



Making Connections: Strategic Planning for Guilford, Vermont

June 19, 2024

Photograph in Green River by Gabe Maulucci

Acknowledgment

Crafting *Making Connections: Strategic Planning for Guilford, Vermont* has been a significant endeavor, made possible through the leadership and guidance of its residents. Thank you.



This Strategic Planning document was produced on behalf of the Town of Guilford by Dubois & King, Inc., in partnership with the Guilford Planning Commission.



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Introduction

Throughout 2023, Guilford planned together regarding the Town's future. We explored several questions, including:

- What does it look like to actively and responsibly steward our beautiful town?
- How will we continue to cultivate authentic community in meaningful and productive ways?
- What are the organizational structures the town will need to offer efficient and effective services, and remain flexible and responsive?

Community members offered thoughtful and exciting ideas through monthly public meetings of the Planning Commission, three in-person forums, and a four-hour public visioning workshop. The Guilford Planning Commission and the consultant team from DuBois & King then synthesized our community's recommendations into 30 Actions that span a 10-year time horizon.



Photograph by Gabe Maulucci

Here is a sample of what townspeople expressed during the strategic planning process:

- As has been the tradition in Guilford, let's maintain clear and safe trails around Guilford, based on respect for private property and sensitive natural features.
- It would be useful to offer new neighbors first-hand knowledge of the land and town, its history, plants, wildlife, views, and open spaces.
- People wish to make well-informed choices about their properties and the community. Knowing where wetlands, forest blocks, and wildlife crossings are located can help property owners make choices that align their own needs with public safety and environmental health.
- There is a desire for a regularly-updated paper and online directory of businesses, products, jobs, and space rentals to support the vitality of the local economy.
- As we work to support Guilford's character and natural features we want public services and housing opportunities to be available and affordable for current and future generations.
- People of all ages have a role in shaping Guilford's future. Let's continue to honor the generations who have called Guilford "home," and who inspire the legacy of our past to help shape our vision of the future.
- The opportunity for townspeople to speak honestly and openly with each other is at the foundation of civic health.

As the 2022-2030 Town Plan states, Guilford has:

"a mosaic of beautiful agricultural and forested landscapes, a good school, and a population of [diverse] individuals who work hard and care about each other."



Purpose of the Strategic Planning Process

This Strategic Planning document has been prepared by and for the Town of Guilford in order to support the following outcomes:

- Create Goals that are consistent with Guilford's values, as expressed in its Town Plan and other community planning initiatives such as the 2014 Vermont Council on Rural Development Report and Action Plan.
- Establish a planning time horizon as the basis for an ongoing dialogue regarding specific town wide objectives.
- Consider Actions that will address the major challenges and opportunities likely to arise during the planning time horizon.
- Provide information for the Town Staff, Selectboard, Planning Commission, for other volunteer committees, and for individual property owners to develop more specific actions and tasks, and ultimately fulfill Guilford's vision for the future.

This strategic planning document provides a framework for an ongoing dialogue about maintaining and enhancing the quality of life in Guilford. This document does not make policy decisions. Each of the Actions discussed herein will require further collaboration and input from the community before the Selectboard makes final policy or investment decisions.

Measures of success for the Strategic Planning Process:

- + **Broad participation**
- + **Active conversations offering a variety of perspectives**
- + **Visible near-term positive results**
- + **Viable and supported future improvements**
- + **Cost effective and fiscally responsible**

Guiding Principles and Throughlines

The following are Guiding Principles and Throughlines are the philosophical framework that informed the strategic planning process. In turn, they informed Goals, Strategies, and Actions detailed later in this document and on the Goals, Strategies & Actions chart.

Appropriate Investments and Sustainable Services

Providing reliable services requires funding that covers today's financial needs and supports investments in the Town's vision for the future.

The Town's financial capabilities and standards must ensure that it has the financial strength and resources to provide the reliable and high-quality services that residents expect.

The Town's finances must be resilient to economic variability, cover the full cost of operations, provide adequate funding to maintain financial reserves, and support capital investment.

Protection of Public Health, Safety, and the Environment

A key responsibility for the Town is to provide services, whether it be reliable road upkeep and plowing, emergency services communications; sewer services in Algiers Village or elsewhere; maintenance of lands for recreation and social gathering; and support of other civic needs.

The Town is committed to protecting the well-being of the community. This means being good stewards of the environment and maintaining a strong framework for business opportunities.

Transparency and Community Engagement

Guilford is committed to ongoing, meaningful, and substantive dialogue.

Through easy access to information and timely responses to public inquiries, Guilford's residents, business owners, and visitors understand the Town's values, priorities, policies and plans.

Why Do We Plan?

Since before Guilford's establishment in 1791 its people have shaped the land, decisions, and their actions were shaped by the land. Guilford's topography, waterways, soil types, resources, influenced the physical patterns of the town's development— its hamlets, roadways, land uses.

Most of this evolution occurred without documents to guide it, and was the result of private initiative in response to circumstance, opportunity, and expediency. What has changed since 1791 that would require a different approach? What benefit might our town derive from generating planning documents and undertaking this strategic planning process?

Some reasons for this type of community planning in Guilford include:

- The town government's mandate is to promote the safety and welfare of all of its community.
- Our natural environment is threatened on more fronts, and we have robust scientific information about how to support its resilience.
- Economic pressures and opportunities are greater in a quickly-changing regional and global marketplace.
- Through new analytical tools and data, we are better equipped to receive, process, discuss and prioritize information.
- Planning best serves a community when it is conducted via an open and inclusive process that is accountable to current and future residents.

In everyday life, we often say "I need a plan" when something has gone wrong. If we look back at Guilford's history and wonder, "if only they knew then what we know now...", then might our town be better positioned to respond to today's civic needs and responsibilities?

Planning in Guilford needs to be derived from collaboration that responds to current needs and considers future needs through crafting a clear framework to identify priorities and guiding action. That is the reason and the vision for our strategic planning process: to develop a roadmap so that we, and future generations, can more productively and enjoyably live, work, play, grow and prosper in Guilford.

The Process is Getting Results

From the outset of this strategic planning process, the Selectboard and Planning Commission emphasized that in-depth public engagement should be the foundation of the work, and would be the key to its value as an effective tool for community guidance.

Specifically, the September 2022 Request for Proposals that led to the selection of the consultant team stated that "the Town seeks to hire a consultant to facilitate a strategic planning process with the community to elucidate future priorities." In other words, the desire was not only to produce a report, but to engage in a structured exploration of the town's interests and values, and tie these to specific community needs.

The conversations that we had during the three townwide forums, the public visioning workshop, and monthly Planning Commission meetings were wide ranging, and touched on themes of public safety, local economy, physical and social health, environmental stewardship, scenic beauty, and additional quality-of-life issues and concerns.

While these conversations were still ongoing, our motivated community members decided that Guilford didn't have to wait for this strategic planning report to be completed in order to start tackling the emerging "action items." Several projects are already underway, including:

- Drafting a Guilford Guide to town amenities, functions, events and opportunities
- Scheduling regular business community roundtables
- Planning a series of community conversations around issues of town interest such as conservation and housing
- Implementing recommendations from the 2022 Guilford Path Scoping Study
- Connecting with surrounding communities, such as Vernon

So, our town's planning work is already generating momentum and results! That also means that it is not finished. We will continue to monitor how our action items are being implemented, and continue to share and publicize our progress. We will update the Goals, Strategies & Actions chart as the work moves forward, harnessing the diverse perspectives, talents, skills of our townspeople.

Goals: "Guilford Is"

Based on the purpose of the strategic planning process described above, the consultant team developed a series of Goals. These Goals relate to categories of civic interest that may be addressed in the selected 10-year planning horizon.

These Goals do not represent final decisions by the Selectboard, rather, they provide enough detail for the Town's staff and commissions to continue to clarify issues, collaborate with experts, inform the public, and develop and implement specific Actions.

Each Goal is designed to align with the Town's vision, which, as stated in the 2022-2030 Town Plan, is **to maintain Guilford's rural character, protect and conserve its natural resources, and to support viable living, education, and economic opportunities.**

Goal 1. Develop Physical Connections – Guilford is a Town where roads and public trails are well maintained and clearly marked for public safety and ease of use for transportation and recreation, while vital linkages through private lands respect owners' preferences and are user-respected.

