

# Chapter 6: Pathway to Prosperity

## In this Chapter:

Rockville

Vernon Center  
and Talcottville

Residential  
Patterns &  
Housing Needs

Business  
Development

Community  
Facilities

Transportation

Utilities



## ROCKVILLE

*VISION: Rockville will continue to be Vernon's "downtown" and a center for civic uses, jobs, retail and other businesses in a village setting.*

*Rockville's neighborhoods will be revitalized and home to a mix of income levels. Key "anchors" will continue to draw residents and visitors to Rockville. Our future growth will help reinforce the role that Rockville plays in our community.*

### STRATEGIES

#### MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE

**The village nature of Rockville**

#### ENCOURAGE

**Revitalization of Rockville**



# Rockville

Residents see great potential in their downtown, Rockville (see sidebar). Rockville is an identifiable place with a distinctive feel. It has retained much of its New England village patterns, its mixture of residential, business and civic uses and its historic architecture. A majority of residents support the redevelopment of historical buildings in Rockville for office (71%) or residential use (77%).

## Rockville – Resident's Ideas

Rockville is a “gem”.  
- public workshop attendee

“...I was compelled to purchase [a home in Rockville] because of the **stunning architecture** and the desire for a **walkable town center**. .....I see great potential in Rockville marketing itself as a walkable downtown, close to jobs ....”

- public workshop attendee

“...with its **distinctive** historical architecture, Rockville could house eateries with real atmosphere that could perhaps **draw people** to spend more time here. I see old postcards of the old Hof Brau Haus that was in Rockville and would love to have a place like that here now”

- from a Facebook entry

“To help with the litter ... perhaps some kind of **volunteer organization** can be started? This would be a great opportunity for members of the community (especially high school students) to become involved in a positive movement.

- from a Facebook entry



## Maintain and Enhance the Village Nature of Rockville

A successful downtown or village has a combination of physical elements that attract people to work, visit and live there. This framework is already in place in Rockville; it should be maintained and enhanced.

### Positive Elements to Encourage



#### Overall Village Principles

- A mixture of uses
- Higher densities than elsewhere in town
- Park once and walk to multiple destinations

#### Site Design

- Buildings oriented to street – face street, entrance on street, building close to sidewalk / street
- Wide sidewalks
- Parking is on-street or located behind buildings

#### Building Details

- First floor mostly retail uses with façade mainly windows (no blank walls facing street)
- Residential and office uses upstairs
- Window displays oriented to pedestrians – visually interesting

#### Details / Amenities

- Benches, places to sit
- Awnings – decorative and protect pedestrians from weather
- Banners denote that this is a “place”
- Landscaping, plantings

These are just a few of many elements that contribute to a successful, attractive and inviting village. These elements could form the basis of a thorough set of design guidelines that would outline good design practices, identify what is most appropriate in Rockville, and identify what to encourage and avoid. Such guidelines could be used to:

- provide advice to business owners and landlords on simple improvements they can make; and /or,
- guide the Design Review Board (and PZC) when reviewing land use applications.

Zoning plays an important role in maintaining and enhancing a village. Generally, retail uses at the street level create a more positive pedestrian experience. Vernon recognizes this and requires a special permit for first floor office use in the DBR zone. This provision should continue. In cases where a special permit is granted for first floor office use, such uses can be encouraged to create interesting store fronts and window displays (design guidelines can provide techniques for accomplishing this).

Zoning updates could help ensure that new development and building upgrades contribute to Rockville's village nature. Such updates for Rockville zones might include:

- require that parking be located to the rear of buildings in the Downtown district
- reduce the amount of parking needed (see page 109)
- require a certain percentage of window coverage for street-level facades
- reduce the minimum front yard setback and set a maximum (see box below)
- adopt additional restrictions against auto-oriented uses (e.g., drive throughs)
- provide greater flexibility to older buildings in meeting dimensional requirements (see sidebar)

Finally, Town capital projects and operations play an important role in maintaining the village nature of Rockville. Operations such as street sweeping and overall maintenance and capital projects such as sidewalk and road repair and upgrades, parks, etc., contribute to the Rockville's ambiance.

### Zoning Flexibility to Promote Building Re-Use

Zoning regulations do provide flexibility for the reuse of historic buildings and mills. General updates to older buildings and houses, however, require a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals if additions / updates cannot meet today's zoning standards.

Some communities allow older buildings flexibility via special permit.

For example, in the Town of Wilton, CT, buildings that were built before 1920 (and other buildings deemed to have historic architectural merit) can obtain the following relief through a special permit:

- Front, side and/or rear building setback requirement can be 75% of the applicable regulation requirement.
- Site coverage can be up to 125% of the applicable regulation requirement.

Vernon should consider allowing similar flexibility through the special permit process.

