

DRAFT Goals

Objectives

Implementation Strategies

Vernon POCD

April 12, 2021

Position Historic Downtown Rockville as the economic, civic, social, and cultural center of Tolland County: Goal #1

What We Know

The Rockville section of Vernon has significant historic, cultural, civic, and institutional assets that can be leveraged as part of its revitalization.

- Rockville has a rich industrial history and is listed as a State and National Historic District. National Register of Historic places listings in Rockville include the Florence Mill, Minterburn Mill, and Old Rockville High School.
- The Town has adopted a special zoning district and Village District Overlay for Downtown Rockville focused on promoting development that is compatible with historic development pattern and design.
- Rockville is home to numerous cultural institutions including the Rockville Public Library, the New England Civil War Museum, and the New England Motorcycle Museum that draw in a regional audience.
- Rockville is Tolland County's institutional and civic center and is home to Rockville General Hospital, the Rockville Superior Court, and Town offices. These institutions are also among the largest employers in the Vernon.
- The Rockville Downtown Association (RDA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving, promoting, and enhancing Downtown Rockville. RDA is a member of the Connecticut Main Street Center, a statewide group dedicated to the revitalization of downtown business districts.
- As part of the public outreach process, participants noted a strong desire for community spaces, arts and cultural amenities, and historic preservation in Downtown Rockville.

Today, Rockville has transitioned to a neighborhood retail center largely serving the surrounding residential population. As part of its revitalization strategy, attracting patrons from elsewhere in Vernon, as well as the surrounding region, is a priority.

- Survey respondents identified Rockville as the Town’s top economic development priority over the next ten years.
- Historically, Rockville was a regional retail center. Since the completion of I-84, most regional retailers have moved to more heavily trafficked sites in the Route 83 and Route 30 corridors.
- Attracting unique or niche businesses such as specialty retail, entertainment, breweries, or restaurants, in tandem with its arts and cultural amenities, can help Rockville become more of a regional draw.
- Rockville has a robust sidewalk network and access to transit. Improved connections to other neighborhoods in Vernon can make businesses in Rockville more accessible to a larger population.

Growing Rockville’s residential population can strengthen the Downtown commercial base by providing a larger customer base for businesses.

- Rockville contains the highest density and most diverse housing in Vernon, at densities greater than 10 units per acre. While higher density housing is common, Rockville is home to a range of housing types, including 3- and 4- family homes, duplexes, and single-family homes.
- Formerly industrial mill sites in Rockville have been converted into housing including Springville Mill, Florence Mill, and Minterburn Mill (Loom City Lofts).
- Rockville has limited available vacant land. Future housing growth will be driven by small infill projects, redevelopment of underutilized properties, or the adaptive reuse of mill sites or commercial buildings.
- Housing demand in Vernon appears strong, particularly for multi-family options, evidenced by public input during the POCD process.

Objective 1.1

Grow Rockville's residential population through infill development and adaptive reuse.

Strategies

- Encourage, through partnership, adaptive reuse of mill sites into residential or mixed-use development with a residential component.
- Educate property owners on available financial tools that can be used for housing development such as historic preservation tax credits, Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) assistance, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, or Tax-Increment Financing.
- Amend the regulations to permit smaller multi-family development as a matter of right, with site plan approval.
- Consider the use of zoning incentives that allow an increase in permitted residential density in Rockville for projects that meet other Town policy objectives. Potential objectives include those pertaining to historic preservation, sustainability, and provision of public space.
- Encourage the use of shared parking arrangements for new residential developments in Rockville.

Objective 1.2

Promote arts, culture, and civic activities and events.

Strategies

- Continue collaboration between the Arts Commission, Rockville Public Library, Rockville Downtown Association, Parks and Recreation Department, and the Economic Development Department and Commission to create engaging public events and market these events to the community.
- Strengthen partnerships with regional arts and cultural organizations such as the Greater Hartford Arts Council and University of Connecticut.
- Expand and enhance public infrastructure such as street trees, benches, lighting, plantings, and public art in Rockville.

- Consider establishing a Municipal Cultural District in Rockville pursuant to Public Act 19-143.
- Through the Municipal Cultural District, work with state and regional organizations to market and advocate Rockville’s cultural resources and tourism opportunities.

Objective 1.3

Enhance Rockville’s commercial base.

