

DEVELOPMENT

5

Overview

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

How a community wishes to grow ("development") is a key component of a Plan of Conservation and Development. Booklet 4, Conservation Strategies, provided a framework for those things that should be protected in Vernon (e.g., natural resources, farms, historic resources, overall character). The next step is to approach future development – residential and business development – and prepare strategies for where and how growth should occur in Vernon.

This booklet covers:

- Vernon's "community structure" (including Rockville and Vernon Center)
- Residential development and housing needs
- Business development overall



"We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us."

- Winston Churchill

When reviewing this booklet think about:

- What issues or topics should be covered that are not?
- Where do we need to elaborate on our vision?
- Are the strategies, recommendations appropriate for Vernon?
- What issues do we need to expand upon further?

Community Structure

Overview

Community structure refers to the physical organization of Vernon. Structure influences how residents and visitors perceive and understand the community. Physical organization enhances community character and quality of life and can help guide land use regulations and decisions. Land use regulations should reinforce community structure and enhance community character.

Community Structure – Positive Elements

Elements	Description
Villages / Nodes	Community-size places with distinctive characteristics (such as Rockville).
Clusters / Campuses	Neighborhood-size places identifiable by use, location, character, or style.
Focal Points	Site-size places of exceptional function, identity, character or style.
Greenways	Trails, rivers, and other linear elements that provide overall context (see Conservation Booklet).
Gateways	Places providing a sense of entry or arrival.
Scenic Resources	Places providing a sense of beauty, scale, or perspective (see Conservation Booklet).

Vernon's structure is depicted on the Community Structure Plan. People identify most strongly with areas in a community that have a "sense of place," such as "nodes." Nodes are distinct areas with notable character; often these are traditional New England downtowns and villages, such as Rockville. Having attractive, distinctive gateways into a community can also contribute to structure – gateways convey a sense of arrival and give a glimpse of the character of the community.

History contributed greatly to two key structural elements: Rockville (Downtown) and Vernon Center (a municipal node). Over time, additional nodes evolved. In some cases, potential nodes exist – the framework is there to become a more distinct, identifiable node.

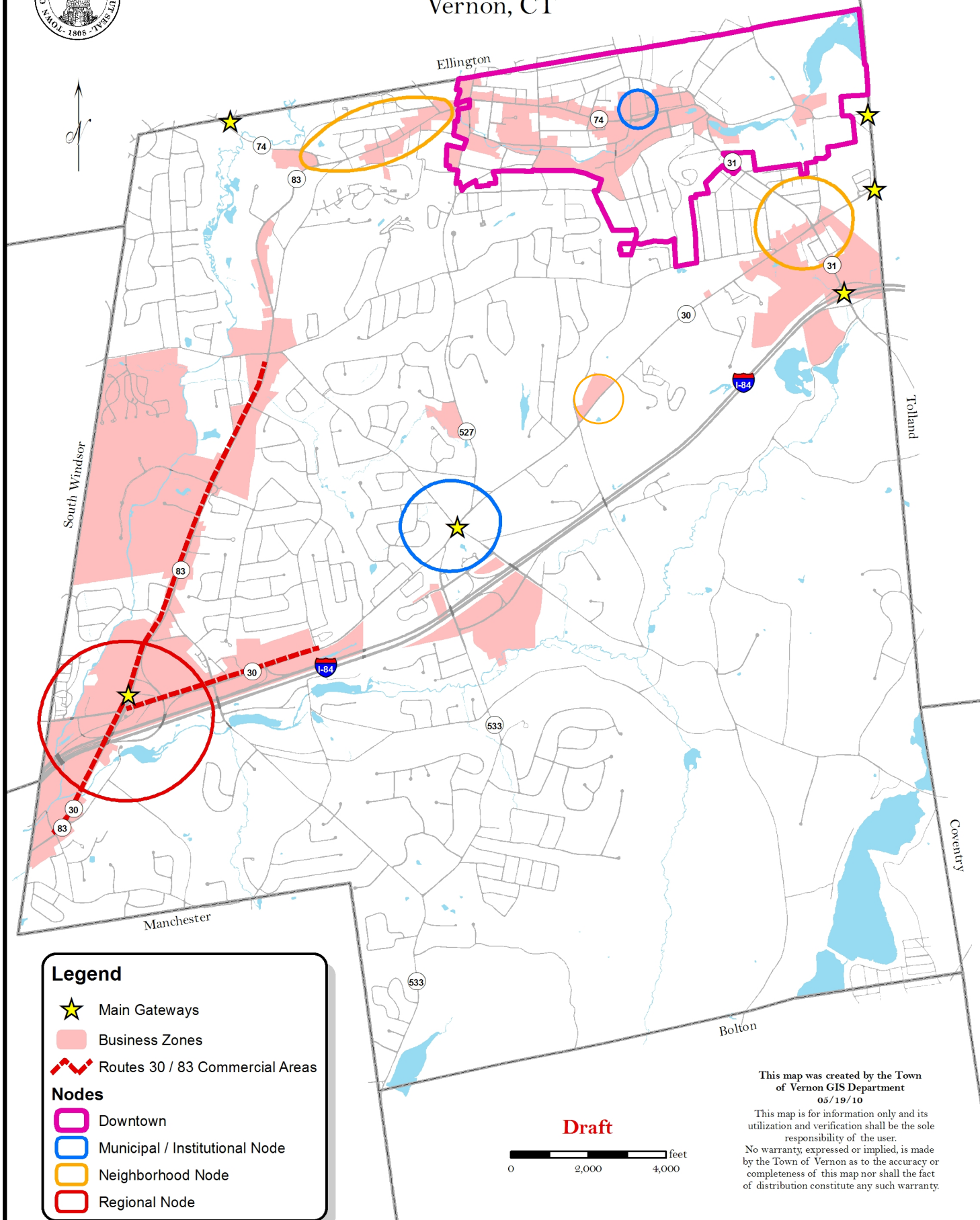
Routes 83 to and 30 play integral roles in Vernon's structure. They have (or have the potential) detract from community structure. People often perceive strip or sprawl to detract from community structure / character. Overall, Vernon should encourage development to occur in locations and in manners that contribute to positive elements of structure and discourage those elements that detract from structure. Potential strategies for doing so are discussed throughout this booklet.

