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TOWN OF MANCHESTER
PLANNING & ZONING DEPARTMENT

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REPORT OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION
ON THE PROPOSED MANCHESTER TOWN PLAN
FOR MARCH 13, 2017, PUBLIC HEARING

Pursuant to 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117, §4384, the Manchester Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on Monday, March 13, 2017, beginning at 7:00 PM in the Kilburn Meeting Room at the Manchester Town Offices at 6039 Main Street, Manchester Center, Vermont. The purpose of the hearing is to receive public comment on the proposed Manchester Town Plan. Pursuant to §4384, this report is prepared to address the extent to which the proposed plan is consistent with state planning goals as established in 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117, §4302. These include 4 general goals and 14 specific goals, which are individually addressed below.

Consistency with General State Planning Goals:

To establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework to guide decisions by municipalities, regional planning commissions, and State agencies.

Manchester has a well established and statutorily compliant planning process that includes regular revision and adoption of the town plan and land use and development ordinance, as well as the Manchester Capital Improvement Program. The town regularly engages in specialized planning projects and studies, such as the recently completed Northshire Economic Development Strategy (NEDS), Manchester Hazard Mitigation Plan, and the Manchester Community Visit Report and Action Plan. The town regularly seeks and attains funding from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development and other state agencies to pursue particular planning and infrastructure improvement projects. The town is engaged in regional planning efforts by the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) and receives assistance from the BCRC for municipal planning efforts. The Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, Design Advisory Board, and Development Review Board all meet regularly to address various aspects of planning and development in Manchester with the involvement of dedicated staff and an engaged citizenry. This plan update reflects this established planning process.

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.

This plan update builds upon recent completed planning efforts such as NEDS and is the result of several months' effort by the Planning Commission with assistance from town staff, the Conservation Commission, an *ad hoc* Arts and Culture Committee, the Manchester Historical Society, and other engaged citizens. The intent of this update is to: (1) reorganize the plan to offer better logical flow and an action oriented format; (2) update the plan by incorporating new data and the results of recent public planning efforts, (3) improve map and other visual planning resources; (4) reflect public sentiment expressed throughout the comprehensive rezoning effort, and (5) meet statutory requirements for new sections on flood resilience and renewable energy resource planning. No substantive changes to general policies or goals are introduced in this update. Rather it is essentially a reorganization and update of the 2012 plan that nonetheless reflects substantial citizen involvement.

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.

The Conservation Commission was very heavily involved in improving the natural resource and energy sections of the plan. As a result, these sections of the plan are most comprehensively improved from the 2012 plan and offer strengthened policy statements and distinct actions to be undertaken to conserve and protect natural resources, including Manchester's scenic resources and rural character, which are seen as vital to community wellbeing and the local economy. The plan reinforces needs for housing and commercial services in the core, while protecting the rural character and working lands nature of the outlying areas.

To encourage and assist municipalities to work creatively together to develop and implement plans.

By incorporation of the findings and goals established in NEDS, this plan update reflects a major cooperative planning effort by the Town of Manchester with the Village of Manchester and the Town of Dorset. As it has in the past, Manchester will continue to seek the cooperation of neighbors and the regional planning commission and state agencies in realizing its planning goals. The update reflects an understanding that land use issues very often transcend municipal boundaries, and therefore cooperation and creativity are imperative in order to realize goals. The plan also recognizes that cooperation with other than government entities is also essential. Organizations like Manchester Community Land Trust, Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, Shires Housing, and Bennington Area Habitat for Humanity among many others are referenced as important partners in achieving stated goals.

Consistency with Specific State Planning Goals:

To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

Manchester has a long established goal to encourage denser development in the downtown while protecting the rural nature of outlying areas. This plan update reiterates that central goal.

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.

This plan update includes an economic development section that incorporates relevant findings and goals of the Northshire Economic Development Strategy (NEDS) completed in 2016. In addition, as already noted, the plan includes an enhanced natural resources section that reinforces the importance of environmental protection of Manchester's resources. The stated economic development mission is to create a vibrant economic environment that encourages people to both live and work in Manchester. Strategies designed to meet this mission include increasing residential density of the core, diversifying Manchester's economy; expanding industries identified as locally strong; enhancing quality of life by protecting Manchester's natural beauty and providing diverse and engaging recreational, entertainment and cultural activities; and creation of jobs that provide professional challenge.

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

The stated education mission in this plan update is to provide for the highest quality education for children, encourage youth to pursue higher education and training, and promote lifelong learning for all residents. This is in line with the state goal and the plan recognizes and supports the efforts of Manchester's mix of public and private educational and cultural institutions in fulfilling this mission.