Strategies

- Review and amend zoning in Downtown Rockville to allow for more innovative and experimental uses to attract visitors. Potential uses include breweries, experimental retail, entertainment uses, and artisan manufacturing (small-scale production and sale of goods within the same premises).
- Modify the Downtown Rockville zoning regulations to allow professional or business offices to occupy the ground floor of buildings.
- Review current special permit uses within the Downtown Rockville zoning regulations and consider permitting additional uses with site plan approval, if appropriate.
- Establish zoning incentives to encourage consolidation of parking lots across properties to create a park once and walk environment.
- Continue to market Rockville businesses both locally and regionally, in partnership with the Rockville Downtown Association and Chamber of Commerce.
- Prioritize the redevelopment, expansion, and re-design of the Courthouse Plaza area defined by Main St., Court St., and Brooklyn St., through incentive, partnership, or other creative means.
- Improve signage in Rockville, including directional signage from I-84 and signage for public parking facilities.

Objective 1.4

Support the redevelopment of mill sites.

Strategies

- Complete the redevelopment of Amerbelle Mill site
- Continue to pursue grants to remediate remaining brownfield sites.
- Educate property owners and prospective developers on financial incentives available to support adaptive reuse and historic preservation.
- Review current adaptive reuse zoning requirements and consider more flexible site design requirements for mill sites.

Objective 1.5

Protect Rockville's historic resources.

Strategies

- Complete the renovation and re-tenanting of the Citizens Block.
- Consider developing a visual design guideline for Rockville to better communicate desired architectural design, signage, lighting, materials, and site design features to prospective developers and the community at-large.
- Consider establishing a façade improvement program or local property tax abatement program to encourage the rehabilitation of historic properties in Rockville.
- Educate owners of historic properties on other funding opportunities such as state and federal rehabilitation tax credits.

Objective 1.6

Enhance Rockville's connections to the town trail and open space networks.

Strategies

- Extend the rails-to-trail east of Vernon Avenue, or identify an alternative trail routing connecting to the trail to Rockville.
- Enhance bicycle and pedestrian connections between rails-to-trail and Rockville along Vernon Avenue, Spring Street, Morrison Street and West Street.
- Install bicycle and pedestrian signage on the rails-to-trail directing users to key destinations in Rockville.
- Install bicycle parking and racks in Downtown Rockville, on sidewalks, or places such as at Town Hall or the Rockville Public Library.
- Integrate the Hockanum River into Rockville's identify, in accordance with the Hockanum River Master Plan. Strategies may include modifying the zoning regulations to require or incentivize public improvements along the Hockanum River, securing public access easements, and studying the feasibility of daylighting portions of the river as part of future redevelopment efforts.

Create thriving, attractive, connected, and diverse business districts and mixed-use corridors: Goal #2

What we know

The Route 83 and Route 30 corridors have the highest traffic volumes in Vernon, making the area conducive to local and regional retailers. However, transportation infrastructure can be improved.

- Traffic volumes exceed 20,000 vehicles per day in the Route 83 corridor and over 17,000 vehicles per day in the Route 30 corridor, making the area conducive to retail development.
- Traffic volumes in the Route 83 corridor are highest near I-84 and decrease as you move north towards Rockville.
- The Route 83 and Route 30 corridors are anchored by regional retailers such as grocery stores and big box retail, supported by numerous national chain and local retailers, restaurants, and services.
- Crash hot spots are concentrated in the Route 83 and Route 30 corridors at signalized intersections.
- The sidewalk network in the Route 83 and Route 30 corridors is disjointed, with numerous gaps. While sidewalks are required for new developments, many developments in the corridor predate the Town's sidewalk requirements.

Development continues to evolve to meet market demands and consumer preferences.

- There is a decent amount of vacant land within commercial and mixed-use corridors. Future development will also be driven by infill projects and redevelopment of obsolete land uses.
- There are numerous, existing commercial sites with little or no landscaping.
- There is a shift towards small format, standalone commercial development in the Route 83 and Route 30 corridors. New commercial developments over the last ten years include Aldi, Starbucks, Taco Bell, Cumberland Farms, Dollar General, and Economy Express.

- There are several vacant large-format retail spaces in the Route 83 and Route 30 corridors that provide opportunities for adaptive reuse or redevelopment.
- The Route 83 corridor has transitioned to a mixed-use district with the completion of major housing developments such as the Trail Run Apartments with over 300 units and the Mansions at Hockanum Crossing with over 700 units.