Rockville and Vernon Center are discussed in this Section. The other nodes are primarily commercial and therefore discussed under the Business Development section.



Community Structure Plan

Vernon, CT



Legend



Main Gateways



Business Zones



Routes 30 / 83 Commercial Areas

Nodes



Downtown



Municipal / Institutional Node



Neighborhood Node



Regional Node

Draft

0 2,000 4,000 feet

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of Vernon GIS Department
05/19/10

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Parking, Sidewalks and Roads

Issues related to parking, traffic, sidewalks and other transportation-related topics will be addressed in the upcoming Booklet 6, Infrastructure.

Rockville

Rockville continues to be Vernon's "downtown." It is an identifiable area that is distinct in character from the remainder of Town. Rockville has retained its New England village patterns, its mixture of residential, business and civic uses and its historic architecture. Although a stretch of the Hockanum River has been buried, the river still has a presence in Rockville today.

The role that Rockville plays in the larger community has changed substantially. There is still some industry in Rockville, but most business development over the last 50 years has occurred outside of Rockville. 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. At planning workshops residents felt that Rockville has great potential to attract residents who seek living in a walkable downtown. To move forward with that vision, it is important to retain and enhance those features that make Rockville a walkable downtown and encourage a mixture of uses that draws people downtown seven days a week during day and evening hours.

Key strategies for Rockville should include maintaining and enhancing Rockville's physical appearance, updating zoning to better reflect historic patterns and accommodate upgrades and expansions, promote additional economic development, and continue to increase attract middle and upper income households back to Rockville. Issues and strategies related to parking, sidewalks and roads will be examined in Booklet 6, Infrastructure.

Elements that Contribute to Rockville's Image

A successful downtown or village has a combination of physical elements that attract people to visit and live in or near the downtown. There are many positive village elements in Rockville that should be enhanced and further encouraged.

There are many tools for encouraging these elements:

- Providing advice to business owners and landlords on simple improvements they can make.
- Creating design guidelines that outline good design practices, what to encourage, and what to avoid. Design guidelines can be used when reviewing applications or can be educational.
- Zoning regulations can require that parking be located to the rear of buildings, require a certain percentage of window coverage for street-level facades, etc.

The Town's commitment to Rockville is evident in that it maintains a civic presence here and has improved streets, sidewalks, Central Park, and other areas. The Town should continue to seek funding for additional upgrades. Longer term, additional physical improvements can further reinforce Rockville's sense of place. Landscaping, sidewalk pavement and other techniques can help accomplish this.

As discussed in Booklet 4, Conservation, historically the Hockanum River played an integral role in Rockville. Although a portion of the river flows underneath buildings and parking areas, there is opportunity to celebrate the remainder of the river in Rockville. Papermill Pond Park is a good example of how this can be done elsewhere in Rockville. Efforts to expand the Hockanum River linear park through this area, with benches, walking paths and historical markers should continue.

Positive Elements to Encourage



- Buildings oriented to street
- Wide sidewalks
- Benches, places to sit
- Frontage predominantly windows
- Window displays oriented to pedestrians
- Awnings – decorative and protect pedestrians
- On-street parking provides buffer between pedestrian and busy road
- A mixture of uses
- Banners denote that this is a "place"

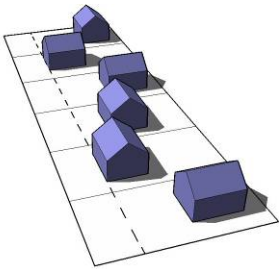
Zoning Provisions in Rockville

Very often, communities find that today's zoning does not allow the patterns that historically made a place special. As discussed below, the Town has adopted a number of zoning measures that reflect Rockville's village patterns. Additional zoning updates can further reinforce the village nature of Rockville when new development or upgrades occur.

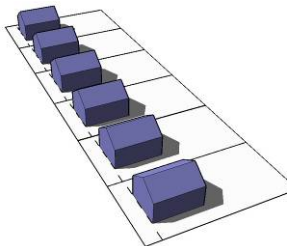
Continue to minimize office uses on the street level

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. Having design guidelines can help convey techniques for accomplishing this.

