

## Rural Areas

### **Goal 3.4** *Preserve the working landscape and the rural character of Hinesburg.*

Actions:

- 3.4.1** Assess and revise the zoning for the rural portions of the Rural Residential 1 zoning district to reinforce the rural character of these areas – particularly the northern and southern portions of the district.
- 3.4.2** Guide development so as to minimize impacts on agricultural and forestry operations, retain tax abatement program eligibility, and reduce conflicts between agriculture/forestry and other land uses.
- 3.4.3 Direct development in agricultural and forest areas to land that is less suitable for agricultural or forestry due to poor soils, slopes and other property size, location or access constraints.
- 3.4.4 Ensure the creation and preservation of access and proper rights of way to preserve the long term viability of agricultural and forest lands.
- 3.4.5** Direct development to avoid primary resource areas including: wetlands; flood hazard areas; steep slopes of 25% or greater; surface waters and setback area; rare, threatened and endangered species locations and significant natural communities. See chapter 5 for discussion of these resources.
- 3.4.6** Direct development to minimize impacts on secondary resource areas including: moderately steep slopes between 15-25%; prime and statewide agricultural soils; core wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors; deer wintering areas; important cultural features (e.g., historic structures, stone walls). See chapter 5 for discussion of these resources.
- 3.4.7 Plan subdivision of lands to minimize the fragmentation of forest land.
- 3.4.8 Explore zoning techniques for the preservation of Hinesburg’s forest resources – e.g., a separate forest district, overlay districts for important forest lands, design standards for forest preservation.

### **Goal 3.5** *Monitor the Town’s progress in implementing the rural area vision outlined in this plan.*

Actions:

- 3.5.1 Conduct natural resource and wildlife habitat inventories for public use, and for use by the DRB in the development review process.
- 3.5.2 Develop and maintain a set of indicators as a measure of rural development patterns (e.g. annual, bi-annual or every five years).
- 3.5.3 Implement a periodic review of Hinesburg’s development activity with the DRB to assess the practical implementation of land use regulations and to address any inadequacies or misinterpretations.

## Rural Areas

A working landscape of agriculture, forestry, and greenspaces with low density residential use typifies over 80% of Hinesburg. The rural areas are comprised of the agricultural lands with interspersed woodlands west of Route 116 (AG district), the forested hillsides east of Richmond Road, North Road, and Route 116 (RR-2 district), as well as the wooded and largely undeveloped northern portion of town near Mt. Pritchard (portion of RR-1 district). The Agricultural and Rural Residential 2 districts have by far the lowest residential development density of any zoning district – AG, approximately one dwelling unit per 30 acres; RR-2, approximately one dwelling unit per 28 acres. Certain small neighborhoods have higher densities of one dwelling per 10-12 acres, but these are few in number and are not the dominant land use.

Hinesburg's rural character and unique sense of place depend on the separation and lower development densities provided by greenspace and rural vistas of these areas. Private and public farmland and forests are important assets to the Town for their capacity to support a local economy and as natural infrastructure for ensuring water and air quality, wildlife habitat, aesthetics, recreation, and education.

***Preserving rural character and a working farm and forest economy is paramount in this largest portion of Hinesburg.***

What is Hinesburg's rural character? In the rural areas of town, it is a landscape where forests, farmland, and other greenspaces predominate. These greenspaces and working lands form the context within which limited development is part of the surroundings rather than the dominant land

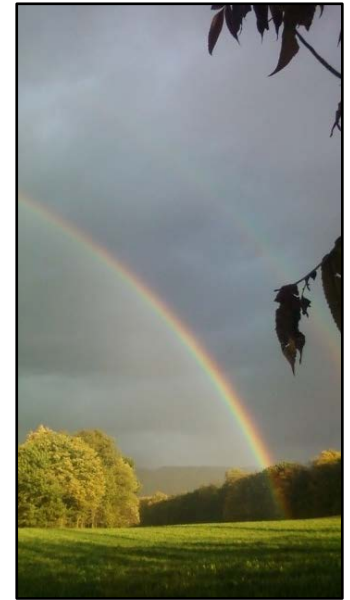
use. This requires careful balancing of growth and development, land conservation, economic vitality, and resource stewardship. This is especially true in Hinesburg given the proximity to the Burlington metropolitan area, and Chittenden County's continued growth. Some of the pressures include increased land valuation, property tax burden, growth in surrounding towns, and a shift away from land intensive dairy farming that served as the dominant agricultural use for much of the 20th century.

