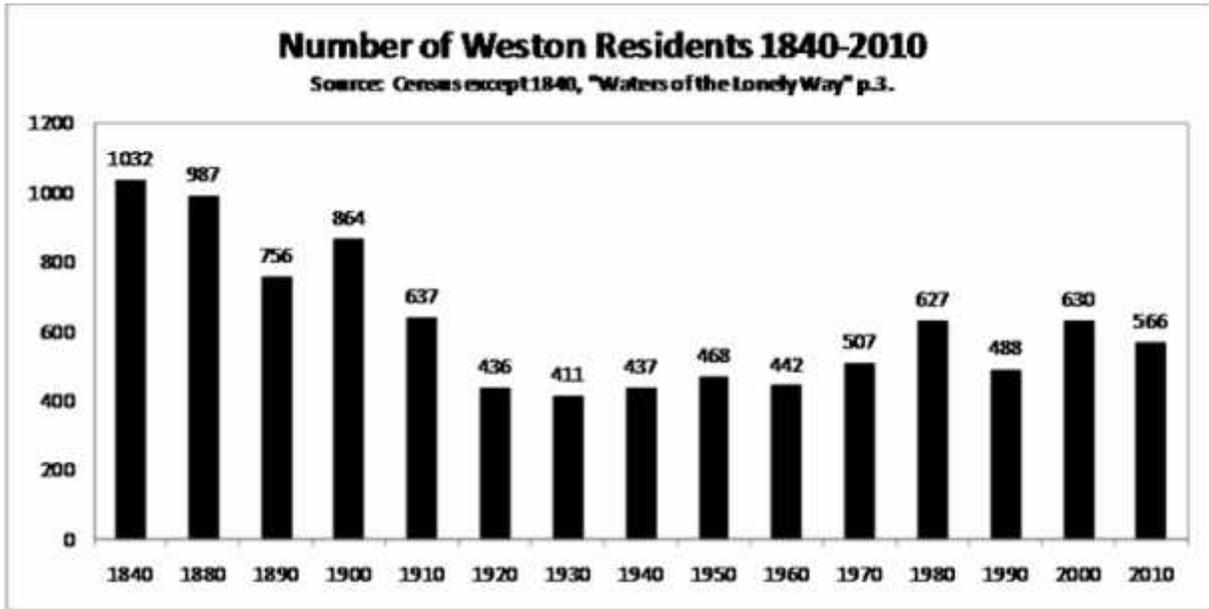
Residential settlement occurs mainly along the many gravel roads that fan out from Route 100, which is the major north-south thoroughfare through the Town. Farm acreage and open fields continue to be converted to residential use. Over the years there have been several small subdivisions of 2 to 9 lots and four larger subdivisions. There also is a significant pattern of large individual lots of 25 acres or more. This development pattern fragments the landscape and is raising the possibility that the character of Weston may become more suburban in nature with a population of retirees or people commuting elsewhere to work. However, despite the increasing pressure of development, Weston still has a considerable amount of undeveloped open land and forest areas. Preserving these spaces and encouraging working use of the landscape is vital to maintaining the rural character valued by Weston residents.

Outside the Village Center, the impact of commercial uses is minimal in Weston. There is one working small gravel pit, three inns/motels, a summer music school, and the Weston Priory. Many home occupations are scattered throughout the Town. The public and quasi-public land under local ownership is associated with the municipal buildings, the firehouse, churches and cemeteries. Several properties are owned by non-profit organizations including the Weston Playhouse, the village green, Kinhaven Music School, the Weston Rod & Gun Club and the Weston Recreation Club.

**Population:**

As already noted, Weston's population peaked in the 19th century with 1,032 residents in 1840 and fell to a low of about 400 people in the 1930s. The population grew from 442 people in 1960 to 630 in 2000, then fell to 566 in 2010. Weston has a significant second-home population – a majority, in fact. If each second home averaged 2.5 occupants, Weston's overall population would be approximately 1,200.

Weston's current resident population is older and wealthier than the State of Vermont average. According to five-year estimates from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey (ACS), Weston's median age is 59 years compared with 40.6 years for the state. Whereas 7 percent of Vermonters have incomes below the poverty level, only 2 percent of Westontonites meet that criterion. Conversely, 7.6 percent of Weston's population have incomes over \$200,000 versus 2.6 percent of the total Vermont population. According to the Vermont Department of Labor, Weston's current unemployment rate is below the state average. As discussed in the chapter on Education, Weston's number of school-age children is slipping.



**Second and Primary Homes in Weston**

**Housing:**

In 1990, Weston had a total of 430 houses – 219 primary residents and 211 second homes (U.S. Census). Fifteen years later, by the end of 2005, the number of houses had risen to 502, with 196 primary residences and 306 second homes (Town Listers' report). Early information from the 2010 Census reports a total of 565 Weston housing units. While the Census Bureau had not issued the number of primary and second homeowners in time to include it in this document, the Town Listers reported in mid-2011 that homesteaders (owners of primary homes) represented about 45% of Weston homes – versus 50% in 1990.

**Economic Base**

Weston's economy, chiefly dairy farming and forestry through the 19th and first half of the 20th century, is now based on retail sales, construction and service businesses, including providing services to second homeowners and retirees. The Vermont Country Store and the Weston Priory attract a large number of visitors year round and the Weston Playhouse Theatre Company and Kinhaven Music School, in addition to attracting visitors, bring a significant number of actors, musicians, and technical staff to the Town. The economic viability of some fledgling "new farms" is uncertain but has attracted considerable interest.

### **Topography/Physical Attributes:**

Weston, with a total of 22,247 acres, is characterized by open fields, forests, tight mountains and the West River Valley. The Green Mountain National Forest controls 9,340 acres, approximately 860 acres are in the Okemo State Forest, an estimated 450 acres are used for agriculture, and 36.2 acres are in the village center. Some of the present farmland and some of the village center lies in the floodway and flood hazard areas of the West River. In the past, development has been limited by the restrictions on individual subsurface sewage disposal systems to treat domestic wastes – due to steep slopes and shallow and wet soils – so as not to result in a hazard to public health. Recently there have been changes to State water and wastewater regulations which now would make it easier to develop many of these areas. Weston should recognize that former sewerage disposal restrictions might no longer be a controlling factor in the pattern and density of settlement and the protection of steep slopes and shallow and wet soils. Therefore, other methods of protecting fragile areas and managing growth will become more important in the future.

### **Town-Wide Planning Efforts**

In 2008-09, the Weston Land Conservation Trust – with support from the Orton Family Foundation and the Windham Regional Commission – surveyed Weston second home owners and primary residents to gather data on the characteristics, habits and lifestyles of the two sets of respondents and to examine the impact of second homes on the culture, and use and economy of Weston. Among the chief findings is that an overwhelming majority of both groups want Weston to remain basically unchanged.

### **Weston's Future**

There are many factors converging that will have an impact on the future of Weston. Weston's natural and built beauty is attracting a significant number of new people. Town residents are watching their community change with a mixture of feelings. Some fear that growth that is too rapid and without control may irreversibly alter the way of life cherished by Westonites. Others see development as a trend providing more and attractive employment opportunities. There is an inherent conflict between the pressure for more land for residential use and the desire to preserve the historical landscape. There is also concern that escalating land values combined with an increasing demand for a rural, safe environment and the statewide education property tax will render Weston unaffordable to middle-income families and individuals and some long time residents. Some people believe that preservation and conservation drive property taxes upward because they create scarcity and because conserved land is often taxed under the "current use" program.

These conflicting attitudes and values present a challenge to Weston's citizens, elected officials and the Planning Commission. Determining how to regulate Weston's scarce community resources of developable land and space will affect the character of Weston for generations. It is the goal of this Plan to address these issues and look for common understanding and solutions.

## Weston Values

The Town offers an outstanding “quality of life” to its residents, both permanent and part-time, including:

- A rural-residential town, with a cohesive and picturesque village center comprised of residences, businesses, and public facilities.
- A clean environment with natural beauty -- open fields, scenic vistas, mountains, valleys, wildlife and forests.
- A sparsely populated community of people with diverse backgrounds and interests working together in harmony to create a cohesive community.
- Opportunity for outdoor recreation.
- Opportunity for cultural and spiritual activities.
- Opportunity for community participation and service.
- A sustainable economy.

The people of the Town value these qualities and wish to protect and perpetuate them for future generations, while recognizing that over time change is inevitable. This Plan is an attempt to manage and guide the inevitable change in a way that will maintain and improve our quality of life.

The Weston Planning Commission also recognizes that as the needs of a community change, the laws, which protect its citizens’ way of life, must reflect and support their needs, desires and rights. With this in mind the Planning Commission is committed to periodic evaluation and modification of the Plan to see that it remains responsive to the wishes of the community.

# Land Use and Development Plan

## **Goals:**

- To ensure that future development of Weston takes place in a way that maintains the town's rural character, with a lively and historic village center of mixed uses at a scale appropriate to the architecture and historic character of Weston, surrounded by woodlands and open fields and striking a balance among the various land uses – residential, agricultural, forestry, retail, commercial and cultural – that define a rural Vermont community.
- To avoid "suburbanization", the entrances to the village center along Route 100 should be kept open and undeveloped and commercial strip development should be prohibited, and new homes should be sited in such a way as to conserve, to the extent possible, the traditional pattern of settlement, views of surrounding hills, and open fields and forests for agriculture, logging and recreation.
- To encourage agriculture and forestlands of a size and location capable of yielding economic value.

## **Background:**

The Town of Weston is still a relatively undeveloped rural community. Its pattern of land use includes a centrally located historic village center surrounded by predominantly rural residential development scattered along winding secondary roads, most of them narrow, unpaved and often highly scenic.

The Town is located in the high mountain valleys of the Green Mountains where the headwaters of the West River are located, and as a result, much land has been unsuitable for development because of steep slopes, shallow soils, wet soils and flood hazard areas. Currently residential land use is predominantly single-family, both permanent and second home. Commercial and industrial land use is quite limited. Agricultural land is used for hay production, with some pasturage for domestic animals, and a sheep cheese making operation. The US Forest Service owns nearly 50 per cent of the land in the Town.

The village center, with a fenced green and many nineteenth century buildings, has been designated an Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places by the US Department of Interior and is characterized by several structures of architectural, historic, cultural and scenic value.