Potential Building Alignment under Minimum Setback Standards



Required Building Alignment under Build-to Standards



Consider requiring maximum front yard setbacks

The 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 the houses are oriented

to the street. Having a few houses set much further back can impact a streetscape (see sidebar example).

In addition, current patterns are at odds with having a large front setback. A GIS analysis indicates that the majority of existing lots in the NR-10, PND, and HD-RC zones have front yard

setbacks less than 30 feet. The front yard setbacks could be updated to require a minimum and maximum setback (e.g., no closer than 10 feet but no further than 30 feet). The exact setbacks should be determined for each zone.

Zone	% of Parcels not compliant with 30-foot front setback
PND	75%
NR	72%
HD-RC	59%

Continue to discourage auto-oriented uses and features

Many downtowns and historic areas tend to lose their character and pedestrian nature when parcels are converted to auto-oriented uses. The Zoning Regulations generally do not allow uses such as gas stations. However, drive through service windows are allowed by special permit. The Commission should consider adding approval criteria for drive through windows to ensure that they do not create an automobile dominated streetscape (e.g., drive through windows cannot be visible from the frontage. As noted earlier, placing parking behind buildings and minimizing the prominence of entrances to the parking lots contribute to a pedestrian environment. The parking area behind Town Hall exemplifies this approach.

Provide greater flexibility to older buildings in meeting dimensional standards

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 some flexibility via special permit rather than a variance. 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 allow 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.

Economic Development in Rockville

The greatest opportunities for additional business development in Rockville are through the re-use or redevelopment of existing properties, particularly in the Downtown Zone. The Town should continue to work with building owners to identify funding sources for building renovations and redevelopment.

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.”

Rockville Downtown Association

Most successful and vibrant downtowns and main streets have an organization focused solely on promoting the area. The Town is fortunate to have a staffed organization dedicated to the revitalization of Rockville. The Rockville Downtown Association (RDA) keeps business owners actively engaged in improving the vitality of Rockville and helps promote Rockville to residents of Vernon and beyond. The Town and the RDA should continue to work collaboratively to promote economic development, address issues and challenges faced by Rockville businesses, and help property owners find funding sources that can aid in upgrades and redevelopment.

Major employers

Rockville has a daily influx of potential customers – the employees (and visitors) that work at Town offices, the courts and Rockville General Hospital. Some employers provide on-site services for the convenience of their employees and visitors which may create little need or incentive to patronize Rockville businesses. To entice these potential customers, Rockville businesses must provide the goods and services desired by workers / visitors and then encourage them to visit. Surveying employees and visitors can help identify desired goods and services. Results could then be shared with existing businesses and landlords. The Town and RDA could then help businesses with strategies to market their goods and services to the employees.

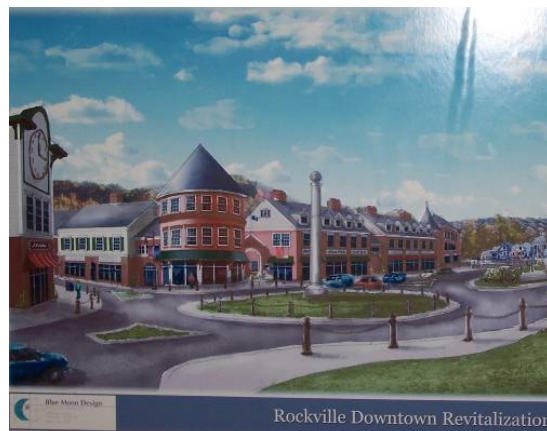
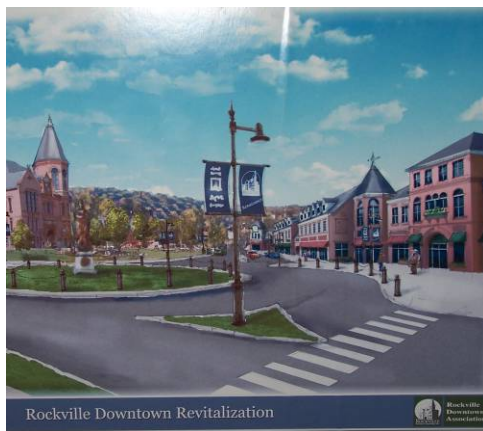


West Main Street Retail Block

Those storefronts with frontage along West Main Street and the main parking area are well-tenanted, while other parts of the plaza that are less visible from the street are vacant. 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. However, the timeframe for such redevelopment could be years away.

In the short term, the focus can be on providing goods and services to employees and visitors and to Rockville residents (as discussed earlier, building the residential base can spur additional business in Rockville). Infill development along the frontage (see rendering) could be encouraged to 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. The RDA-commissioned renderings are shown below. Based on these renderings, Planimetrics has created photo simulations of this stretch of West Main Street (see next pages). 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.

RDA Vision for Rockville



The Citizens Block

The Citizens Block building is owned by the Town and the Town 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. Over the long term, the Town should encourage non-office uses on the first floor, but the primary short term goal should be to keep the building in use and update / redevelop it for additional businesses uses.

