

CONSERVATION

4

Overview

This booklet is for discussion purposes only. It is intended to outline issues and possible strategies for discussion with the Commission.

Outlining conservation strategies is a critical first step in preparing a Plan of Conservation and Development. Determining which features are important from an ecological perspective, for preserving character, and for enhancing overall quality of life sets the framework for later discussions about future growth in Vernon. This discussion booklet highlights key issues and provides recommendations related to those things in Vernon that should be protected:

- Natural Resources
- Open Space
- Historic Resources
- Community Character (including farmland)

As appropriate, text from the current POCD is incorporated in this booklet.

Strategies related to reducing energy use and encouraging alternative forms of energy will be discussed in the Infrastructure Booklet.

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the...community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

- Aldo Leopold

"POCD Library" Concept

The Town and others have prepared a number of studies, plans and other documents that provide background information, analyses, and detailed information on issues and strategies contained in the POCD.

These documents can be considered the "POCD Library." These documents are not included within the text of the Plan because it could make the Plan unwieldy and less user-friendly. But because those other documents contain important information, they should be listed in the POCD and easily accessible to readers.



Natural Resources

Much of this discussion focuses on the protection of natural resources to maintain their ecological, public health and safety, and aesthetic values. At public workshops, residents also expressed a desire to better capitalize on resources – particularly water resources. They see opportunities to tap into rivers for energy production and to better promote Vernon’s natural features to attract visitors.

Overall Natural Resource Protection

The presence of certain natural resources influences development patterns and the intensity of development. Some natural resources are so important that they must be “preserved” in order to continue to provide ecological benefits and protect public health and safety. Permanent preservation as open space or, if open space preservation is not feasible, ensuring that development is carefully regulated can be the best approach for protecting such resources.

For other natural resources, “conservation” is a key approach. Conservation means that some level of development is often acceptable, provided that the integrity of the natural resource is “conserved.” Best practices to conserve such resources are contained throughout this section.

An overall approach to protecting natural resources in Vernon might be:

- where feasible, preserve sensitive natural resource areas as open space
- where preservation is not possible, reduce densities / development intensity
- when development does occur, design sites to avoid sensitive areas (i.e., allow flexibility)

Open space preservation is discussed later. The Zoning Regulations include a “developable acreage” concept which could be expanded to reduce densities in areas with a large concentration of natural resources. Currently, the “developable acreage” only applies to rear lots (area without wetlands, floodplains or slopes over 15%). The regulations could be updated to require that the minimum lot size for new lots in R-40 (and possibly R-27) must be “developable acreage”.

Increasing flexibility when laying out new building lots can allow the landowner to avoid sensitive areas and better follow natural topography. The Town’s cluster regulations, which allow a generous bonus in number of permitted units, require a minimum parcel size of 10 acres and must be in areas with sewers. The Town might consider reducing or eliminating the minimum parcel and sewer requirements for areas that are adjacent to existing open space or in areas for conservation; however, the bonus provision should be scaled back in those areas. Enabling wider use of the cluster provision (provided septic needs can be met) can result in site design that is more respectful of natural site features.

Resources to Preserve

Alterations should be avoided to the maximum extent feasible:

- 100 year floodplain
- Steep slopes (>20%)
- Watercourses
- Wetlands

Resources to Conserve

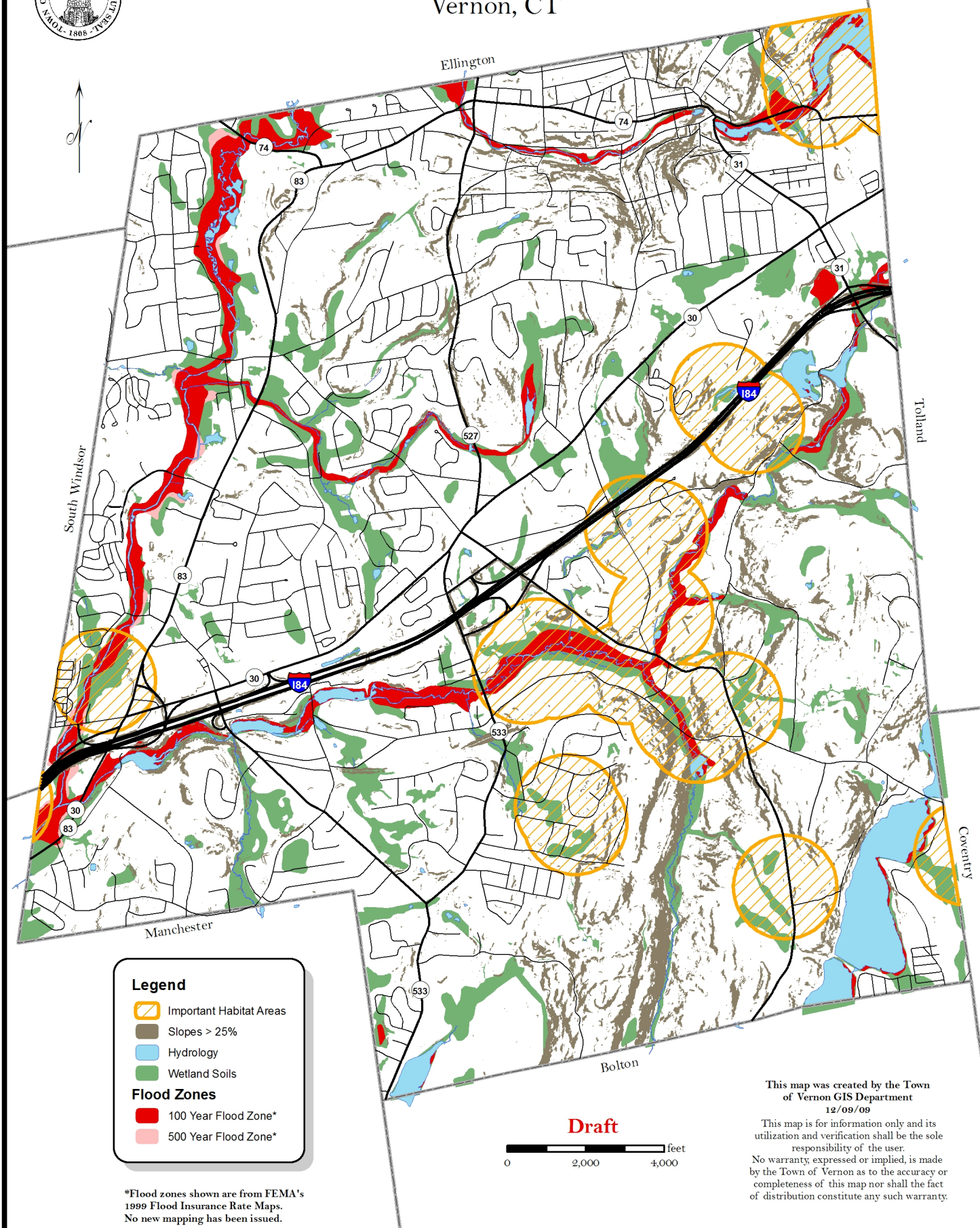
The functions of the resources might be able to be maintained if development occurs in an environmentally sensitive manner:

- 500 year floodplain
- Aquifers
- Unique or special habitat areas (DEP Natural Diversity Database)



Natural Resources Plan

Vernon, CT



Legend

- Important Habitat Areas
- Slopes > 25%
- Hydrology
- Wetland Soils

Flood Zones

- 100 Year Flood Zone*
- 500 Year Flood Zone*

*Flood zones shown are from FEMA's 1999 Flood Insurance Rate Maps. No new mapping has been issued.