The Route 100 corridor is an important entry to the Town from both the north and south and runs directly through the village center. Currently, this corridor contains hundreds of acres of open agricultural lands and meadows. Maintaining these rural open spaces and the aesthetics associated with these open spaces has been a long time goal of the people of Weston. Over the past 10 years, several hundred acres at the north and south ends of the village center have been conserved with the Vermont Land Trust.

## **General Land Use Policies:**

1. Encourage businesses within the village center that are compatible with its historic character.
2. Require that significant new development in the Town be balanced against the Town's financial resources and existing and projected services and facilities. Proposed development that exceeds the Town's historic growth rate or which will cause economic hardship to the Town because of the increased demand for facilities and services is inappropriate and shall not be permitted.
3. Discourage any development which would alter the character of this small, well-preserved village center and encourage any new structures or changes to existing structures

be compatible with the existing character of the village center and planned to avoid traffic congestion, difficulties with water supply and sewage disposal, unsafe parking and other undesirable or dangerous consequences.

4. Encourage mixed use, including primary residences, in the village center.
5. Encourage the restoration and preservation of buildings that contribute to the architectural and historical character of the Town (including the historic residences and the public buildings such as the Weston Playhouse, the churches, the library, the Town office, the Little School, the Farrar Mansur Museum, the Old Mill and Craft Building). When such buildings become obsolete for current uses, new uses should be found for them, which will preserve the character of the buildings.
6. Encourage open lands (cleared and undeveloped) be maintained and expanded whenever and wherever possible, particularly along the scenic Route 100 corridor.
7. Support the preservation of open farmland and agricultural activities in order to achieve the scenic qualities vital to residents and visitors. Agricultural uses of open land shall be actively encouraged.
8. Require that new development or changes to existing structures be reasonably related to the existing settlement pattern, the location of public services, utilities, commercial facilities and the existing road network in view of the community's need for private facilities and services.
9. Support a mixture of rural land uses including forests, agriculture, housing, home occupations, small-scale commercial and industrial uses, and outdoor recreation, so long as these uses do not cause excessive noise, pollution, or traffic congestion or affect safety, or result in additional cost to the Town for infrastructure and services.
10. Encourage "cluster housing" development coupled with dedicated open space to prevent unwanted sprawl into natural greenway areas. Prevent strip development along roads, maintain essential natural resource and scenic values and reduce potential service costs to the community.
11. Require that lands adjacent to or including areas of historical, cultural, architectural or natural resource value be used in a manner that will not reduce or destroy the value of the site or area.
12. Encourage the purchasing or accepting of donations of conservation easements and similar rights to properties, which have high public value, including but not limited to scenic. Encourage voluntary action to ensure Plan implementation, particularly with respect to conserving open spaces, and as tools to protect important natural, scenic and historic resources including, privately-agreed restrictive covenants binding on purchasers of land, use of existing non-profit land trusts to acquire or hold conservation easements on resource lands, participation by landowners in Vermont's "Current Use" program, participation in Act 250 review process by abutting landowners, and participation in the town planning process by the conservation commission, residents and property owners.
13. Require that land use and development be consistent with the land's capability to support such use and development and the relationship to adjacent properties.
14. Require that development projects integrate natural features and resources, rather than reclaiming or destroying them, and that open space and landscaping shall be incorporated into such projects.
15. Encourage the placement of utility lines off-street or underground, particularly in the village center.

16. Require that all parking areas, except for single-family dwellings, minimize impact on adjoining properties, through screening and, to the extent possible, location preferably behind the structure or at a minimum behind the required building front setback. Combined access and shared parking shall be allowed in cases where such use results in improved efficiency of land use and integration of open space.
17. Require that proposals for land development, other than a single-family dwelling, will not be in conflict with the character of the area.
18. Require that significant natural or topographic land features be retained, so that the loss of natural and irreplaceable resources shall be minimized.
19. Preserving the character of the Town shall be accomplished by actively planning for growth and the provision of public facilities and services. The planning and development of such facilities and services shall be based upon a reasonable projection of population increase and economic growth and shall recognize the limits of the Town's human, financial and natural resources. Projects, which cause an undue impact on existing public services and facilities, shall be discouraged, unless adequate provisions to correct such deficiencies are provided by the developer.
20. Seek appropriate compensation for any resulting decrease in tax revenues otherwise due to the Town in the event that the State or Federal government acquires substantial parcels of land.

#### **Recommendations for Action**

1. Review and, if necessary, revise zoning bylaws for conformance to Town Plan.
2. Designate areas within Town boundaries that are appropriate for significant growth and those areas to be preserved.
3. Identify and inventory architecturally significant buildings and streetscapes (defined as groups of buildings where each individual building in the group may be undistinguished but together they make an important historic architectural environment).
4. Investigate ways of preserving scenic vistas, the historic district and other valued resources.
5. Form a committee to explore strategies for implementing land use policies, including how to deal with growth in order to avoid sprawl and be consistent with Weston's historic land use legacy.

# Land Use Districts

The land use districts, defined in the following paragraphs, are a guide for the growth and development of Weston. Currently, Weston has 7 land use districts: the Village, 3 residential districts, a conservation district and commercial and industrial districts. These land use areas provide for a variety of residential, commercial, agricultural and recreational opportunities for the future while considering local environmental constraints as well as existing land use patterns. For purposes of this revised plan, the Planning Commission has considered the three residential districts together. The Town Plan is not a zoning ordinance; however, it provides guidance for zoning changes and updates. The future land use map, designating the boundaries of each district, is an integral part of the future land use plan.

## **Village District:**

The village center is the focal point of the Town, containing a high density grouping of buildings without public water and sewer. The Town offices, the library, two churches, an inn, two restaurants, the town green, the Weston Playhouse, the fire station, two museums, and several retail uses are located in the Village Center in addition to many residences. The village center provides a center for community interaction and a sense of community place.

Three recent events have affected or will affect the Village District:

1. In 2008, Weston voters approved a set of zoning changes that modified lines defining the Village zoning district in a way that corresponded with all the properties that were presumed to be part of the village center and brought minimum lot sizes and setbacks into conformity with actual practice.
2. The Town has become aware of the need for additional space for certain municipal and community services. The Town office is too small to meet current and future needs and the Library does not have sanitary facilities and is unable to attain them in its present location;
3. The Weston Playhouse Theatre Company has acquired the 5-acre Walker farmstead at the north edge of the village and is in the process of designing and funding its transformation into a year-round campus for play development.

It is the goal of this Plan that the pattern of settlement in the Village district shall maintain and reinforce the village center as the focus of the town.

## **Policies for the Village District:**

1. Future development in the Village should continue the historic development patterns and scale of a traditional New England Village. Continued residential uses in the village center should be encouraged, lest the village become only a tourist-oriented commercial center.
2. Pathways/sidewalks for safe pedestrian travel should be considered.
3. Ways to control the speed of traffic through the Village on Route 100 should be addressed with the State.
4. A plan for the needed expansion of public facilities should be developed.

## **Residential Districts (Rural Residential, Rural Low Intensity District, and Resource District)**

Rural residential settlement in the outlying areas of the Town was historically associated with farming and related agricultural uses. For this reason, homes were generally located on land that was suitable for residential purposes and at the same time compatibly related to the pattern of open fields and woodlands. However, recent rural settlement has not been related to farming, but rather to the construction of single-family homes as permanent residents or second homes. This type of housing and country lifestyle is highly valued, yet usually breaks up continuous tracts of land formerly used for agriculture or silviculture and often contributes to sprawl.

The Residential Districts are intended to accommodate the demand for rural housing (usually single-family, a few farm animals, a garden and one or two out-buildings), with minimal economic and environmental impacts. Lands within these districts are already committed to residential development and appear capable of accommodating a portion of the expected growth in Weston. These areas are generally accessible by improved highways, and generally appear suitable to residential uses, although some of the lands have serious limitations to development (e.g., steep slopes or wetlands, or limited access) or are in productive agricultural use or have high natural, recreational, scenic or other special resource values.

The Residential Districts shall have minimum lot sizes of between 2 and 5 acres for single- or two-family dwellings.

The development of residential housing creates the largest growth pressure in Weston. Every effort should be made within this district to have development sited in locations that preserve open space, scenic vistas, forested areas and natural resources. The use of PUDs is one method of achieving these goals.

### **Planned Unit Development (PUD)**

The Town of Weston has adopted both zoning and subdivision bylaws that permit clustering of rural residences in planned unit developments (PUDs). The number of residences/structures in a PUD is governed by the density permitted by the zoning rules for the district (i.e., 5 residences on a 10-acre tract in a two acres zone), but the structures can be placed close together. This permits the conservation of open space on the remaining portion of the parcel. PUDs in contrast to typical tract subdivisions encourage flexibility of design and development that promotes the most appropriate use of land, facilitates the economical provision of streets and utilities and preserves the natural and scenic qualities of the open lands and forests of the town. When updating the zoning and subdivision bylaws, the Planning Commission will re-examine and update the sections pertaining to PUD and subdivision.

### **Agricultural Uses**

Agriculture used to be an important part of the economy, image and lifestyle of Weston. Today, agriculture in Weston consists of one dairy farm, a sheep farm with cheese making, a few small farms with sheep and/or goats and some horses. There are also significant haying operations along with a Christmas tree farm and honey and maple syrup production. The continuation of agriculture in Weston depends directly on the availability of large amounts of undeveloped land with moderate slope and productive agricultural soils.

When updating the zoning bylaws, the Planning Commission should consider whether zoning regulations should contain provisions, which would limit subdivision of large lots in prime agricultural areas into residential parcels unrelated to farming. Density bonuses should be explored by the Planning Commission for development that protects scenic vistas or agricultural lands or which minimizes the impact on or need for municipal services.

### **Policies for Development in Residential Districts**

1. Scenic vistas, environmental qualities and the preservation of open spaces should be encouraged and preserved.
2. Clustering (PUDs) should be encouraged as a way in which subdivisions can be planned to allow for conservation of open space and agricultural land.. Agricultural lands should be preserved whenever possible.
3. Houses should be sited and exterior lighting should be designed so as to avoid impact on scenic vistas.