This would provide the Commission with broad discretion and allow a review of the design of the proposed addition / expansion while providing greater flexibility to building owners. Input from the Historic Properties Commission can help ensure appropriate additions.

### Sample First Floor Window Requirements

For communities that require or encourage a minimum percentage of window coverage for street level facades in certain districts, the percentages vary. Here are some examples:

- Hamden – The first story of all facades shall be glazed with clear glass no less than 30% and shall be glazed at least 70% if a shopfront.
- Milford and Bridgeport – 50% of the ground floor façade shall be windows.
- Suffield – Between 50% to 75% of first floor facade shall be windows.

### Keys to Success

Facilitating and encouraging revitalization requires:

- Vision – a common goal
- Capacity – leadership and support by the Town, the business sector, community groups and residents in achieving the vision
- Tools – appropriate programs, incentives, regulations to work toward the vision

### Rethinking Setbacks in Rockville

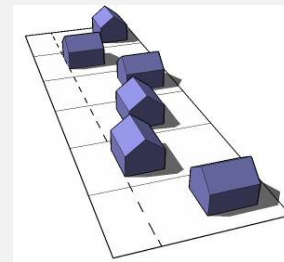
Current zoning regulations allow flexibility for front yard requirements in the DBR, PND, NR-10, and HDRC in that new buildings can have a lesser front setback if existing neighboring buildings also have lesser front setbacks.

Otherwise, the minimum front yard setback is 30 feet (and a landowner could choose to place the house even further back). A large part of Rockville's village character is derived from how houses and other buildings are oriented to the street.

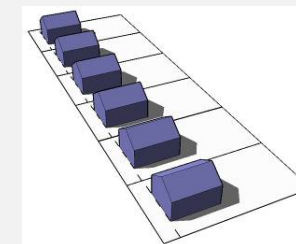
Analyses indicate that the majority of existing buildings in the NR-10, PND, and HD-RC zones are less than 30 feet from the street right-of-way.

The front yard setbacks requirements could be amended to require a minimum and maximum setback (e.g., no closer than X feet but no further than Y feet). Appropriate minimum and maximum setbacks would need to be determined for each of these zones.

#### Potential Building Alignment under Minimum Setback Standards



#### Required Building Alignment under Build-to Standards



### Maintain and Enhance the Village Nature of Rockville:

1. Encourage business and property owners to make improvements that will contribute to Rockville's village atmosphere.
2. Create design guidelines for Rockville.
3. Continue to discourage first floor office uses in pedestrian areas.
4. Consider updating zoning in Rockville so that the following applies to redevelopment:
  - a. require that off-street parking be located to the rear of buildings in the Downtown District
  - b. reduce the amount of required parking
  - c. require a certain percentage of window coverage for street-level facades (see sidebar)
  - d. adjust minimum front yard setbacks and provide for maximums
  - e. further minimize the potential for auto-oriented uses and sites
  - f. provide greater flexibility to older buildings in meeting dimensional requirements



## Encourage the Revitalization of Rockville

Revitalization efforts must continue to encompass both economic development and housing investment. It is important for the private sector to be assured that long-term, the Town is committed to Rockville. The fact that the Town maintains a civic presence here and has improved streets, sidewalks, Central Park, and other areas, conveys this commitment. Implementing the Hockanum River Linear Park Plan, which includes parks in Rockville, can further enhance this area.

### Economic Revitalization

While Rockville is no longer the sole job center in Vernon, three major employers remain in here – the Town, the State (court system), and Rockville General Hospital. They provide jobs for residents of the Town and the region and they bring potential customers to Rockville daily. In fact, most Vernon residents (75%) visit Rockville at least once a month, according to the survey. Retaining these “anchor” land uses in Rockville is an important component of any revitalization strategy.

But most (64%) admit that they rarely or never visit retail establishments when in Rockville. This statistic corresponds with resident’s low ratings regarding the availability of retail establishments in Rockville. Residents are optimistic that Rockville can be revitalized and attract people to live, work and shop here. The strategies in this Plan can help move Rockville in this direction.

Several downtown associations are key partners in accomplishing many of the strategies for economic revitalization. These include the Rockville Downtown Association (RDA), the Rockville Community Alliance and greater Rockville neighborhoods groups.

The Town should continue to collaborate with these partners on economic development, addressing issues and challenges faced by Rockville businesses, and helping property owners find funding sources for upgrades and redevelopment.