Objective 2.1

Enhance architecture, site design, and landscaping within existing mixed-use corridors and gateways

Strategies

- Develop landscaping and site design standards incorporated into the Zoning Regulations that are tied to the location of the site as opposed to the zone. For example, all properties fronting Route 83 should have the same landscaping and site design standards, regardless of their zoning designation to ensure consistency across multiple uses. Single-family homes should be exempt from these standards.
- Strengthen screening and setback requirements for outdoor storage areas and trash enclosures within the Route 83 and Route 30 corridors.
- Establishing a landscaping design matching grant fund that matches property owner landscaping investments. These funds could be used to focus on pre-existing sites with minimal or zero plantings in the 83 and 30 corridors.
- Create a Landscaping and Site Design Visual Guide for mixed-use corridors that can accompany the Design Review Visual Guide.
- Create a corridor-based Design Review Visual Guide with specific information on recommended materials and architectural details (roof type, windows, colors, signage, etc.) for each business district.
- Enhance welcome signage, directional signage, landscaping, and public realm improvements at gateways, prioritizing locations near highway ramps.

- Strengthen property maintenance and code enforcement resources in in Town with a focus on commercial corridors.

Objective 2.2

Optimize traffic flow and enhance safety in commercial corridors

Strategies

- In partnership with CRCOG and CTDOT, complete a Corridor Study of the Route 83 and Route 30 corridors focusing on traffic flow, safety, access management, transit infrastructure, and pedestrian accessibility.
- Work with CTDOT and CTtransit to evaluate the potential for bus pull offs in the Route 83 and Route 30 corridors to increase safety and improve traffic flow. This should be evaluated as part of the larger corridor study.
- Consider adding pedestrian lighting requirements to the landscaping and site design standards within commercial and mixed-use zones.
- Develop zoning incentives (such as a reduction in parking minimums) to encourage property owners to enter into shared parking agreements.

Objective 2.3

Enhance pedestrian, bicycle, and transit connections

Strategies

- Require sidewalk connections between a building's primary entrance and the sidewalk system within all commercial and mixed-use zones.
- Establishing a sidewalk matching grant fund that matches property owner sidewalk investments. These funds could be used to fill in gaps in the existing sidewalk network on Route 83 and Route 30.

- Work with CTDOT to incorporate safe pedestrian crossings at all signalized intersections. Elements that should be considered include dedicated pedestrian signals, marked crosswalks, and installation of proper signage.
- Establish a zoning incentive (such as a parking reduction) for new developments that incorporate bus stop amenities such as seating areas, shelters, and lighting.
- Enhance bicycle and pedestrian connections between Vernon's rail-to-trail system and the Route 83 and Route 30 corridors, prioritizing connections on Center Road, Regan Road and Hartford Turnpike.

Objective 2.4

Encourage the redevelopment of underutilized or obsolete land uses

Strategies

- Create separate dimensional standards for small lots under two acres in the Route 83 and Route 30 corridors to provide more flexibility to property owners.
- Consider modifying the zoning regulations in the Commercial Zone to allow purely residential developments, so long as they are in structures that are set back at least 200 feet from the roadway, reserving the frontage for commercial uses.
- Consider modifying the zoning regulations in the Commercial Zone to allow for certain light industrial uses, subject to special permit approval. These uses should have the same landscape and design standards as commercial uses and should be appropriately buffered from adjacent residential areas.
- Evaluate minimum parking requirements in commercial zones and consider lowering parking requirements, where appropriate, to support adaptive reuse.

Promote economic growth and business expansion: Goal #3

What we know

Vernon is served by quality water and sewer infrastructure

- Most neighborhoods in northern and western Vernon are within the Vernon Sewer Service Area, served by the Vernon Water Pollution Control Facility (VWPFC).
- The 2017 Wastewater Facilities Plan for Vernon notes that there is ample sewer capacity to support future development, mill conversions, and expansions to the sewer service area.
- The VWPFC is currently undergoing a major upgrade to comply with state and federal environmental standards. The project should be completed by 2023.
- The Bolton Lakes neighborhood in southeastern Vernon is served by the Bolton Lakes Regional Water Pollution Control Authority (BLRWPCA).
- Connecticut Water Company (CWV) provides water service to most neighborhoods in northern and western Vernon.

The land around Exits 66 and 67 provide opportunities for business expansion.