### **Conservation District**

Conservation areas contain lands that are very sensitive to development for a variety of reasons. They are usually characterized as significant resources such as productive forests, high elevations, steep slopes (often with shallow soils), wetland areas, and stream banks, among others and areas of scenic, ecological, cultural or historical significance. They are essentially

undeveloped and may lack access to improved public roads or utilities and services. The Federal and State governments own most of the land in this District. This District also contains lands that are protected from development above the 2,500-foot contour by Act 250.

In general, lands in this district are suitable for silviculture, including logging, and low impact recreational uses, such as nature and hiking trails, cross country skiing and hunting.

High-density residential development in this area should be prohibited, and the minimum lot size for single- and two-family dwellings should be increased in acreage from the current 5 acres.

When updating the zoning bylaws, the Planning Commission should consider a Ridgeline/Hillside Overlay or other zoning bylaws to protect scenic vistas and ridgelines, particularly with respect to exterior lighting. The Planning Commission should also explore the possibility of linking development restrictions to topography and elevation.

**Policies for Conservation District:**

1. Lands in this district are not suitable for dense development because of their attributes.
2. Primary use of lands should be for agriculture, forestry, open space and low-impact recreation.
3. Agricultural lands should be protected from substantial development.

**Commercial District**

This district contains the commercial uses that are not located in either the Village or Industrial Districts. This area is appropriate for additional commercial uses. However, new businesses and/or expansions of existing businesses shall be consistent with the policies and goals of this Plan and shall be in a scale appropriate to other businesses in the district and in keeping with the character of the neighborhood.

**Industrial District**

This district is the primary location for industrial uses in Weston. This area is appropriate for additional industrial uses; however, new businesses and/or expansions of existing businesses shall be consistent with the policies and goals of this Plan and shall be in a scale appropriate to other businesses in the district and in keeping with the character of the neighborhood.

**Recommendations for Action**

1. Review zoning regulations in all zoning districts with emphasis on lot sizes, setbacks, and other requirements for conformance to the Town Plan.
2. Review subdivision and Planned Unit development regulations.

## Economy

**Goal:** To encourage a stable economy in the Town of Weston in order to provide a range of employment opportunities, livable wages, including agricultural and forestry, and an adequate tax base.

**Background:**

Historically and typical of a small rural town, Weston's economy has been diverse, including retail commerce and inns in the Village, small farms producing agricultural products and harvesting the forests in the surrounding areas, and small manufacturers refining locally produced natural resources.

The current economy is largely dependent on transient visitors and second homeowners. The Town is centrally located among several major ski resorts, and Route 100 traffic provides a steady stream of visitors throughout the year. The historic character of the village center, the scenic agricultural land and natural beauty of our river valley, and the forested ridges surrounding the Town make it a desirable tourist destination, inviting visitors to stop and shop, eat and sleep, and take advantage of the outdoors and cultural and spiritual offerings. An abundance of recreational opportunities are easily accessible in Weston or nearby, including golf, fishing, skiing, snowshoeing, hunting, swimming, boating, hiking and snowmobiling. Major attractions in Weston include the Vermont Country Store, the Weston Playhouse, Kinhaven Music School, the Green Mountain National Forest and the Weston Priory, among others.

Inventory of Town Businesses	2006	2011
Antiques	1	1
Art Gallery	1	3
Churches	3	3
Cultural Arts school (seasonal)	1	1
Grocery/Convenience store/gas station	1	1
Inns/Bed & Breakfasts	4	5
Library	1	1
Licensed Trades	3	3
Manufacturers/industry	0	0
Non-profit organizations *	6	6
Pre-school & child-care	1	1
Professional offices	1	0
Real estate office	1	1
Restaurants	4	4
Retail establishments	3	2
Theater company	1	1

\*Several of the other businesses are also non-profit organizations.

The increasing number of second homes has also stimulated the economy, creating opportunities such as construction, landscaping, sales and rentals, caretaking and maintenance. Weston's village center, natural and cultural resources and continued preservation of its scenic resources have contributed to the popularity of Weston as a second home location.

Economic dependence on tourism and second-home owners can have some undesirable side effects, including extreme vehicular congestion in the village center during peak seasons and a boom-and-bust business cycle throughout the year.

### **Economic Development Policies**

1. Support economic development that provides diversified and stable local employment opportunities with competitive wages that will enhance Weston's small town rural character and that will protect the community's natural resources.
2. Encourage those industries which best utilize the raw materials or labor already available in Weston and which do not adversely affect the natural resources or scenic beauty of the Town.
3. Encourage up-to-date communications services.
4. Require that all agricultural, industrial and commercial operations adequately control wastes, be environmentally responsible, relate satisfactorily to existing land uses and account to the Town for both direct and indirect municipal costs.
5. Encourage stable employment opportunities, including trained service providers.
6. Encourage businesses that support tourism and second homeowners by providing lodging, dining, recreational activities and necessary services.
7. Encourage home-based work and entrepreneurial ventures that preserve and revitalize the Town's character and add to the diversity of culture and activities available to residents and visitors.
8. Encourage farmlands to remain in a productive state and encourage land that has previously been used for farming to be returned to farming uses whenever possible. Encourage production and marketing of land-based activities such as agriculture and forest products.
9. Encourage and support Weston's cultural and spiritual based economy including civic, religious and non-profit organizations that contribute much to the quality and diversity of life in Weston.
10. Require that the construction, expansion or providing of public facilities and services not reduce the resource value of adjoining agricultural and forest lands.
11. Encourage sensible forest management practices in accordance with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and applicable State law.

### **Recommendations for Action**

1. Consider joining forces with other towns in the district to employ the resources at Flood Brook School and nearby technical training centers to enhance employment opportunities for local residents.
2. Help the Town prepare a capital budget.
3. Form an economic development committee to prepare an economic development plan for the Town to enhance business capabilities, including high speed, broadband telecommunications service.

# Education

**Goal:** To provide effective and efficient educational facilities and programs for Weston residents.

**Background:**

Weston does not operate a public school within the Town boundaries. K-8 students attend Flood Brook Union School in Londonderry. Students in grades 9-12 have school choice to attend any Vermont-approved secondary school. Pre-K students now participate in the new Windsor Southwest Supervisory Union Pre-School Collaborative.

### Weston Student Enrollment

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Pre-K			11	13	8	6
K-8	43	39	40	45	51	46
9-12	35	31	26	23	22	25
Total	78	70	77	81	81	77

Weston, along with Londonderry, Landgrove and Peru, belongs to the Windsor Southwest Supervisory Union and is a member of Union District #20, which operates the K-8 Flood Brook Union School in Londonderry. Weston has two representatives on the 8-member Flood Brook Union School Board. Forty-six Weston students currently attend the Flood Brook Union School (compared to 99 in 2000 and 43 in 2005). Of concern is the steady decline in Flood Brook's total enrollment over the past 15 years, from a peak of 345 students in 1995, to 281 students in 2000, to 252 students in 2010. The Flood Brook Union School District education property tax rate is based on the budget approved at the Flood Brook Annual Budget Meeting.

In addition, a three-member local Weston School Board deals with secondary and pre-K education expenditures. In 2006, the Windsor Southwest Supervisory Union created the Early Education Collaborative program through which the Town provides 10 hours of preschool per week to Weston 3 and 4 year olds attending pre-schools participating in the program. Currently six Weston children (out of 65 total children) attend The Little School at an annual cost of \$3,684 per child. The Little School is an independent, non-profit early-childhood program serving children aged 2 to 7 from Weston and neighboring towns. The Little School is located in the old Weston School building, which it leases from the Town. Since 1976, The Little School has been providing pre-school instruction and child-care for children, a necessary and valuable service.

Nearly all of Weston's secondary school students attend Burr & Burton Academy in Manchester. Each year a few students also elect to attend other private schools. Although Weston currently does not have any students attending Green Mountain Union High School or the River Valley Regional Technical High School, Weston students also have these public school options. As of Town Meeting 2011, Weston voted to authorize tuition payment not to exceed the Burr & Burton annual rate of \$14,100 per resident pupil attending approved independent secondary schools. Public school tuition is paid based on the school's announced tuition rate. In addition, the voters agreed to authorize transportation payment of \$1,008 per resident pupil attending Green Mountain Union High School, Burr & Burton and the Long Trail School. The local Weston school budget, which covers pre-school and high school tuitions, plus any special education costs for these students, is approved at the Weston Annual Meeting.

Weston's budget determines the education property tax rate for pre-K and 9-12 students. Weston's total education tax rate is a combination of the Flood Brook and Weston tax rates, apportioned on the percentage of equalized Weston students in each group (adjusted for Weston's Common Level of Appraisal). Additionally, 65.1% of Weston resident taxpayers are

income-sensitized and pay education property taxes based on their income rather than on their property values.

Under Act 153 of 2010 of the Vermont Legislature, the Weston Board has joined with the local boards of Londonderry, Landgrove, and Peru to consider the possible consolidation of all the local boards into a newly constituted K-12 Regional Education District to improve service and reduce costs. Replacing the four local boards and the current Flood Brook board with one unified K-12 board requires extensive study, approval by the Commissioner of Education, and final approval by the voters of all four towns. The boards are also considering a request to the Vermont Board of Education to move from Windsor Southwest Supervisory Union to the Bennington Rutland Supervisory Union where most students also attend Burr & Burton Academy. These initiatives could have a far-reaching impact on the education of Weston students.

### **Educational Policies:**

1. Encourage the active participation and input of Town residents into the decision-making process and actions being considered by Flood Brook Union School, Burr & Burton Academy, the Windsor Southwest Supervisory Union and the Weston School Board.
2. Require that proposed significant new development be reviewed in accordance with Act 250 formulas to determine whether the development will result in more students than our current school system can handle.
3. Continue the current method of providing choice for secondary schooling. Every effort should be made to continue this desirable system, rather than the Town joining one secondary union district. Elementary school students should be made aware of the available secondary school choices.
4. Continue to provide support for and cooperation with the Little School. The Little School is an asset to the community and should be encouraged to continue to provide education and services to pre-schoolers so that Weston's youngest students start school ready to learn.
5. Support educational policies to assure that Weston's school students will become self-supporting and participating members of society, including being literate, mathematically prepared, and aware of their own potential and the world around them. Students should be computer-literate by the end of eighth grade and possess the skills necessary to make informed decisions. High school students should be properly prepared for their future whether it be college, vocational, agriculture or forestry.
6. Encourage adults to use the existing educational facilities in the region, including the computers at Flood Brook School.
7. Continue to support the Wilder Memorial Library, which is an asset to the community also providing inter-library loan service and a computer with Internet access.