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Water Resources

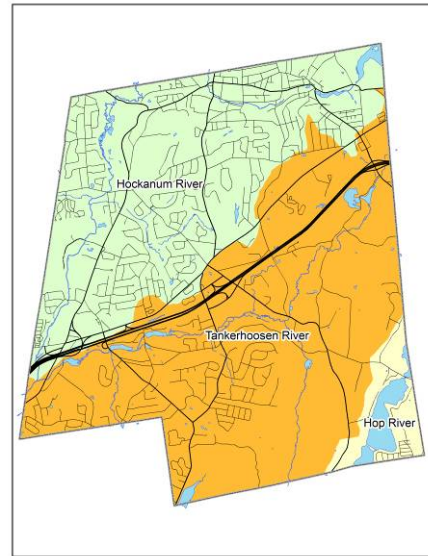
Vernon is divided into three main watersheds: Hockanum River, Tankerhoosen River, and the Hop River. Both the Hockanum and Tankerhoosen rivers originate in Vernon. These rivers, along with Vernon's lakes, provide ecological and recreational benefits, and are important components of the community's identity.

Hockanum River

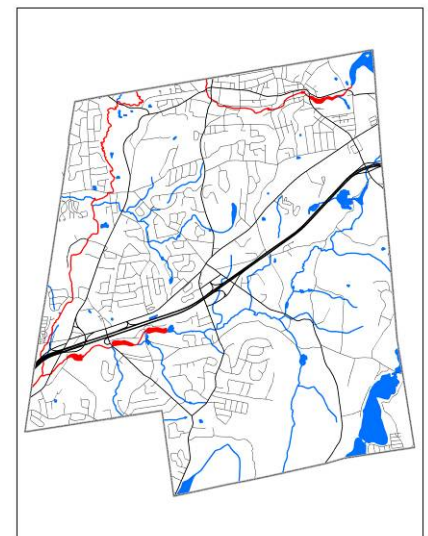
The Hockanum River, which originates at Lake Shenipsit, provides habitat, aesthetic value, and recreational opportunities. The DEP has rated its water quality as "impaired" with a goal to improve it. The recent upgrade at the Town's water treatment plant, which discharges into the river, was one important step at improving water quality. Additional efforts to upgrade the water quality of the river and its associated lakes and ponds (such as Paper Mill Pond) should continue.

A stretch of the river in Rockville is buried under a parking area and buildings. Some residents have expressed interest in daylighting this portion. It would be important to analyze the feasibility, the characteristics of the river in this stretch (e.g., depth) and implications of uncovering (e.g., loss of redevelopment potential of the covered area). Regardless of whether the river could be daylighted, an overall goal should be to enhance the River's presence in Rockville. If daylighting the full stretch is not feasible, other options could be explored to better make the river's presence known. Examples include marking the river's buried path and providing plaques or an information kiosk. As redevelopment occurs, opportunities to expose portions should be examined. In the meantime, focus should continue on enhancing the uncovered parts first, with additional pocket parks and vantage points.

Vernon's Watersheds



Surface Water Quality



Legend

- Good / Maintain
- Impaired / Improve

For the remainder of the river, key strategies should focus on restoring and improving water quality and continuing to implement the Linear Park plan (see Box on p.16).

Tankerhoosen River

The Tankerhoosen River has its headwaters at Gages Brook. The Tankerhoosen River watershed has been recognized as unique in the State, particularly for the robust native wild trout populations. Although the Tankerhoosen was once one of the cleanest rivers in the State, the westernmost stretch is considered “threatened” largely due to pollution generated by residential growth and other human activities. East of Tankerhoosen Lake, the river maintains a higher water quality rating. Because 70% of this river’s watershed is within Vernon, efforts within the Town can have great impact on this river.

Preservation of additional lands can help to offset the impacts of pollution. Expansion of the large contiguous greenway formed by Valley Falls Park, the Belding Wildlife Management Area, Bolton Lakes, and State of Connecticut preserved land would link important wildlife habitats, enhance biodiversity, and create extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation. Detailed strategies for restoring and protecting the River were identified in the 2009 Tankerhoosen Watershed Management Plan (see box). The document’s recommendations could be incorporated by reference into the POCD.

Tankerhoosen Watershed Management Plan, 2009

The Friends of the Hockanum River Linear Park (in association with the Town and others) created the Tankerhoosen Watershed Management Plan in 2009. The multi-town Plan assesses issues facing the river and watershed, reviews existing regulations, and recommends actions to restore and protect the river and watershed.

The overall watershed management goals are to: develop an affordable and effective watershed management plan; maintain and enhance water quality and ecological health; protect the upper region of the watershed from pollution and restore and enhance water quality and ecological health.

Objectives to accomplish these goals include:

- Establish a coalition and coordinate regionally
- Enhance habitat
- Protect and restore buffers
- Address illicit discharges and encourage stream cleanups
- Advance local government, business and residential awareness
- Monitor water quality
- Manage and acquire open space
- Mitigate impacts of stormwater runoff
- Conduct additional assessments in other parts of the watershed

The Plan recommends that Vernon develop consistent stormwater management standards which would become the regulatory standards for all boards and commission. Details on administration, applicability, enforcement, etc., would need to be worked out. Such standards should incorporate Low Impact Development / Design (LID, see p. 10).

Bolton Lakes (and Hop River Watershed)

The Bolton Lakes network is comprised of three lakes spanning the towns of Coventry, Vernon and Bolton. Of the three, only Middle Bolton Lake is located entirely in Vernon. The lakes provide habitat and extensive recreational opportunities. They are a key defining feature of the character of this section of Vernon.

Over the short term, sewers will be extended to the neighborhoods around the lakes to reduce potential pollution from failing septic systems. Sometimes the addition of sewers can spur development at densities that might not be desired in a given area. Ensuring that sewer availability supports desired land use patterns rather than driving patterns will be examined in the upcoming Infrastructure Booklet.

Long-term, the water budget in this area should be monitored. Currently, water cycles up from the wells and discharges back into the ground through on-site septic systems (i.e., remains in the same watershed). When sewers are installed, the water instead will be transferred out of the watershed to a treatment plant in Manchester and then discharged into the Hockanum River. The Environment Impact Report prepared for the sewer project estimated a loss of 2.4% of annual flow in the watershed and considered such a loss to have a negligible impact. This situation should be carefully monitored to ensure that well water levels are not affected. Efforts to increase stormwater infiltration on site can also help mitigate this water loss (see LID discussion later) along with improving water quality.

Addressing water quality and water level issues related to Bolton Lakes takes a multi-town approach. The Town should continue to work with the other communities in the watershed to reduce pollution potential and to determine optimal water levels for the lakes and to maintain groundwater levels.

Other Water Bodies

- The Tankerhoosen Ponds (Tankerhoosen Lake, Talcottville Pond, and Dobson Pond) have impaired water quality, likely due to pollution in storm water runoff from nearby development. Efforts to improve water quality in the river can also help improve these waterbodies.
- Although called a “reservoir” Walker Reservoir is not a public water supply. Rather it is a popular year-round recreational outlet attracting hikers, fishermen, and ice skaters. The Reservoir serves as the headwaters to the Tankerhoosen River. Its health should be maintained in order to continue to provide recreational opportunities and to ensure that the eastern stretch of the Tankerhoosen maintains its high water quality rating.
- There are many additional brooks, streams and ponds in Vernon. Many of these smaller waterbodies feed into larger water resources and therefore their water quality is important.

Wetlands, Flood Plains and Vernal Pools

Wetlands and floodplains provide critical public health and safety functions. Wetlands not only provide habitat, but can absorb and store water, thereby providing natural flood control. They can also filter out pollutants from storm water. Flood plains are intended to convey water during times of heavy rain. Any depletion of their flood conveyance capacity can impact adjacent and downstream properties. Preservation of the 100-year flood plain is of particular importance. As required by the State, activities that might impact wetlands and flood plains are regulated. The Town has further strengthened wetlands protection by extending the upland review area along certain rivers.

Vernal pools are basins that contain water for just a few months in the year. Protection of vernal pools is essential for species which are dependent upon them for survival. The land surrounding vernal pools are critical to their proper functioning. Landowners should be encouraged to protect these areas.