### Future Land Use – Rural

A comprehensive package of rural zoning revisions was adopted by the Selectboard and affirmed by voters in 2013 after five years of concentrated work by the Planning Commission that followed decades of debate and discussion. These changes had three basic objectives:

- Provide rural area landowners with more land use options by expanding the types of uses allowed in the Agricultural and Rural Residential 2 zoning districts.
- Clarify and improve rural area development design standards to make sure important natural resources are better defined by the Town, and considered early in the design process.
- Define how much residential development is allowed via an objective formula, and allow for smaller lot sizes to increase flexibility when creating new subdivisions.

It will likely take five or more years to assess the impact of these changes, even as minor revisions and fine tuning are done on an ongoing basis. One anticipated zoning change is the reassessment and likely splitting of the RR-1 district to better recognize that the northern portion (south of Mt. Pritchard) is really part of the rural areas (similar to the RR-2 district) as opposed to being a rural residential area. The southern portion of the RR-1 district may also be reassigned to a new or existing zoning district (e.g., AG



district) given how different it is from the core of the RR-1 district along Richmond Road.

### Rural Residential Area

North and east of the village is the rural residential area. Residential development dominates much of this area with higher densities along the Richmond Road corridor and lower densities elsewhere. This part of town is home to several larger neighborhoods such as Aube Ridge Road, Partridge Hill, and Birchwood Drive (“Sunny Acres”), as well as two of Hinesburg’s three mobile home parks (Triple L and Mountain View). The Richmond Road and Pond Brook Road sections also serve as gateways to densely settled areas around Lake Iroquois and Sunset Lake (see shoreline area below). Although not part of the Town’s growth area, portions of the rural residential area are served by municipal water and sewer, particularly along the western portion of the Richmond Road corridor. Largely the result of historical development patterns, the existing residential land use and topography clearly distinguish most of this area from the more rural forested hillsides to the east. The land south of Richmond Road to the Route 116, North Road intersection is less developed and lacks access municipal water and sewer. This area has clusters of residential development, but also has larger parcels with substantial undeveloped forest.

Beyond the areas described above, the rural residential area also includes a large portion of the CVU Road corridor (including Champlain Valley Union High School) and land and neighborhoods east of Route 116 near Place Road and Billings Farm Road. Although currently included in the RR-1 zoning district, the rural residential land use area doesn’t include the wooded and largely undeveloped northern portion of town near Mt. Pritchard. This area is more similar to the Rural Residential 2 district, and is in need of rezoning to recognize its development constraints and the

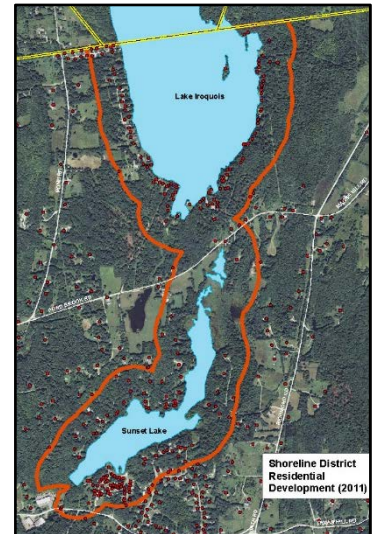
importance of keeping its natural features intact. The Planning Commission has also discussed the southern portion of the RR-1 district, and it may also warrant re-districting.