### **Recommendations for Action**

1. Town directors on the School Boards should develop a system to keep the people of Weston informed throughout the year of the actions being considered by the schools used by Weston residents.
2. Town representatives to the School Boards should push for standards to measure performance of students so that we know that our priorities with respect to learning are being met.
3. The ramifications of the impact of Acts 60 and 68 and the consequences on school budgets and education property taxes should continue to be monitored.

# Roads and Transportation

## **Goals:**

- To provide residents of the Town with safe and passable roads at all seasons of the year.
- To ensure that the road system respects the integrity of the natural and built environment.
- To provide safe and appropriate transportation for village center residents and visitors, while preserving the village center character.
- To ensure that traffic speed, parking and pedestrian facilities are handled adequately for the safety and convenience of residents and visitors, particularly in the village center, and in such a manner as to retain the rural character of the Town.
- To keep as many roads as possible as gravel roads in order to maintain the rural character of the Town, using paving only as a last resort.

## **Background:**

There are over 56 miles of highways in Weston, which should be adequate to serve the transportation needs of the community for the near future.

Type of Highway	Number of Miles
Class 1 Town Highways	0.00
Class 2 Town Highways	2.85
Class 3 Town Highways	35.41
Class 4 Town Roads	7.77
State highways	10.67
Total Highways	56.70

State Routes 100 and 155 are the major roadways into and out of Town. Route 100 runs from the Weston/Londonderry town line in a generally northerly direction through the Village Center and then to the Weston/Andover town lines, and serves as the primary transportation artery through Weston, as well as serving the local needs of Weston residents and visitors. State Route 155 connects Route 100 to the Mount Holly town line.

There are also two main east-west roads: the Andover Road which runs east from Route 100 in the Village Center, and the Landgrove Road running west from Route 100 in the Village Center to the Weston/ Landgrove town line. All of these roads are paved except for a portion of the Landgrove Road.

Most of the remaining town roads are gravel surfaces, and provide accesses to individual properties throughout the community. In addition, to the existing town roads, there are a few private roadways. The Town's narrow, winding gravel roads contribute to the community's scenic and historic character. The fact that few of the Town's roads are paved also limits traffic volume and speed, thus helping to promote safety.

The maintenance of the network of Town roads, bridges, culverts and drainage systems involves considerable work and expense. The cost of road maintenance has been steadily increasing over the last five years due to increased expectations for services from Townspeople. In 2011, the total highway budget is approximately 62% of the Town's total annual budget. The Town maintains the roads using the Town's road equipment that must be repaired or replaced periodically. Funds are being set aside in the municipal equipment reserve fund to cover future equipment costs.

Travel on area roads can be difficult during “mud season” and other periods of severe weather. Substantial growth in the commercial and social activity in the village center over the years has contributed to increased traffic volumes. Economic growth in the area has also led to increased volume of very large trucks and tractor-trailers on Route 100. Maximizing safety for pedestrians and travelers will require slowing traffic on Route 100 in the village center. Such measures may include traffic calming devices and techniques to control vehicular movement as well as providing adequate off-street parking and pedestrian walkways and crosswalks. Ways to make the village center a more attractive place for pedestrians should be developed and encouraged.

**Transportation Policies:**

1. Require that before improvements on Town roads are undertaken the impact of a greater, faster traffic burden should be carefully evaluated and considered. Stonewalls are an important part of the rural and aesthetic quality of the Town and shall not be affected by road improvements unless relocation is agreed to by the Town and affected landowner.
2. Encourage the preservation of the rural, historic and scenic character of the Town by retaining the existing paved and unpaved roads with no widening or increase in paving activity unless necessary for public safety. Any widening or paving shall minimize any adverse impact on the existing aesthetics and character of all Town and State roads.
3. Require that all road maintenance activities focus on safety, efficiency, cost-effectiveness and prevention of deterioration rather than on facilitation of greater traffic volumes or speed.
4. Allow the removal of healthy trees from the right-of-way only where absolutely necessary to improve visibility, to maintain utility corridors, to provide necessary plowing room or for the purposes of safety or to provide adequate drainage.
5. Require that all road cuts and embankments be properly graded and seeded to minimize erosion and to maintain the scenic character.
6. Retain all existing public rights-of-way whether or not the Town is presently maintaining them, in order to maintain access and provide for future growth.
7. Accept new roads only if they are related to the existing compact road system, thus avoiding unnecessary new mileage, and minimizing the impact of new or improved roads on designated areas of historic or scenic significance, fragile landscapes and major watershed drainage areas.
8. Encourage the continued support of transportation for the elderly.
9. Encourage efficient and safe pedestrian traffic circulation in the village center, including the development of sidewalks, crosswalks and other traffic calming measures to slow traffic particularly on Route 100.
10. 10Encourage the development of sufficient parking in the Village Center. The selection of land for any new parking areas shall be made so that these areas do not detract from the visual, architectural and historical significance of the Town and/or Village Center.
11. Require that all road construction activities, public or private, preserve scenic and historic features of the landscape, have no impact on important natural areas.
12. Require that all land use regulations continue to limit density and discourage development in remote areas, thereby minimizing negative impacts on Town roads.

**Recommendations for Action:**

1. Due to speeding traffic and the increased use of Route 100 by trucks, work with the State of Vermont to design and implement a plan to control traffic and pedestrians in a safe manner in the village center (e.g. sidewalks, crosswalks and other traffic calming measures).
2. Ensure timely maintenance of all roads and bridges through capital planning and budgeting.
3. Form a committee to explore ways to enhance traffic circulation in the village center, such as a pedestrian/cycling path and/or better signage that would link the north and south ends of the village.

# Town Government, Community Facilities and Services

**Goal:** To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of town government, community facilities and services to meet future needs.

## **Municipal Government:**

The official business of the Town of Weston is conducted at the annual March town meeting. The legislative body conducts most of the business of the Town between meetings. Elected or appointed officers with administrative and planning responsibilities include:

<b>Municipal Government Officials</b>		
Selectboard	5	Elected
Town Clerk	1	Elected
Town Treasurer	1	Elected
Listers	3	Elected
Auditors	3	Elected
Planning commissioners	7	Appointed
Zoning administrator	1	Appointed
Board Of Zoning Adjustment	7	Appointed
School Directors	5	Elected
Justices of Peace	5	Elected
Constables	2	Elected

Town government expense has increased because of inflation, and because administration has become more complex in recent years due to mandatory requirements imposed by State and Federal regulations. Further, the administration of the Town highways has been revised by the State with an increase in the number and complexity of the reports required.

The Town of Weston does not provide water or sewer systems, or fire or police protection. To provide these services would increase town taxes dramatically over present levels.

## **Public Buildings and Land:**

The Town owns the Town Hall, the Town Office Annex (leased to the Little School), the Wilder Memorial Library, the Town Garage, three cemeteries and four small parcels of land. The U. S. Forest Service owns approximately 9,340 acres. In addition, several public buildings and parcels of land are owned by non-profit organizations, including the Weston Playhouse, Farrar-Mansur Museum, Old Mill Museum, Craft Building, Farrar Park, Cold Spring Park, Weston Recreation Club, Weston Rod and Gun Club, Old Parish Church, Weston Priory, Weston Firehouse and Church on the Hill.

Public buildings and lands play an important role in the life of the community. For example, the Weston Playhouse and the Rod and Gun Club serve as the location of many Town functions, and community, social and cultural events. The National Forest is used for many recreational activities from hiking to cross country skiing to snowmobiling. The Weston Recreation Club serves as the focal point for summer activities of many Weston residents.

## **Emergency Services and Law Enforcement:**

Weston has an all-volunteer fire department with a firehouse located at the north end of the Village on Route 100. Duties of the Weston Fire Department range from fire prevention measures to assisting in rescue calls, as well as fire fighting. Weston is a member of the Southwestern New Hampshire Fire Mutual Aid, which may be called upon to assist the Weston Fire Department.

Emergency rescue services are provided to Weston residents by the Londonderry Rescue Squad located in the neighboring Town of Londonderry.

Weston has an elected constable and second constable who serve on a part-time, when-needed basis. The nearest State Police barracks is in Rockingham, approximately 16 miles from Weston.

#### **Emergency Planning And Disaster Preparedness:**

Disasters can happen anytime, with or without warning. Being prepared for disasters is key to developing a sustainable community. In the past, flooding from a rain related events have been the most likely disasters to occur in Weston. For example, flooding over the weekend of July 14, 2000 caused substantial damage to four of the Town's roads and flooded the basement of the Weston Playhouse.

Most preparation for disasters has been left to organizations that are called "first responders" such as local fire departments, search and rescue, Vermont Agency of Transportation, the Windsor County Sheriff and the State Police. These are strong organizations and as responders they continue to provide excellent service; however, preparedness is not only about response to emergencies, but preparing for emergencies, recovering from emergencies and finding ways to successfully mitigate against the impact of future emergencies and disasters.

Emergency planning and disaster preparedness are needed to help reduce the risk to life and health, the damage to public and private property and the environmental damage that often occurs during an emergency. Planning encourages Town officials to prepare calmly and realistically for likely emergencies, to know the location of resources and equipment that will be needed, to inform residents of the potential dangers and the ways to avoid them, and to quickly arrange help when help is needed. Recently, the emergency plan was revised and updated by the emergency service coordinator.

#### **Health and Social Services:**

There are no health care facilities or services based in the Town, although services are available in neighboring communities, including several organizations which the Town helps support: the Londonderry Rescue Squad, Neighborhood Connections, Mountain Valley Medical Clinic, which offers a full array of health care services, the Visiting Nurse Association, the Vermont Center for Independent Living, Health Care and Rehabilitative Services, and the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired. In addition, there are four hospitals within about one hour drive. An evaluation of the Town's health care needs suggests that the Town could not, in the foreseeable future, support a full-time physician or specialized health services.