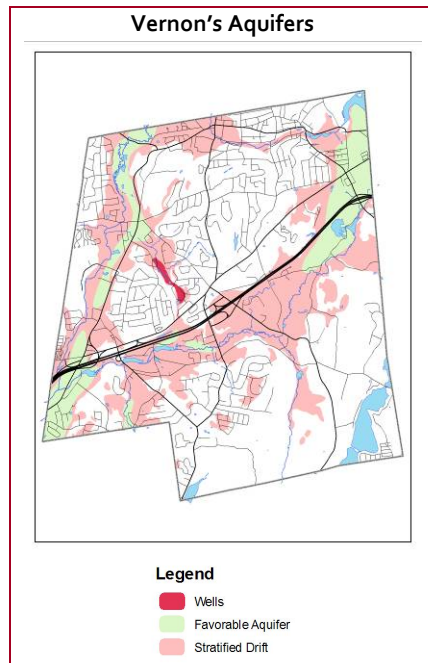


Drinking Water Reservoirs and Aquifers

Vernon's ground and surface waters provide drinking water to residents of the Town and the larger region. Protecting the quality of these supplies is an important public health consideration.

There are two types of aquifers in Vernon: stratified drift aquifers and bedrock aquifers. The 1988 Aquifer Management Study delineated the Town's stratified drift aquifers and their recharge areas, along with subareas which are particularly favorable for providing drinking water because the saturated thickness of sand and gravel exceeds 30 feet (see sidebar).

The Drinking Water Protection Plan on page 9 outlines possible levels of protection as follows:



Protection Level 1. Currently provides drinking water to a public water system and warrant the highest level of protection. Surface supplies include Shenipsit Lake (operated by the Connecticut Water Company) and Risley Reservoir (operated by the Town of Manchester).

This also includes the Connecticut Water Company's public water supply wells which are located in a stratified drift aquifer west of Vernon Center. The State requires additional mapping and the adoption of regulations for this aquifer since it currently provides a public water supply for more than 1,000 people.

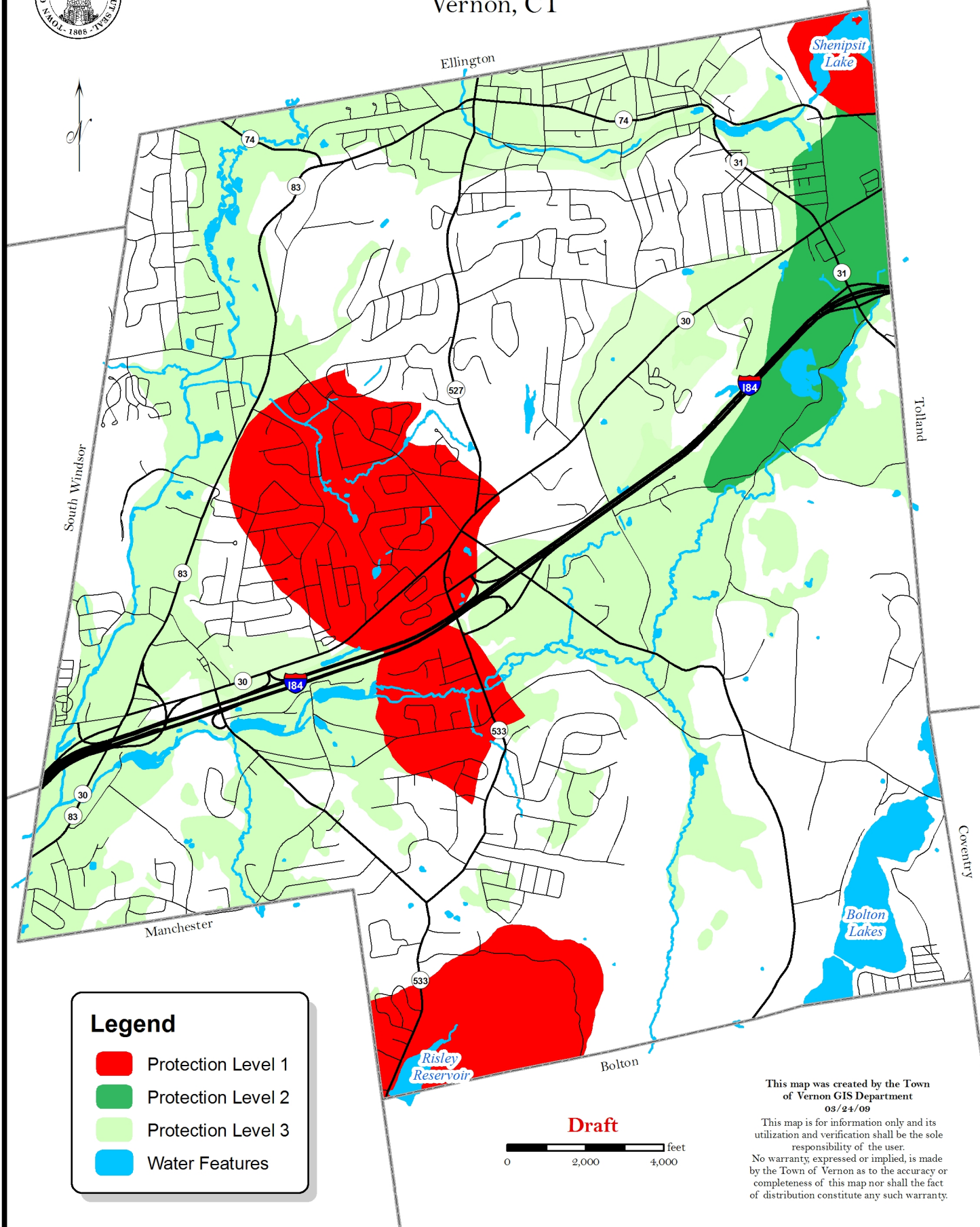
Protection Level 2. Area identified in the 1988 Aquifer Management Study as one of many Favorable Aquifer Areas. This one area is placed in the second protection category because DEP data does not indicate ground water pollution threats or impairments. The goal for this area should be to maintain its integrity so that the aquifer can be preserved for future use. The Town's Aquifer Protection Overlay Zone applies to this area.

Protection Level 3. Remainder of stratified drift aquifers that may have a higher risk of contamination based on DEP data and existing land uses. The goal in this area should be to reduce additional risks by maintaining the existing Aquifer Protection Overlay Zone and incorporating other water quality practices, discussed later. The Connecticut Water Company has abandoned one well (in the Vernon Circle area) here due to water quality issues.



Drinking Water Protection Plan

Vernon, CT



Legend

- Protection Level 1
- Protection Level 2
- Protection Level 3
- Water Features

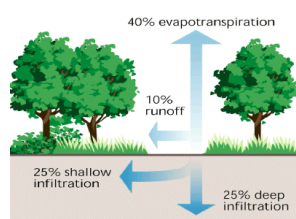
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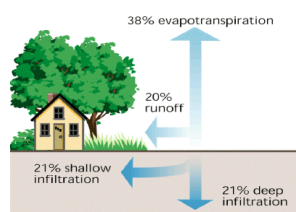
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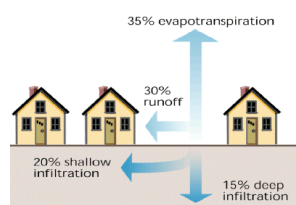
Groundcover and Runoff



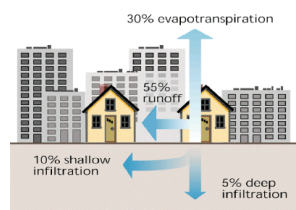
Natural ground cover



10 - 20% impervious surfaces



35 - 50% impervious surfaces



75 - 100% impervious surfaces

Low Impact Development

LID is a comprehensive approach to reducing development impacts. A main tenet is mimicking natural processes rather than piping water off-site as quickly as possible. LID has been proven effective at protecting water quality and reducing runoff volume.

Some communities have adopted LID and can serve as models.

For an overview of LID see nemo.uconn.edu

Protecting Water Quality – Surface and Ground Water

In addition to strategies already mentioned, strategies to protect both ground and surface water quality could focus on minimizing pollution sources and reducing stormwater runoff (and thus the flow of pollutants).