Goal 2. Increase Business and Economic Vitality – Guilford supports business development and expansion that enhances the tax base and provides gainful employment while minimizing negative impacts.

Goal 3. Explore Land Use Planning – Guilford facilitates land use decisions based on sharing of information in order to preserve the character of Guilford and its environment while accommodating inevitable growth in a manner consistent with our Town Plan.

Goal 4. Enhance Public Facilities and Recreation – Guilford improves and maintains capital assets that are critical to service delivery and public safety, and increases access to diverse recreational opportunities.

Goal 5. Support Community Communications – Guilford is a Town where open communications are actively sought.

These Goals, and their associated Strategies and Actions, are fully discussed starting on Page 31.

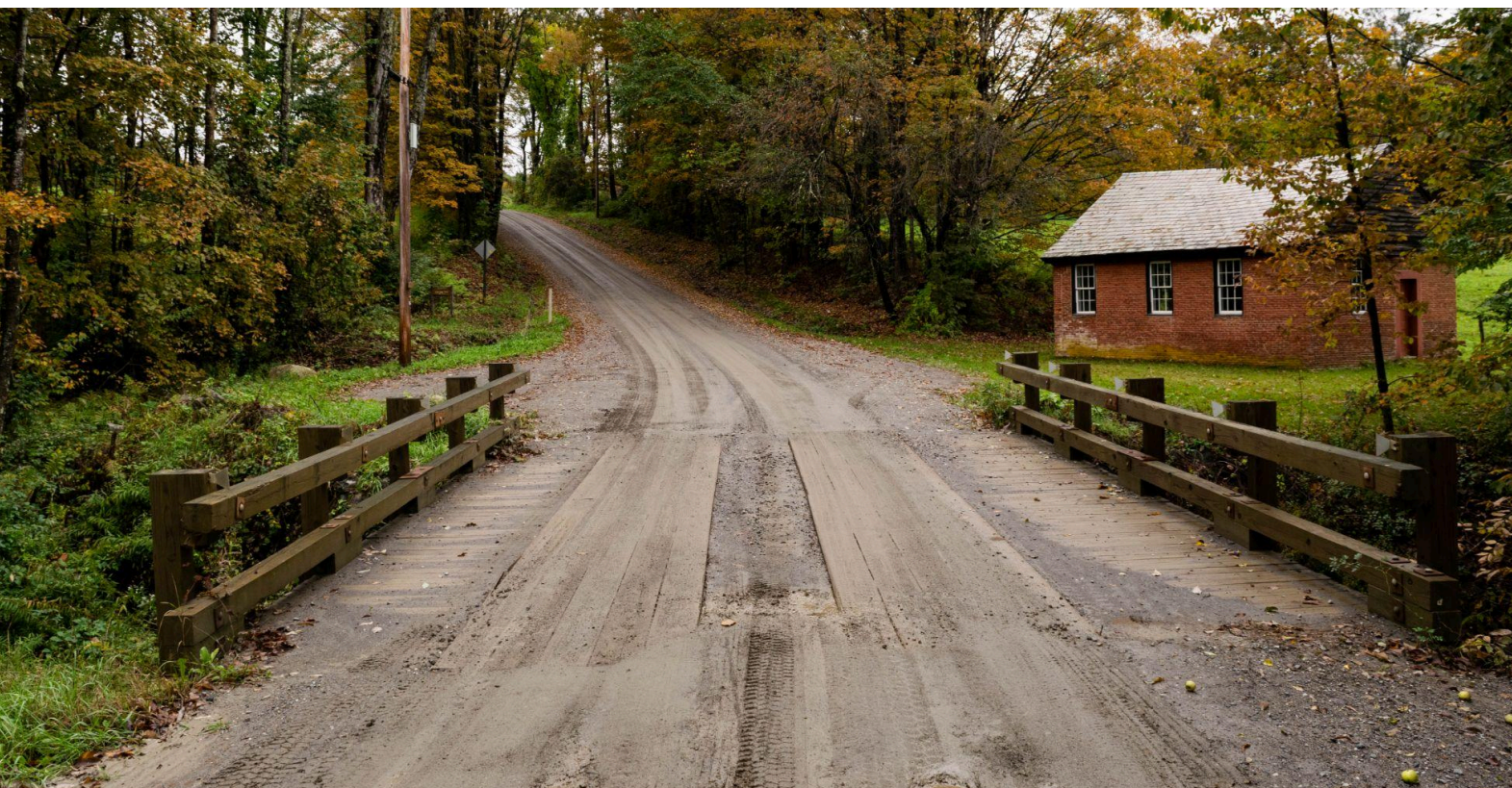


Welcome to Guilford

Guilford was chartered on April 2, 1754; first settled in 1761, and then re-chartered in 1764. The first Town Meeting was held in 1772 and, like most other towns in Vermont, Guilford still holds Town Meetings to pass budgets and to settle large issues.

However, the lands of the Town have a much older history; humans inhabited and traversed what was to become Guilford from "time beyond memory." Further, as noted by a participant in the Visioning Workshop, the non-human inhabitants, the plants, animals, fungi, have existed here for hundreds of thousands or millions of years. In particular, the biological and geological history of the past 12,000 years continues to shape the land and character of Guilford.

We honor the past with our vision for the future.



Town Tour

The project team kicked off its investigations into Guilford by an all-day Town Tour on March 22, 2023, arranged by Jeannette Tokarz, Chair of the Planning Commission. In addition to driving along several of the Town's roads, the team visited several focal locations:

Algiers Village - The team met with representatives of Friends of Algiers Village and discussed public safety at the intersection of Route 5 with Guilford Center Road, local connectivity opportunities among businesses, residences, and gathering spaces such as the churches and Guilford Community Park.

The team discussed the re-opening of the Guilford Country Store, water extension and other relatively recent multi-partner initiatives in the "triangle." Reviewing the 2018 *Algiers Village Living Communities Challenge Vision Plan* was particularly useful in understanding the planning issues around property owned by Guilford Preservation Inc. (GPI), located on the east side of Route 5 at the northern gateway to Algiers Village. This strategic planning document does not offer specific recommendations about the use of this property. However, the worthwhile conversations during the strategic planning process about the status of this property touched on many important facets of individual and civic interest.

Fairgrounds and Recreation Fields - The team met with a member of the Guilford Recreation Club to discuss the shared spaces at the Fairgrounds and the adjacent Recreation Fields, which are owned and managed by the Guilford Recreation Club. Discussion addressed shared use and maintenance synergies, local connectivity opportunities and the disposition of surrounding private lands, relationship and opportunities to promote all-age and year-round use.

Green River - The team met with a resident of Green River, and walked through the hamlet. Social and physical connectivity merged with the ecological landscape along the Green River, Sheppie's Meadow, the transformation of a former junkyard to Green River Meadows shortly before Tropical Storm Irene.

Site of the attractive covered bridge and crib dam, and several historic buildings. Green River is also at the head of a long stretch of relatively flat road, River Road, leading southward into Massachusetts and therefore a popular bicycling route.

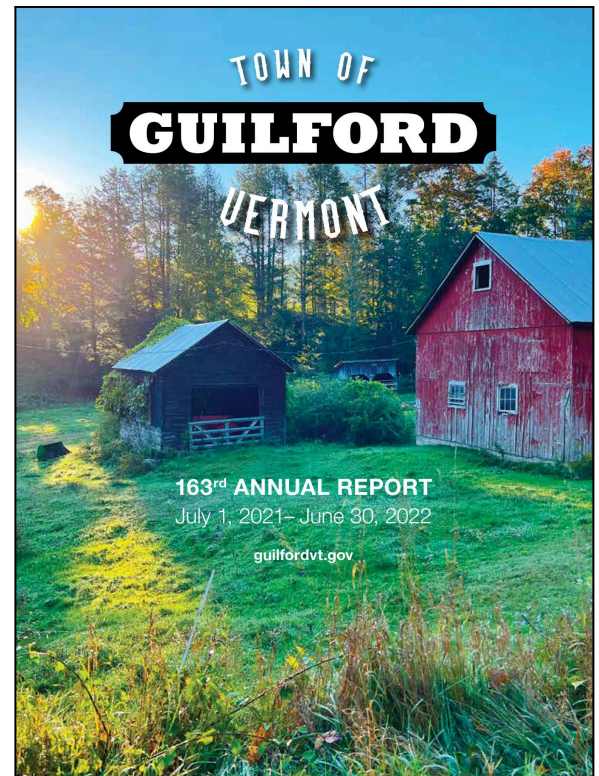
Guilford Center - The DuBois & King team was already familiar with Guilford Center, it being the focus of the Guilford Path Scoping Study that they had recently completed in October of 2022. One of the Actions that emerged from the strategic planning process was to move forward on the recommendations of this scoping study.