#### **Electricity and Telecommunications:**

Satisfactory electric and landline telephone service (with optional high-speed Internet) is available throughout Weston. Cable service – including television, high-speed Internet and telephone – is increasingly available. Cell service, wireless and broadband is available in only some areas of Town.

#### **Communication Towers:**

Currently a proposal to construct at least one cell tower in Weston is before the Public Service Board. Weston's telecommunications zoning bylaws have been preempted by the State of Vermont.

#### **Cemeteries:**

There are three cemeteries in Weston. An elected board oversees the cemeteries in Town, and the Town appropriates funds for a portion of cemetery maintenance.

#### **Library:**

The Wilder Memorial Library, which has been operating as a public library for more than 100 years, is located in an historic building in the village center. The Library has a seven-member board of trustees elected at Town meeting. The Library, which is open on a regular basis, has a collection of approximately 4,000 books (adult and children's) and two computers with high-speed Internet access. Each year the Town appropriates funds to help with the costs of the library.

**Solid Waste**

Solid waste disposal is by contract to the Town of Londonderry for use of its Transfer and Recycling Station located south of Weston on Route 100. Weston is one of five towns utilizing the Londonderry transfer station. Some recycling is available at the site.

**Water Supply and Wastewater Disposal:**

The Town of Weston does not have a town water supply or sewage disposal system and instead relies on individual septic tanks with either dry wells or leach fields and individual wells or springs. Many of the existing on-site septic systems particularly in the village center are fragile and may be in need of replacing in the future. As of July 2007, all water and wastewater issues are managed and controlled by the Agency of Natural Resources.

**Municipal Finance/Capital Expenditure Program:**

Weston’s town budget has shown slow, but steady growth over the past five years. The 2001, 2006 and projected 2011 expenditures and tax rates are set forth below:

	Highway tax rate	Highway expenditures	Town general tax rate	Town general expenditures	School tax rate
2001	.2506	\$492,940 (actual)	.1065	\$222,535 (actual)	1.152
2006	.175	\$449,315 (actual)	.107	\$361,474 (actual)	1.11
2011	Not available yet	\$666,399 (budgeted)	Not available yet	\$407,038 (budgeted)	Not available yet

A capital budget and program would provide one way to coordinate planning for major expenses, and require that all town departments, service providers and school representatives identify projected capital needs, both immediate and for several years in the future. Priorities can then be decided upon and financing planned so that large fluctuations in the tax rate are avoided.

**Town Government, Community Facilities and Services Policies:**

1. Require that proposals for development must address the impacts of growth on police, fire and emergency service systems. Prohibit new development that exceeds the Town’s ability to provide community facilities and services. Developments that impact public services should be permitted only if it can be shown that such impacts will not subject taxpayers to any economic hardships.
2. Encourage non-profit organizations to continue to operate and provide services to the community and to maintain their properties in good condition.
3. Ensure that adequate health care, police and fire protection and emergency services remain available to the community and that the Town continues to support these critical service organizations through annual appropriations.
4. Support efforts to upgrade and expand telecommunications systems in the area so that residents can take advantage of the extensive information and services that are available.
5. Continue to support and appropriate funds to help with the costs of operation of the Wilder Memorial Library.
6. Support an expanded recycling program that encourages source reduction, recycling, composting efforts and hazardous waste disposal.
7. Continue to participate in the Londonderry Transfer station and use its efforts to ensure that it is an efficient regional solid waste management program.

8. Encourage the preparation of a Town capital budget and program indicating future needed and desired capital expenditures in order to coordinate the financing of major public expenditures. The budget should be prepared according to State guidelines, so that the Town would be eligible for State and Federal grant monies.
9. Discourage development on lands where soil conditions and topography may cause failure of waste disposal systems or contamination of ground and surface waters.
10. Be prepared in the event of failure of existing septic systems in the Village.
11. Require that any development, which is responsible for unique or large amounts of solid waste disposal, be permitted only if it can be demonstrated that the method of disposal will not adversely affect the environment and that the developer shall pay for such disposal.
12. Require that all development and subdivisions provide necessary means of fire protection. Including dry hydrants and fire ponds where feasible.
13. Continue to encourage the review and updating of all emergency plans and work with Windham Regional Planning Commission's ongoing emergency planning efforts.

**Recommendations for Action:**

1. Comply with the State's illegal dumping and open burning ordinance.
2. Prepare and implement a capital budget program.
3. Encourage broadband Internet access for all parts of Weston.
4. Review the necessity for Weston's Telecommunications bylaws.

# Recreation

**Goal:** *To offer diverse recreational opportunities to all residents in the Town.*

## **Background:**

Many opportunities for recreation are available in Weston. Weston's rural character is well suited to a wide variety of outdoor activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, bicycling, snowmobiling, and fishing, to name just a few. Much of the land in the Green Mountain National Forest is actively managed for recreational use, and all of this land is accessible to the public. There is a system of trails, Forest Service roads and snowmobiling trails maintained by VAST that are used for recreational activities and can be accessed through an extensive network of trails in adjacent towns.

The Weston Recreation Club owns 13 acres of land, which includes a large swimming pond, tennis courts and a basketball court. There are also private fields at Weston Island used for soccer.

The Town's natural resources have provided important recreational resources and the Townspeople see little need for "built" facilities for recreation other than the Weston Recreation Club. Such valued resources include wildlife habitats, streams, the unpaved rural road system and the expanses of undeveloped land, all of which is essential to the quality of life in Weston.

## **Recreation Policies:**

1. Ensure the preservation of the Town's outstanding natural environment for outdoor sports.
2. Encourage that any development of recreational facilities be as informal and economical as possible and shall not contribute in any way to the deterioration of our natural environment.
3. Require that all developments and capital investments that involve, or potentially affect access to, an important recreational resource include provisions to ensure protection of that resource and continued public access.
4. Continue to support the Weston Recreation Club.

## **Recommendations for Action:**

1. Design and implement a plan for bike/pedestrian trails through the village center.

# Natural Resources

## **Goal:**

- To identify, protect and preserve natural resources, natural areas and fragile areas and scenic resources, such as scenic roads, waterways, landscapes and views, farmlands and open meadows.
- To plan for and protect land, water, air and wildlife resources.
- To prevent the potential adverse impacts of earth resource extraction or processing activities.

## **Background:**

Weston has an abundance and variety of valuable natural resources. The importance of these resources is discussed below. Conservation of natural resources is of continuing public benefit.

## **Topography:**

Weston lies within the Green Mountain National Forest and as a result its terrain presents an extreme contrast of form and elevation. The West River Valley, part of the Connecticut River watershed, runs north south through the central part of the town. Elevations range from 1200 to 2200 feet above sea level. Enclosing the West River Valley are several dominant ridgelines. To the west are Peabody Hill and Holt Mountain, to the east is Markham Mountain. Much of Weston's lands have critical or serious limitations for development where steep slopes, shallow soils and high water table conditions occur. There are areas of steep slopes and soils that are too wet, shallow or unstable for development. Siting development on steep slopes or unsuitable soils can cause severe problems -- roads will be difficult and costly to maintain, septic systems may be impossible to install or can fail and contaminate water supplies and erosion may result in soil loss and degradation of aquatic environments.

## **Forest Lands:**

There is much woodland in Weston, including 9,340 acres of national forest. Timber is a potential resource of commercial value.

The mountainous, forested landscapes is also the primary habitat for large mammals, including black bear, moose, deer, bobcat, fisher, coyote, otter, and beaver. Completing the forest landscape are the smaller mammals, reptiles, amphibians, game birds, raptors, and many valued songbirds and insects, which are dependent on the diverse forest species. Maintaining large tracts of connected forestland for the promotion and support of these species is critical. For example, deer wintering areas and bear habitat are necessary for the animals to continue to thrive within that area. For wintering deer, low-lying softwood stands with southern exposures provide critical shelter from deep snow and cold temperatures. Stands of mature beech and oaks and newly regenerated soft mast areas provide important feeding habitats for black bear. Road and housing construction and other forms of development, as well as indiscriminate timber cutting and outbreaks of tree disease, reduce both the quantity and quality of deer wintering areas. Bear travel corridors supply a necessary link between feeding and breeding areas. These areas are particularly important since food sources and supplies vary from season to season and from year to year.

## **Natural Areas and Wildlife:**

Natural areas are landscape features, which have ecological, educational, scenic, and contemplative value, and are important to the wildlife and the natural heritage of the Town. These areas provide ecological preserves of relatively unaltered environments and can provide habitats for threatened or endangered species. Protecting the critical habitats and corridors for large, roaming species helps to ensure the protection of habitat for other large species and smaller species alike, thus protecting important ecosystems within the Town.

The West River has been identified as a nationally important fish and wildlife habitat.

**Water Resources and Quality:**

Weston contains a rich variety of water resources. The most visible of these are the West River, Trout Club Pond and several smaller streams. These bodies of water are important fisheries, provide a critical habitat component for many wildlife species, offer opportunities for swimming and other recreational activities, and are critical to the area's aesthetic appeal. They also supply clean water to larger waterways. Weston provides much of the headwaters of the West River. It is critical that these water resources remain free of pollution and the stream banks and riparian vegetation not be damaged.

**Shoreland Areas:**

Shoreland areas border waters with high scenic, resource and recreational value. Wantastiquet Pond is the primary shoreland area in the Town.

**Ground Water:**

Weston's residents and businesses depend upon ground water wells for their potable water supply and disposal needs. The amount and quality of ground water appears to be adequate, but problems of supply and quality may well occur if the land is used more intensively. Protecting these water resources from pollution is critical to maintaining adequate water supplies for area businesses and residents. Future protection of these water supplies will depend upon strict adherence to local and State health regulations.

**Surface Water:**

Surface waters are predominant landscape features throughout the Town and have often determined the location and form of settlement in Town. High surface water quality is a valuable resource, which supplies rivers that provide fish and wildlife habitat and recharge the riverine aquifers, from which a significant portion of the Town's drinking water is derived. Methods for protecting the quality of the Town's water supplies from various forms of pollution should be a priority.

**Wetlands:**

Wetlands and other surface waters provide specialized habitats for fish, reptiles, and migratory birds while adding to the scenic quality of the Town. These areas, which are protected by State and Federal regulations, can provide important habitats for threatened or endangered species.