- There are about 200 acres of undeveloped land in the vicinity of Exit 66 and Exit 67. While some of this land is encumbered by natural resource constraints, there is significant development potential in this area.
- The area is currently underutilized due to the lack of sewer and water infrastructure. There is ample capacity at the VWPFC to support sewer extensions in this area.
- Exit 67 contains a mix of land zoned for commercial, industrial, and residential uses.
- The Town adopted a Planned Development Zone for the Exit 67 area which enables flexible development standards so long as natural resource impacts and residential buffer considerations are addressed.
- The Exit 66 area is primarily zoned for industrial and commercial uses.

- 75% of survey respondents agreed that the Town should attract new businesses that can grow the tax base.
- During the public outreach process, participants of public workshop #1 generally viewed development near Exit 67 more favorably than development near Exit 66.

Vernon's employment profile is consistent with a suburban community

- 71% of jobs in Vernon are in one of four sectors: Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services, and Local Government.
- Overall, Vernon lost 1,127 jobs (12% contraction) between 2008 and 2019. The largest losses were in Construction and Manufacturing sectors.
- The limited availability of industrially zoned land to support the manufacturing and construction sectors may have influenced growth in these sectors.

Vernon has a strong commercial and multi-family residential tax base

- Commercial and Industrial uses only make up 6% of the Town's total acreage.
- Nearly 25% of Vernon's Grand List is comprised of commercial, industrial, or public utility properties. This is about 7 percentage points higher than the state average.
- Vernon's top ten taxpayers consist of multi-family residential developments, utility companies, and commercial property owners.

Objective 3.1

Provide a skilled workforce that supports business needs

Strategies

- Continue to support investment in Vernon’s school system and the Rockville High School Career Center.
- Continue the promotion of the dual enrollment programs between Rockville High School and Manchester Community College, Goodwin College, and the UCONN Early College Experience program. Students who participate in the college dual enrollment programs can earn credit from RHS and college simultaneously, thus completing college faster and with more flexibility.
- Continue to meet with businesses to understand local workforce needs and skills gaps.
- Continue to find ways to work with Capital Workforce Partners, the regional workforce development board, to leverage public and private resources to produce skilled workers and close the skills gap between local employers and residents.

Objective 3.2

Pursue utility improvements that support economic development and land use goals

Strategies

- Complete upgrades to the Vernon Water Pollution Control Facility.
- Maintain sewer infrastructure in a state of good repair.
- Extend sewer and water service to Exits 66 and 67. Evaluate the feasibility of using Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to fund utility extensions and other public improvements needed to spur economic development.
- Encourage expansion of high-speed internet service, prioritizing low-income and underserved neighborhoods.

Objective 3.3

Provide opportunities for industrial development and expansion

Strategies

- Expand the Exit 67 Planned Development Zone to encompass all parcels within the Exit 67 Node Future Land Use category.
- Create a similar Planned Development Zone for properties in the Exit 66 node.
- Maintain a balanced approach to economic development near Exit 66 and Exit 67 corridors. New development should contribute to the economic development and fiscal health of the community while avoiding negative impacts to natural resources within the Tankerhoosen River watershed.
- Maintain a list of vacant land and available industrial land and buildings. Actively market the sites to prospective businesses in partnership with regional and statewide organizations such as CERC.

Objective 3.4

Provide an attractive and supportive business environment, including an efficient regulatory process

Strategies

- Evaluate zoning comprehensively to improve clarity and reduce inconsistency. Look for ways to reduce the use of special permits in exchange for higher performance standards related to architecture, site design, and landscape buffer. Consider a comprehensive update of the Town Zoning Regulations
- Seek to improve related on-line department web pages. Maintain an e-permit system to allow prospective businesses to fill out permits online to create a more streamlined approval process.
- Provide regular education and training opportunities for board and commission members with a goal of 100% annual participation.

- Work with the Connecticut Small Business Development Center to coach new and existing businesses in Vernon.
- Introduce a business incubator to Rockville, utilizing part of the Citizens Block, or other building in Downtown, providing low cost rent to local start-up businesses.
- Develop Land Use process explainers and other tools to make the development process more transparent.

Maintain a diverse housing stock that supports people of all ages, income levels, life stages, and backgrounds: Goal #4

What we know

Vernon has a diverse housing stock with a range of styles, sizes, price points, and densities, providing many residents the opportunity to remain in Vernon as they transition to different homes throughout their life.