Driving Routes - The Town Tour also included an extensive driving tour of Guilford, taking in the topography and views of roadways, the location and context of active farms, and additional public recreation destinations such as Sweet Pond State Park - Amiskwbi.

Takeaways from the Town Tour

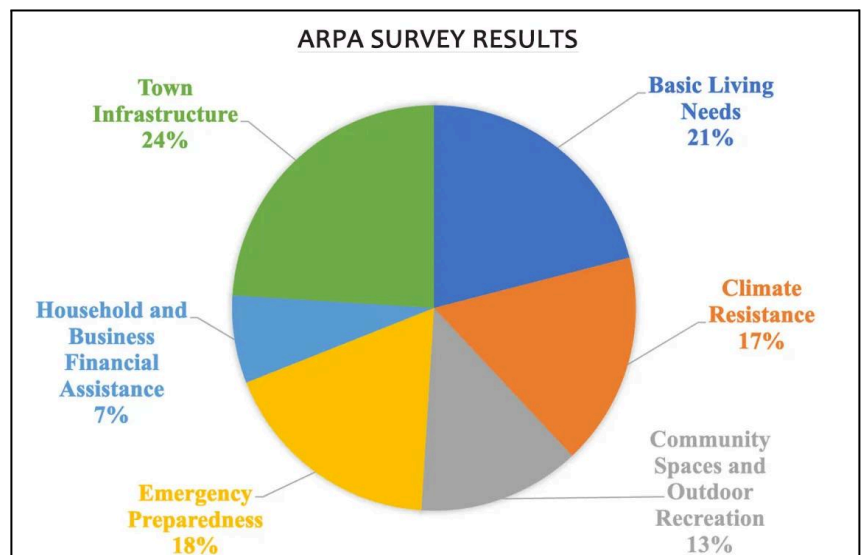
- A strong theme: CONNECTIONS. transportation and trails, physical infrastructure, social connection and communications, economy and markets, wildlife corridors.
- There are many broad-based initiatives to be prioritized, lots of energy to be focused.
- A time-frame should be developed for our strategic planning recommendations
- Work with neighboring communities for cost efficiency, capacity sharing, and "planning beyond borders."
- Build bridges among committees, commissions and groups (e.g., the Recreation Commission and the Recreation Club).
- Synergies = Efficiencies. Example: Green River Meadows: ecological and recreation enhancements aligned with communications, funding, and high social capital.

- Comprehensive annual description of Town expenditures, and how they are tied to Guilford's financial governance.
- Descriptions of recent accomplishments, and future challenges, expectations, and opportunities.
- Useful as a guide for residents to better understand the workings of the Town and School District.



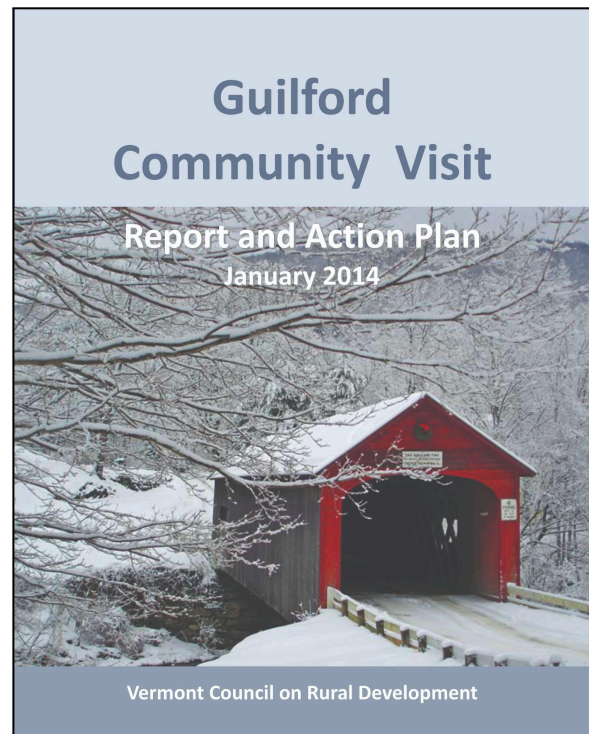
ARPA Committee Report (2022)

- "A representation of the transparency and community spirit that is foundational in Guilford's governance."
- Identified "Projects to fund Now," "Projects of Note Deserving of Funding," and "Additional Projects and Ideas to Consider."



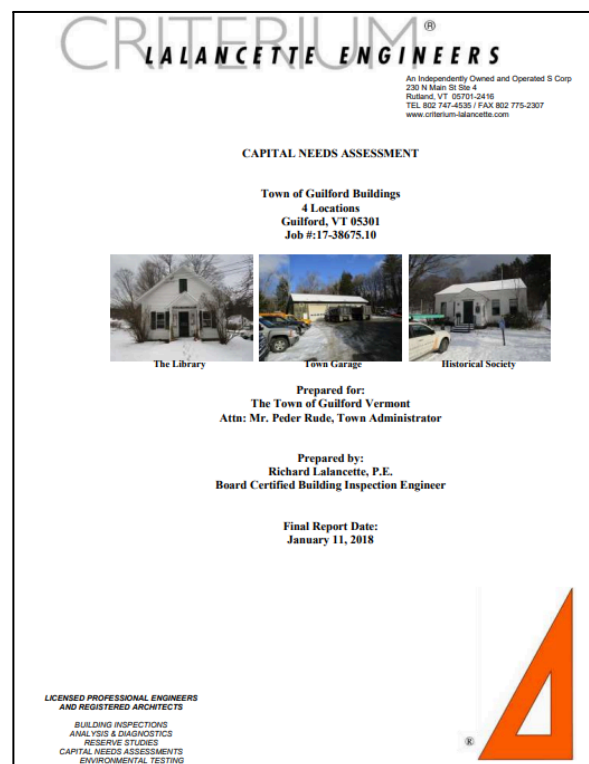
Vermont Council on Rural Development Community Visit Report (2014)

- Example of a successful public engagement process.
- Guilford has already seen positive results (opening of the BBCC, revitalization of the Guilford Gazette).
- A useful tool for capacity building via bringing in a wider group of community members.



Guilford Capital Needs Assessment (2018)

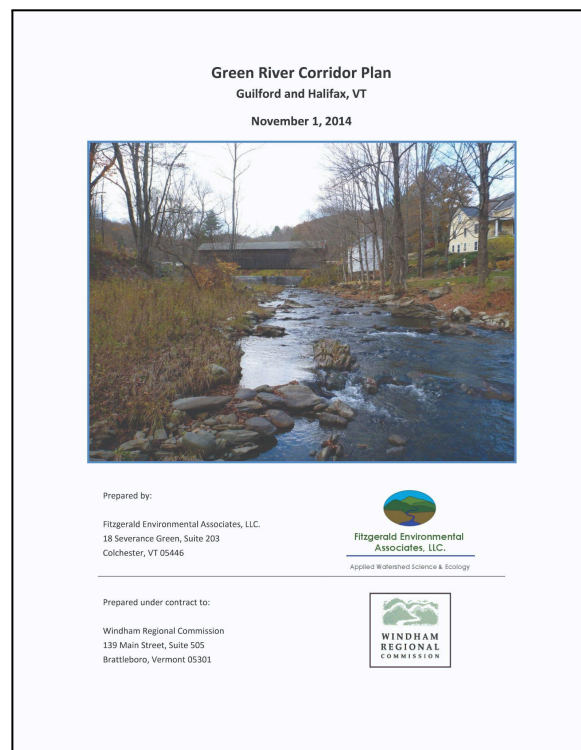
- Spreadsheet through 2036.
- Demonstrates the need for focused prioritization.
- Highlights the need to have asset management plans ready to go for funding becomes available.