Potential Infill Development in Rockville

Before:



After:



Potential Redevelopment in Rockville

Before:



After:



Housing in Rockville

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. This will not only improve help to rehabilitate and preserve the many historic houses, but will 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 where properties are blighted. 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. 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 though since the intent is to draw additional middle and upper income households to Rockville. Such an approach likely 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. Tools used by other communities include:

- providing a grant for each eliminated unit (Pottstown, PA; Bellevue, KY)
- offering low-interest or forgivable loan (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 improving Rockville's housing stock and attracting a better balance of income levels. These include promoting Vernon's amenities (parks, trails), convenient access to Hartford and other job centers, and ensuring that the school system's reputation is highly regarded.

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 building, and recreation facilities). Institutional uses in Vernon Center include churches, the cemetery and the historical society.

These uses, combined with farmland, a general “open” landscape, and recreational activities create a unique character not found elsewhere in Town. The addition of the planned Arts Center will contribute to Vernon Center being a town-wide destination for activities.

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, encourage additional recreation / outdoor activities, continue pedestrian improvements, and maintain the open landscape.



Vision for Community Structure

Vernon will maintain its distinct community structure with its downtown and nodes. Rockville will continue to be Vernon's "downtown", with a mixture of civic uses, jobs, retail and other businesses. Rockville's neighborhoods will be revitalized and home to a mix of income levels. Vernon Center will remain a civic and activity-focal point. Its open landscapes, with fields and farms will continue to remind us of our rural past.

Possible Strategies

Maintain Vernon's overall Community Structure

1. Encourage elements that contribute to Vernon's community structure.
2. Discourage elements that detract from Vernon's community structure.

Encourage revitalization of Rockville

3. Encourage business and property owners to make improvements that will contribute to Rockville's village atmosphere
4. Continue physical improvements to sidewalks, streets, parks, etc.
5. Continue to discourage first floor office uses in pedestrian areas
6. Consider updating zoning to:
 - a. require maximum front yard setbacks
 - b. further minimize the potential for auto-oriented uses and sites
 - c. provide greater flexibility to older buildings in meeting dimensional requirements
7. Promote economic development in Rockville:
 - a. continue to support and collaborate with the RDA
 - b. increase patronage of Rockville businesses by employees in the area
 - c. encourage the redevelopment of the West Main Street Retail Block
 - d. continue efforts to redevelop / re-tenant the Citizens Block
8. Encourage upgrades of Rockville's housing stock and attract additional middle and upper income households
 - a. continue to use tools to redevelop blighted housing lots, replacing structures with owner-occupied single family houses.
 - b. consider establishing financial incentives for converting multi-family properties to single family houses.

Maintain and Enhance Vernon Center

9. Maintain a mixture of civic, institutional, recreation and residences in Vernon Center.
10. Maintain the open, rural landscape.

Residential Patterns and Housing Needs

Overview

With over 70% of land in Vernon zoned for residential uses, the form and pattern of housing will continue to strongly influence the character of the Town. Current residential patterns generally place higher densities north of I-84, with the highest densities near Rockville. Lower densities are found south of I-84. The historic settlement of Rockville as a urban area and farming activity in much of the remainder of Vernon fostered these patterns. Today, the availability of water and sewer service and the presence of natural resource constraints reinforce the housing patterns.

Vernon has a wide array of housing types and housing prices which help meet regional housing needs. As discussed in Conditions and Trends:

- Just over 15% of Vernon's housing stock meets the State's definition of "affordable"
- Median sales prices in Vernon have been lower than the that of the State
- According to the Vernon Housing Authority, they have a surplus of available elderly units and there are many others that provide elderly housing in Vernon

Since Vernon's housing stock helps to meet housing needs (and likely will continue to do so), this Plan focuses attention on other key housing issues which emerged during the planning process:

- Protecting existing neighborhoods from adjacent commercial development.
- Rebalancing Vernon's "housing portfolio". The housing stock, which is over-invested in multi-family housing, could be balanced with more ownership and single-family housing opportunities.



Multi-Family Housing

Vernon's zoning regulations allow multi-family* housing in the following districts:

- C (Commercial) if part of a mixed use development
- PND (Historic District Planned Neighborhood Development)
- RC (Residential Commercial)
- DBR (Downtown Business and Residential)
- PDZ (Gerber Farm) PDZ (Exit 67)
- PRD zones

*structures with 3 or more housing units; may require special permit.

Possible Locational Criteria for Multi-Family Development

Types of criteria might include:

- Served by public water and public sewer.
- Located within a ¼ mile of a bus route (note: ¼ mile is generally considered walking distance).
- Located within ¼ mile of a commercial zone.
- Located within a Node, as identified on the Community Structure map, and
- Located in an area with existing sidewalks.

In turn, new multifamily developments could be discouraged in areas that do not meet this criteria, unless there is some significant community benefit.

Existing Neighborhoods

Residents value the convenience of having retail and services nearby, but also wish to protect neighborhoods from real or potential impacts of nearby commercial development.