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

Manchester recently completed major transportation system enhancements with the construction of two new roundabouts, transforming what had long been called "Malfunction Junction" into what is now referred to as "Function Junction" at the intersection of Depot Street and Main Street and at the companion intersection of Main Street with Bonnet Street. In addition, the town is planning for bike and pedestrian enhancements to Depot Street that will transform an automobile focused corridor into one that is pedestrian and bicycle friendly. These projects have been long prioritized in town planning documents. This plan update recognizes these major recent investments and reiterates the continued importance of transforming the town's transportation system to accommodate all users rather than just the automobile. In addition, standards for improving the safety and efficiency of the transportation network while protecting important natural resources are retained in this plan update.

To identify, protect, and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape.

The plan update reiterates the community's priority to protect its natural resources, especially its scenic ridgelines and the Batten Kill, one of four Outstanding Resource Waters designated by the state. The Conservation Commission is tasked with seeking means of protecting natural features and species, particularly by identifying lands that may provide

critical habitat and then seeking conservation measures. Scenic Byways and roads are identified and their values are prioritized for protection. The plan also includes sections on Manchester's four historic districts and identifies actions aimed at helping to preserve the character of each district.

To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, forests, and other land resources.

The Manchester community values its natural beauty and quality of life as essential. Consequently, all policies in the plan are aimed at seeking to maximize and enhance these assets. Policies articulated throughout the plan are aimed to protect air and water quality, and others are aimed at protecting ecosystem and other land resources.

To make efficient use of energy, provide for the development of renewable energy resources, and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

This plan update reflects this goal and includes the following stated energy mission: encourage and support the conservation of energy and the development of renewable energy resources in Manchester. A new section on renewable energy resources commits the town, with the assistance of the BCRC, to develop a standalone renewable energy resources plan by May 2018 to be submitted to the Vermont Department of Public Service for certification. The plan will include town scale geographic and watershed analyses to determine areas suitable for renewable energy development.

To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

The plan recognizes the importance of recreation opportunities in Manchester for both residents and visitors alike. Recreational opportunities for hiking, hunting, fishing, biking, canoeing, golf, tennis, swimming, and organized sports are abundant. In 2016 the town completed the construction of two new playing fields at The Dana L. Thompson Memorial Park. These new fields with the addition of new hotels in town position Manchester to serve as a venue for soccer, football, and lacrosse tournaments. As outlined in this plan update, the town will market itself this way, and this effort may lead to significant inputs into the local economy. Other recreation goals included in this update of the plan include extension of recreation paths, protection of existing trail networks and woodlands, and support for enhanced biking opportunities.

To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

Recognizing the importance of healthy forest ecosystems and successful agricultural enterprise to the socioeconomic wellbeing of the Manchester community, new sections on agricultural and forest resources have been included in this plan update. Support for expansion of local agricultural enterprises is identified as an important part of economic development goals, protection of agricultural soils is prioritized, and wooded lands (those outside of the designated forest and conservation district) identified as providing irreplaceable ecological functions will be targeted for conservation.

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.

Careful use and protection of the town's natural resources is a theme running throughout the plan. A new section on geologic resources stresses the need to protect the town's aquifer and to ensure timely and adequate rehabilitation of land disturbed by extraction operations.

To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

This plan update reiterates a policy of cooperation with private sector and nonprofit organizations to ensure the availability of an adequate stock of housing of varying affordability in Manchester. Along with expected changes to the zoning ordinance that would allow denser residential development in and around the core, this plan commits the town to encouraging mixed use development including residential in the downtown, multifamily infill development in residential zones with sewer service, and requiring protection of existing housing stock in the core. The plan also commits the town to pursuing a Neighborhood Area Development designation from the state, which would provide incentives to developers of pedestrian oriented neighborhood housing around the designated Village Center.

To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

Along with the Manchester Capital Improvement Program (CIP), this plan update recommits the town to maintaining and improving municipal services, particularly transportation infrastructure, water and sewer services, police and fire protection, and recreation services. The town will pursue improvements to services in an efficient and fiscally sound manner. Although this plan includes comprehensive descriptions of existing infrastructure and services and policies for service delivery and infrastructure maintenance and expansion, details on capital improvement plans are provided in the CIP last updated in 2014.

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

To the extent that town government can influence the provision of safe and affordable childcare in Manchester, this plan includes a commitment to ensuring that town policies do not impede the provision of childcare services.

To encourage flood resilient communities.