**Flood Hazard Areas:**

Flood hazard areas are areas where streams leave their floodways or channels during an event associated with excessive rainfall. They are characterized by broad flat areas that are capable of dispersing flood waters by reducing the velocity of flood waters and thus reducing the amounts of sediment loads that streams are required to carry during a flood event. Historically, these broad flat areas have been easy to develop as towns and/or farms.

Areas subject to periodic flooding are identified by the Vermont Department of Water Resources. Development planning should maintain green space along streams and prohibit development that occurs in the Flood Plain Districts. Flood hazard areas should be protected because they minimize hazards from flooding, erosion and sedimentation: they help to maintain the capacity of stream channels to carry 100-year flood events; they help to protect the recharge and water storage benefits of streams as they relate to flooding, and for the protection of streams as wildlife habitats: and they can help minimize the potential threats against life and property.

**Air Quality:**

Air quality is very good in the Town. Threats to air quality include combustion by-products from wood stoves, industry and manufacturing, and agricultural, forestry and waste management practices. The main locally generated cause of air pollution is from vehicle emissions; however, not all of the pollutants are from sources within the Town. The topography, prevailing wind and weather system patterns result in air pollution traveling from other states and other regions of the State. Due to the transport of air pollutants, it is difficult to control all air

quality at a local level. The Town is dependent upon federal and state regulations to regulate both imported and locally generated air pollution.

**Soils Resources:**

Soils characteristics can create opportunities for, or physical site limitations to, a variety of land uses such as: farming, forestry, and mineral extraction and land development. Prime agricultural soils are soils that are rated high for crop production potential. Weston's primary soils are limited and generally located in the river valleys. Since most primary agricultural soils are flat and well drained, these soils are also very developable. Development in the Town has traditionally been encouraged on soils suitable for in-ground sewage disposal systems. Soils located in steep grade areas generally are not suitable for agriculture or septic systems.

**Mineral Resources:**

There are a number of resources located underground in the Town of Weston, including gravel and sand in the West River valley. Currently, underground mineral extraction does not provide a significant economic resource. In the Windham Region, sand and gravel operations are the only extractive resource that has not declined. Sand and gravel deposits will continue to be important for building foundations, fill, erosion control, road maintenance and construction needs. Earth resource extraction and/or processing activities have a particularly high potential for having an adverse impact to the area where such activities are located. In Weston, gravel and sand extraction is regulated as a conditional use so that sites can be reclaimed and the quality of the environment protected.

Many negative factors are associated with resource extraction. Among these are noise, dust, air pollution, radiation, surface and groundwater pollution, siltation of streams, increased storm water runoff, erosion and sedimentation, despoliation of the landscape and limited utility for subsequent use of the site. The perception of the public is that extractive processes will reduce property values because of primary or secondary impacts of the proposed extractive operations such as increased traffic using large transport vehicles. Additionally, earth resource extraction or processing operations tend to be expansive and land-intensive activities that often begin to grow completely out of scale with past or existing development activity within a town. All of these factors, singly or together, may act to substantially depreciate land values in the immediate vicinity of such activities, as well as in the Town in general.

**Scenic Resources - Landscapes and Views:**

Weston's scenic landscape, including its roads, open lands, the West River, other waterways and water bodies, and its mountains, ridge tops and forests, is widely appreciated by residents and visitors and is a valuable natural and economic resource. These scenic resources provide a unique visual experience for residents and attract a significant tourist population, important to the local economy. As the Town grows, its highly valued scenery will continue to evolve. Only through good planning and design will these changes occur without adversely affecting the scenic value of the landscape. Conservation of scenic resources should be an important consideration in the planning and design of development. Maintaining scenic qualities requires coordination within the Town, neighboring towns and the Region.

The scenic quality of Weston is derived from two major visual components: landscape form and landscape pattern.

Landscape form is the shape or topography of land, which reflects the underlying bedrock formations and past modification by glacial action. The important landscape forms in Weston are 1) steep slopes, 2) valley floors, 3) intermediate slopes, 4) ridgelines and 5) mountain peaks and hilltops. Each of these forms has an influence on settlement and its impact on scenic quality. For example, settlement generally in each of these areas other than intermediate slopes could be extremely visible from other areas.

Landscape pattern, the other major visual component affecting scenic quality, is the distribution and relationship of features on the land related to nature or the activities of man. The important features of the landscape pattern in Weston are 1) open fields and woodlands, 2) surface water, 3) farms, 4) scenic views, 5) scenic back roads, and 7) village center.

The most apparent visual aspect of the Town's landscape is the contrast between open fields and the woodlands that enclose them. The fields are extremely visible and therefore vulnerable to settlement, while woodlands are better able to absorb settlement with less visual impact if tree cover is conserved.

Weston's landscape pattern, outside of the village center, has evolved primarily as a result of agricultural pursuits. The isolated groupings of farm dwellings and buildings are characteristic of these activities and provide focal points of scenic and historic interest.

There are numerous views with high scenic appeal that exist along the roads within Weston, including panoramic views to Peabody Hill, Holt Mountain and Markham Mountain. Such views also include Terrible Mountain in Andover and views to distant mountains (Stratton, Glebe, Bromley and Styles Peak), ridgelines, and along the valley of the West River. Another integral element of the scenic countryside is the network of narrow, gravel back roads comprising the town's highway system.

The village center also has high scenic appeal with its attractive village green, historic buildings and small scale. Preservation of the character of the village has been identified as a key concern of Westonites.

Light pollution or "sky glow" is a cumulative problem. Light projecting upwards from the Town produces a glow, which diminishes the natural quality of the nighttime landscape and night sky. Special consideration should be given to lighting design in order to minimize this cumulative adverse effect of light pollution.

#### **Natural Resource Land Use Policies**

1. Require that land capability be an important factor in deciding how the lands of Weston will be used.
2. Require that lands with a high resource value, including natural, scenic and historic sites, and lands with limited capability for development be protected from development that would threaten their resource value or be detrimental to the public health, safety and welfare.
3. Require that development be discouraged and strictly regulated within the ecological zone above 2,000 feet.
4. Encourage the Town to consider acquiring open land suitable for public use and encourage gifts of land to the Town for the purposes of resource use and conservation so long as the benefits of such gifts outweigh the costs to the Town.
5. Encourage the Town to cooperate with organizations engaged in the conservation and preservation of lands, if it is in the Town's best interest.
6. Require that developers of large projects incorporate open space in their projects for the purposes of recreation and resource conservation.
7. Protect the scenic and aesthetic value of the approaches to the village center, including Routes 100 and 155, the Andover Road and the Landgrove Road.
8. Work to maintain scenic and recreational value and environmental quality of stream and riverbanks.
9. Discourage large clear-cut areas unless part of a forest management plan which has received extensive public comment.

10. Require that development and expansion of public utility facilities and services occur within the highway or existing public utility rights-of-way corridors in order to reduce adverse physical and visual impact on the landscape and achieve greater efficiency in the expenditure of public funds.
11. Efforts shall be made to influence public utility companies and developers to bury utility lines in areas of scenic or historic value, the village center and residential subdivisions.
12. Discourage the highly visible development and extensive clearing of vegetation that could spoil the natural beauty of the ridge tops in Weston.
13. Encourage efforts to continue the preservation of Old Mill Dam.
14. Support maintaining rivers and streams in a natural state and retain existing public access.
15. Discourage development in areas where rare or threatened species are located. \_
16. Settlement on lands of resource value for woodlands shall occur in patterns and densities that will not substantially reduce the area or woodland productivity of those lands. Fragmentation of forest blocks should be avoided.

#### **Groundwater Policies**

1. Require the regulation of development within the following areas:
  - Areas between 2,000 and 2,500 feet elevation,
  - Drainage areas (watersheds) of upland streams,
  - Areas supplying large amounts of recharge waters to aquifers,
  - Areas characterized by steep slopes (20 per cent or more).
2. Require that any builder or developer must give proper assurances that any new water supply system or waste disposal system shall not deplete, contaminate or change the quality of any existing water supply system.
3. Require that all sewerage systems must be of the type that will not pollute ground water or water recharge areas.

#### **Flood Hazard Areas Policies**

1. Require the protection of flood hazard areas by regulating development as follows:
  - Restrict new structures on land within the floodway.
  - Within the remainder of the flood-hazard area, structures shall be allowed, provided they are flood proofed or elevated above the base flood and provided that their sewage systems will not contaminate floodwaters.
  - Suitable uses within flood plains include agriculture and forestry, non-intensive outdoor recreation, activities connected with conservation and wildlife propagation, and flood control projects.
  - Vegetation, indigenous to the area, should be maintained for at least 100 feet back from the stream banks.
2. Encourage the use of flood hazard areas for agricultural purposes and open space.

#### **Surface Water, Wetland, Watercourses and Shoreline Policies**

1. Require that significant wetlands, watercourses and shorelines be protected by appropriate setback and frontage requirements and all other development standards that apply. Shorelines and stream banks shall be retained in a natural state and protected

from uses and settlement that would cause erosion, prohibit public access, and reduce scenic qualities of surface waters.

2. Encourage the protection of wetlands and watercourses, in accordance with federal and state regulations, for the provision of wildlife habitats, retention areas for surface runoff, recreation and scientific value.

### **Wildlife Policies**

1. Require that development within or adjacent to areas of significant wildlife habitat as identified on Town plan maps be regulated to preserve such habitats.
2. Prohibit the development in habitats, which support endangered or rare species.

### **Topography and Soil Policies**

1. Prohibit development in areas where the topography and soil conditions are such that development may cause contamination of surface or subsurface waters, soils, erosion or failure of waste disposal systems. Recommend restriction of development in areas with significant water storage potential for fire protection, recreation, or wildlife purposes. The Weston Town maps and the U. S. Soil Conservation Soils maps and interpretation sheets shall be utilized in determining where development can satisfactorily be located.

