

From: Cornwall Planning Commission
To: Residents of Cornwall
Re: Town Plan Amendments: Education, Economy and Plan Implementation

Hello Neighbors,

The Planning Commission has been continuing its work on amendments to the Town Plan as part of its recently completed Municipal Planning Grant. The goal of the grant was to update the Town Plan for required approval by the Addison County Regional Planning Commission. Public Information Meetings previously have been held to review the drafts of the new Flood Resilience and Forest Integrity sections as well as updates to the Population and Housing sections. The current draft sections available for public review involve the updating of the Education, Economy and Plan Implementation sections. Following the upcoming Public Information Meeting, the Cornwall Planning Commission will hold a hearing, tentatively scheduled for September, to review all the proposed amendments to the Town Plan.

A Public Information Meeting will be held at 7:00PM on July 27 to present and discuss these topics.

Education

The “Cornwall Today” Education Section has been updated to reflect the creation of the new unified Addison County Supervisory District (ACSD) and the reduced role that the Town now plays in the education of its children. Accordingly, the Education Section is in many ways less directly relevant to the current Town Plan than has historically been the case. Nevertheless, education remains important to Cornwallians and the revised Education Section recognizes this.

Updates include a discussion of the educational and enrichment opportunities currently offered at the school, as well as budget and enrollment data over the last decade, both of which have been fairly constant over the past decade. The revised Education Section closes by noting some of the steps that the Town can take to continue to stabilize and grow its student population.

Economy

This section has been updated to incorporate new statistics from the 2020 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates 2015-2019, as well as data from the Vermont Department of Taxes. It inventories the aggregate sources of income and places of employment for townsmen and reviews the services and businesses that are present in town. There is also a discussion of land use as it relates to town planning.

Cornwall's local economy is based primarily on out-of-town employment, agriculture, home-based businesses and several small businesses. Planning for how the community manages its land resources also is part of the economy. As a community, we wish to support the businesses in town and assist landowners as they steward these resources.

Plan Implementation

The Plan Implementation section lists specific actions that the Town should take over the course of the next five years to implement the priority goals and objectives of the Town Plan. Six implementation actions from the current Town Plan consisting of Affordable Housing, Home-based Businesses, Historical Land-Use Pattern, Working Landscape, Recreation Opportunities and Land Conservation Efforts have been revised and updated. Two new actions consisting of Child Care Opportunities and Renewable & Local Energy have been added.



ECONOMY

Cornwall's local economy is based primarily on out-of-town employment, agriculture, home-based businesses and several small businesses. Planning for how the community manages its land resources also is part of the economy. As a community, we wish to support the businesses in town and assist landowners as they steward these resources.

INVENTORY

Income for Residents

According to the Vermont Department of Taxes, Cornwall's income levels are well above the Addison County medians. The income of the town's residents has been among the highest in the region for the past 35 years. The Vermont Department of Taxes summary of median family income in Cornwall has risen from \$57,086 in 2000 to \$78,527 in 2009 and more recently to \$109,619 in 2019. In comparison, the Addison County median family income in 2019 was \$78,872. When adjusted for inflation to 2019 dollars, the net increase is roughly \$15,500 from 2009 to 2019.

Educational Attainment for Residents

<i>Education attainment, Town and County</i>		
	Cornwall	Addison County
<i>Less than high school diploma</i>	2%	6%
<i>Regular high school diploma or GED</i>	22%	30%
<i>Some college</i>	9%	15%
<i>Post-secondary degree (AD, BA, etc.)</i>	38%	33%
<i>Advanced (Masters, Doc.)</i>	29%	16%
Summarized from ACS 5-year estimate, 2020 B15003		

Table 3: Educational attainment for Cornwall and Addison County, Vermont (U.S. Census)

The majority of Cornwall’s townsofolk are a highly educated workforce. With all of Addison County for comparison, Cornwall has proportionally more people who have completed post-secondary education, and relatively fewer people who have not completed high school. As illustrated in Table 4, many of Cornwall’s residents are employed in educational and health care services, including Porter Medical Center and Middlebury College, which would account for a number of these advanced degrees.

