

What Is A Municipal Plan?

“A plan is a vision, a vision tempered by reality and a course of action.”

Darby Bradley, former president, Vermont Land Trust, 1990–2006

Municipal Plans

The one document essential to defining and implementing a community’s vision is the comprehensive municipal plan. The plan provides a framework toward attaining community aspirations through public investments, land use regulations, and other implementation programs such as a state-designated downtown or village center, business improvement districts, or land conservation programs. It can also qualify the community for state grants to fund improvements or receive specialized technical assistance.

Municipal plans can be used as

A long-term guide: The plan can be used to measure and evaluate public and private initiatives that affect the future physical, social, and economic health of the community.

A basis for decision-making, community programs, and taxpayer investments: The plan can help a community identify priorities for funding, establishing a capital improvement program, and directing other public and private local initiatives, such as farmland protection, housing development, or recreational facilities creation or improvement.

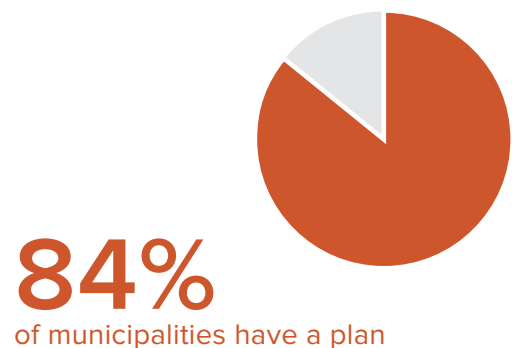
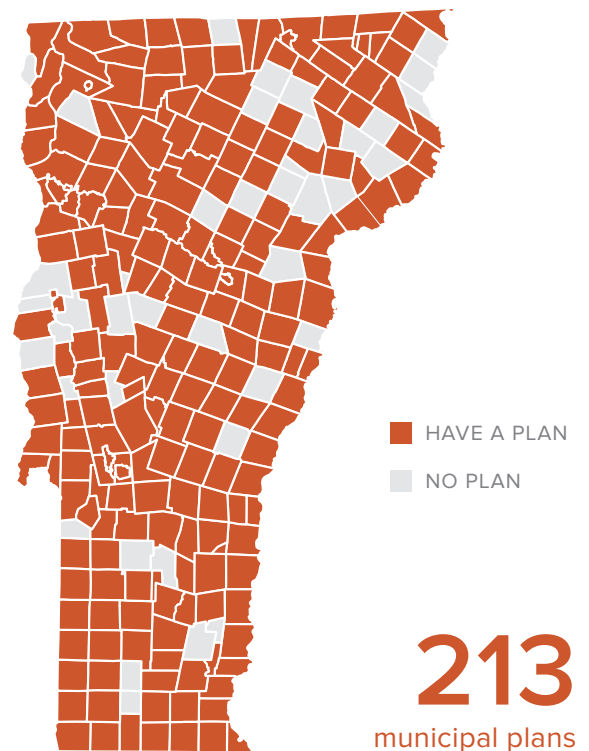
An action plan that identifies implementation steps: The plan details the programs and projects over the short term (one to two years), midterm (three to five years), and long term (six years or more) to achieve goals and objectives. Well-articulated implementation strategies can help leverage grant funding and other support for those actions.

A basis for municipal regulations: The plan serves as the foundation for zoning and subdivision regulations and bylaws to protect shorelands and flood-hazard areas from development. It underpins the official town map and guides local regulatory decisions.

HOW MANY MUNICIPAL PLANS ARE THERE IN VERMONT?

A municipality is political unit, such as a city, town, or village, incorporated for local self-governance.

*Based on data from September 2016.





A source of information: The plan is a valuable source of facts and figures on things like population changes, economic trends, and future housing and infrastructure needs; it also locates and describes important historic and natural resources. Having this information well organized and easily accessible is quite valuable to numerous stakeholders: local boards, commissions, citizens and businesses, the press, and governmental organizations, including neighboring towns, state agencies, and regional planning commissions.

DID YOU KNOW THAT EVEN THE TOWN OF GLASTENBURY HAS A PLAN?

With two roads, eight houses, and a population ranging between four and 20 (depending on the day), even the tiny unincorporated Town of Glastenbury has a plan. If you are a small town debating whether or not you can undertake this process, take inspiration from this community that has had a plan since 1991. Being small has its advantages — like holding meetings on someone’s porch or hosting barbecues during your public hearings.

A source for strategic planning and studies: Few plans can address every issue in sufficient detail. Therefore, municipal plans often recommend further studies to develop policies or strategies to meet specific needs like creating more housing or managing stormwater.

A tool for coordination: Municipal plans are important in conveying a community’s vision for broader initiatives such as the development of intermunicipal, regional, and state agency plans and programs.

A source for community standards in state regulatory proceedings: Act 250, Vermont’s statewide land use law, the Section 248 permitting process for energy projects, and other state regulatory processes reference municipal plans as part of the permit process described in [Appendix 2](#).

EIGHT-YEAR PLAN, 20-YEAR VISION

Many municipal plans have thorough inventories describing the present but do not adequately address what the municipality strives to be in the future, nor do they state specific policies or programs to help residents make their desired future a reality. Imagine beyond the eight-year term and plan for what you want your community to be like in 20 years!

Municipal plans in Vermont are necessary to:



Empower local decisions by making it possible to adopt

- Zoning regulations
- Subdivision regulations
- Flood-hazard and other free-standing regulations
- A capital budget and program and charge impact fees



Influence state regulatory proceedings:

- Act 250 applications must conform to the municipal plan
- Applications for a Section 248 Certificate of Public Good must give due consideration to the municipal plan



Qualify and receive priority for certain state and federal programs, including

- Municipal planning grants*
- State designation programs*
- Downtown and village tax credits (and other benefits of designation)*
- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities funding
- Brownfield redevelopment funds
- Community development and affordable housing funds

*Requires a confirmed planning process that includes approval of the municipal plan by the regional planning commission.



TOWNSHEND