- Vernon provides a range of housing types and densities. About 45% of units are detached-single-family homes, 20% are 2-4 family units, and 27% are in buildings with 5 or more units.
- About 52% of housing units are owner-occupied and 48% are renter occupied. Vernon has a much higher share of renter-occupied housing compared to Tolland County as a whole.

Demographic changes have resulted in evolving housing needs.

- Household sizes in Vernon are shrinking. More than half of households in Vernon consist of one or two people.
- Shrinking household sizes have led to a greater demand for smaller or housing units and multi-family housing.
- In the community survey, 19% of respondents are looking to “up-size” to a larger home, while 32% are likely to “down-size” to smaller accommodations in the next 10 years.

Vernon has a strong housing market and has seen significant development over the last ten years.

- From 2015 to 2019, the town has averaged 121 new housing permits per year, the majority of which are multifamily.

- New residential developments since 2015 include Loom City Lofts, Grand Lofts, Old Talcott Mill, and Trail Run. These projects are a mix of mill redevelopment and greenfield development within mixed-use corridors.
- There has been little new construction of single-family homes in Vernon since the mid-2000s, driven by the lack of available land and shifting consumer preferences.
- Since 2018, single-family home sales have exceeded 275 annually, their highest levels since the mid-2000s. This suggests many new families are being drawn into the community and its diverse and reasonably priced single-family housing stock.
- Housing development is crucial to supporting the Town's economic development goals, as a growing population results in a larger customer base and workforce for local businesses.
- While Vernon's housing costs are lower than many communities in Connecticut, affordable housing remains a challenge for many residents. About 46% of renters and 28% of homeowners in Vernon are cost-burdened and spend greater than 30% of their income on housing.

Objective 4.1

Provide a diversity of housing and housing types for all ages and income levels

Strategies

- Review and update zoning requirements to permit accessory dwelling units to provide more flexibility.
- Review and update zoning to encourage mixed-use development in appropriate areas identified in the Future Land Use Plan.
- Evaluate zoning approaches to promote mixed-income development. Approaches include requiring a percentage of affordable units or providing incentives for developers meeting mixed-income provisions.
- Promote the Elderly and Disabled Tax Relief program to encourage current residents to remain in Vernon.
- Maintain existing Vernon Housing Authority (VHA) units in a state of good repair. Maintain or increase the number of affordable units in VHA properties if they are redeveloped.

- Support the use of Connecticut Housing Finance Authority mortgage programs to expand homeownership opportunities for low- and moderate-income residents.

Objective 4.2

Promote a range of residential densities and housing types

Strategies

- Support a range of residential densities and housing types by scale, height, and architectural style, in accordance with the Future Land Use Plan and Residential Densities Plan.
- Modify Section 4.7.5 of the Town’s zoning regulations to allow for a range of residential densities for multi-family dwellings for different zones, in accordance with the Residential Densities Plan. Consider setting density guideposts using units per acre.
- Encourage housing diversity of unit type within mixed-use settings within the following Future Land Use Policy Areas: Downtown Rockville, the Rockville Gateways, the Mixed-Use Corridor, the Route 67 Node, and the Route 30 Corridor – East.

Objective 4.3

Grow sustainable, efficient, and accessible housing choices.

Strategies

- Consider adding universal design provisions to the zoning regulations, requiring or incentivizing new development to provide units that are accessible to anyone regardless of age or disability status.
- Incorporate sustainable design requirements or incentives into the zoning code. For example: increased permitted density when measures like lid storm water management, energy generation, or active transportation amenities are included in the site plan application.
- Promote energy efficiency in new housing as a means of reducing overall housing utility costs.

- Educate property owners on available funding sources for sustainability and energy efficiency upgrades, such as the Connecticut Green Bank and Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) programs.
- Develop residential design and performance standards for infill residential developments.

Maintain high quality, sustainable, and equitable public facilities, and services: Goal #5

What we know

Vernon continues to make investments in its public facilities, infrastructure, and services.