Vernon's Zoning Regulations include stipulations that can help ensure that impacts are minimized (e.g., restricting delivery hours, hours of operation, etc.). Many types of businesses also must obtain a special permit if located within 200 feet of a residential structure and the Commission can require landscaped buffer strips be provided. These provisions allow the Planning and Zoning Commission to minimize potential impacts and should continue.

Housing Densities

Based on Vernon's community structure and historic development patterns, Rockville should remain a generally higher density area. However, there may be cases where a slight decrease in density can improve the quality of life on a given street or neighborhood. This could be accomplished by encouraging the conversion of multi-family structures back to single-family houses, or in cases where a building is demolished, rebuilding at lower densities with green space (see earlier discussion of Rockville for tools to encourage this).

As discussed in the Conservation Booklet, the R-40 areas are generally more rural in nature and are home to an array of sensitive natural resources. The Town should examine extending the "developable acreage" concept to all new housing developments in this area of Town in order to better match future densities with the ability of the land to support the development.

Multi-family and Planned Residential Development

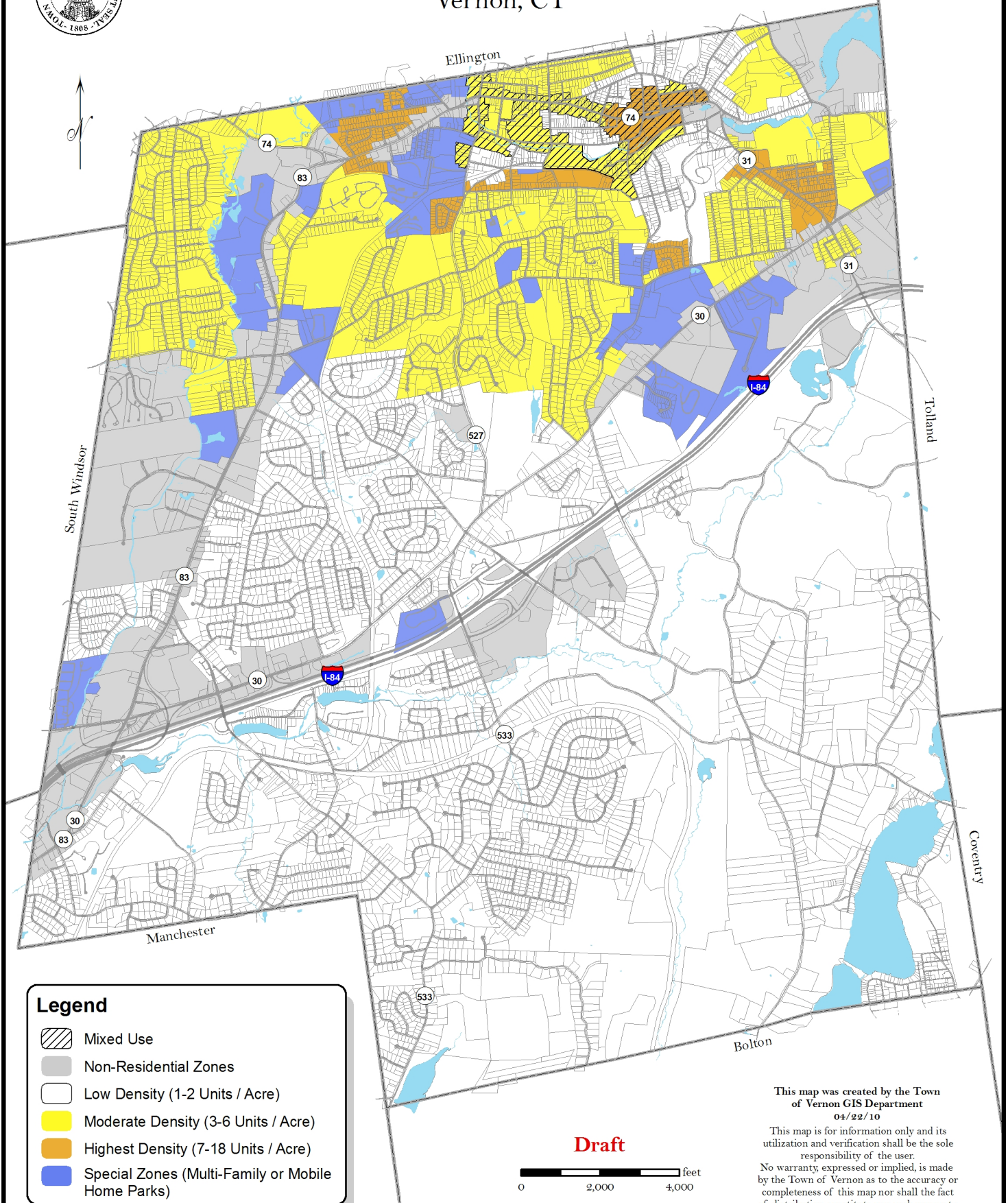
Vernon has a very high percentage of multi-family units and rentals and roughly 510 acres are zoned for planned residential developments. At workshops, residents generally felt that Vernon provides a more-than adequate supply of multi-family housing opportunities and over-55 and elderly housing.