Employment

In 2020, 46% of the Cornwall workforce was employed in the educational services, health care and social assistance professions. The top three employment industries, the sectors that begin with Educational Services; Professional; and Retail, which employ more than twice the remaining industries represented in the town’s workforce. This illustrates one of the central tensions to land use planning in Cornwall - while our town is, or has the appearance of, a working rural landscape, the vast majority of its residents are engaged in non-agricultural industries.

INDUSTRY	
<i>Civilian employed population 16 years and over</i>	
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	46.4%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	13.5%
Retail trade	12.2%
Other services, except public administration	6.7%

Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	5.4%
Construction	5.2%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	2.8%
Manufacturing	2.2%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	1.5%
Public administration	1.1%
Wholesale trade	1.1%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	0.9%
Information	0.7%

Table 4: Cornwall employment by sector (U.S. Census)

Many of the jobs held by town residents are outside the boundaries of Cornwall. As illustrated in the map below, a great number of residents work in the Town of Middlebury. Two areas of Middlebury are highlighted as dense areas of employment for Cornwall folk: near Middlebury College and Porter Medical Center. Beyond the borders of Addison County, many Cornwall residents work in Burlington and Chittenden County.

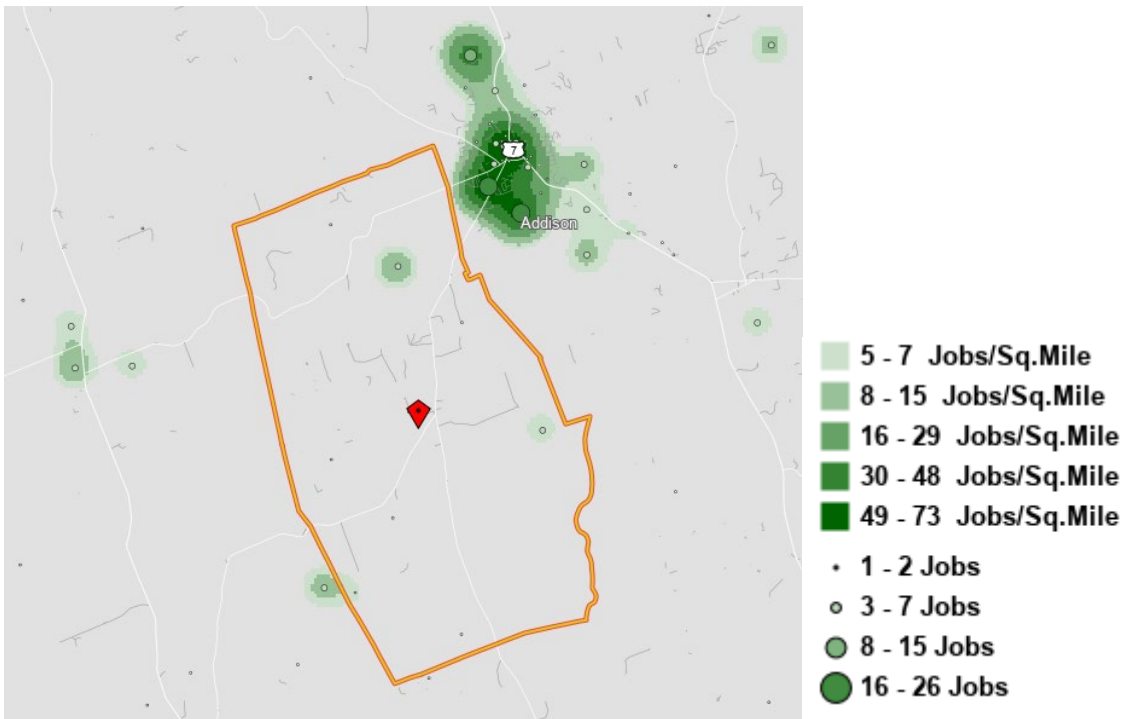


Figure 9 – Map from US Census Bureau On the Map tool, <https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>

As of 2020, the American Community Survey estimates that there are 890 individuals over the age of 16 in Cornwall, 534 of whom are in the workforce. The majority of these individuals, approximately 390, get to work by driving alone, with a small amount carpooling or using other means of travel. During this same period, 83 individuals worked from home, relatively level with the 78 who were estimated to have worked from home in 2010. It also should be noted that much of the surveying for the 2020 American Community Survey took place in the first half of the year, which was still early in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another facet of the town's economy is the portion of the population who are retired. The US Census Bureau tracks the number of households that received retirement income. While not a perfect measure, it can provide some point of reference. According to the American Community Survey, there has been a general trend upwards in the number of households receiving retirement income. In 2010 the survey states that 18.3% received retirement income, in 2015 it was 10.9%, and in 2020 28.1%. In each case, the margin of error for these numbers suggests some possibility for variation, but they suggest Cornwall has roughly 1 in 5 households, out of 442 households in 2020, that receive retirement income.