- 74% of community survey respondents rated Vernon's quality of life as good or excellent.
- Survey respondents generally rated Vernon's town facilities and services as excellent or adequate. Facilities and services that were identified as in most need of improvement were sidewalk conditions (38%), arts and cultural opportunities (29%), and local road maintenance (26%).
- Several major capital projects have been recently completed, are planned or ongoing, including opening of a new senior center in 2018, ongoing renovations to the Citizens Block, ongoing upgrades to the Water Pollution Control Facility, replacement of the Town fueling stations, and repairs to Fox Hill Tower.
- The Town of Vernon Department of Public Works (DPW) maintains over 113 miles of roadways. About 88% of roads have been resurfaced under the Town's last six-year road bond.
- Major transportation projects listed in the CIP include the reconstruction of bridges on Dart Hill Road, Talcottville Main Street, and Pleasantview Drive, and the reconstruction of South Street.

Demographic shifts may lead to greater demand for certain Town services serving seniors and young adults.

- The population of those 65 and older has increased between 2010 and 2018.
- As of 2017, Vernon's median age was 39 years old, up from 37.7 in 2000.

- From 2010 to 2018 there was a large increase in the adult population in the 25 to 34 age range.

Objective 5.1

Continue to invest in high quality town facilities, infrastructure, and services

Strategies

- Complete the ongoing and planned upgrades to Town facilities.
- Monitor conditions and space needs at Town facilities and make improvements through the Capital Improvement Plan, as needed.
- Continue the local road resurfacing and sidewalk construction programs.
- Conduct a conditions assessment of the existing sidewalk system to prioritize repairs.
- Evaluate the 2020 Census upon release to measure potential impacts of changing demographics.

Objective 5.2

Improve bicycle, pedestrian, and transit connections to town facilities

Strategies

- Improve bicycle and pedestrian connections between the rail-to-trail and town facilities and schools in Vernon Center.
- Prioritize trail and sidewalk connections to schools and green spaces.
- Adopt a Complete Streets Policy.

Objective 5.3

Enhance access to open space and recreational opportunities in Rockville

Strategies

- Identify properties that can be used as pocket parks, playgrounds, or community gardens within Rockville.
- Improve public awareness of and access to Stickney Hill Preserve.
- Enhance bicycle and sidewalk connections between Rockville and Henry Park.

Build a livable, healthy, resilient, and sustainable Vernon: Goal #6

What we know

Vernon is a state leader in sustainability and public health

- In November 2018, Vernon registered as member of SustainableCT, a voluntary certification program that provides recognition, technical assistance, and funding in support of a range of sustainability programs.
- In October 2019, Vernon reached a “Silver” certification level through SustainableCT, the highest level available.
- Over the past six years, the Town of Vernon has implemented a program to update the Town’s vehicle fleet, resulting in improved fuel efficiency and reduced emissions.
- Solar panels are being installed at the Police Station, Center Road School, Lake Street School, and Northeast School.
- Vernon has been nationally recognized for its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Town of Vernon has an ongoing campaign to vaccinate the community against COVID-19. This effort includes ongoing vaccination

clinics at the Vernon Senior Center and Mobile Vaccination Clinics conducted throughout the region.

The effects of climate change are impacting Connecticut, which has seen increasing frequency of heavy rainfalls, floods, and extreme weather events. The town is continuing to improve its capacity to respond to these events.

- In partnership with CRCOG, Vernon completed an update to its Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (NHMP) in 2019.
- The NHMP identified flooding, hurricane winds, and winter storms are the top hazards of concern for Vernon. The Hockanum River and Tankerhoosen River are the primary sources of flood problems.
- A flood map modernization effort by FEMA is currently underway for Tolland County, but its full extent, and how much of Vernon it will cover, is unknown.
- The Town has undertaken several resiliency improvements over the last five years, including building redundancy into its IT systems, implementing dam removal and bank stabilization projects as part of mill redevelopments, and purchasing equipment for tree maintenance and debris cleanup.

Objective 6.1

Continue to implement sustainable policies and actions using the *SustainableCT* framework

Strategies

- Maintain Silver Level certification or higher through *SustainableCT*
- Incorporate sustainable development best practices around green energy, energy efficiency, and low-impact development into the Town zoning code.
- Offer an annual sustainability training course for Board and Commission members, in partnership with *SustainableCT*.