when

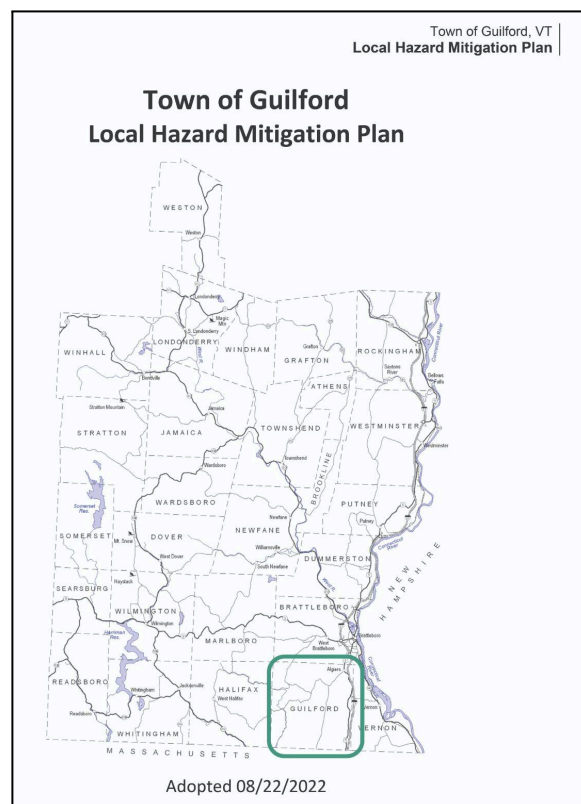
Green River Corridor Plan

- Describes the importance of planning at the watershed level, as a useful way to distill planning for connections, character, recreation, resilience.
- Taking action has meaningful results.
- Advises that science should be the basis of solutions.



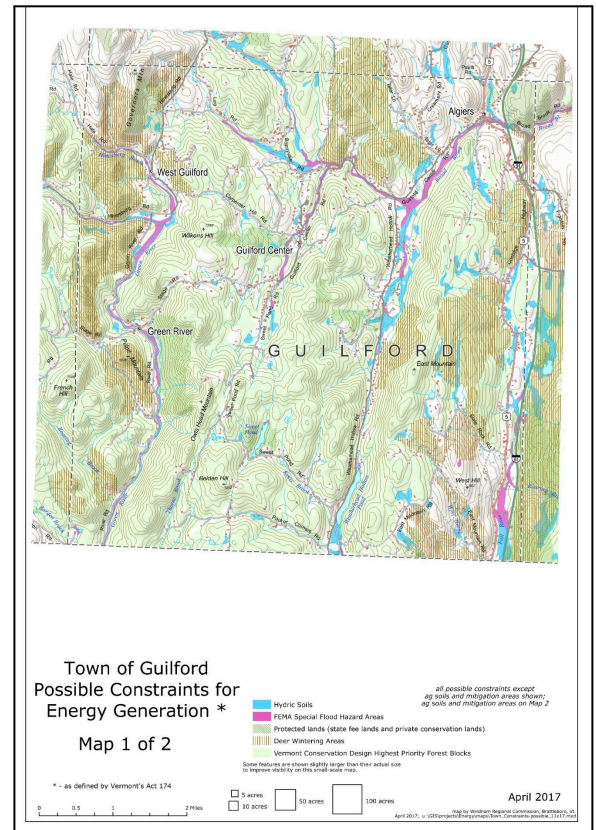
Local Hazard Mitigation Plan 2022-2027

- There is synergy between ecological resilience, hazard reduction, farm protection, preserving character, and promoting public recreation.
- Flood Hazard Area Bylaws should be considered to promote the consistent sharing of information with current and future residents, and predictability for property owners looking to develop their properties.



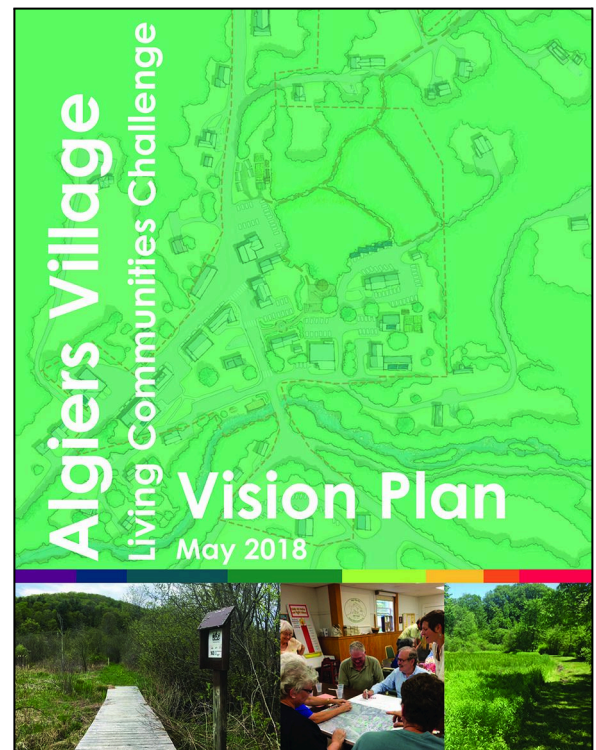
Energy: Vision, Goals, Discussion, Policies, Actions (2017)

- Reduce use and expenditures.
- Consider community scale options.
- Work with neighboring communities.



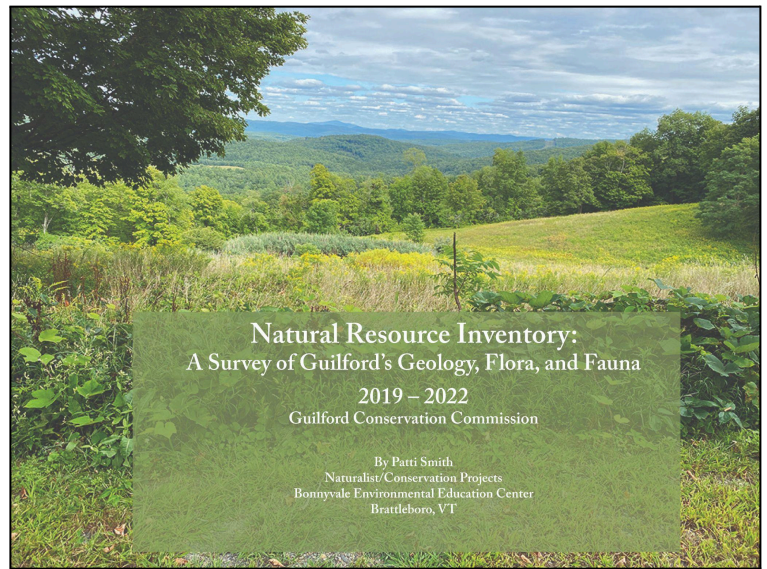
Algiers Village Living Community Challenge Vision Plan (2018)

- Good planning is a process that does not start with the assumption of a particular outcome.
- Partners make progress.
- Good design is critical to preserving the aesthetic character of Guilford.
- When taking the next steps, be sure to study the results of prior efforts.



Natural Resource Inventory: A Survey of Guilford's Geology, Flora, and Fauna, 2019-2022

- Reduce use and expenditures.
- Consider community scale options.
- Work with neighboring communities.
- Opportunity Costs due to inflation.



Asset Management Plan (In Progress)

- Takes a holistic view of all community properties, facilities, and equipment.
- Integrates the vision of the Town Plan with detailed asset information and capital and expenditure planning.
- Vital work that is part of Guilford's ongoing strategic planning.



Public Participation: A Key to Successful Planning

Revenues must be forecast, budgets balanced, bills paid, and services provided. The strategic planning process considered these core purposes of good governance through Guilford's blended vision of its future. In this way, while each of us may have a longer-term vision for Town management or development, this strategic planning process needed to clarify this vision from community members via their expression of shorter-term needs, such as for facility upgrades, communications infrastructure, business support, and the like. Through robust public participation, community members' visions informed the Actions recommended by this document.

Public Participation Plan

The Planning Commission and consultant team developed a Public Participation Plan (PPP) to guide communication outreach and in-person public engagement during the strategic planning process. This PPP established that effective public participation in the strategic planning process would be:

- To understand what community members' concerns are, and the aspirations they hold for themselves and the Town.
- To improve communication, create meaningful dialogue, and enhance transparency in decision-making with the public.
- To strengthen a sense of community ownership that will ultimately result in an improved, supported and sustainable long-term planning process.

In addition, the public participation component of this work was intended to educate the community about the benefits of strategic planning in efficiently aligning priorities, and to provide clear and regular updates on its progress.