Although agriculture employs fewer of our residents than historically has been the case, the landscape of the town is visually and in practice still engaged in agriculture. According to the State of Vermont's records on the Current Use Program, there are about 7,845 acres in town enrolled in the program. This is a little over 40% of the town's total area being managed for agriculture and silviculture.

And while there are few dairy operations in town, currently two, a dwindling number of other agricultural businesses maintain a noteworthy and varied presence.

Cornwall-based Non-agricultural Business

There are a number of townsmen who own and operate businesses in town or work from home. In addition to the retail operations of the two orchards, there are a variety of businesses in town, including a motorsports and boat storage facility, several construction and excavation firms, a vehicle body shop, a rug hooking school and retail operation, as well as others. Aside from businesses that actively seek local customers, several townsmen run their businesses from home. One noteworthy absence is the small childcare center that has closed since the last writing of the town plan. The lack of childcare providers in Cornwall and neighboring communities, not only has revenue and employment impacts in the town, but also has the ripple effect of making it harder for local working parents to find childcare so that they can work. Another form of local business that has blossomed in the past decade is the use of residential homes as short-term rentals. At present, very little is known about the impact of these on the local economy and the housing market, but the monetization of residences for temporary accommodation should be included for a complete picture of the local economy.

Cornwall's work-from-home contingent, according to the American Community Survey, saw marginal growth since 2010, but that is also possibly quite different now due to changes from the pandemic.

Demographic Considerations

Many Cornwall residents enjoy a relatively high standard of living with regionally high incomes and advanced degrees. This information, paired with the demographic discussion of the Population section, should highlight the fact that Cornwall is a community of mostly high earning and/or high net worth individuals many of whom are in a later stage of their career or retired. As the Population section noted, there are some members of our community living below the poverty line. Our plans should reflect the community and be mindful of the range of households that are part of the town. The Planning Commission should seek to better understand the avenues the town might have to encourage the in-flow of younger people and a greater variety of incomes and employment.

Agricultural Economy

The appearance of an agricultural landscape is a large part of Cornwall's appeal as a town. People in Cornwall have long depended on the land to generate regular income, but over time the value derived from the landscape tends to be more from real estate, and less from farm-based income. Aside from the profits generated by property sales, available land becomes perceived as being more valuable and thus less affordable for those interested in agriculture pursuits.

It is a state and local priority to preserve prime agricultural land and Cornwall should consider how to continue to plan for agriculture to be a key element of our local land use policy making. Aside from providing local employment, the thoughtful management of land can ensure we have access to land that can contribute to a local food supply.

Cornwall should continue to support a farmer's right to farm using Required Agricultural Practices. Farmers, along with the appropriate state and federal agricultural agencies, should also be encouraged to farm in an environmentally responsible way utilizing Accepted Management Practices (AMPs) and Best Management Practices (BMPs). Residents involved in planning and conservation should familiarize themselves with supportive resources for current farmers and those looking to acquire land to farm. Those involved in planning and zoning should look to creative agricultural policies which support on-farm businesses and boost the economic viability of farms.

Home-Based Businesses and Work-from-Home

There are a wide variety of non-agricultural home-based businesses in town, including those involving excavation, architecture, landscape design, woodworking, dog kennels and horse stables. Cornwall residents operate most of these from the property on which they live. Operating a business from residential property is a traditional practice

in rural areas where the dominant economic activity, farming, could be described as a home-based business. Cornwall should support the ability of residents to work from home. Working in Cornwall may increase the chance of an individual becoming involved in town community activities, reduce the amount of commuting traffic on local roads, and generate economic activity within the town.