Minimizing Pollution Sources

There are common practices by households and businesses that can contribute to water pollution. These include the overuse of fertilizer, use of pesticides, dumping or washing cleaners (such as car wash cleaners) into storm drains, etc. These and other pollutants may seep into groundwater or wash away into rivers, lakes and other water bodies. Public education should focus on explaining the impacts of these practices and suggesting alternative approaches.

Potential contamination from underground storage tanks (USTs) was of concern in the 2001 plan. [Note to PZC: we can map high risk USTs if we can obtain the data]. Often communities find that there are a number of old residential or commercial USTs that might pose a risk because they are not constructed to today's standards. Ideally older tanks would be removed to reduce the risk of leaks. Some communities prohibit installing new USTs for heating oil for 1- and 2-family houses, while others have adopted ordinances to require that USTs over a certain age be replaced. Vernon might consider this type of provision in the areas that warrant a higher level of protection (Protection areas 1 and 2).

Some stormwater issues are outside of the Town's control, particularly those related to I-84 and DOT facilities. According to local officials, DOT facilities are impacting Walkers Reservoir. It will be important to work with the State to find options for addressing these issues.

Reducing Stormwater Flow

The traditional approach to stormwater management practiced by most communities was to carry stormwater off site as quickly as possible, often emptying directing into water bodies with little if any treatment. A new approach – called Low Impact Development / Design or LID – aims to better manage both water runoff volume and water quality. LID's goal is to use multiple on-site techniques to reduce runoff and increase the landscape's ability to detain (or reuse) rainwater and capture pollutants.

LID in Vernon might include some mixture of the following approaches:

- Education Approach – educating property owners, developers and others about simple LID practices they can undertake (e.g., rain gardens, directing roof runoff to vegetated areas, etc.)
- Guidance Approach – Provide guidance to property owners during the development review process; provide advice to landowners who wish to retrofit their properties.
- Regulatory Approach – Update zoning and subdivision regulations to require LID approaches; adopt a town drainage ordinance; provide incentives for re-

ducing peak and total stormwater runoff; reduce parking requirements; require swales and non-piped drainage structure as appropriate; etc. The Tankerhoosen Watershed Plan provides specific LID-related regulatory recommendations, such as eliminating some curb requirements, reducing paving widths for new roads, reducing front setbacks to allow shorter driveways, etc.

- Municipal Practices – Incorporate LID techniques into municipal projects, such as road reconstruction, repaving, facility updates, etc.

The Town has begun to introduce some LID concepts, such as allowing gravel driveways subject to review by the Town Engineer. This is a good first step and additional LID strategies should be explored. Also, the Inland Wetlands regulations were recently amended to increase the upland review area from 75 feet to 100 feet and to 200 feet for certain rivers and streams. Retaining a buffer along rivers and streams can promote infiltration and remove pollutants before stormwater reaches the waterbody.

Habitat and Vegetation

Continued open space protection and greenway preservation can help preserve habitat in Vernon. This strategy is particularly important within the Tankerhoosen River watershed, as the river is home to robust native wild trout populations and the watershed contains a concentration of DEP-identified important habitat areas (“endangered, threatened and special concern species and significant natural communities”). The continued preservation of land in this watershed can help protect and link important wildlife habitats, along with other benefits that open space provides.

As discussed under open space, existing open space is home to habitat for wildlife. The Town and its conservation partners should maintain and enhance wildlife habitat by inventorying, analyzing, and developing habitat management plans for open space. This could be conducted in conjunction with the open space management plans discussed later.

Trees and vegetation provide habitat, decrease stormwater runoff, reduce erosion, sequester carbon, filter air pollution and add to the character of an area. Strategies to preserve vegetation include minimizing the amount of clearing during construction, employing practices during construction to prevent accidental damage to trees, ensuring that newly planted trees (as part of development approvals) are properly planted and maintained, and encouraging property owners to retain vegetation.

Vision for Natural Resources

Preservation and conservation of Vernon's natural resources will contribute to the ecological integrity of the Town, protect our health and safety, and enhance our quality of life. We will protect and preserve our ground and surface water resources and flora and fauna. We will preserve our natural areas and our town regulations will promote ecologically responsible development. We will engage our citizens and businesses in taking action to preserve our natural resources. The Town will capitalize on its natural assets to provide recreation opportunities and attract visitors.

Possible Strategies

Overarching Strategies to Protect Vernon's Natural Resources

1. Where feasible, preserve sensitive natural resource areas as open space.
2. Where preservation is not possible, update zoning to reduce densities / development intensity in areas with a concentration of natural resources.
3. Design sites to avoid sensitive areas.
4. Update Cluster Development regulations to enable wider use, as appropriate.

Continue to Restore and Improve Vernon's Lakes and Rivers

5. Continue to preserve open space along lakes and rivers (see Open Space discussion)
6. Better integrate the river into Rockville's identity.
7. Implement the Tankerhoosen River Watershed Plan.
8. Incorporate LID into land use regulations and Town projects.
9. Continue to work with the other Bolton Lakes communities to reduce pollution potential and determine adequate water levels.
10. Monitor groundwater levels near Bolton Lakes to ensure that long-term, the diversion of water out of the watershed does not impact groundwater levels.
11. Protect wetlands, floodplains and vernal pools through the regulatory process.

Protect Ground and Surface Drinking Water Supplies

12. Preserve the water quality of existing drinking water supplies (Protection Level 1 on map).
13. Maintain the integrity of potential future water supply aquifers in Protection Level 2 on map.
14. Reduce pollution risks in Protection Level 3 on map and restore water quality.

Minimize Water Pollution Sources

15. Educate residents and businesses on practices they can undertake to reduce water pollution.
16. Investigate the need for UST removal programs and /or regulations.
17. Work with the State to determine options for reducing the pollution potential from state facilities.

Reduce Stormwater Flows

18. Educate residents and businesses about simple LID approaches they can take to reduce stormwater flow from their properties.
19. Integrate LID into land use regulations.
20. Employ LID techniques into municipal practices.

Protect Habitat and Minimize the Clearing of Vegetation

21. Continue preserving open space in areas with critical habitat (see Open Space discussion).
22. On existing open space, develop habitat management plans.
23. Work with applicants to minimize the amount of vegetation cleared during construction, to prevent accidental tree damage, and to ensure that new trees are planted correctly and maintained.
24. Encourage property owners to retain vegetation.

Open Space Definitions

Dedicated Open Space - land or development rights intended to remain for open space purposes. For this analysis, Dedicated Open Space included: land owned by land trusts, water bodies, cemeteries, and town-owned and state-owned lands that are intended to provide open space.

Managed Open Space - land that provides open space benefits but is not protected from future development. For this analysis, Managed Open Space includes schools (fields), private open space (Fish & Game club), and town-owned or state-owned land that is vacant, but not specifically intended as open space.

Vacant land that is under the PA 490 program is not included in this calculation because the program defers development; it does not permanently preserve the land. The benefits of PA 490 are discussed in the Character section.

Open Space and Greenways

The quality of life in a community is largely determined by the quality, quantity and distribution of its cultural and natural resources. Protection of these resources through the preservation of their supporting landscape is a key critical function of open space preservation. Open space preservation also provides for the community's recreation needs and the basic human needs for fresh air, sunlight, physical exercise and psychological release.

The need to preserve open space in Vernon remains strong, particularly to provide recreation opportunities and to protect natural resources. Open space enhances the quality of life in a community – not just for residents – but also for visitors and businesses. Sometimes there are perceptions that development and open space preservation are at odds. Residents expressed certainty that this does not have to be the case in Vernon.

The Vernon Open Space Task Force developed an Open Space Plan as part of the 2001 POCD and has regularly updated the Plan. The Open Space Plan establishes policies and recommendations to:

- ensure the protection of resources,
- preserve of the unique character of Vernon,
- provide adequate open space to meet recreational needs, and
- enhance the Town's quality of life.

This section summarizes the Open Space Plan, provides updates based on research, analysis, and public input, and recommends a vision and strategies for continued open space preservation in Vernon.