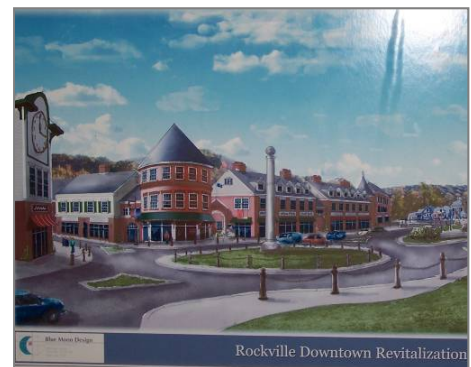
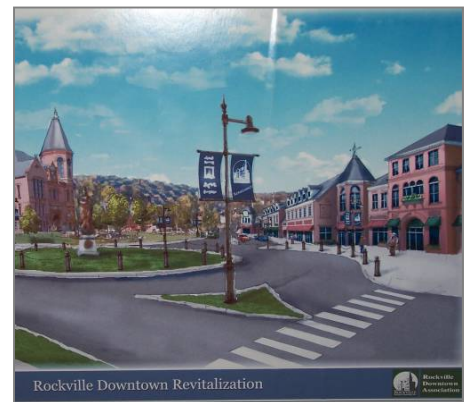
There is great potential to capitalize on the 75% of residents who visit Rockville at least once a month and the many employees who work in Rockville. Some employers provide on-site services for the convenience of their employees and visitors which reduces the need to patronize Rockville businesses. To entice potential customers, Rockville businesses must provide the goods and services desired by workers and visitors and encourage them to visit. Surveying employees and visitors can help identify desired goods and services. Results could be shared with businesses and building owners.

### Rockville Downtown Association (RDA)

The RDA is a non-profit organization whose mission is to:

“Preserve, Promote and Enhance Rockville’s Historic Downtown and to create partnerships that stimulate economic activity and action for a renewed sense of pride and community.”

### RDA Vision



## Visualizing Rockville's Potential

Before:



After:





## Visualizing Rockville's Potential

Before:



After:



Specific economic development projects in Rockville might include:

- **West Main Street Retail Block.** As identified in past plans and in studies conducted by the RDA, this block provides the biggest opportunity for whole-scale redevelopment over the long term. In the short term, the focus can be on providing goods and services to employees and visitors and to Rockville residents. Infill development along the frontage could extend the streetscape further east.  
The longer term goal could be whole-scale redevelopment. Any new development or redevelopment should contribute to the downtown / village atmosphere, with pedestrian amenities and design (as discussed earlier). The RDA has taken a proactive approach by putting forth a vision of how redevelopment in Rockville could look. Based on these renderings, Planimetrics has created photo simulations of this stretch of West Main Street (see pages 66-67). The intent of the renderings is not to dictate future design or architecture, but to help residents and property owners visualize the potential this area holds.
- **The Citizens Block.** The Town, which owns the building, has conducted studies on its condition and potential for reuse and has attempted to find a buyer for the building. These efforts should continue. As noted in Town reports, the building is eligible for historic preservation tax credits, which can help facilitate its redevelopment. The primary short term goal should be to keep the building in use and update / redevelop it for additional businesses uses. Over the long term, the Town should encourage non-office uses on the first floor to better contribute to Rockville's pedestrian orientation.

In addition, Vernon is fortunate to still have some mills that continue to be used for business purposes (e.g., Amerbelle and Anacoil). The Town should continue to ensure that mills are capable of supporting business uses and help to retain those businesses currently located in mills.

The Town should also review the zoning regulations for Rockville to determine if updates are needed to facilitate redevelopment and revitalization for these and other properties.

## Housing Revitalization

Housing is also an important component of successful revitalization. Rockville provides a range of housing opportunities for low and moderate income residents and families. Rockville should continue to provide these opportunities, but attention should focus on promoting a mixture of income levels by attracting middle and upper income households and, particularly, homeowners. This will help to rehabilitate and preserve the many historic houses and provide a larger customer base for existing and potential businesses in Rockville.

The Town and non-profits have developed the capacity and tools to increase homeownership and upgrade residential properties. The recent Village Street housing project is a good example with visible results. The program improved the appearance of the neighborhood and increased homeownership in a targeted area.

The Town has also used its powers to acquire and demolish houses that were in extreme disrepair. Residents expressed a desire to see the Town take additional action on blighted properties. However, impediments include the length of time it can take to acquire a problem building (due to slow court processes) and finding the funding to demolish the structure.

One tool to address the financial challenge is to establish a revolving fund to cover the cost of demolishing a building. The fund would need an initial appropriation (e.g., possibly using funds from the Small City Community Development Block Grant). After the demolition, the Town would sell the lot and the money from the sale would go back into the fund. After the initial appropriation, the fund would be self-sustaining. When selling the lots, the Town could place restrictions on the future use (e.g., require owner-occupancy and only allow single family units). Income restrictions for this type of program should be avoided since the intent is to draw additional middle and upper income households to Rockville. This approach should target specific areas in order to most efficiently use limited resources.