A new section on flood resilience has been included in this plan update, committing the town to maintaining a healthy watershed and well controlled development in flood prone and riparian areas. Manchester recognizes that resilience extends beyond flood resilience and will pursue further articulation of risks, mitigation measures, and planning toward community resilience, particularly with updates to the town's standalone Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Land Area Designation Considerations

According to 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117, §4384, this report must also address alterations to land use designations of any land area within the town. The plan includes a new official land use map that is based upon proposed new zoning districts for the town. The previous land use map identified seven land use districts based upon the 2012 zoning map for the town: (1) Forest and Recreation lands; (2) Farming and Rural Residential lands; (3) Single Residential lands; (4) General Residential lands; (5) Mixed Use lands; (6) Commercial lands; and (7) Industrial lands. The new map identifies five land use districts: (1) Forest and Conservation lands; (2) Rural Residential and Agricultural lands; (3) Neighborhood Residential lands; (4) Mixed Use and Commercial lands; and (5) Office and Industrial lands.

The entire land area of the town is affected by these new designations, although for most of the town, land uses will remain similar. For example, the Forest and Conservation lands are largely the same as the current Forest and Recreation category; the Rural and Agricultural lands are largely the same as the current Farming and Rural Residential lands; and the Neighborhood Residential category includes most of what is now classified as Single and General Residential. The Mixed Use and Commercial category includes what is now classified as Commercial, Mixed Use, and parts of the current Industrial, General Residential, Single Residential, and Farming and Rural Residential lands in and around the downtown and within what have been known as Transient Commercial Overlay zoning districts. Finally, the Office and Industrial category includes most of the current Industrial lands and limited parts of the Farming and Rural Residential lands.

The pending zoning revisions, on which these new land use categories are based, have been conducted with extensive public outreach starting in March of 2016 and continuing through the adoption of a new land use and development ordinance expected in Spring of 2017. The main focus of the rezoning effort has been to recognize existing patterns of development and better reflect town plan goals of compact use and development of the town core while protecting the rural use and character of the outlying areas. Through this public effort, the Planning Commission received extensive and numerous comments on map boundaries and allowed land uses. Consequently, the new land use map is reflective of public sentiment in Manchester.

Specific required land area designation considerations are each addressed below:

The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.

As explained above, the new land area designations are based upon proposed new zoning districts that were designed to be reflective of existing development patterns and town plan goals for dense mixed use development of the core and protection of rural character within the outlying areas. Therefore, these designations themselves will not result in significant increased traffic and are designed to protect the prevailing pattern of land use. Small changes in industrially designated lands are designed to provide for more area for industrial development in some areas, while limiting industrial growth over the town aquifer. Expansion of the Commercial and Mixed Use designation into areas currently classified as residential,

reflects the fact that the residential zoning already allows certain commercial uses and development and will not in and of itself result in significant increased traffic in these areas.

The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on the municipal tax base; and the need for public facilities.

Insofar as the land area designations reflect zoning changes that would allow higher residential density within the town core, while decreasing allowable density of the outlying areas, these changes are likely to result in long term efficiencies in the provision of services and an increase in the town's tax base. Furthermore, the expansion of allowed commercial activity into the extended mixed use designation around the core are in keeping with this result, as is the relative increase in industrially designated areas.

The amount of vacant land which is already subject to the proposed new designation; and actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.

Again, these designations reflect a renaming of current designations and reflect proposed new zoning districts. Insofar as the new zoning encourages infill development within the downtown and surrounding areas, vacant lands may experience new development in coming years. Increased industrial area designation (Office and Industrial) may also result in development of currently vacant lands.

The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of appropriate alternative locations; alternative uses for the area under consideration; and the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated.

Throughout the 2016 to 2017 rezoning process, the planning commission has carefully considered suitability, alternatives, and impacts of areas receiving changes in designations. For example, an expansive gravel pit adjacent to US Route 7 currently classified as Farming and Rural Residential is proposed to be reclassified as Office and Industrial. Alongside this reclassification a relatively large parcel with historic industrial type use on Depot Street to the east was also reclassified this way. The hope is that this parcel on Depot Street, a state highway, could offer access to any new industrial development of the gravel pit area, rather than continuing to access the gravel pit land through a small residential neighborhood on Dufresne Pond Road to the west.

The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability, and existing development in the area.

The new land use designations are comprehensive and very similar in extent and purpose to those that are currently effective in the town. They are designed to reflect priorities for increased density and use of the downtown and surrounding areas, a modest increase in availability of land for industrial use, and protection of rural character and decreased density of the outlying areas. As indicated above, land suitability and existing development patterns were considered in devising new land area designation boundaries.

A copy of the proposed Manchester Town Plan is available for review in the office of the Manchester Town Clerk, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at 6039 Main Street, Manchester Center, Vermont, and on the town website (www.manchester-vt.gov). For further information or questions, please contact Janet Hurley, Planning & Zoning Director, at j.hurley@manchester-vt.gov or 802-362-1313 option 3.