In order to achieve the above purposes and generate useful public input, the planning team was guided by the following principles:

- Cover the bases: land use and housing, economic vitality, infrastructure, public buildings and equipment, environmental stewardship, recreation, events and social capital.
- Engage different points of view.
- Harness the energy behind the loudest voices while amplifying the quietest.
- Remain open-minded and flexible.
- "Close the loop" with communication and transparency about the planning process.

Public Participation Methods: Who, Where, When

In order to reach the most people, public participation work was planned around "Who, Where and When," in order to best understand and effectively implement the "How."

Who: People-based

- + Businesses, including farm community
- + Recreation users and property owners/stewards
- + Multiple Generations and Families

Where: Place-based

- + Guilford Center: BBCC, Library, Meeting House
- + Algiers Village: infill/infrastructure, Community Church / New Park Area
- + Other hamlets of Packers Corner, Green River, West Guilford
- + Existing recreation and conservation areas

When: Event-based

- + Library Concert & Raffle at the Fairgrounds
- + Guilford Fair - Labor Day weekend
- + Events at the Broad Brook Community Center



Ongoing Communications

The project team took an "all of the above" approach to sharing information about the ongoing strategic planning process, including updates and progress and advertising events.

Communications methods included:

- **Digital**
 - + Town website; a page on the Town website about the strategic planning process was regularly updated throughout the course of the project.
 - + Front Porch Forum: for posting about upcoming events and engagement opportunities such as the three forums and the Public Visioning Workshop.
 - + Town Facebook Page: similar function to Front Porch Forum
 - + Guilford Gazette: an article about the strategic planning process was published
- **Analog**
 - + Postings at places, such as Country Store, BBCC, Library, Green River Bridge
 - + Posters and info at events, such as at Town Meeting and Guilford Free University
 - + Guilford Gazette
- **Planning Commission and other advertised Public Meetings**

A good deal of communication about the strategic planning process would also happen in person. Therefore, the Public Participation Plan offered sample language that the members of the Planning Commission and Town Staff could use to describe its purpose:

“The strategic planning process is a tool for Accountability, Communication, and Prioritization.”

“The strategic planning process focuses Town decisions about cost-effective services and smart investment choices, in light of community-identified needs.”

“The strategic planning process works to translate prior community planning efforts, such as the 2014 VCRD Community Visit Report and Action Plan, into a clear and viable course of action for achieving Guilford’s short, medium and long term goals.”

Three Public Forums

Based on the timing of existing events, and the opportunities to effectively and efficiently tailor the strategic planning work to a diverse group, the project team ultimately focused its outreach efforts on three forums. Notes and takeaways are summarized below.

Forum #1: Library Concert & Raffle

June 9, 2023, Guilford Fairgrounds

The project team set up easels and information at the entrance to this pre-scheduled event, to engage attendees and better understand "first hand" the use of the Fairgrounds. While the primary intent was to have discussions focused on public recreation activities and facilities throughout the Town, as this was also the first public engagement opportunity during the strategic planning process, any topic of local importance was on the table for discussion. In keeping with the vision of the Town Plan and the emerging strategic planning theme of "Making Connections" in Guilford, the team learned:

1. People do want safe routes to walk or bike around Town, on and off road, and there is a particularly strong desire to mark and maintain off-road connections throughout Guilford.
2. Long-time trail users, whether bikers, hikers or runners, have been finding that some properties around Guilford are newly posted, so that trail thru-access is prohibited. Multiple potential reasons for this were discussed, including lack of awareness of historic use, issues with some users going off established trails (maybe unintentionally, maybe not), and safety-related concerns about hunting activity.
3. One builder mentioned the challenging economies of scale in building single-family homes, as well as the basic business challenge of attracting and maintaining workers that can live locally.
4. Regarding the Fairgrounds itself:
 - People would like public transportation for children to get to after-school programs that could be held there, or just to hang out until a parent can pick them up.
 - Many mentioned the desire for community gardens.
 - Some people were not sure if the various facilities at the Fairgrounds were open to the public without a reservation.
 - There was a great deal of interest in having a pool, particularly a "natural pool" that has the safe design and water quality of a standard rectangular pool but with more of a swimming-hole design and feel.
 - Hold a Community Day!

Forum #2: Joint Conservation & Planning Commissions Meeting

June 15, 2023, Broad Brook Community Center

The Guilford Conservation Commission and the Planning Commission held a joint public meeting, facilitated by DuBois and King. The discussion was framed around the draft Natural Resources Inventory, and the essential relationship between environmental stewardship, public safety, and wise land use planning. However, the lively conversation touched on many aspects of social and personal interest, such as the availability of housing and the status of the Guilford Preservation Inc. property along Route 5 at the north side of Algiers. Brattleboro Community Television (BCTV) was on hand to film the meeting, [and their video is available here](#). The team learned:

1. The Character of Guilford is tied closely to the land and the people.
2. It would be useful to get first-hand knowledge about the land and Town to new neighbors— history, plants and wildlife, views, and traditional trail linkages.
3. People want to make well-informed choices about their properties and the community. Layering maps of natural features is one good tool. For example, seeing where wetlands, forest blocks, and wildlife crossings line up is good information to help landowners make choices about where to locate buildings, driveways, gardens, etc.
4. There should be clarification of what conservation of property means and what landowners may expect, particularly regarding the Vermont 30×30 and 50×50 goals.
5. The GPI property in Algiers brings several important issues to the fore:
 - Views of open land is part of Guilford’s character
 - Wildlife preservation is highly valued
 - Targeted “issue forums” are useful, to come together and learn and discuss Town topics
 - “Keep the heart of Guilford.”
6. Community gardens are good for people. Particularly for people that don’t get outside enough, having garden space nearby is healthy.
7. The major tree blowdown from the March storm sparked discussion around public safety, wildlife conservation, waterway management, regulations and landowner initiative.
8. A lack of fences and abundance of dirt roads has characterized Guilford for a long time.
9. “Guilford feels like home.” The next generation should be able to afford to live in Guilford, on family land or elsewhere.
10. Acknowledgement of current and future threats to the land from things such as climate change, fires, floods, development, chemicals.
11. Sharing knowledge about Guilford’s natural features and wildlife is the core mission of the Conversation Commission. They are a great resource, and the Natural Resources Inventory should be available soon.

Forum #3: Business Breakfast Forum

July 8, 2023, Broad Brook Community Center

Approximately 35 people attended this Saturday morning discussion, which is hoped to be the first of many such business forums. This initial gathering showcased the diversity of business types in Town: farming, hospitality, healthcare, construction and building repair, technology sector, retail business, and more. Childcare was available and used, and the Guilford Country Store and Planning Commission supplied breakfast. The team learned:

1. Cross-marketing among businesses is essential. Businesses can reference and endorse each other, such as a hospitality host making connections with area service professionals.
2. An attractive, visually-coordinated and regularly-updated online and paper business directory was discussed very positively. There could be various forms for this, such as:
 - Pamphlet of local products and services
 - Map-based guide to businesses, which can also highlight recreation opportunities
 - A Guilford "Yellow Pages"
 - Database of local farmland rental, available retail and event spaces
3. Sometimes business owners make changes to improve systems. Sometimes the nature of the business changes, such as with new technologies, and the business owner has to adapt.
4. Good insights about business challenges:
 - Workers compensation insurance is a significant hurdle to business growth.
 - Training workers is expensive, and with the cost of living high, people come and go.
 - Reliable electrical service is a core business need.
5. Are there options on some business' properties, with the wastewater capacity, to house employees? Accessory dwelling unit regulations were changed in 2021 to give property owners more options. The Vermont Housing Improvement Program can help with new and upgraded units. Learn about the [VHIP here](#).
6. DV Fiber, a non-profit broadband internet service, is coming to Guilford. It will be available to all properties for hookup and service.
7. There is technical and financial support available for local businesses. There are funding opportunities for small businesses through the [Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation](#). BDCC's Pipelines & Pathways Project is a useful career access and readiness program for local high school age students.
8. It is useful to tap into the "communal memory" of business owners, at regular forums like this one. Mentorship pipelines should be nurtured through business incubators.
9. A local job board would let people know about local opportunities. It would fill a particular need for high school students. Also list barter opportunities and internships.
10. A member of the Vernon Planning Commission joined the breakfast forum. She spoke highly of this gathering, and looks forward to supporting each other's success.