Another goal for Rockville's housing stock is to convert multi-family structures back into single- or two-family houses. Other communities around the country have developed incentives for this exact purpose including:

- providing a grant for each eliminated unit (Pottstown, PA; Bellevue, KY )
- offering low-interest or forgivable loans (Collinswood, NJ)
- providing tax credits for any increase in property value resulting from improvements (Hagerstown, MD)

Strategies found in other sections of this POCD also will play an important role in increasing homeownership in Rockville. These include promoting Rockville's amenities, maintaining a police substation in Rockville, and overall revitalization of business areas in Rockville. The Town should also track sales data for residences in Rockville to monitor trends and to help determine appropriate strategies. The Town might be able to integrate sales data into its Geographic Information System.



#### Encourage the Revitalization of Rockville:

1. Maintain a public commitment to Rockville, including capital improvements and keeping a civic presence here.
2. Continue to support and collaborate with the RDA.
3. Increase patronage of Rockville businesses by employees in the area and Vernon residents.
4. Encourage the redevelopment of the West Main Street Retail Block.
5. Continue efforts to redevelop / re-tenant the Citizens Block.
6. Work to ensure that existing buildings (e.g., mills) can continue to support business uses.
7. Increase homeownership in Rockville.
8. Encourage upgrades of Rockville's housing stock and attract additional middle and upper income households.
9. Continue to redevelop blighted housing lots, replacing structures with owner-occupied single family houses.
10. Consider establishing financial incentives for converting multi-family properties to owner-occupied single family houses.
11. Consider tracking sales data for houses in Rockville.
12. Maintain the police substation in Rockville.
13. Explore State programs that can aid in the redevelopment of Rockville.



## **VERNON CENTER & TALCOTTVILLE:**

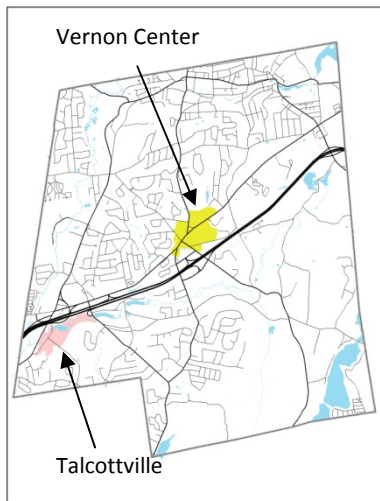
**VISION:** *Vernon Center will remain a civic and activity-focal point and its open landscapes of fields and farms will remind us of our rural past. Talcottville's historic and residential character will be maintained.*

### **STRATEGIES**

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE  
**Vernon Center**

MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE  
**Talcottville**

# Vernon Center and Talcottville



These two areas of Vernon have retained their historic patterns and remain “places” in Vernon that are identifiable. Because the Town has “lost” the framework of some historic areas as the community grew (e.g., Dobsonville), it is especially important to support those neighborhoods that retain their heritage, even after 200+ years.

## Maintain and Enhance Vernon Center

Vernon Center can be considered a Municipal or Institutional node, with a feeling of a rural town center. It is an identifiable “place” (though exact boundaries may not be commonly agreed upon), with historical significance due to its civic role. While most town administrative functions moved to Rockville over 100 years ago, some civic uses are located here (schools, public safety, and recreation facilities). Institutional uses in Vernon Center include churches, the cemetery and the historical society. The addition of the planned Arts Center will contribute to Vernon Center being a town-wide destination for activities.

These uses, combined with farmland, a general “open” landscape, and recreational activities create a unique character not found elsewhere in Town. The area is zoned residential (R-27). A number of non-residential uses are allowed by special permit and it appears that most of those uses are consistent with the nature of this area.

Strategies for Vernon Center should include maintaining the area as a predominantly residential and institutional node, encouraging additional recreation / outdoor activities, continuing pedestrian improvements, and maintaining the open landscape.



## Maintain and Enhance Vernon Center:

1. Maintain a mixture of civic, institutional, recreational and residential areas in Vernon Center.
2. Maintain the open, rural landscape.



## Maintain and Enhance Talcottville



Talcottville has retained its historic mill town patterns and continues to have a strong neighborhood identity and sense of place.

Today it is predominantly a residential neighborhood with some institutional uses. Its designation as local historic district will help ensure that updates and new construction maintain the historic feel. Recent streetscape improvements have added to the historic ambiance.



The Talcottville Mill has a strong presence in this neighborhood although it is currently empty. Re-use of the historic mill should be encouraged, particularly for uses that are compatible with the Talcottville neighborhood.



### Maintain and Enhance Talcottville:

1. Continue to ensure that building alterations and new construction complement the historic character of Talcottville.
2. Maintain Talcottville as a predominantly residential neighborhood with some compatible non-residential uses.
3. Encourage the rehabilitation of the Talcottville Mill.

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