Some of Cornwall's home-based businesses pre-date the town's zoning regulations and many have been permitted as home occupations. However, some do not meet the strict definition of a home occupation found in the current zoning regulations or they have grown beyond them. From time-to-time, conflicts arise between business operators and their neighbors over the impacts of the business on surrounding property owners. Cornwall should reexamine its regulations related to home-based businesses and develop standards that will allow many of the town's existing businesses to meet the legal standards of the regulations and that will protect neighboring property owners from potential nuisances that in certain situations may be generated by home-based businesses.

While some of the local businesses do not rely on the internet as a primary means of conducting business, many opportunities for remote work and ancillary elements of running a business rely on fast and reliable internet service. Currently, Cornwall has one internet-service provider offering DSL hardwire service and one offering high speed satellite service. Cornwall should consider how best to support local business with a concerted effort in updating high-speed internet infrastructure.

Maple Broadband, a local communications union district of which Cornwall is a member, has been working in conjunction with other local communities to upgrade broadband service in Addison County. Local people making these kinds of sizable investments in technological upgrades have some noteworthy historical precedent in Cornwall. Almost one hundred years ago during rural electrification, after other corporations had decided not to expand service into Cornwall, the town's residents joined with Salisbury to create a local utility company to extend service to everyone in both towns. Eventually, other small rural communities around Salisbury and Cornwall joined this company and many additional local towns were electrified through these efforts.

Commercial Development in Cornwall Village

Cornwall Village once was a commercial center, albeit small, that provided a variety of goods and services to local residents. Due to the closing of Longey's Cornwall Country Store in the 1980s and the Cornwall Store in the early 2000s, there is nowhere in town where residents can purchase basic groceries or other such goods. In a small town like Cornwall, a general store or cafe offers residents a public space outside of the home in which to meet and engage with neighbors, in addition to being a convenient place to purchase a few household necessities. As recently as 2011, a majority of residents in a Planning Survey supported some kind of small general store in town, with anecdotal support continuing to be strong.

Such commercial development should be of a scale appropriate to a small, Vermont village center and provide goods and services needed by town residents. Recently there have been some early moves to develop a small-scale retail business at the site of a former general-store type business. As of writing, this project is in the permitting phase.

While it is important to have a sense of what kind of amenities and services Cornwall residents would welcome, it is just as important to have a clear understanding of the limiting factors of implementing such plans. Lack of available land, water, and wastewater infrastructure are significant hurdles to discuss. The Town should be prepared to discuss these options for the future – when land becomes available, or a development proposal is presented to the town. Cornwall’s zoning regulations should be reviewed to ensure that design standards, such as building size, permitted uses, signage, lighting and parking promote only relatively small-scale commercial activity and complement the character of the village. Investigation of potential wastewater infrastructure in the village also is recommended. The neighboring Town of Shoreham, which constructed a treatment system in its village, may provide a model that could be used in other similarly situated rural hamlets.

EDUCATION

Education is an important planning topic for a number of reasons. In rural communities like Cornwall, the local school and its related events and organizations are a central component of community life and a mechanism for increasing residents’ participation in and identification with their town. The quality of education in a community affects how attractive it is to new residents, especially those with children or about to start families.

INVENTORY

Overview of Schools

Cornwall is a member of the Addison Central School District (ACSD), which owns, maintains and administers the Town’s public elementary school, the Anna Stowell Sunderland Bingham Memorial School (Cornwall School), as well as the public middle school and high school located in Middlebury. The elementary school is located proximate to the Cornwall village center and currently serves children from kindergarten through fifth grade. The Middlebury Union Middle School (MUMS) educates the district’s sixth through eighth graders and the Middlebury Union High School (MUHS) is the public high school for ACSD ninth through twelfth graders. Cornwall children attend MUMS and MUHS along with students from Bridport, Middlebury, Ripton, Salisbury, Shoreham and Weybridge. There are also a number of private schools in the area, although none are located in Cornwall.

Cornwall students and residents have access to vocational training at the Hannaford Career Center (the Hannaford Center) in Middlebury. The Hannaford Center also has the capability to offer distance learning and interactive educational programs. The Community College of Vermont (CCV) offers college classes, professional training and continuing education opportunities to adults from a site in Middlebury as well. In addition, Middlebury College offers a wealth of educational, enrichment and cultural activities and opportunities to the public.