Public Visioning Workshop

On November 11th, 2023, dozens of members of the Guilford community came to the Broad Brook Community Center to participate in a four-hour Public Visioning Workshop. The purpose of this workshop was for the project team to hear from Guilford residents, about how they viewed their Town, what they wanted evolved or strengthened in Town life, and what they wanted preserved. It was also intended to serve as a model for future community engagement and planning work in Guilford.

The day was divided into six mini-workshops, one for each of the following Goals-based categories that were developed out of the prior strategic planning forums, discussion with the Planning Commission, and the project team's review of Guilford's prior planning work such as the Town Plan, the VCRD Community Visit Report, and the ARPA Survey.

1. Physical Connections
2. Business and Economic Vitality
3. Land Use Planning
4. Public Facilities and Recreation
5. Community Connections
6. Health and Wellbeing

A flyer for a Public Visioning Workshop. The background is a photograph of a wooden building with a sign that reads "TOWN OF GUILFORD VERMONT". The flyer includes the "MAKING CONNECTIONS" logo on the left and the "TOWN OF GUILFORD VERMONT" logo on the right. The text is centered and reads: "The Guilford Planning Commission invites you to a Public Visioning Workshop Saturday, November 11, 2023 -10 AM to 2 PM at the Broad Brook Community Center 3940 Guilford Center Road". Below this, it says: "This is a community-building event that will help the Strategic Planning Process prioritize what matters in Guilford. We will dig deeper into our values, Guilford's scenic and natural world, and traditional land uses. We will focus on creating a vision that clearly identifies what we want to maintain, evolve, or transform." At the bottom, it says: "Please also visit guilfordvt.gov/strategic-planning to learn more about the strategic planning process" and "COLLABORATION • INSPIRATION • CULTIVATION • GROWTH • BUILDING COMMUNITY".

 The Guilford Planning Commission invites you to a

Public Visioning Workshop

Saturday, November 11, 2023 -10 AM to 2 PM
at the
Broad Brook Community Center
3940 Guilford Center Road

This is a community-building event that will help the Strategic Planning Process prioritize what matters in Guilford. We will dig deeper into our values, Guilford's scenic and natural world, and traditional land uses. We will focus on creating a vision that clearly identifies what we want to maintain, evolve, or transform.

Please also visit guilfordvt.gov/strategic-planning to learn more about the strategic planning process

COLLABORATION • INSPIRATION • CULTIVATION • GROWTH • BUILDING COMMUNITY



Participants in the Public Visioning Workshop discussed each topic openly, facilitated by Dubois & King and members of the Planning Commission and Conservation Commission. The following are summaries of the discussions around each of the six topics. Not surprisingly, much of the discussion highlighted the cross-connections among topics, and reinforced themes from the prior strategic planning forums, as well as from the Town Plan and ARPA Survey.

Physical Connections

Residents expressed a desire for clearer definitions to discern in Town what is a “public road” vs. “private land,” particularly regarding amenities like hiking and snowmobiling trails. This turned the discussion to the concept of some “goodwill sharing” to get residents more involved in public life.

Residents noted that there are currently 81 miles of dirt roads in Town, making it difficult to travel in poor weather conditions. Concerns were also raised about the loss of internet and phone services in storms, something that is particularly hazardous for the elderly and those living alone. There was acknowledgement that these issues are not unique to Guilford, so we can learn from other communities.

Business and Economic Vitality

One key suggestion was the creation of a regularly updated business inventory, similar to the Natural Resources Inventory. Residents expressed the desire to keep businesses local and the need for jobs in Guilford, but also acknowledged the difficulties in finding workers.

One resident suggested adding a branch of the Brattleboro Career Center (or something similar) to the Town. There was also a need to identify and promote the resources businesses and workers in Town would need, such as internet and childcare. Through identifying and improving these resources, there was hope that this would help attract more businesses and workers to the area.

The problems with finding workers was tied back to the difficulty finding housing in Town, specifically housing that is reasonably affordable. There were also suggestions to incentivize Veteran workers to come to the Town through tax breaks on grants, or offering Veterans a tax break to live and work in Town.

Participants expressed well-deserved pride at what Guilford has to offer, including trails, a state park, fishing, biking and running, snowmobiling. One resident called Guilford the “Secret Gem of Southern Vermont.” In that vein, the Town can further promote Guilford at the Interstate 91 Welcome Center in Guilford, or to maintain an online directory of businesses and amenities that visitors might need or enjoy.

Land Use Planning

Affordable housing was a theme of the discussion at this table. Residents expressed that the Town needs a well-run mobile home community and affordable elder housing.

There was a suggestion that elders looking to age in place in their homes could be offered incentives to add an apartment to their property to create more affordable housing, as well as tax breaks in general to help all residents winterize older homes.

Additionally, there was support that some of these older or larger properties in Town be converted into affordable housing and that there be no limit on the amount of residences per land parcel, to encourage infill. However, it was emphasized that the way the housing is constructed needs to fit the character of the Town.

Apart from the housing discussion, there was also a robust discussion around open land management. Residents rightfully noted that the Town needs to consider a larger span of history when considering their land and its context of use. Residents felt that the history of past land use as a precedent for future land use and historical conservation needed to be based on a history that expanded past European settlement and encompassed the fact that Vermont has been populated for roughly 12,000 years.

The topic of cemetery conservation was seen needing a multidisciplinary approach. One resident suggested that would be an excellent opportunity to get high school students included through curriculum projects or community service efforts for hands-on learning, as well as to promote Town land conservation.



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this

Public Facilities and Recreation

Overall, residents in this discussion noted that facilities and recreation are tightly linked with health, well-being, and physical connections.

A Town website forum would allow people and road crews to share information regarding the safety or passability of roads, especially after and during storms.

There are good public recreation facilities in Guilford; questions of who can use what and when currently hinder use. A “Town User Guide” may help, via a list of facilities, what the facilities offer, and who can use them.

Although there are currently few public recreation facilities in the southeast of Town, a resident expressed strong interest in donating a portion of their land in this part of Town for use in a conservation easement.

Better access to public facilities would be of particular use to stay-at-home parents of small children and to Guilford’s robust home-school community, one of the area’s largest.

Community Communications

Connections in the face of extreme weather was a common theme of this discussion. Residents suggested the Town promote the use of VT Alert and add a branch of this service specific to Guilford. This branch could be formatted as a “Neighborhood Alert” model to help residents check in on their neighbors after a storm.

Of course, community communications are about more than just storm response. Residents wanted more information regarding community needs and some sort of mechanism for volunteers to apply their skills to meet those needs. One suggestion was a volunteer page on the Town website to match those in need with those with the means to help.

Supporting feelings of community through getting to know one's neighbors was seen as a vital step in overall community communications. To that end, residents suggested identifying “Neighborhood Ambassadors” to welcome new residents and key them into resources in the community, such as agricultural, plow services, and community potlucks.

All of this information could also be included in a Town User's Guide, to encourage residents on how to get out, get involved, and meet the rest of their community.

Health and Wellbeing

There was a desire to support and promote all the good work already being done by Guilford Cares.

There was also a strong desire to support the diverse needs of Guilford's aging population. This includes help with property maintenance, replacing the Town workforce as folks retire, social connections, and housing options, including home shares.

Residents noted that many of these needs are tied to community connections and inter-generational bonds. One resident expressed an appreciation for the connections their young family was developing with their elderly neighbors, and there was a general desire for more opportunities for such bonding through the community at large. These bonds could be promoted through school research projects, volunteering, or community events like a dance night.

It was noted that successful community conversations, and community events such as this Public Visioning Workshop, are most successful when they are accommodating of the diverse needs of the community. Town events could promote their attendance by offering food, childcare, or other welcoming amenities like adult beverages and games.

The Town should host regular Community Forums centered around topics of interest, recognizing that people with diverse perspectives often find common ground when brought together for conversation. (For example, the best date for scheduling this Public Visioning Workshop was also the first day of hunting season. However, the perspective of hunters would be useful to include in many aspects of Guilford's community conversations, around natural resource conservation, public safety, sourcing of local food, and tourism.



Implementation: Goals → Strategies → Actions

Goals, Strategies, and Actions grew out of the public input process, including the Library Concert & Raffle, Joint Conservation & Planning Commissions Meeting, Business Breakfast Forum, Public Visioning Workshop, and discussion during 15 public Planning Commission meetings held between February 2024 and May 2024.