Open Space Preservation Status

Approximately 1,900 acres (16%) of land in Vernon is currently considered Open Space. Of this amount, almost 1,600 acres is dedicated open space – i.e., land that is expected to remain as open space over the long term (see sidebar). The remaining 300 acres is managed open space (land that currently provides the benefits of open space, but is not protected from future development). Vernon has made progress over the last 10 years preserving additional open space, as follows:

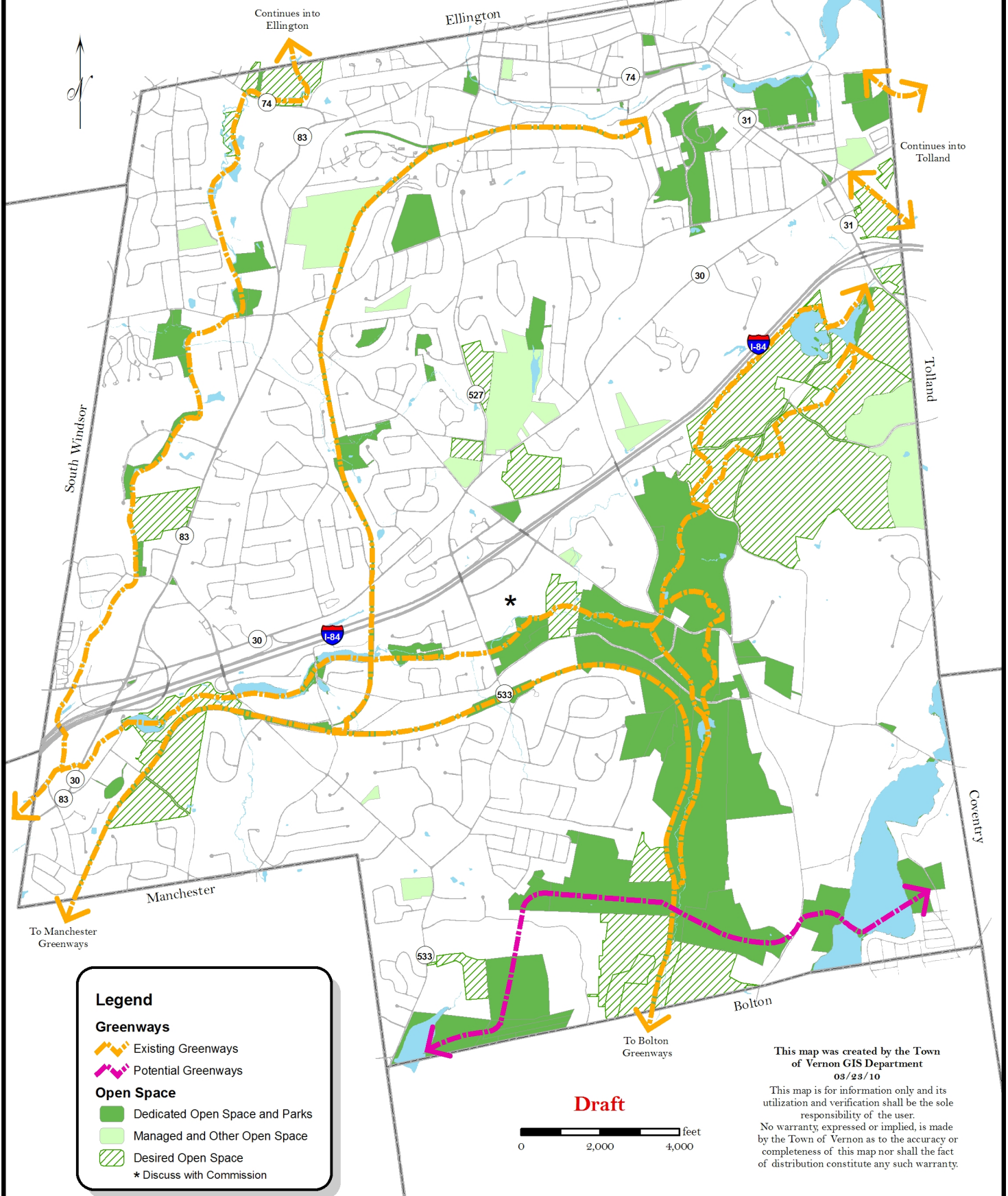
2000 Open Space:	1,692 acres (1,891 if utility land is included)
2010 Open Space:	1,900 acres (excluding utility land)

Parcels protected over the last 10 years include the Roberts Property (acquired by the DEP, connects Valley Falls Park to Bolton Lake); the Knapp Property (acquired by the Northern CT Land Trust, connects Valley Falls Park and the Rail Trail); Valley Falls Farm (acquired by the Friends of Valley Falls, connects Belding and Valley Falls Park); and additions to Dart Hill Park (acquired by the Friends of Hockanum River Linear Park and transferred to the Town).



Open Space Plan

Vernon, CT



Greenways are an important component of Vernon's open space system. Greenways are corridors of open space that generally follow natural land or water features and link destinations such as cultural and historical features, open space, parks and other areas. Because of efforts to create linear parks and bike trails, Vernon has a distinct greenway network already in place. Key greenways are:

- The Hockanum River Linear Park (see box below)
- The Tankerhoosen Greenway
- The Hop River Linear Rails-to-Trails
- The Rockville Linear Rails-to-Trails

Both the Hockanum River Linear Park and the Tankerhoosen Greenway are "Officially Designated Connecticut Greenways" and included on the Connecticut Greenways map.

Vernon has developed its organizational capacity to manage and pursue open space preservation by forming the Open Space Task Force and having an Open Space Plan that is updated and maintained. The Town is supported by engaged citizen groups, such as "friends of" groups. Further, the Town and these groups have prepared plans for specific components of the open space network, such as the Hockanum River Linear Park Master Plan.

Issues focus on managing existing open space and continuing to acquire desired parcels to further enhance Vernon's open space and greenway network.

Hockanum River Linear Park – A Regional Greenway

The Hockanum River Linear Park is a planned regional riverscape and recreational park incorporating the lands along the 25 mile length of the Hockanum River, from its origin at Shenipsit lake to its confluence with the Connecticut River. This regional plan includes the four towns through which the river flows: Vernon, Ellington, Manchester and East Hartford. Each town is responsible for developing and managing that section of the river within its borders.

Given the important role that the Hockanum River has played in the history of the community and the considerable watershed lands that lie along its five-mile length in Vernon, the objectives and strategies detailed in the following documents are incorporated by reference into the POCD:

- *A Plan for the Hockanum River Linear Park*, prepared for the CT DEP by Roy Mann Associates, Inc., 1981.
- *The Hockanum River Linear Park Proposal: Connecting Our Community*, prepared for the Vernon Town Council by the Hockanum River Linear Park Committee, 1989 [accepted and approved by the Town Council]
- *The Master Plan of Development*, prepared by Johnson and Richter, 1990.

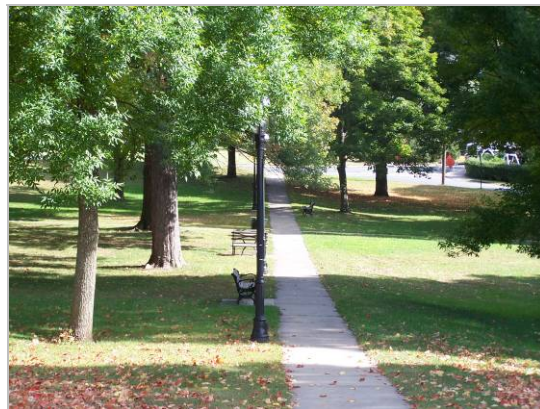
Managing Existing Open Space

Some parcels which are presumed to be dedicated open space actually do not have clear deed restrictions that would prevent development or uses other than open space. In those cases where other entities, such as the State, own the parcel, the Town should work with them to ensure that the long term intention is to keep the land as open space. For town-owned parcels, the Town should prepare management plans that outline the intended use for each parcel over the long term. Having management plans can help reach consensus on future intentions for the land. The development of the management plans should involve the various boards, commissions and departments involved with open space preservation and municipal facilities operations and management.