### Future Land Use – Rural Residential

Continued residential development is anticipated; however, this will likely be limited to smaller projects due to municipal water and sewer capacity issues. Clarifications to allowed uses and development densities are needed, similar to the analysis done for the rural areas. **As noted above, zoning for both the northern and southern portions of the RR-1 district also need to be reassessed given how different these areas are from the more densely settled central portion of the district.**

### Shoreline Area

The areas around Lake Iroquois and Sunset Lake are densely settled with a mixture of year round homes and seasonal camps. Development density here is second only to the village growth area – Shoreline zoning district, approximately 2.2 acres per dwelling (calculated from E911 and parcel data). Around Lake Iroquois, many year round homes were originally built as camps, and later were improved. Seasonal camps still predominate on east side of Lake Iroquois (e.g., along East Shore Road). With frontage on the lake a premium, and most lots created prior to the advent of zoning regulations and wastewater regulations, parcel sizes tend to be small and development density highest along the waterfront. This is in sharp contrast to the northern portion of Lake Iroquois that lies in Williston, which is far less developed. Lake Iroquois also serves as a public recreation resource with a State fishing access on the northwest side in Williston, and a municipally operated (four town collaborative) public beach and trail system on 150 acres at the northern end, also in Williston.





Sunset Lake is a smaller and shallower lake with less recreational use and no developed public access. Residential uses around Sunset Lake tend to be more year round than Lake Iroquois, including three sizable neighborhoods – Sunset Lane (East and West) on the northwestern shore, Birchwood Drive on the southeast shore, and the Sunset Villa mobile home park (Jourdan Street) on the south shore. There is some agricultural land use along the stream that connects the two lakes. Otherwise, residential uses predominate with no commercial or industrial uses except for the Industrial 2 zoning district (currently home to Iroquois Manufacturing) that sits just downstream of the Sunset Lake water control structure. With the exception of the west and southwest shoreline area of Lake Iroquois, most of the residential lots around both lakes retain substantial tree cover; however, there is little to no conserved land or dedicated greenspaces.

**Future Land Use - Shoreline**

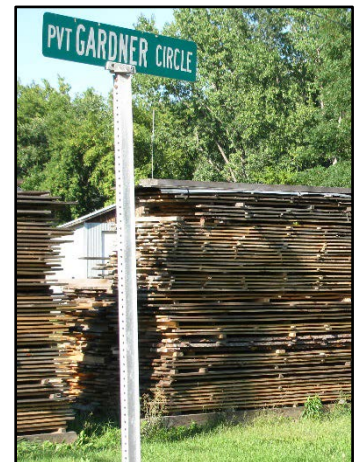
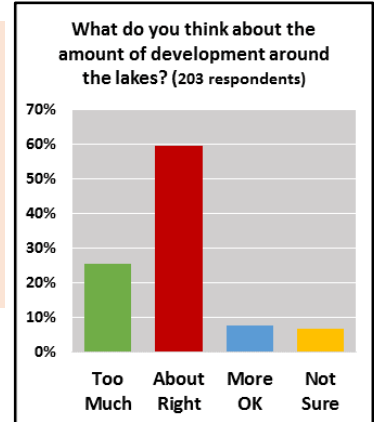
The shoreline area is largely built out. Subdivision and development of new lots is not expected nor encouraged. Future development will primarily be redevelopment of existing properties – e.g., demolition and reconstruction, home expansion and improvement, and camp conversions to year-round homes. Improving the water quality of Lake Iroquois, Sunset Lake, and downstream to Lake Champlain is a significant challenge. In a 2013 community survey, 74% of 202 respondents favored tying expansion of structures close to the shoreline to required improvements to help lake water quality – e.g., vegetation plantings, stormwater treatment, etc. In conjunction with the survey, the Planning Commission has discussed a variety of possible zoning changes to better ensure water quality and the health of the lakes. One idea is the creation of a lake watershed overlay district to extend design standards (e.g., erosion control, driveway specifications, etc.) and

protections beyond the immediate shoreline to all the areas that drain to the lakes. Modifying the boundaries of the Shoreline zoning district has also been discussed. The Shoreland Protection Act enacted in July 2014 created a State permit process to regulate development within 250 feet of lake shorelines. Any revisions to Hinesburg’s shoreline land use area and regulations should be carefully dovetailed with the State’s regulations.