Objective 6.2

Support municipal energy efficiency, green energy, and waste reduction programs

Strategies

- Implement new measures that improve fuel efficiency and reduce emissions for the Town fleet.
- Continue to evaluate opportunities to install renewable energy projects, such as solar panels, at Town properties.
- Continue to convert Town buildings to natural gas.
- Complete the creation of “green,” local, and/or energy efficiency standards in the Town’s procurement policy for materials.
- Explore options to create of a food scrap/ composting program at the Transfer Station or partner with a private business to provide this service.
- Install electric vehicle charging stations at municipal properties and pursue funding through the Connecticut Green Bank and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

Objective 6.3

Strengthen resiliency and disaster preparedness capabilities

Strategies

- Implement the recommendations of the Capitol Region Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (NHMP).
- Conduct a study of drainage problems identified in the NHMP, including Franklin Road, the Manchester Flats area, and Frederick Road.
- Evaluate the costs and benefits of joining FEMA’s Community Rating System.

- Support periodic tree limb inspection and maintenance programs to minimize potential for downed power lines.
- Develop a phased approach to replacing aboveground utility lines with underground utility lines, taking advantage of opportunities such as streetscaping projects.

Objective 6.4

Support programs that promote public health and wellbeing

Strategies

- Continue public health education, programs, and services, in partnership with the North Central District Health Department.
- Identify sites that can support community gardens in Vernon, in partnership with regional farmers and the UConn Tolland County Extension Center.
- Continue to provide education and outreach to residents impacted by crumbling foundations on available funding sources and state programs.

Protect, connect, and promote Vernon's natural and historic resources: Goal #7

What we know

Vernon's open space and natural resources contribute to residents' quality of life

- Vernon is fortunate to have numerous boards, commissions, and volunteer organizations who protect, maintain, and steward Vernon's open space and natural resources. These groups include but are not limited to the Open Space Task Force, Conservation Commission, Inland Wetland Commission, Hockanum River Linear Park Committee, the Parks & Recreation Department, Friends of Valley Falls, Vernon Greenways Volunteers, Manchester Land Trust, Vernon Garden Club, and Strong Farm.
- According to the 2019 Town of Vernon Open Space Inventory, Vernon contained 2,631 acres of Managed Open Space (23% of total land area), 2,455 acres (21%) of which are Protected Open Space.
- About 51% of Vernon's Protected Open Space is owned by the State of Connecticut, and 31% is owned by the Town of Vernon. The remaining 18% is owned by water companies, land trusts, non-profit organizations, or is privately held.
- Recent Open Space preservation accomplishments include the preservation of Strong Farm, Stickney Hill Preserve, and the construction of Gene Pitney Memorial Park.
- Vernon has one Level A Aquifer surrounding the Connecticut Water Company wellfields near Vernon Center. The Town has adopted Aquifer Protection Regulations to protect this important drinking water supply.
- The upper reaches of the Tankerhoosen River are designated as a Wild Trout Management Area by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

Vernon has significant historic and scenic resources ranging from rural structures, to village centers, to

- Vernon is home to two National Historic Districts, three State Historic Districts, and one Local Historic District. In addition, Vernon has numerous historic structures individually listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

- Vernon has adopted a Village District Overlay Zone for Downtown Rockville. This zone ensures that new development is consistent with the historic scale and design of structures in the Downtown.
- The Town of Vernon has a Local Historic Properties Commission (LHPC) that oversees the Talcottville Historic District as well individually listed historic properties. In 2010, the LHPC published Design Guidelines for owners of historic properties.
- Vernon has four locally designated Scenic Roads: Valley Falls Road, Reservoir Road, Bamforth Road, and Baker Roads.

Objective 7.1

Foster open space and trail connectivity

Strategies

- Annually update the Town Open Space Plan and inventory, identifying properties with high conservation or scenic value for potential future protection.
- Monitor desirable properties as they become available and pursue funding through the State's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program or Farmland Preservation Program.
- Prioritize open space acquisition in the Tankerhoosen River watershed, in accordance with the Open Space Plan.
- Develop an Urban Open Space Plan focused on small parks, natural areas, recreation, and community gardens within the built environment. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to require quality, useable open space in all development projects.
- Continue to acquire land or secure public access or conservation easements along the Hockanum River in accordance with the Hockanum River Linear Park Master Plan.

- Establish policy, zoning incentives, or requirements to enhance public access along the Hockanum River as part of future development proposals.