The current regulations allow multi-family housing in a number of zones, mostly by special permit (see sidebar). Planned Residential Developments (PRDs), which also allow multi-family development, can be created in areas served by public sewer and water. The Town should consider revising the zoning regulations so that additional PRDs and multi-family developments are allowed only in areas that meet certain locational criteria (see sidebar). Such criteria can help minimize the need to expand infrastructure, put housing in areas where residents are able to walk to jobs or for basic errands, and help support the overall community structure.



Residential Densities Plan

Vernon, CT



Many districts allow 2-family by right. Therefore densities may seem higher than expected.

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04/22/10

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Vision for Residential Development

Vernon will continue to offer a wide array of neighborhood types. Lower density patterns will continue in the southeastern part of Town in order to preserve the unique character of the area and protect its sensitive natural resources. Higher density residential patterns will be enhanced in areas in and near Rockville, while some areas will benefit from additional open land and conversions back to 1 or 2 family units. New multi-family developments or other planned residential developments will be guided to areas that help support our community structure.

Possible Strategies**Protect residential neighborhoods**

1. Continue to manage potential impacts of business uses that are adjacent to residential neighborhoods through zoning.
2. Continue to ensure that development provides adequate buffers when adjacent to residential buffers.

Generally maintain the overall residential density patterns, with some updates

3. Decrease densities in parts of Rockville where the quality of life will benefit from such a decrease (see earlier strategies).
4. Consider extending the “developable acreage” concept to the R-40 areas to better match the density of future development with the ability of the land to support development.

Guide multi-family development to appropriate locations

5. Consider updating zoning to require that future multi-family development must meet locational criteria

Business Development

Overview

Business development provides:

- goods and services for residents and other businesses
- job opportunities, and
- a tax base.

Historically, Rockville served as the Town's business center. The mills attracted residents to Rockville and many businesses opened up to provide goods and services to those residents and to the mills. As noted in the Conditions and Trends report, the advent of the automobile and construction of I-84 opened up Route 83 and parts of Route 30 for business development. Gradually, additional businesses located along key intersections and business / industrial parks were created. Today's business development pattern has an array of businesses throughout Town.

Commercial Zones

The majority (519 acres) of Vernon's business areas are zoned Commercial - C. As a result, very different areas are zoned the same, such as Vernon Circle, the Rockville West neighborhood node, areas near Exit 66, and other areas. The C zone currently allows 11 uses by right and 27 uses require either a special exception or special use. There are many uses that might be very appropriate and desirable in one area, but might not be suitable in another area.

The special permit process provides the Commission broad discretion in determining whether a use is appropriate for a particular area. However, the process creates uncertainty to landowners, and therefore greater risk because they do not know what types of uses might be acceptable until after site plans have been prepared and submitted.

As a result, many uses that seem highly appropriate for Vernon Circle must go through the Special Permit process. Conversely, there are many uses by Special Permit that might not make sense in all Commercial Areas. For example, a hotel might be very appropriate in the Vernon Circle area, but not appropriate just west of Rockville or near the Vernon Avenue / Route 30 intersection. The Commission could tailor the C zones to better encourage those uses most appropriate for each area.

To accomplish this, the Commission could consider the following zoning adjustments:

- Vernon Circle Zone. This area is more appropriate for larger / regional scale businesses. Many uses currently allowed by special permit, could be allowed with site plan approval.
- Rezone Rockville West and the Vernon Avenue area as neighborhood commercial zones, offering goods and services to residents and commuters that pass by. Smaller retail, restaurants and services would be allowed as permitted uses, with site plan review. Larger scale and more automobile oriented uses could be prohibited or require a special permit.

- Consider rezoning some of the C zone along Route 83 to Planned Commercial, so as to encourage the consolidation of small lots and manage curb cuts.

One potential challenge to this approach is that virtually all C zones are located within the Aquifer Protection Zone. Uses that pose a high risk to contamination would still be prohibited and aquifer protection measures would still be required and evaluated during the site plan review process.

Additional Strategies for Vernon Circle

This area has evolved as a regional retail center attracting not only Vernon residents but residents from the larger region. Although the area has evolved over time, it still retains its identity as “Vernon Circle.” The overall goal is to maintain Vernon Circle as a regional node with businesses that serve the larger area.

The highway, its interchanges and the major arterials are important regional transportation features and will continue to be a dominant feature in this area. This area would not be a successful regional destination without this transportation infrastructure, yet residents express frustration with the level of traffic, the prevalence of pavement, and the need to drive a car to get from business to business.

The appearance of buildings, signs and landscaping contribute to the character of Vernon Circle. The continued design review of buildings and signs can help to improve the overall appearance of the area. For existing buildings, property owners could be encouraged to improve the appearance of buildings and landscaping and provide additional pedestrian amenities.

There are a number of residential neighborhoods within walking distance of the stores here. The addition / extension of sidewalks can help to better connect these neighborhoods to the businesses and property owners can be encouraged to work together to provide pedestrian connections between adjacent properties.

Access management will continue to be an important issue in this area. The Town should continue to encourage the closing and / or consolidating of curb cuts and encouraging smaller properties to consolidate to allow for better access and coordinated development. This can be encouraged by providing incentives in the zoning regulations that allow greater development potential for larger properties.