Cornwall historically has had a handful of home-based early childhood education providers, but the bulk of the area's childcare programs are located in Middlebury and elsewhere in Addison County. Middlebury is home to several of the area's largest early childhood education programs, including Mary Johnson Children's Center, Otter Creek Child Center, College Street Children's Center, Aurora Preschool, Quarry Hill School and the Addison County Parent/Child Center, among others.

Cornwall School

As the only school located within the Town of Cornwall, Cornwall School is the primary focus of the Education Section of the Town Plan. However, MUMS, MUHS, the Hannaford Center, CCV, Middlebury College and the area's early childhood education centers all play important roles in educating Cornwall's children and residents.

a. The Facility

Cornwall School is a masonry and steel structure that was constructed in 1959. Prior to construction of the current school, Cornwall owned several "one-room" schoolhouses located in different parts of the town. By the 1950s, these schoolhouses had become overcrowded and outdated, and the student population was projected to continue to grow. Accordingly, Cornwallians recognized the need for a new, central school of sufficient size and capacity to educate all of the Town's elementary school-age population for years to come. The tax rate at that time was relatively high, however, and public sentiment opposed any tax increase. Instead of funding construction through a tax increase, the Town spearheaded a campaign asking for personal contributions to offset the amount to be borrowed for the new school. In the end, the Town raised \$129,000 for the new school through donations and in 1959 the Peet family donated the approximately five-acre parcel that remains the home of Cornwall School today.

In February 2018, the Cornwall School building and land were deeded to the ACSD as part of the unification of the school district (the District) prompted by Act 46. The District now is responsible for the cost of operating, maintaining and making necessary capital improvements to Cornwall School. Previously in 2017, the District launched a facilities master planning process to review all of the ACSD's school buildings, evaluate their condition, strengths and weaknesses and ultimately to determine what school facility projects to prioritize and how best to configure district resources, with the stated goals of ensuring student success, equitable opportunities across the entire ACSD learning community, and fiscal responsibility to ACSD taxpayers. The culmination of this planning process may result in the closure of one or more elementary schools in the District. If Cornwall School were to close, ownership of the school property would revert to the Town of Cornwall and the Town would have to determine what to do with the property.



Figure 10 – Cornwall School playground

There have been many improvements to the Cornwall School building and property in recent years. Since 2016, the roof has been repainted to address cosmetic rusting issues and several efficiency and electrical upgrades were made to the building. In 2019, asbestos tiles from the halls were abated and new Flowtex flooring was installed. A wind turbine was donated and installed that not only provides electricity to the school, but also educational opportunities to the students. The playground has received several improvements, including adding trees as wind blocks, berms and other landscaping improvements. Also, several new playground structures have been added in recent years, including a gaga ball court and the “chaos climber.”

b. Enrollment

During the 1960s, Cornwall School’s first decade of operation, enrollment reached as high as 126 students. Over the next few decades, however, enrollment dropped considerably. As of 1999, the school’s enrollment had decreased to 81 students. However, since the turn of the century, Cornwall School’s enrollment largely has been stable, hovering between the high seventies and the mid-nineties, with an average enrollment between 2004 and 2022 of roughly 83 students.

Year	Enrollment	Average Class Size
2004-05	91	13.0
2005-06	90	12.9
2006-07	80	11.4
2007-08	92	13.1
2008-09	96	13.7
2009-10	83	11.9
2010-11	78	11.1
2011-12	85	12.1
2012-13	80	11.4
2013-14	88	12.6
2014-15	77	11.0

2015-16	77	11.0
2016-17	81	11.6
2017-18	78	11.1
2018-19	76	10.9
2019-20	82	11.7
2020-21	87	12.4
2021-22*	78*	13.0
Average for 2004-22	83.3	12.0

*Table 5 – Cornwall School Enrollment (2004-2022) [*6th grade moved out of Cornwall School to MUMS]*

In FY 2022, the ACSD moved the sixth grades of all of the area elementary schools to MUMS, which reduced the Cornwall student population by 11 students to 78. However, notwithstanding this shift, the school projects enrollment of 84 students for FY 2022-23, which is the highest projected student population of any of the elementary schools in the District other than Mary Hogan. The capacity of the Bingham Memorial School is 175 students (i.e., 25 students per classroom). Given current population projections, its capacity is not likely to be exceeded without a dramatic increase in the Town’s population, which is unlikely for the foreseeable future.