A **GOAL** is a short statement of intent built around a broad category of civic interest.

A **STRATEGY** focuses effort in a subject area that directly supports the **GOAL**.

An **ACTION** is a precise task, method or process by which the **STRATEGY** may be fulfilled.

The five Goals described below were developed throughout the strategic planning process, and address community challenges or needs of importance to the residents of Guilford. The Strategies and Actions that support and fulfill these Goals are discussed in the following pages.

A sixth Goal was explored during the Public Visioning Workshop: "Health and Wellbeing," focused around the desires for protection of life and property, and the promotion of physical health, social connection, and civic strength. However, as the Planning Commission and consultant team refined the corresponding Strategies and Actions, it was noted that such desires are foundational to all of the Goals. Therefore, while removed as a separate Goal, Health and Wellbeing remain the essential aims of the strategic planning process.

Goal 1: Develop Physical Connections. There is a strong desire in Guilford to ensure that Town roads and public trails are well maintained and clearly marked for public safety and ease of use, whether it be by car, on foot, on bike, horse, ATV or snowmobile. Likewise, vital linkages through private lands should respect owners' preferences and be user-respected, safe, and clearly documented and signed.

Goal 2: Increase Economic and Business Vitality. Business development and economic vitality that enhances the tax base, and provides local goods and services is well-served when we support opportunities for businesses to connect, we promote our local "brand," and we create structures that allow future generations to prosper in our Town.

Goal 3: Explore Land Use Planning. Guilford residents prize the character of our Town - its farms, forests, waterways, people, while generally acknowledging the need for more housing choices and other development opportunities that are consistent with that character. How lands may be envisioned to be used by property owners is a matter of personal preference, based on a shared knowledge of the many factors that inform good decision-making.

Goal 4: Enhance Public Facilities and Recreation. Our recreational facilities offer diverse opportunities for outdoor activities. However, it can be challenging for residents to determine what facilities are available to whom, and when. Our capital assets and designated emergency shelters are critical to service delivery and public safety, especially during floods, storms or other emergencies. Residents need to know what facilities and services are available during emergencies, including the location, times of operation.

Goal 5: Support Community Communications. A basic ingredient of healthy civic life is good communication, sharing our thoughts with honesty and decency, while hearing those of others with the same. Open and respectful communication can support collaborative approaches for Town improvement, and are an essential part of personal, family and community well-being.

Goal 1: Develop Physical Connections

The following Strategies and Actions are intended to Develop Physical Connections in Guilford.

There is a strong desire in Guilford to ensure that Town roads and public trails are well maintained and clearly marked for public safety and ease of use, whether it be by car, on foot, on bike, horse, ATV or snowmobile. Likewise, vital linkages through private lands should be respectful of owner preferences, be user-respected, safe, and clearly documented and signed.

Physical Connections should address the needs for, and challenges of multi-modal transportation and transit in a rural town. Moving forward in support of this Goal, we may engage private property owners, via "trail ambassador" members of the Trails Committee, in discussions about creating or restoring trail linkages on their properties. With the guidance from local chapters of VAST, VASA and other trail user groups, existing snowmobile trails or ATV trails could support a variety of 4-season use modes.

Strategy 1: Improve Public Safety on Roadways

Actions:

1. Discuss a Town ordinance or "overlay" that designates certain Town roads as permanently unpaved and/or as bikeways.
2. Develop pedestrian and/or bike paths in Guilford Center based on the 2022 Guilford Path Scoping Study.

Strategy 2: Expand Trail Network

Actions:

1. Create and update a comprehensive trail network map in digital and paper formats.
2. Engage private property owners, via "trail ambassador" members of the Trails Committee, in discussions about creating or restoring trail linkages on their properties. This may include exploration of use for a variety of users and modes.
3. Evaluate the opportunities/restrictions around creating a connection between the Broad Brook Community Center and the Natural Playscape.

Strategy 3: Strengthen Public Transportation Access

Actions:

1. Work with the Windham Regional Commission to identify projects that strengthen safe active transportation use along the Route 5 corridor.
2. Increase awareness of existing transportation resources, along with teaming with surrounding communities.

Goal 2: Increase Business and Economic Vitality

The following Strategies and Actions are intended to Increase Business and Economic Vitality in Guilford.

Business development and economic vitality that enhances the tax base, and provides local goods and services, is well-served when we support opportunities for businesses to connect and we promote our local "brand."

We also wish to create structures that allow future generations to prosper in our Town. Moving forward in support of this Goal, Guilford can partner with the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation's Pipelines and Pathways career readiness program for high school students.

Strategy 1: Establish an Economic Development Committee

Actions:

1. Create and maintain a complete list of businesses in Guilford by category and type.
2. Promote Guilford as an attractive and welcoming place.
3. Promote existing business resources available in Guilford.
4. Hold regular Business Breakfast Forums.
5. Identify and then promote business incentives available from the State of Vermont.
6. Create a structure to connect students with local businesses.

Goal 3: Explore Land Use Planning

The following Strategies and Actions are intended to help us Explore Land Use Planning in Guilford.

Guilford residents prize the character of our Town - its farms, forests, waterways, people, while generally acknowledging the need for more housing choices and other development opportunities that are consistent with that character. How lands may be envisioned to be used by property owners is a matter of personal preference, based on a shared knowledge of the many factors that inform good decision-making.

Moving forward in support of this Goal, we can benefit from information provided by the Windham Regional Commission, as we may explore how best to navigate the land use planning and decision making process.

One theme that emerged during the strategic planning process was the linkages among housing, business vitality, Town character, public facilities including clean drinking water and sanitation, and general welfare of Guilford's current and future residents. A toolkit for building accessory dwelling units using available renovation funding sources, or initiating home shares, may be useful for property owners to be informed about ways to further housing goals in the manner that best suits them.

Strategy 1: Review Natural Resources and Community Assets to Consider Land Use Priorities

Actions:

1. Utilize the 2019-2022 Natural Resource Inventory to target conservation areas and share information with the community about high value areas.
2. Identify areas for potential smart growth that are consistent with Guilford's character.
3. Host Community Conversations around land use, housing, conservation, and planning issues, and review the available tools for conserving property as well as creating capacity for desirable growth.

Strategy 2: Identify Tools for Property Owners to Build Guilford's Housing Capacity

Actions:

1. Identify housing market needs, such as for "missing middle" or senior housing, as a part of Guilford's ongoing village planning.
2. Use "what we know" about natural features, flood hazard areas, and utility systems, to help property owners identify locations that may be most suitable for housing.
3. Establish a Housing Committee to gather and share information about local builders, home shares, funding support, shared well and septic, state regulations, etc.

Goal 4: Enhance Public Facilities and Recreation

The following Strategies and Actions are intended to Enhance Public Facilities and Recreation in Guilford.

Our capital assets are critical to service delivery and public safety, and offer diverse recreational opportunities. However, it can be challenging for residents to determine what facilities are available to whom, and when, especially during floods or other emergencies. Access to information is paramount to address these safety and connectivity concerns, and for making townwide investment decisions.

The Planning Commission, Recreation Commission, the Guilford Fair Association and the Recreation Club are actively exploring opportunities to collaborate. Per Strategy 3, Action 1 below, Guilford and the School Board and PTO can also strengthen connections around common interests, such as the public use of school facilities.

Strategy 1: Create a Forum for Public Safety Information

Actions:

1. Create a section of the Town website for residents and the road crew to share information on the safety and opening of roads, especially during or after storms.
2. Promote the use of VT Alert and a “Neighborhood Alert” or “buddy” model to check in on neighbors in the event of a storm, as coordinated with the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
3. Collaborate with the Emergency Management Director, to explore ongoing ways to support the EOC's mission.

Strategy 2: Create a Cohesive List of Recreational Amenities and Needs

Actions:

1. Periodically (every 2 years) conduct a community survey focused on recreational gaps and needs.
2. Include recreational amenities in a Guilford Guide and online resources that identify locations, accessibility and availability.

Strategy 3: Promote Collaboration Between School District and Town

Actions:

1. Collaborate with the School Board and PTO representatives to strengthen connections.
2. Include information regarding public access to School District resources in the Guilford Guide.

Goal 5: Support Community Communications

The following Strategies and Actions are intended to Support Community Communications in Guilford.