**Industrial Areas**

Beyond the industrial and mixed-use portions of the village growth area, there are two other distinct industrial areas in Hinesburg. As noted above, the first is a small industrial area south of Sunset Lake (Industrial 2 zoning district, 8.8 acres) where Iroquois Manufacturing is currently located. The location of this area is tied to Hinesburg’s early history of industrial uses that relied on water power from the lakes that flowed along Patrick Brook. That history included a whole host of mills from the upper reaches of Patrick Brook south to the Town Cemetery – an area that retains the place name Mechanicsville, with a Town road of the same name. Although the mills of Mechanicsville are long gone, the Industrial 2 zoning district retains some of that history thanks in large part to the success of Iroquois Manufacturing, which has been in operation since 1925. This industrial area is largely built out with large buildings on both the north and south sides of Richmond Road.

By contrast, the other industrial area is extremely large (459 acres), and is located at the southern end of Hinesburg on the east side of Route 116 around the Hollow Road intersection. The Industrial 1 zoning district is currently home to several businesses such as Hinesburg Sand and Gravel, Clifford Lumber, VT Well & Pump, as well as a State of Vermont gravel pit. With a cluster of businesses north of Hollow Road around Clifford Lumber, the bulk of the industrial area is south of Hollow Road and



is dominated by Hinesburg Sand and Gravel's operation. This extraction and processing facility actively utilizes about a third of the zoning district (over 150 acres). With that said, south of the gravel operation, approximately 170 acres of this industrial district remains undeveloped – much of this area previously used by the owner for an elk farm.

Current zoning does not allow residential uses in any of the industrial zoning districts; however, the Industrial 1 district does have approximately 10 residential lots with pre-existing non-conforming single-family homes, most along the Hollow Road.

#### Future Land Use - Industrial

No major changes to the development pattern of the industrial areas are anticipated in the near term. As noted above, a large area in the southern portion of the Industrial 1 zoning district is undeveloped and has excellent development potential. Thanks to well drained soils, septic capacity is likely not an issue even though this area is not served by the municipal sewer system. The lack of 3-phase power is a real constraint, one that has been highlighted in Town Plans going back decades. Creating more industrial activity here will likely depend on Green Mountain Power finally making this 3-phase power connection (2016 GMP cost estimate of \$194,000), along with the landowner's willingness to entertain development south of the Hinesburg Sand and Gravel operation. Zoning changes may be warranted to help facilitate development, once the two factors above play out.

#### Flood Hazard and Fluvial Erosion Hazard Areas

Overlaid on top of the five land use areas described above are flood hazard areas associated with Hinesburg's lakes, rivers, and some streams. Underlying land uses in these areas are more limited because of the potential hazards to

private property, public and private infrastructure, and public safety. Hazards can include both inundation from flooding and catastrophic streambank erosion and realignment. The extent of these hazard areas are delineated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency through the National Flood Insurance Program maps, as well as the VT Agency of Natural Resources. Development in these areas is discouraged, but certain types of development can be allowed when necessary and when specific design standards are met to minimize the potential for loss and to prevent undue adverse impacts to the environment, surrounding properties, and infrastructure. These areas are described in detail in the natural resources chapter of the plan and depicted on Map 7 (Wetlands and Flood Hazard Areas).

#### Future Land Use – Flood Hazard

No major land use changes are anticipated for the flood hazard areas. In general, very little additional development is anticipated in these areas. The exception is likely to be a small area on the northwest side of the existing village core. Build out of the Village zoning district and establishing a road and pedestrian connection to future recreation fields and development to the north (in the Village Northwest zoning district) will have limited impacts on the Patrick Brook flood hazard area.