c. Costs

Public education is expensive, but a critically important investment. Though school budgets are now voted on at a district-wide level, Cornwall residents have been supportive of funding the district’s schools. And for good reason: quality public schools have long-lasting positive effects on the students attending those schools, as well as beneficial ripple effects that resonate throughout the community and beyond. Notwithstanding inflationary pressures, the budget for Cornwall School in recent years has been fairly stable. The FY2011 school budget was \$1,299,806. Between FY2011 and FY2016, the school budget increased at an average rate of 2.76% of year. The unification of ACSD resulted in a substantial 27% decrease in the annual school budget for FY2017.

And since then, the school budget has averaged a modest 1.5% annual increase, which actually is lower than the national change in the consumer price index over the same period. The proposed FY2023 school budget is \$1,161,677.

d. Educational & Enrichment Programs

The Cornwall School has long provided quality educational experiences, enrichment programs and community building activities for Cornwall children. Like the other elementary schools in the ACSD, Cornwall is an authorized “primary years program” school that is part of the larger International Baccalaureate (IB) teaching and learning framework. The IB program focuses on big-picture concepts and utilizes an inquiry-based approach to education. The framework is intended to help students better understand themselves, others, their communities, and the world beyond through the concept of student agency. Embedded in the IB programming are traditional educational disciplines including math, reading, writing, science, history, social studies, computer literacy, music, art and physical education. In addition to the traditional curriculum, the school offers numerous outdoor

education opportunities for students, including working in the school garden, learning in the school’s outdoor classroom, and exploring the natural landscape surrounding the school and other local areas. Many of these opportunities have been funded and/or organized by the parent-led Friends of Cornwall School (FOCS) organization and made possible with the financial support of the Gilligan Fund. In recent years, the school and FOCS have offered a variety of enrichment activities to Cornwall students such as Four Winds Environmental Education and Nordic skiing. FOCS has also spearheaded afterschool outdoor, music and art programming for Cornwall students, in partnership with area nonprofits such as the Middlebury Area Land Trust, the Middlebury Community Music Center and the Middlebury Studio School. Cornwall School hosts special events throughout the school year such as harvest festival, grand-friends luncheon, gifts for giving, “all out” days and movie nights. It has also hosted several artists-in-residence over the years, recently including puppeteers from the No Strings Marionette Company and an instructor in capoeira, a Brazilian martial art.

ANALYSIS

The unification of the ACSD has moved ownership of and control over Cornwall School from the Town to the District. Accordingly, whereas previous iterations of this Town Plan have discussed at length needs for future improvements to the Cornwall School facility and short- and long-term educational planning, these decisions are no longer made at the local level. Rather, Cornwall residents now take part in a larger conversation of District-wide educational policy and facilities planning along with residents from the other towns comprising the ACSD. Ultimately the ACSD school board, in consultation with the District’s various stakeholders, will determine whether and how investments are made in the Cornwall School facility, and more generally how it will allocate educational resources across the district. Cornwall has one representative on the 13-member ACSD school board.

While the Town no longer has a direct role in educating its children, Town decisions and policies do have an impact on education in the District. For instance, while Cornwall School’s student population does appear largely to have stabilized over the last two decades, it is certainly much lower than when the school was built. Increasing the stock of affordable and workforce housing in Cornwall, investing in broadband and other infrastructure and amenities that can facilitate remote work, and supporting the provision of early childhood education and afterschool programs in Cornwall and Middlebury as well as other nearby towns would make it easier for young families to settle in Cornwall, boosting student enrollment.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

This section of the Cornwall Plan lists specific actions that the town should take over the course of the next eight years to implement the priority goals and objectives of this plan, and to move towards the creation of the community described in the vision statement above. They are as follows, listed in the same approximate order as the Plan Goals and Recommendations.

A. Better understand affordability challenges and opportunities

Action 1: Promote and support affordable housing

Completion Date: Ongoing

Who: Planning Commission and Select Board

How: Investigate sustainable, affordable housing models that may be appropriate for Cornwall. Assess the possibilities of requiring an “affordable housing” fee from all major subdivision applications and other options designed to make housing in Cornwall more affordable.