Other issues related to existing open space include continuing to promote the enjoyment of open space by residents and others in the region and State. The Town should also continue to expand access to waterbodies within its parks (e.g., additional river access points) in order to enhance recreation opportunities. The Town should also continue to make accessibility upgrades where feasible (e.g., paths that are wheelchair accessible, expansion of the Braille trail, etc.).



Photo by: Kelly Pramberger



Criteria for Open Space Preservation

In addition to specific parcels identified as desirable open space, other criteria for prioritizing future open space might include land that:

- contains other important natural resources, as outlined in the Natural Resources section,
- links or expands existing open space, or
- enhances close-to-home recreation opportunities for the public including small neighborhood parks in Rockville.

Future Open Space and Greenways

The Open Space Task Force has developed a list of specific parcels of desirable open space and have described criteria for other land that might warrant preservation as open space (see Open Space Plan map on p. 15 and sidebar).

The Town should continue to strive to preserve a minimum of 21% of its land as open space. This would entail:

- preserving an additional 500+ acres of land as open space (or ¼ of remaining vacant land), and
- working with the owners of managed open space to permanently preserve their land.

To acquire open space, towns can take reactive approaches (e.g., receiving open space dedications when development occurs, accepting donated land) or proactive approaches (working with landowners on preservation options, purchasing parcels).

Outright acquisition of land is the strongest tool for permanently preserving land as open space and Vernon has used this tool to establish many of its parks and open spaces. The Town also has established some financial tools to enable a proactive approach should acquisition opportunities arise. However, often these funds are not sufficient to cover costs and instead are better suited to augment other funding sources. To finance open space acquisitions, Vernon residents have expressed a desire to use bonding, which requires a referendum.

In addition to Town purchases, open space acquisition by the State and non-profit entities have played and will likely continue to play an important role in Vernon. The Town should continue to collaborate with these entities.

Vision for Open Space

Vernon's open system and greenways will link local and regional parks and other destinations, thereby improving our natural infrastructure, providing close-to-home recreation opportunities, buffering existing parks and enhancing our experience as we move through the landscape. Open space will help protect ground and surface water, flora, fauna and other natural resources; provide high quality outdoor activity and passive recreational opportunities; and, protect and preserve the scenic, historic and cultural resources.

Possible Strategies

Promote and Manage Existing Open Space

1. Maintain and update the inventory of open space and greenways.
2. Make information on open space access and amenities easily available.
3. Program events to promote use of open space and parks.
4. Encourage / provide river access for canoes, kayaks, and fishing.
5. Where feasible, improve accessibility for people with disabilities.
6. Consult with the Conservation Commission and other land use boards when any municipal open space is to be sold, transferred, or exchanged.
7. Provide regular funding in the Capital Improvement Program for maintenance.
8. Continue to encourage volunteers and non-profits to aid in maintenance.
9. Prepare management plans for town-owned open space that outline intended long-term uses. Seek input from Department of Parks and Recreation, Conservation Commission, Inland Wetlands Commission and other boards, commissions, agencies and departments.

Preserve 21% of Vernon as Open Space by 2023

10. Work with the owners of managed open space (including state agencies) to permanently preserve their land.
11. Focus on preserving priority open space parcels identified on Open Space Plan
12. Encourage open space preservation in areas that meet the criteria listed on page 17 and elsewhere in the POCD.
13. Ensure that deeds for open space state that the property is to remain open space in perpetuity.
14. Pursue additional means of funding to purchase desirable parcels including:
 - a. State and federal grants
 - b. Bond referenda
 - c. Continued contributions to the Open Space Fund
 - d. Donations and other gift contributions

Continue to Enhance and Expand Vernon's Greenway Network

15. Encourage the development of additional trails for walking, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and flora and fauna observations.
16. Create linkages to existing trails in Vernon and neighboring communities.
17. Continue to actively pursue the establishment of the Box Mountain Greenways.
18. Implement the Master Plan of Development for the Hockanum River Linear Park and update the plan as needed.
19. Protect the Tankerhoosen River Watershed and associated wildlife habitat by creating contiguous greenways of 2,000 preserved acres in the watershed.

What do Historic Designations Mean?

Listing on the National and State registers generally provides recognition and some limited protection.

The National and State Register designations affect activities involving Federal and / or State funding and may prevent unreasonable destruction of important resources.

Pursuant to the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act, citizens can intervene in the proposed demolition of structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Local historic district designations afford the highest level of protection. The local historic district commission is given the authority to regulate the construction and demolition of structures and the alteration of architectural features. In cases studies were submitted to the state to create a local historic district, but ultimately a local district was not created, the district is still listed as a State District. This was the case with the Valley Falls State Historic District.

Historic Resources

Historic buildings, structures and landscapes remind us of Vernon's rural and urban heritage and contribute to the community's overall quality of life. The Town and its historic preservation partners have done an extensive job of:

- inventorying historic assets,
- designating resources as local, state and national historic resources,
- promoting resources through events and publications, and
- encouraging and facilitating the reuse of historic buildings.

The following lists historic resources in Vernon that have a local, state or national historic designation.

Districts	National	State	Local
Talcottville Historic District	✓	✓	✓
Rockville Historic District	✓	✓	
Valley Falls Historic District		✓	

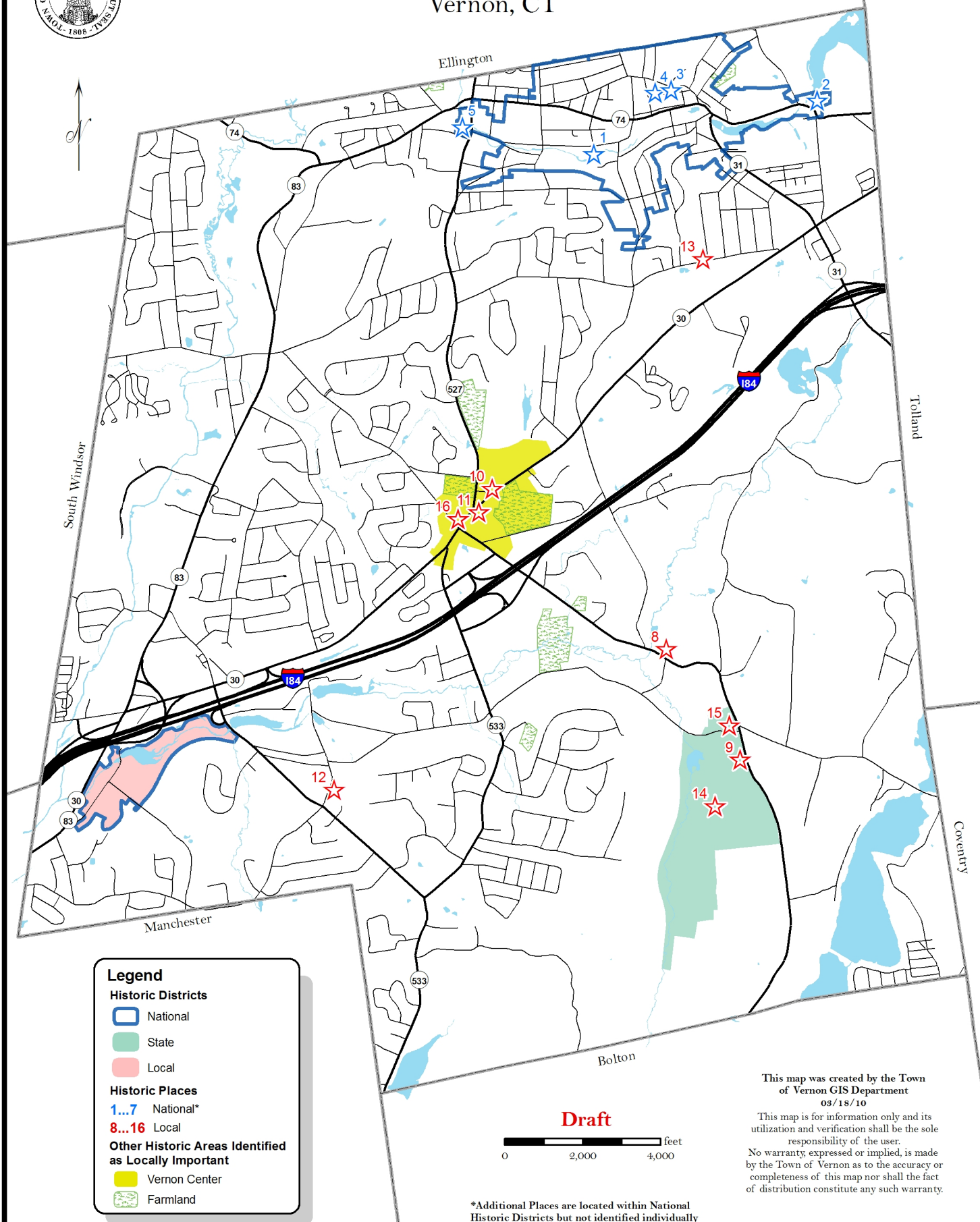
Places	National	State	Local
1. Florence Mill	✓	✓	
2. Minterburn Mill	✓	✓	
3. Old East School	✓	✓	
4. Old Rockville High School	✓	✓	
5. Saxony Mill	✓	✓	
6. Sharpe's Trout Hatchery*	✓	✓	
7. Valley Falls Cotton Mill site*	✓	✓	
8. Thrall Farm		✓	✓
9. Dr. Charles C. Beach House		✓	✓
10. Skinner – Hammond House		✓	✓
11. Vernon Grange No. 52		✓	✓
12. Jonas Sparks House		✓	✓
13. Leonard Rogers House		✓	✓
14. Valley Falls Farm A		✓	✓
15. Valley Falls Farm B		✓	✓
16. County Home School Property		✓	✓