Exit 67

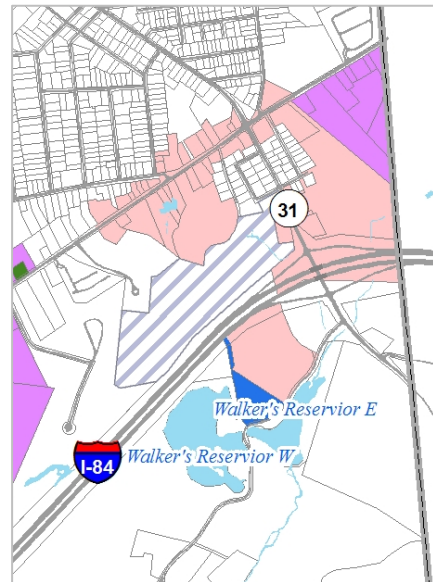
Over the past decade, this area has generated a tremendous amount of discussion due to uses which have been proposed and planned for this area. Ideas and opinions vary widely, however there does appear to be agreement on some aspects. For the purposes of the POCD, discussion about the Exit 67 area extends beyond the few parcels that have received the most attention. Planning for this area should encompass a larger area – possibly all of the business zones in this area (see sidebar).

This area is the eastern gateway to the Town and its appearance will help convey Vernon's image. Residents and local officials recognize the opportunity presented in this area, but ideas vary on what would contribute to a positive image.

There seems to be general agreement on two issues when discussing this area:

- This area provides opportunities for economic development
- Development should be planned and designed to protect the important water resources here (both surface and ground water).

The POCD should outline the Town's overall approach for this area and then provide strategies for undertaking that approach. This is an important issue that will require discussion by the PZC and input from local officials and residents. The following table illustrates a range of approaches that can help guide discussion on this area.



Possible Zoning Approaches*		
Less prescriptive		Most prescriptive
Market-Based Approach	Market-Based with Focus on Form / Design	Managed Approach
Maximum flexibility in form / design and use.	Form / design is a priority and regulated; use is less important.	Form / design and use are both priorities and regulated.
Allow a wide variety of uses.	Allow a wide variety of uses.	Limit the allowed uses to those desired.
Do not regulate form beyond setbacks, building height, and other standards typically contained in Town's zoning regulations.	Regulate (or incentivize) development to meet a certain form such as campus-style, neotraditional, etc.	Regulate (or incentivize) development to meet a certain form such as campus-style, neotraditional, etc.
Detailed vision not needed.	Requires a detailed vision to determine desirable forms / physical aspects.	Requires a detailed vision to determine desirable uses and form / physical aspects.

*There are many variations between these approaches.

Vacant Buildings

Vacant buildings / space in Vernon include larger, historic buildings in Rockville (e.g., Citizens Block), mills (e.g., Talcottville Mill) and newer retail space along Route 83. At public workshops, residents stressed the importance of reusing vacant business space. However, businesses may find it more cost effective to build on a vacant site than to update or rehabilitate an existing building. Challenges include financial (e.g., handling contaminants, structural issues) and meeting regulatory requirements such as zoning and building codes. In addition, the layout of older buildings might not be suitable for modern needs.

The Town has successfully helped the owners of vacant buildings identify and obtain financing, with the most recent example being Roosevelt Mills. It is important for the Town to maintain staff that is knowledgeable about funding sources and can work with owners. In instances where the reuse of a building for business purposes will have a great community benefit, the Town should explore options to provide direct financial assistance / financial tools.