### **Mineral Resources Policies**

1. Require that the extraction or processing of resources located underground in the Town must not be permitted to impose an adverse impact upon the residents of Weston. The public interest shall be protected by regulations assuring that both the present and future effects of such extraction or processing operations are not unduly adverse to the public health, safety comfort or convenience or unreasonably damaging to the value of surrounding properties.
2. Require that the following factors be considered in connection with the extraction or processing of earth resources:
  - Noise, dust and air pollution or radiation;
  - Surface and groundwater pollution, siltation or radiation;
  - Storage and disposal of waste materials, both solid and liquid;
  - Increased storm water runoff, erosion and sedimentation;
  - Despoliation of the landscape and limited utility for subsequent use of the site;
  - Decreased highways safety and increased municipal costs due to increased traffic and accelerated deterioration of highways and bridges attributable to transportation activities generated by the earth resources operations;
  - Reduced property values because of primary or secondary impacts of the proposed earth resources operations.
3. Permit all earth resource extraction or processing activities unless it is demonstrated that there will be an undue adverse impact on the Town or its residents.
4. Require that no new earth resource extraction or processing operation, expansion of an existing operation, or resumption of an inactive operation be permitted until a full examination of the proposed operation has shown that there will not be an unreasonable detrimental impact on the Town. Any such extraction or processing proposal shall include a plan, acceptable to the Planning Commission, for the rehabilitation of the site and guarantees should be received to ensure the rehabilitation at the operators' expense. State law (24 V.S.A. Section 4407(8)) permits local zoning regulations to require financial guarantees.
5. Prohibit earth resource extraction or processing operations, which will involve more than five acres of land at any one time.

**Recommendations for Action:**

1. In cooperation with the Weston Conservation Commission and the local land trust, identify and catalog significant natural sites that may need protection, including important wetlands and wildlife habitats, important farm and forestland parcels.
2. In cooperation with the Weston Conservation Commission and the local land trust, identify significant wetlands and watercourses.

# Historic and Cultural Resources

**Goal:** To identify, protect and preserve important historic and cultural resources.

## **Historic Resources:**

There are a number of structures and locations within Weston that have historical value, including sites of significant events in the history of the Town, ruins and remains of the Town's economic history, remainders of the Town's settlement and transportation pattern as well as stone walls and open fields.

Weston has continued to attract both residents and tourists through its compatible relationship of architecture and environment, and the character of the village center, which has been consciously maintained by past and present generations of residents. Weston's village center, comprised of many structures of historic value, represents a significant development pattern during an important period in American history. The National Register of Historic Sites and Structures identifies the Village Center in its inventory of Historic Districts. The Weston Village Historic District (1985) is composed of 67 principal structures most of which line Route 100. The preservation of the character of the village center is very important to the people, community and economy of Weston.

In addition to the village, there are many structures and sites scattered throughout Weston with historical value, including unique barns, old mill sites, all of which help to contribute to maintaining the social fabric of the community and establishing a sense of continuity between generations of citizens. Each structure, regardless of architectural style, reflects the values and standard of the period from whence it came.

## **Cultural Resources:**

Weston is fortunate to have a large number of and strong tradition of cultural resources for a town of its size. For example, the Weston Playhouse Theatre Company, which was organized, by a group of local residents is celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2011. Weston is also home to the Kinhaven Music School, two museums, a 100-year-old library, two churches and the Weston Priory which each year draws thousands of visitors from around the world. Weston's cultural resources play an important part in the lives of its residents. Many people who settle in Weston come for the cultural aspects as well as the natural and built beauty of the Town. Preserving and supporting these resources should continue to be a high priority.

## **Historic and Cultural Policies:**

1. Strengthen the role of cultural and artistic disciplines in public education.
2. Encourage community-based facilities and organizations that support cultural needs.
3. Protect places of outstanding educational, aesthetic, archeological, cultural, or historical value from development that unreasonably impairs their character and quality.
4. Discourage development which would adversely affect cultural resources, including their destruction or alteration, alteration of surroundings, or the introduction of non-harmonious visual, audible, or atmospheric elements.
5. Require that publicly owned, architecturally and historically significant structures be kept as visual and cultural assets. Seek public uses and/or ownership to preserve significant historic sites or structures.
6. Encourage rehabilitation of significant historic sites and structures. Whenever feasible, structures of historical significance shall be converted to new uses which would maintain their architectural or cultural value to the community.

7. Encourage development which preserves the historic and architectural character of the Town, village center and rural landscape.
8. Require that lands adjacent to or including historic places listed in the National Register and any local historical surveys, or areas of historical educational, cultural, scientific, architectural or archeological value be used in a manner that will be compatible with the character of their neighborhood.

**Recommendations for Action:**

1. In cooperation with the Weston Historical Society, identify and catalog historic sites and structures and archeological sites within the Town and assess the need for further protective measures.
2. In cooperation with the Weston Historical Society, assist property owners to identify, preserve, and protect historic sites, foundations, stonewalls, and ruins located on their property.
3. The Planning Commission should consider whether there should be an historical overlay district in the village center.

# Energy

**Goal:** To encourage the efficient use of energy in Weston.

## **Background:**

Energy is a scarce resource that should be considered in any comprehensive land use planning process. Homes and businesses use a variety of energy sources for heating -- fuel oil, gas, wood, electricity and coal. With a heating season that generally lasts seven months, it is evident that home and business energy consumption is a significant issue for everyone in the area. Substantial economic savings can be realized through energy conservation. In addition, a reduction in energy usage also reduces the production of environmental pollutants.

Energy conservation can be facilitated through effective land use planning, building standards and design, and improved transportation efficiency. As a rural community, development densities in Weston should be relatively low and new development should be along existing roads, thus limiting the need for costly and energy inefficient scattered development. Permitting home occupations also supports the objective of energy conservation by reducing the need for some residents to commute to work. Decisions concerning public capital expenditures on roads and other infrastructure should consider energy conservation.

The siting, design and construction of buildings strongly influences the amount of energy required for heating and cooling, as well as the amount of electricity needed for lighting. Proper subdivision design, building orientation, construction and landscaping provide opportunities for passive solar space and domestic hot water heating, natural lighting and photovoltaic electricity production. Additional energy savings can be realized by retrofitting existing building with insulation, weather-stripping, energy efficient windows, compact fluorescent lights and efficient appliances.

## **Energy Policies:**

1. Ensure that utilities have demonstrated, using all reasonable measures, that they are maximizing efficiencies and assisting customers in energy conservation before constructing additional generation and transmission facilities.
2. Encourage all new development to follow the energy conservation guidelines developed by the Public Service Department for Act 250 permits.
3. Ensure that the state monitors the effects of restructuring electric utilities and protects the interests of small rural communities and their residents.
4. Require the use of existing utility line corridors for the expansion of existing electric transmission lines or the construction of new electric transmission lines.
5. Encourage the layouts of streets, lots and buildings that are oriented to the south where practicable in order to take advantage of natural light and heat. New and rehabilitated buildings shall be designed to maximize solar gain.
6. Require that new construction take into consideration shelter from the winter winds and the use of trees shall be encouraged for summer shade.
7. Protect buildings that are using solar energy from interference cast by new structures.
8. Encourage the use of wood, propane and other clean fuels as heating so long as its emission does not interfere with the state standards for air quality.
9. Encourage Town residents to use state and local weatherization programs that identify areas of heat loss in buildings and also provide solutions.

10. Require the full cost of energy be considered in any new construction or rehabilitation.
11. Encourage landlords to adequately insulate multi-family dwellings, especially those in which tenants are responsible for their own heating bills.
12. Encourage the Town to make every effort to minimize its own energy consumption by using appropriate energy conservation and efficiency practices and support programs that are designed to increase public awareness of energy issues and to encourage homeowners to conserve energy.
13. Require that all major development proposals fully and effectively address energy conservation and efficiency concerns.
14. Require that all land use planning be consistent with the objective of energy efficiency.
15. Protect all renewable energy resources.

**Recommendations for Action:**

1. Form a committee to study renewable energy resources.

## Housing

**Goal:** To make it possible for persons of all income levels to have access to safe and affordable housing.

**Background:**

Housing, especially affordable housing, is an increasingly important issue for communities and the State of Vermont. Home ownership is difficult for many credit-worthy people due to the high up-front costs of purchasing a home and the increase in median home sale prices in recent years. Weston has housing needs that are influenced by state and national trends but are also unique to a small, rural community that has become an attractive place for second homeowners.

An adequate supply of year-round housing which offers a variety of size, cost and location is essential to the economic and social health of the Town. It is a benefit to the Town when employees can live close to their workplace, young adults are able to buy or rent a home in the Town and elderly residents are able to remain in the Town with their family and friends. The Town abuts a number of areas used for seasonal recreation, vacation activities and has been affected by seasonal housing development. Providing safe, affordable, and convenient housing for senior citizens, very low-income households, and disabled residents is a priority shared by the Town with all towns in the Region.

Weston residents live, for the most part, in widely dispersed, single family housing along the major roads in town. Over the years there have been several small subdivisions of 2 to 9 lots and four larger subdivisions. Weston also has a sizeable number of seasonal housing units. The 2010 Census counted 565 housing units but as of this writing had not yet released the breakdown of primary and secondary homes. However, the Town Listers reported in mid-2011 that homesteaders (owners of primary homes) represented about 45% of Weston homes – versus 50% in 1990.

Like many neighboring communities, most of the Town's new houses have been built according to an emerging settlement pattern where most new houses are built away from the village center, usually along Town roads. The desire for a housing site that is rural in appearance is a priority for many who seek to build in the Town. This low-density form of single-family housing has contributed to the long-term change of the Town's historic landscape with non-resident demand for second home sites still strong in the Town. In general, this is typical of Southern Vermont.

The second home market has inflated land and housing prices by adding demand for land, construction, labor and resources. The high cost of land has discouraged the construction of modest, resource-efficient, year-round homes suited to the needs of long term Weston residents, while encouraging the construction of less environmentally and socially sustainable dwellings. The current rate of construction is centered on a demand for single-family homes suggesting that housing prices are likely to rise even further, adding to an existing affordability problem.

The number of building permits for new construction is one indicator of the Town's housing market. The chart below shows the number of residential permits issued for new home construction over the last 4 years. Over the past 11 years, the annual numbers ranged from 2 in 2010 to 10 in 2001 and 2003. The average has been about 5 per year.