Why: High home prices, energy costs and tax rates continue to be viewed as obstacles for young families, older residents on fixed incomes and many in the greater Middlebury area’s workforce. In addition, according to the State definition of affordable housing, an Addison County household earning 80% of the Median Family Income could afford to spend \$1376 on housing, yet the \$1856 median monthly ownership cost in Cornwall greatly exceeds that level. The elementary school enrollment needs to have a student population that affords financial sustainability.

B. Further support home- based businesses

Action: Review and propose appropriate zoning regulations to ensure that clear and practical definitions for “home-based business” and “home occupation” are included.

Completion Date: Ongoing

Who: Planning Commission and Select Board

How: Use existing regulations from other towns, if appropriate. If none are appropriate, craft language that is clear and definitive. Encourage all of those in Town who currently have home-based businesses or home occupations to participate in development of workable definitions.

Why: It has become apparent that the existing definitions are too vague to ensure consistent interpretation and application by the DRB and Zoning Administrator.

C. Reinforce our historic settlement land-use pattern

Action 1: Review zoning regulations and assess opportunities to increase housing densities in village and medium density residential areas consistent with historical settlement patterns.

Action 2: Work with Select Board and state agencies to encourage further traffic calming measures in the Cornwall Village and West Cornwall areas.

Completion Date: 2025

Who: Planning Commission and Select Board

How: Review case studies from other towns with similar development patterns to evaluate alternatives available to reinforce historic settlement patterns. Assess the current town road signage and consider additional signage. Discuss the possibilities of crosswalks, visual cues such as striping or narrowing of roadway, short runs of sidewalk, posting Town roads with lower speed limits, and consistent speed enforcement surveillance to slow traffic.

Define traffic calming needs and locations and present a case to the Select Board.

Why: In prior planning surveys, almost 80% of respondents wanted a safer pedestrian environment connecting existing civic buildings. The Select Board frequently receives correspondence from Town residents requesting analysis and action to reduce speeds on Town roads and the highways that pass through Cornwall. Historic settlement areas encourage a landscape of villages and hamlets surrounded by areas of agricultural and natural areas, and also provides opportunities in the future for more residents to access services and amenities by bicycle or foot.

D. Preserve the working landscape

Action 1: Promote related town-wide events and education which foster the support networks and foundations needed to generate agriculturally focused social and economic capital.

Action 2: Review and amend Cornwall's zoning and subdivision regulations to better ensure the preservation of working landscape and encourage a healthy, local agricultural economy.

Completion Date: 2024

Who: Planning Commission and Select Board

How: The CPC, working with other Town groups, will facilitate opportunities that support awareness of and provide a forum for highlighting the benefits of a working landscape, such as the October 2020 Conservation Commission online panel titled “Setting Land Aside for Conservation,” featuring representatives of the Vermont Land Trust and the Middlebury Area Land Trust, as well as a professional land appraiser. The recording of the panel is available on the Conservation Commission’s website, and can be used as a model for additional forums and events.

The CPC will review the zoning and subdivisions regulations and amend, as needed, to ensure the preservation of the working landscape and present any amendments to the Select Board for approval

Why: Prior surveys indicated that residents feel strongly about the need to maintain the rural character of Cornwall and to support local agricultural enterprises. Attendees at the 2016 Community Values workshop identified farms and working lands as one of eight high-priority values. Participants marked about 40% of Cornwall’s lands as valuable for farms and working lands. There is a continuing need to protect agricultural land.

E. Development of local childcare opportunities

Action 1: Investigate options for the development of sustainable local childcare facilities and support projects that would benefit the residents of Cornwall.

Completion Date: 2024

Who: Planning Commission and Select Board

How: Determine the current and future childcare needs of Cornwall residents. Determine current and planned future capacity of neighboring childcare centers. Support expansion of nearby childcare facilities that would benefit Cornwall residents in need of childcare.

Why: Currently there are no childcare centers in Cornwall. The lack of childcare providers in Cornwall and neighboring communities not only has revenue and employment impacts in the town, but also has the ripple effect of making it harder for local working parents to find childcare so that they can work.