Objective 7.2

Protect water quality and reduce non-point-source pollution

Strategies

- Add zoning incentives to further the use of Low Impact Design (LID), especially for properties near the Tankerhoosen and Hockanum rivers.
- Continue to update and implement the Town's Stormwater Management Plan in compliance with state MS4 requirements.
- As part of the MS4 plan, educate residents on best practices to reduce stormwater runoff to improve water quality. Direct them towards additional educational resources from organizations such as the Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR).
- Educate landowners on water quality issues and techniques for protecting water quality. Topics could include removal of invasive species; maintenance or creation of vegetated buffer strips along lakes and streams; use of non-chemical fertilizers and pesticides; septic design and maintenance. Provide requirements or incentives in the zoning code to reduce impervious surfaces and/or treat water before discharge or infiltration.
- Conduct regular water quality testing along the Tankerhoosen River, in partnership with local conservation organizations.

Objective 7.2

Improve stewardship and awareness of existing open spaces and recreational opportunities

Strategies

- Publish an Open Space map on the Town website noting where parking areas and public access points are located.
- Establish partnerships between local conservation organizations and Vernon Public Schools to better market open space and recreational opportunities to youth.
- Expand opportunities for canoe and kayak access.
- Improve ADA accessibility to recreation and open space areas.

Objective 7.3

Protect Vernon's historical and scenic resources

Strategies

- Update and maintain a historic and scenic resources inventory.
- Maintain Town-owned historic properties in a state of good repair.
- Preserve Clark Farm as a Heritage Farm.
- Consider creating historic preservation zoning incentives, for example, excluding historic structures up to a certain size from lot coverage calculations or creating more flexible use or site design standards for adaptive reuse.
- Educate owners of historic properties on other funding opportunities such as state and federal rehabilitation tax credits.

- Commence efforts to evaluate the relationship of suburban design and development to Historic Preservation

Objective 7.4

Promote Vernon's natural and historic resources as part of larger marketing and branding efforts

Strategies

- Market historical, cultural, and natural resource elements in partnership with state and regional organizations. The creation of a Municipal Cultural District can help leverage state resources for marketing and promotion.
- Provide directional signage on main roads and the trail to points of interest.
- Develop and publish walking or cycling routes that highlight Vernon's natural and historic resources. Potential locations include Talcottville (Talcottville Historic District and Tankerhoosen Ravine), Valley Falls, and Rockville (Rockville Historic District and Hockanum River).

Cooperate with local and regional organizations to promote the health and wellbeing of the region: Goal #8

What we know

Vernon is a part of the Greater Hartford Metropolitan Area and its residents rely on the regional transportation network to access employment opportunities in the larger region.

- Just 9.6% of employed Vernon residents work in Vernon. A majority commute to jobs elsewhere in the Greater Hartford Area.
- Vernon is served by CT Transit express and local bus service. Local bus service is provided in Rockville and the Route 83 corridor. Express bus service connects park & ride locations at Exit 65, 66, and 67 to Downtown Hartford.

- Interstate 84 (I-84) provides connections to the Greater Hartford region to the west and Massachusetts to the east. Traffic volumes on I-84 in Vernon range from 75,000 to 100,000 vehicles per day.

Vernon participates in numerous regional organizations to encourage collaboration.

- As a part of the Capital Region Council of Governments, Vernon participates in regional land use, transportation, and economic development planning.
- Vernon's Water Pollution Control Facility is a regional facility that also serves parts of Manchester, South Windsor, Ellington, and Tolland.
- Vernon is a member of the North Central District Health Department, covering eight municipalities in north central Connecticut.

Objective 8.1

Continue to participate in regional land use, economic development, and transportation initiatives through CRCOG

Strategies

- Continue to work with neighboring municipalities to implement the recommendations from the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).
- Continue to participate in regional land use planning and transportation initiatives through CRCOG.

Objective 8.2

Support enhancements to the regional roadway and transit systems

Strategies

- Support the extension of *CTfastrak* service east of the Connecticut river, including connections between Vernon and the UConn campus in Mansfield.

- Advocate for enhanced bus stop amenities at park & ride locations such as larger seating areas, improved lighting, and pre-pay ticket kiosks.
- Support regional improvements to the I-84 corridor in Greater Hartford.

Objective 8.3

Work with neighboring towns on land conservation, rails-to-trails, waste management, and other conservation issues that cross-town boundaries

Strategies

- Continue to work with regional groups in the areas of land conservation and recreation, including the Hockanum River Watershed Association, Manchester Land Trust, Northern Connecticut Land Trust, and East Coast Greenway.
- Support regional efforts to complete the East Coast Greenway in Greater Hartford.
- Continue to participate in statewide product stewardship initiatives such as the PaintCare and mattress recycling programs.