### Number of Zoning and Sign Permits Issued from 2007 - 2010

	2007	2008	2009	2010
New homes	5	3	3	2
Residential additions/alterations/decks	10	8	12	5
Commercial alterations	0	1	7	3
Garages, sheds etc.	11	10	8	7
Agricultural or barns	0	0	0	1
Trailers	0	0	0	1
Commercial utility bldgs	0	2	0	0
Signs	3	0	0	0
Other	1	1	1	1

At a public input meeting held by the Planning Commission in early 2006, one of the top concerns of the attendees was the growing need for affordable housing for different types of households – from young families to older residents. Housing is “affordable”, according to the Department of housing and Community Affairs, when households with incomes at or below the county median pay no more than 30% of their gross income for housing costs.

Weston is a small community and efforts to alleviate the affordable housing needs should be implemented on a scale appropriate to the population. In a rural town, efforts to provide affordable housing may include: identification of property or structures that could be used for affordable or senior housing, informal counseling and assistance to families in need of affordable housing, flexible zoning regulations which would allow for alternative housing types which may meet affordable housing criteria and working with local land trusts.

The development of residential housing is perhaps the biggest factor affecting the future of Weston. While development is proceeding at a moderate pace, its individual, scattered nature – one structure at a time – inhibits the Town’s ability to plan new growth comprehensively.

**Housing Policies:**

1. Require that new and rehabilitated housing, including seasonal housing, should be safe and sanitary and coordinated with existing public facilities, services and utilities.
2. Require a diversity of housing opportunities including affordable housing for young families and seniors.
3. Support the provision for one-acre lots in the Weston Zoning bylaws that will encourage development of affordable housing.
4. Encourage the inclusion of provisions in the Planned Unit Development regulations that will provide applicants with incentives to include housing opportunities for less economically advantaged persons.
5. Support a requirement by the Selectboard that any organization requesting a certificate of public good for planned land use address the question of how it plans to accommodate the long-range objective of Weston to maintain a diverse socio-economic population if the land in question includes parcels suitable for residential use.
6. Encourage multi-family housing and senior housing.

7. Require that all housing, both seasonal and permanent, be considered by the same standards, and new development shall include adequate provision for public facilities and services.
8. Require that new housing be planned and sited so that it blends with the character of the community and does not destroy natural and scenic resources.
9. Encourage the development of rental housing.
10. Discourage the conversion of affordable residential housing into commercial properties.
11. Encourage cluster housing.
12. Consider “incentive/flexible zoning” to allow for higher density housing developments to preserve farmland and undeveloped land.
13. Consider higher density in the village center.
13. Work with not-for-profit organizations and government agencies to pursue options and meet housing needs of Weston residents.

**Recommendations for Action:**

1. Conduct an inventory of community needs and existing low and moderate-income housing.
2. Conduct a study of Town policies for low and moderate income housing to assure that these policies are current.
3. Conduct studies to help identify areas where residential growth is appropriate and where it should be limited.
4. Upon completion of the Town Plan, re-evaluate zoning and subdivision bylaws for conformance with the Plan.

## Implementing the Town Plan

Effective implementation of this Plan requires careful consideration and action by the Townspeople, their Selectboard, Planning Commission, and other local boards, commissions and organizations. As the Town continues to grow and come under additional development pressure, Weston will need to develop methods to deal with the inevitable problems. Among the many available methods, which should be considered, are the following:

1. **Planning:** The Weston Town Plan must constantly be reviewed and, if necessary, amended to reflect new developments and changed conditions affecting the Town. The existing planning program should be strengthened, with the Town boards, especially the Planning Commission, taking the lead. Discussions of planning issues should become a regular part of their agendas. Effort by all the people of the Town is needed to sustain and enrich such programs.
2. **Community Needs/Actions:** The Plan contains a set of recommended actions. . Following approval of the Plan, the Planning Commission should work with representatives of the community establish a schedule for the discussion and possible implementation of these recommendations.
3. **Land Use Regulations:** Zoning bylaws, including flood hazard, shoreland, and wetland regulations, subdivision regulations, and other ordinances allow the Town to permit, prohibit, restrict, regulate and determine land development, including, without limitation, the following:
  - Specific uses of land, watercourses and other bodies of water.
  - Dimensions, location, erection, construction, repair, maintenance, alteration, razing, removal, and use of structures.
  - Areas and dimensions of land to be occupied by uses and structures, as well as areas, yards and other open spaces and distances to be left unoccupied by uses and structures.
  - Density of populations and intensity of use.

Such land use regulations should be used to promote the public health and safety, environmental quality and protection of the quality of life.

4. **Land Acquisition:** Acquisition by the Town in fee simple, by lease, by easements of development rights, and by gift are the most certain methods for protecting and assuring access and enjoyment of valuable recreational and scenic lands. Landowners can also negotiate conservation agreements with organizations such as the Vermont Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy and the Weston Land and Conservation Trust to protect productive agricultural and forestlands, protect wildlife habitat, natural areas, or public recreation lands.
5. **Taxation:** Vermont's Use Value Appraisal Program encourages long-term agriculture and forestry uses of property through tax incentives. The Program encourages the maintenance of undeveloped land for farming, forestry, and public recreation. The Town may also provide property tax relief for qualifying farm, forest, and open space landowners by adopting local tax stabilization programs to reduce local property tax burden. For general purposes, the assessing and taxing of land shall seek to strengthen the policies spelled out in this Town Plan, so long as they do not conflict with State laws or policies.

6. **Voluntary Action:** Privately-agreed restrictive covenants binding on purchasers of land, special attention and consideration given by private landowners to the objectives of this Plan and its policies when they decide to build or subdivide, formation of non-profit conservation or community land trusts, participation in the Act 250 review process by abutting landowners, and participation in Town planning by citizens concerned about the future of Weston are all ways to implement this Plan.
  
7. ***Relationship Between Plan and Plans for Surrounding Areas.*** The relationship between the Plan and the development trends in and Plans for the surrounding area has been considered. It is the goal of this Plan and future planning process to cooperate with neighboring towns in addressing mutual concerns and in planning regional development, including participating actively in the Windham Regional Commission, participating actively in the Union District # 20 which operates Flood Brook School and District # 3 of Weston which oversees the secondary education and communicating with neighboring towns on matters of mutual concern, such as roads, educational facilities, state aid, health care, economic development, land development, waste disposal and recycling.

## Weston's Response to Vermont's Planning Goals

Weston's response to the Vermont Planning Goals (24 V.S.A. § 4302) can be found throughout the Plan. Often times the goals, and therefore the responses, overlap from section to section. Our specific responses to the goals will be listed as they are found in our objectives, policies and action steps.

**Goal 1:** To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside. Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged. Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas. Public investments should reinforce the general character and planned growth pattern of the area.

- Results of Public Meeting
- Town Plan Goals
- General Land Use Policies
- General Land Use Actions
- Residential District Policies
- Village District Policies
- Economic Development Policies
- Transportation Policies
- Natural Resources Land Use Policies
- Historic and Cultural Policies
- Historic and Cultural Actions

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

- Town Plan Goals
- Commercial District Policies
- Industrial District Policies
- Economic Development Policies

**Goal 3:** To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

- Town Plan Goals
- Educational Policies
- Historic and Cultural Policies

**Goal 4:** To provide for safe, convenient, economic and energy efficient transportation systems that respects the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.

- Results of Public Meeting
- Village District Policies
- Economic Development Actions
- Transportation Policies
- Transportation Actions
- Recreation Actions

**Goal 5:** To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including significant natural and fragile areas; outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shore lands, and wetlands; significant scenic roads, waterways and views; important historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas.

- Town Plan Goals
- Economic Development Policies

**Goal 6:** To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, and land resources.

- Town Plan Goals
- General Land Use Policies
- Rural Residential District Policies
- Commercial District Policies
- Transportation Policies
- Recreation Policies
- Natural Resources Land Use Policies
- Wildlife Policies

**Goal 7:** To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.

- Town Plan Goals
- Energy Policies

**Goal 8:** To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors. Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities. Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided and protected wherever appropriate.

- General Land Use Policies
- Recreation Policies
- Natural Resources Land Use Policies

**Goal 9:** To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries. Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural and forest lands should be encouraged and should include maintaining low overall density. The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged. The use of locally grown food products should be encouraged. Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged. Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forestland.

- Results of Public Meeting
- Town Plan Goals
- General Land Use Policies
- Rural Residential District Policies
- Rural Low Intensity District Policies
- Commercial District Policies
- Economic Development Policies

**Goal 10:** To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.

- General Land Use Policies
- Natural Resources Land Use Policies
- Mineral Resources Policies

**Goal 11:** To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters. Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income. New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary, public facilities and utilities. Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings. Accessory apartments within or attached to single-family residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly person should be allowed.

- Town Plan Goals
- General Land Use Policies
- Energy Policies
- Housing Policies

**Goal 12:** To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs, including fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal. The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the Town to provide facilities and services

- Result of Public Meeting
- General Land Use Policies
- Transportation Policies
- Transportation Actions
- Town Government, Community Facilities and Services Policies
- Natural Resources Land Use Policies

**Goal 13:** To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate childcare issues into the planning process, including childcare financing, infrastructure, and business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

- Town Plan Goals
- Educational goals

**Process Goal 1:** To establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework that shall guide decisions by municipalities, regional planning commissions, and state agencies.

- Results of Public Meeting
- Town Plan Goals
- Education Policies
- Process Goal

**Process Goal 2:** To encourage citizen participation at all levels of the planning process, and to assure that decisions shall be made at the most local level possible commensurate with their impact.

- Results of Public Meeting
- Education Policies

**Process Goal 3:** To consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development for the region and the state, as well as the community in which it takes place.

- Results of Public Meeting
- General Land Use Policies
- Natural Resources Land Use Policies
- Economical Development Policies

**Process Goal 4:** To encourage and assist municipalities to work creatively together to develop and implement plans.

- Results of Public Meeting
- Education Actions
- Process Goal

## Maps

Available at Town Office upon request.

## **Acknowledgements**

### **Planning Commission:**

Brad Ameden, Chair, Bob Johnston, Chris Lindgren, Kelly Pajala, Chris Perry, David Ruess, and Marguerite Warner.

### **Selectboard:**

Denis Benson, Chair, Darrell Hart, Bob Johnston, Shirley Knowlton, and Jeffrey Yrsha.