F. Promote renewable and local energy generation

Action 1. Implement the use of a renewable energy source that will meet Cornwall’s municipal energy needs for the Town Hall and Town Garage.

Action 2. Encourage dispersed, small-scale development of renewable energy systems, including solar and wind turbines, for residences and businesses.

Action 3: Find an energy coordinator and Create an Energy Committee.

Completion Date: Ongoing

Who: Select Board and Energy Committee

How: The Select Board will investigate and assess various options for installing a solar array capable of generating more than 20 Kw of energy for use by the Town Hall and Town Garage. The goal is that the solar array will be installed on or near the Town Hall by 2023. Leverage the Energy Coordinator position to form an Energy Committee, whose mission will be to provide assistance and guidance related to energy conservation and savings through education and outreach utilizing state and regional resources. The Energy Committee will also disseminate information and hold public events to inform residents about renewable energy options, including low-cost options.

Why: Installing a solar array to generate electricity for the Town Hall will cushion the Town from fluctuating and unpredictable energy costs. As of 2021, Cornwall has 96 renewable energy generators and a total of 470 households, suggesting that about 80% of households do not generate their own renewable energy. For the electric sector, Vermont's 2022 Comprehensive Energy Plan sets the goal that 100% of energy needs be from carbon-free sources by 2032, and 75% from renewable energy.

G. Increase local recreation opportunities

Action: Identify potential new local recreational opportunities. Support the current activities of the Recreation Committee.

Completion Date: Ongoing

Who: Recreation Committee and Select Board

How: Seek interested persons through the use of the Town Newsletter and Town website to mutually develop a work plan and goals and to work with landowners, when appropriate, to achieve goals. The Recreation Committee, along with other Town groups, can also re-assess the practicality for recreational use of Douglas Pond and the re-establishment of town youth sports teams.

Why: Prior surveys indicated that residents seek increased opportunities to recreate in Cornwall but are challenged by not knowing what is available and what lands are accessible. Of particular interest were: bike shoulders on Routes 74 and 125, possible use of the VAST trail network for summer hiking and horseback riding, trail connectivity into Middlebury, and an inventory of property allowing unhindered access for hunting and fishing. In 2017 there was sufficient interest in Town trails to form a Trails Committee, consisting of members from the Conservation Commission, the Recreation Committee and several other interested residents. Although the Trails Committee identified Douglas Pond as a potential location for a trail, that location did not receive support from the Planning Commission. More recently, the Select Board has identified the creation of multi-use trails as one idea in several to receive American Rescue Plan Act funding.

Action 1: Promote and support efforts by landowners, land trusts, state and federal agencies and other organizations to conserve forest blocks, wildlife corridors and working lands.

Action 2: Better inform town residents about the concepts of forest integrity.

Action 3: Enhance the 2015 Ecological Inventory of Cornwall to field-verify existing data and add new data and significant areas to the Inventory.

Action 4: Revise the zoning and subdivision regulations to further enhance Cornwall's existing forest blocks and wildlife corridors.

Action 5: Create a Special Features Overlay Map to guide development decisions on projects that could otherwise fragment forest blocks and wildlife corridors.

Completion Date: Ongoing

Who: Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, and Select Board

How: The Conservation Commission will identify potential funding sources for enhancing the Ecological Inventory, and avenues for creating a Special Features Overlay Map. The Planning Commission will investigate regulatory opportunities and, where appropriate, propose revisions to zoning and subdivision regulations that promote and strengthen conservation efforts in Cornwall. The Conservation Commission will disseminate information and hold public events about land conservation. The Conservation Commission will explore what factors prompted Cornwall residents to conserve their land in the past, to better understand how these factors might motivate others to conserve in the future.

Why: With the completion of the Ecological Inventory in 2015 and the establishment of the Conservation Reserve Fund in 2021, Cornwall has the foundation to strengthen its conservation efforts even more. Prior surveys showed a strong desire for the preservation of Cornwall's natural features and rural character. Also the overwhelming approval vote (86% in 2021) to fund the Conservation Reserve Fund indicates strong consent for Town financial support of conservation efforts. In addition, Act 171 encourages Vermont municipalities to address protection of forest blocks and habitat connectors. Vermont statutes also require a flood resilience plan, and to identify and avoid development in flood hazard, fluvial erosion and river corridor protection areas.