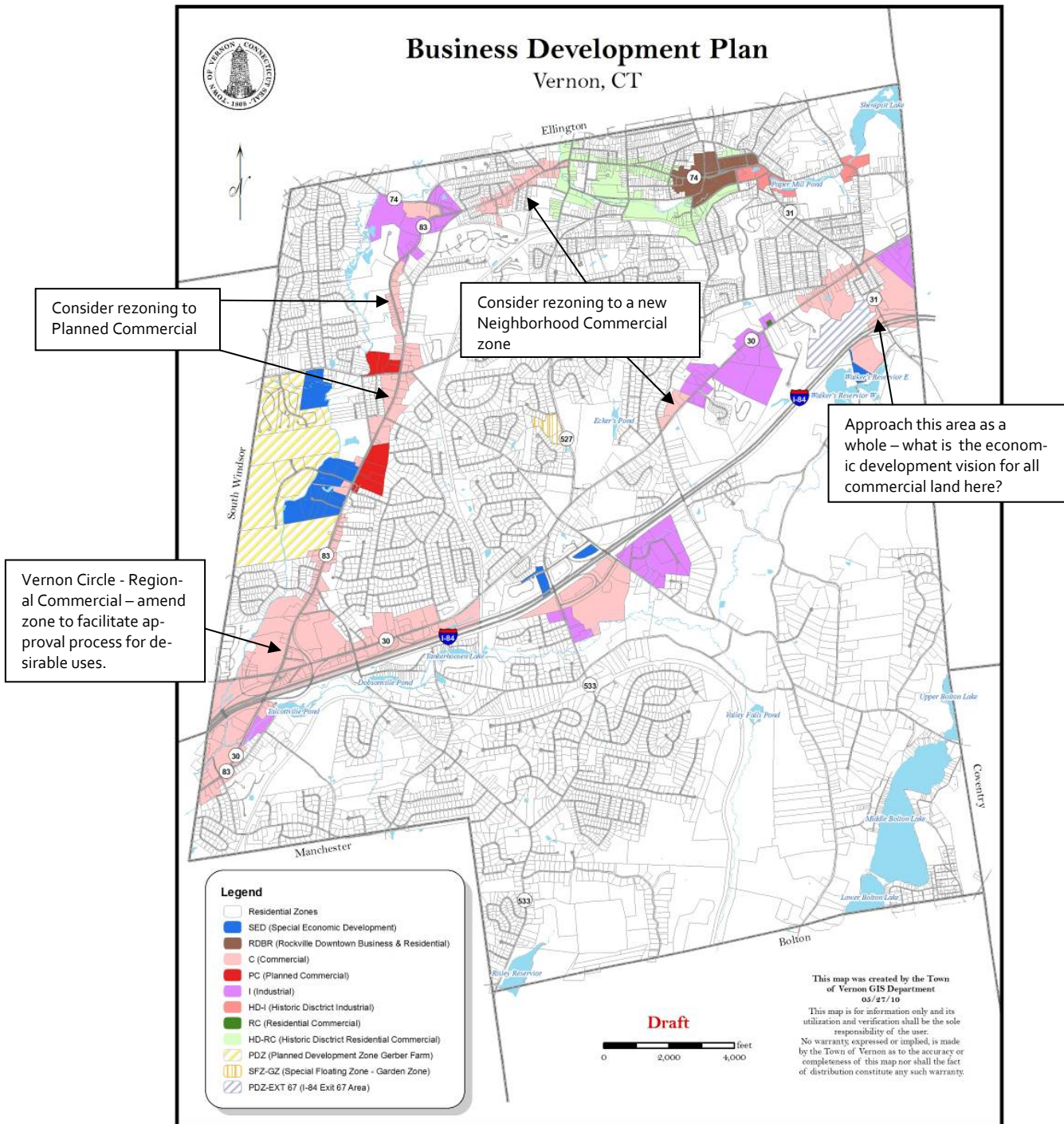
In terms of regulatory challenges, the zoning regulations allow for adaptive reuse of buildings for business purposes. This provision provides the flexibility often needed when redeveloping unique and challenging mill sites or other older vacant buildings. Recommendations discussed under Rockville, may also reduce possible regulatory barriers to redevelopment and facilitate upgrades that help meet modern needs.

Lastly, the Town had maintained a list of vacant business properties (land and buildings) to aid in attracting business to Vernon. The Town should continue to take an active role in marketing and regularly update the vacant property listings.

Additional Business Development Strategies

Overall, the Town should continue to promote business development in its commercial and industrial zones. As will be discussed in the upcoming Booklet 6, Infrastructure, the Town may wish to consider extending sewers to commercial and industrial zones that currently lack sewers.

The Town is exploring innovated approaches to economic development, particularly related to energy (the recently adopted Energy Improvement District ordinance). At the planning workshop, residents expressed a desire to see the town capitalize on its natural assets for economic opportunity. One idea included tapping into the Hockanum River for power generation. Other ideas included capitalizing on the rail-to-trail users and marketing Vernon's cultural and natural amenities to attract visitors. These options should be explored.



Vision:

Continue to encourage business development to enhance our tax base, provide goods and services to our residents and the region, and to provide jobs. Our zoning regulations will facilitate the types of development desired in appropriate locations. Potential impacts will be carefully managed in order to protect our neighborhoods.

Potential Strategies:**Consider tailoring the Commercial C Zone**

1. Create a separate Vernon Circle Zone and neighborhood commercial zones.
2. Rezone some Commercial C zones along Route 83 to Planned Commercial.

Vernon Circle

3. Maintain Vernon Circle as a regional node.
4. Continue to require design review for development in this area.
5. Encourage existing businesses to improve the appearance of buildings and signs and to provide pedestrian amenities.
6. Add / extend sidewalks, especially to provide connections from nearby residential neighborhoods.
7. Improve pedestrian connections between properties.
8. Continue access management.
9. Encourage the consolidation of smaller properties when developed / redeveloped.

Exit 67 Area

10. Encourage business development in this area.
11. Ensure that development employs low impact techniques to reduce potential impacts the water resources.
12. [need to determine approach for this area]

Redevelop / Re-tenant Vacant Buildings

13. Maintain the organizational capacity (e.g., staff) to identify funding sources for redeveloping vacant buildings.
14. Continue to facilitate the reuse / redevelopment of vacant buildings through zoning and update regulations as needed.
15. Maintain listings of vacant buildings and actively market their availability.

Additional Business Development Strategies

16. Continue to promote business development in commercial and industrial districts.
17. Consider extending sewers to business zones not currently served by sewers.
18. Identify additional innovative approaches to economic development.



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