* Not mapped – address restricted.



Historic Resources Plan

Vernon, CT



Understanding “Historic”

Vernon, and Rockville in particular, is home to a large number of older structures. In fact, in the Rockville Historic District, there are over 800 “contributing buildings” (buildings that contribute to the historic nature of the district). In addition, for zoning purposes, the Rockville area is referred to as the Rockville Historic District. These designations and terms remind residents of the historic importance of Rockville, but can make preservation seem like an overwhelming task – how would a community preserve all older buildings? By labeling all of Rockville as “historic” in zoning, has it confused the meaning of “historic” and hindered the development of focused and workable historic preservation strategies?

“Historic” is typically defined as structures which are at least 50 years old. For many people, buildings built in 1960 are not what comes to mind when thinking of “historic” in Vernon. The POCD should set forth a vision about what we mean by “historic”, thereby helping to develop a vision of what we wish to protect and how to do so. The following approach may aid in the POCD update process.

Step 1: Determine Importance of Structure - Does a Structure / Building Provide any of the Following:

Identity: Places that are important to Vernon’s history because of what occurred there or who lived there. Provide value because they instill local (and state) pride, give residents a sense of heritage and provide an educational tool. The primary goals for these types of historic resources should be **preservation** of the place and **promotion**.

Architecture: Unique to a period in history, educational about architecture, visually interesting. The primary goal should be **preservation** of the architectural features.

Patterns: How buildings, streets, spaces work together to create a neighborhood reflective of historic Vernon and / or Rockville. The primary goal should be to **preserve** the patterns and ensure that **redevelopment** and **infill** contribute to those patterns.

Step 2: Based upon the Classification, Determine Appropriate Strategic Approach:

	Less aggressive		More aggressive
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plaque on building • Provide public information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National & State Registers • Street plaques / kiosks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events • Regular publicity
Preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer design review advice to interested owners • Collaborate with Local Historic Properties Commission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require design review • Demolition delay ordinance • Zoning incentives for owners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Historic Place • Village District • Public ownership
Redevelopment/ Infill		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring zoning regulations do not prevent or create a strong disincentive for historic patterns (e.g., setbacks, locations of parking areas, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village District

An Approach for Vernon

The Town has successfully obtained funding to make capital improvements to enhance historic areas including Talcottville and Rockville. The Town also has adopted some tools that are available to help preserve resources and promote reuse. These include:

- Adoption of a demolition delay ordinance, allowing a delay of up to 90 days before the owner can tear down a historic building. The delay provides a window for the Town and historic preservation entities to explore alternatives. The State law has been updated to enable communities up to a 180 day delay; the Town could update its ordinance to reflect this increased waiting time.
- Creation of a Local Historic Properties Commission, which has designated a local historic district and a number of local historic places. They are working on design standards for historic districts.
- Requirement of design review for uses that require a site plan or special permit. Although historic preservation is not their mission, new development and infill can impact its surroundings.
- Adopted incentives for the reuse / continued use of historic buildings for private sector use. Homestead Revitalization Committee, seeking grants for mill reuse, and adaptive reuse provisions in zoning.

The POCD should outline an overall strategic approaches for historic resource preservation in Vernon. The chart on the preceding page can set the framework for discussion with the Commission to determine what types of strategies can help accomplish goals.

Vision for Historic Resources

Vernon's historic resources will be preserved and celebrated, instilling a sense of pride and reminding us of our rich history. We will have the tools to protect and preserve our historic buildings and structures. We will encourage the continued use and reuse of historic buildings as homes and businesses.

Potential Strategies:

[Note – here are some starting points. Need to discuss approaches outlined above with Commission]

Promote Vernon's Historic Resources

1. Increase efforts to promote and celebrate Vernon's history and historic assets.

Preserve Historic Resources

2. Continue the collaboration between the PZC and the Local Historic Properties Commission when making land use decision that affect historic buildings and neighborhoods.
3. Update the demolition delay ordinance to allow up to a 180 day delay.
4. In Vernon Center:
5. In Rockville:
6. In Talcottville:

Community Character

While “character” means something different to each person, attributes that make Vernon’s character unique include:

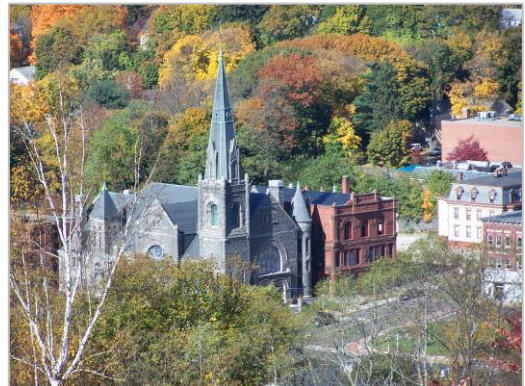
Scenic views



Community icons



Special places



Water features



Community spirit



Photo by: Kelly Pramberger



Agricultural heritage



The preservation of many elements of Vernon's character are discussed elsewhere (e.g., natural resources, open space, historic resources) or will be discussed further in future booklets (e.g., development patterns). This section discusses strategies to preserve scenic features, "openness", farmland, and community spirit and identity.

Article IV. Designation of Scenic Roads

CGS 7-149a lists six specific criterion for scenic road designation. A road must meet at least one of the criteria to qualify for designation:

- Unpaved,
- Bordered by mature trees or stone walls,
- No more than 20 feet wide,
- Offers scenic views,
- Blends naturally with surrounding terrain, or
- Parallels or crosses water bodies.

The Vernon ordinance included an additional criterion related to agricultural land and historic resources. The Town should eliminate this extra criterion and update “scenic views” to include historic and agricultural landscapes.

The Town should also confirm if the process for owner consent is consistent with state statutes.

Scenic Features

Scenic Road designation ensures that road improvements will have minimal impact on those features that make the road scenic. Vernon adopted a scenic road ordinance in 2004 and applied the designation to Reservoir Road and Valley Falls Road. Before designating additional roads, the Town may need to update its ordinance to ensure that the criteria for designation and procedures are consistent with state statute (see sidebar).