A basic ingredient of healthy civic life is good communication, sharing our thoughts with honesty and decency, while hearing those of others with the same. As evidenced throughout our strategic planning process, open and respectful communications can support collaborative approaches for Town improvement, and are an essential part of personal, family and community well-being.

In support of this Goal, there is a desire in Guilford to tap into the diverse experiences, skills, and perspectives of our neighbors and from the wider world, and provide information about events, resources, opportunities and other matters of public interest across a variety of media.

Strategy 1: Provide Access to Community Information

Actions:

1. Regularly update the Guilford Guide, including its list of social service agencies.
2. Publicize to all residents when significant new Town documents and other important information is available.
3. Add an audio/video recording system to the Broad Brook Community Center to make it easier to record meetings or other public events.

Strategy 2: Engage Diverse Community Groups Within Guilford

Actions:

1. Promote the use of resources such as Front Porch Forum for sharing skills and needs within the Town.
2. Partner with Guilford Cares and other entities to identify distinct neighborhoods within Guilford and create Neighborhood Ambassadors to welcome new residents.
3. Develop a schedule of committee and commission updates for the Guilford Gazette.
4. Commit to conducting Community Conversations at various times (evenings, weekends) and that offer childcare services, and engage diverse voices.
5. Host social events, such as ice cream or pizza socials, game nights, music and dances, in a variety of locations with evening or after school child care.

Goals, Strategies & Actions Chart

The Goals, Strategies & Actions Chart that accompanies this document (and reproduced on the following page), provides a single-sheet, color-coded and cross-referenced tool to track the Goals, Strategies and Actions, over a 10-year planning horizon.

The 10-year planning horizon was discussed during the strategic planning process, and considered a suitable for the following reasons:

- 10 years is not too long-term, beyond which action-focused planning can get hazy. Actions that may be taken over 10 years can be realistically tied with near-term and currently-relevant town-wide conversations, budget forecasting and potential funding, staff and volunteer capacity.
- 10 years is a reasonable timeframe by which to assess progress in achieving the Actions, and supporting and fulfilling the Goals and Strategies. After 10 years, many current residents, those who helped guide this strategic planning work, can look back and review how the Goals, Strategies, and Actions were aligned, fulfilled, or perhaps modified. Using what we've learned, we can better chart the following 10 years, improving on what works and adapting to new conditions.
- 10 years allows multi-faceted projects that support multiple Actions concurrently (such as for conservation, recreation, and business vitality) to be aligned in their timing and in their funding.

Many of the 30 Actions listed on this chart support multiple goals. To help visualize these interconnections, the numbered, color-coated diamonds on this chart reference the separate Goals that the particular Action closely supports. In a few cases, some Actions support all of the Goals.

This Goals, Strategies & Actions Chart was created in Microsoft Excel, and the file has been transmitted to the Town. Therefore, new versions of this chart can be considered, based on new knowledge, new funding opportunities or economic models, new technology, or new public interests and needs. Time will offer more effective and efficient ways to achieve the broader Goals. As an Excel file, this chart is a living document, an adaptable tool to help us navigate the best paths forward.

Making Connections: Strategic Planning for Guilford
Goals, Strategies & Actions Chart
 June 19, 2024



This chart has been developed based on public input during Guilford's 2023-2024 Strategic Planning Process, and to assist ongoing Town discussions and decision making. Just as communities are complex and interconnected, so are the plans that guide them. Actions that support one Goal may support other Goals as well. Therefore, while many Actions on this chart are listed under a Goal that it is associated with, this chart also lists other Goals that these Actions support: the corresponding color bar has numbers in it, with each number referencing a separate Goal.

10 YEAR PLANNING HORIZON →

Goal 1: Develop Physical Connections		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Strategy 1: Improve Public Safety on Roadways											
Action 1: Discuss a Town ordinance or "overlay" that designates certain Town roads as permanently unpaved and/or as bikeways.			1	3	4						
Action 2: Develop pedestrian and/or bike paths in Guilford Center based on the 2022 Guilford Path Scoping Study.		1	4								
Strategy 2: Expand Trail Network											
Action 1: Create and update a comprehensive trail network map in digital and paper formats.				1	2	3	4	5			
Action 2: Engage private property owners, via "trail ambassadors" and/or the Trails Committee, in discussions about creating or restoring trail linkages on their properties. This may include exploration of use for a variety of users and modes.		1	4								
Action 3: Evaluate the opportunities/restrictions around creating a connection between the Broad Brook Community Center and the Natural Playscape.					1	4					
Strategy 3: Strengthen Public Transportation Access											
Action 1: Work with the Windham Regional Commission to identify projects that strengthen safe active transportation use along the Route 5 corridor.		1	4								
Action 2: Increase awareness of existing transportation resources, along with teaming with surrounding communities.				1	4						
Goal 2: Increase Business and Economic Vitality		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Strategy 1: Establish an Economic Development Committee											
Action 1: Create and maintain a complete list of businesses in Guilford by category and type.		1	2	5							
Action 2: Promote Guilford as an attractive and welcoming place.		1	2	5							
Action 3: Promote existing business resources available in Guilford.											
Action 4: Hold regular Business Breakfast Forums.		1	2	5							
Action 5: Identify and then promote business incentives available from the State of Vermont.											
Action 6: Create a structure to connect students with local businesses.		1	2	5							
Goal 3: Explore Land Use Planning		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Strategy 1: Review Natural Resources and Community Assets to Consider Land Use Priorities											
Action 1: Utilize the 2019-2022 Natural Resource Inventory to target conservation areas and share information with the community about high value areas.		3	4	5							
Action 2: Host Community Conversations around land use, housing, conservation, and planning issues, and review the available tools for conserving property.		1	3	4	5						
Strategy 2: Identify Tools for Property Owners to Build Guilford's Housing Capacity											
Action 1: Identify housing market needs, such as for "missing middle" or senior housing, as a part of Guilford's ongoing village planning.				5							
Action 2: Use "what we know" about natural features, flood hazard areas, and utility systems, to help property owners identify locations that may be most suitable for housing.		2	5								
Action 3: Establish a Housing Committee to gather and share information about local builders, home shares, funding support, shared well and septic, state regulations, etc.		5									
Goal 4: Enhance Public Facilities and Recreation		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Strategy 1: Create a Forum for Public Safety Information											
Action 1: Create a section of the Town website for residents and the road crew to share information on the safety and opening of roads, especially during or after storms.		1	4	5							
Action 2: Promote the use of VT Alert and a "Neighborhood Alert" or "buddy" model to check in on neighbors in the event of a storm, as coordinated with the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).		1	4								
Action 3: Collaborate with the Emergency Management Director, to explore ongoing ways to support the EOC's mission.		4	5								
Strategy 2: Create a Cohesive List of Recreational Amenities and Needs											
Action 1: Periodically (every 2 years) conduct a community survey focused on recreational gaps and needs.											
Action 2: Include recreational amenities in a Guilford Guide and online resources that identify locations, accessibility and availability.		2	4	5							
Strategy 3: Promote Collaboration Between the School District and Town											
Action 1: Collaborate with the School Board and PTO representatives to strengthen connections.											
Action 2: Include information regarding public access to School District resources in the Guilford Guide.		1	4	5							
Goal 5: Support Community Communications		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Strategy 1: Provide Access to Community Information											
Action 1: Regularly update the Guilford Guide, including its list of social service agencies.		1	2	3	4	5					
Action 2: Publicize to all residents when significant new Town documents and other important information is available.		2	3	5							
Action 3: Add an audio/video recording system to the Broad Brook Community Center to make it easier to record meetings or other public events.			4	5							
Strategy 2: Engage Diverse Community Groups Within Guilford											
Action 1: Promote the use of resources such as Front Porch Forum for sharing skills and needs within the Town.											
Action 2: Partner with Guilford Cares and other entities to identify distinct neighborhoods within Guilford and create Neighborhood Ambassadors to welcome new residents.			2	3	5						
Action 3: Develop a schedule of committee and commission updates for the Guilford Gazette.		2	3	5							
Action 4: Commit to conducting Community Conversations at various times (evenings, weekends) and that offer childcare services, and engage diverse voices.											
Action 5: Host social events, such as ice cream or pizza socials, game nights, music and dances, in a variety of locations with evening or after school child care.											

Appendices

Photographs (Town Tour, events, posters)

Front Porch Forum postings

Guilford Gazette Article

Additional website materials

Minutes from Planning Commission Meetings, including presentations

Sources