While scenic road designations can effectively protect the roadway, it does not protect scenic features and views located outside of the right-of-way. Communities have limited ability to regulate the protection of scenic areas, hilltops and ridgelines, but there are some strategies that can help reduce the loss of scenic hilltops and ridgelines. These include:

- Limiting the type of development and building coverage allowed in areas with hills and hilltops. Much of the area south and east of I-84 is characterized by steep slopes (and thus scenic views) and is zoned R-27 and R-40. Zoning does allow some uses that would not be appropriate in these areas (hospitals, schools), and can allow a lot coverage of greater than 25%. But a special permit is required, thereby giving the PZC broad discretion.
- Limiting the clearing of trees during the development review process. The extent of tree clearing should be minimized and measures should be in place to protect trees during construction (see earlier discussion of vegetation).

Regional scenic views are afforded from a number of vantage points in Vernon. Preserving those views is outside of Vernon’s ability to control. The Town could encourage a regional approach to identifying scenic areas and developing a regional approach.

Openness (Perceived Open Space)

Travelling throughout Vernon, particularly in the southeast part of Town, “openness” plays a prominent role. This land is often perceived as being open space, but is simply vacant land that has not been developed. Some of this land remains vacant due to reduced tax assessments under the PA 490 Open Space program (currently, 13 landowners have enrolled their vacant land in the program). PA 490 does not protect land from development; but it can delay development and thus protect the character of these areas for some period. State statute requires that eligible parcels / criteria for eligibility are contained in the POCD and adopted by the Town Council. The current PA 490 policy is that priority open space areas and vacant land of at least four acres located in R-10, R-15, R-22, R-27 and R-40 are eligible. Lots created through subdivision or resubdivision are not eligible. The POCD should support the continuation of this PA 490 open space policy and eligibility criteria.

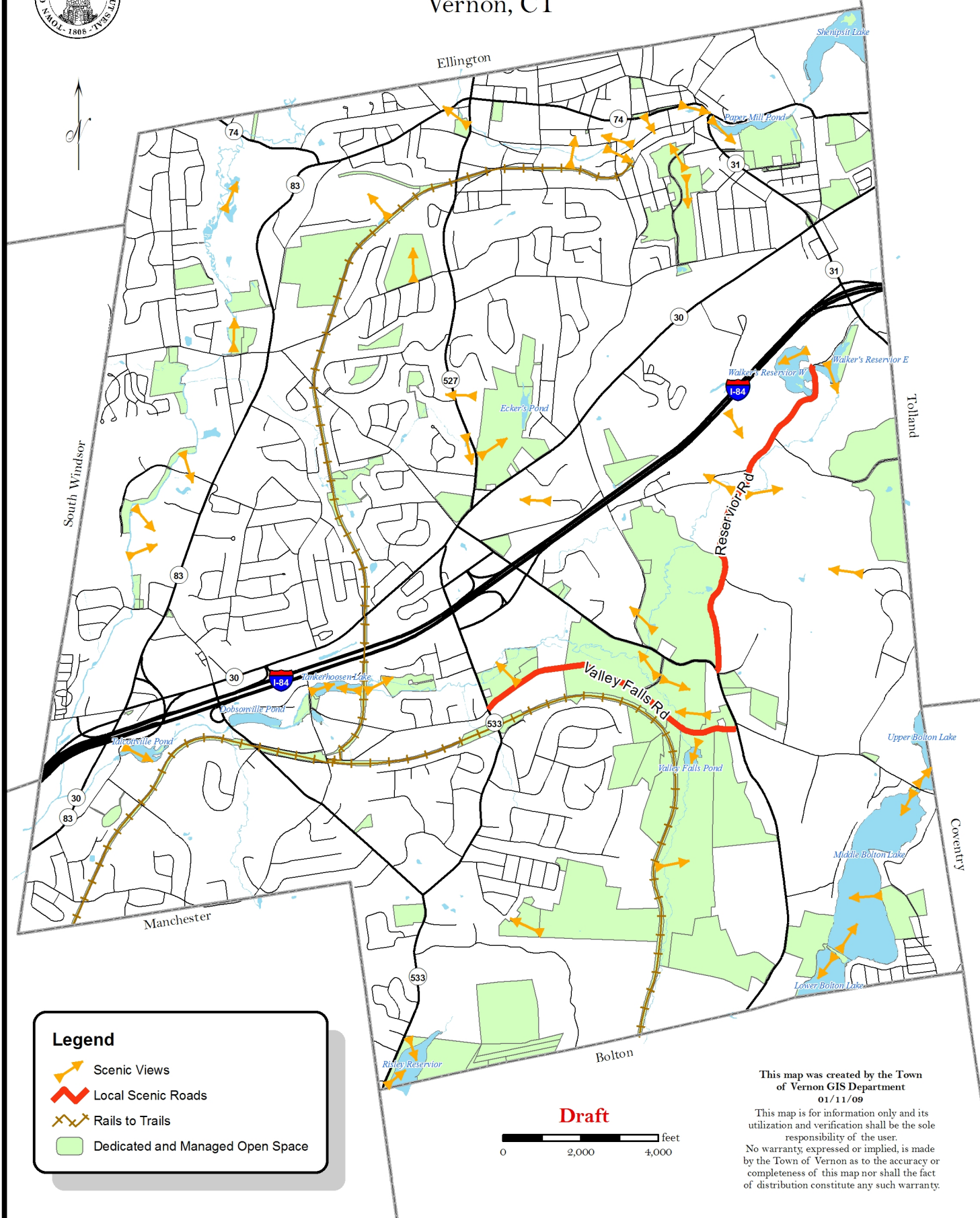
Farmland

Like many Connecticut communities, Vernon has a strong agricultural heritage. Most farms have since been developed for housing or business or have reverted to forest. It is difficult to “reclaim” farmland, but Vernon is fortunate to have retained a prominent



Scenic Resources Plan

Vernon, CT



Legend

- Scenic Views
- Local Scenic Roads
- Rails to Trails
- Dedicated and Managed Open Space

Draft

0 2,000 4,000 feet

This map was created by the Town of Vernon GIS Department
01/11/09

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farm, centrally located in the historic Vernon Center. The 58-acre Strong Farm keeps the connection to this past, strongly contributes to the character of Vernon Center, and contributes to the local economy. It is also easily accessible to visitors due to its proximity to I-84. Because of its central location, development pressures could be strong. The Town should continue to work with the owners to ensure that the farm remains economically viable and continues its important role to both Vernon Center and the Town.

Community Spirit and Identity

At public workshops, residents were particularly proud of the level of volunteerism and how such involvement contributes to community spirit. They also expressed a desire for the Town to find ways to get more people involved – especially younger residents and those who are new to Vernon. Historic tensions between “Vernon” and “Rockville” contribute to a perception of two Vernons. Protecting those things that are important to Vernon (as discussed throughout this booklet) can help residents identify more with Vernon as a whole and build community pride and spirit. The Town could explore ways to engage residents with the implementation of the POCD. Events and celebrations can play an important role in instilling civic pride. Many events are held right in Rockville at Central Park, including concerts, ceremonies, and other events. Town events held around Vernon include fireworks, fishing derbies, trial days, races and tournaments, and many other activities. Such events should continue to be held.

Vision for Character:

Vernon will retain those natural and cultural features that make the community unique. We will continue to publicize those things that make Vernon a special place and continue to build community spirit by engaging more residents in planning our future.

Potential Strategies:

Preserve Scenic Features

1. Update the local Scenic Road Ordinance, if necessary.
2. Continue to designate local Scenic Roads.
3. Preserve the scenic value of hilltops and ridges by ensuring that large-scale development is avoided.
4. Work regionally to identify and protect scenic views.

Maintain “Openness”

5. Continue the current PA 490 Open Space eligibility requirements.

Preserve Working Farms

6. Ensure that existing farms remain viable and that farmland is preserved.

Promote Community Spirit

7. Continue to hold a variety of events for residents.
8. To implement the POCD, work with the various community groups and seek ways to engage a wider array of residents.

