



Rural Character in Waterford: Tools for Preservation

BACKGROUND: 2016 Town Plan goals and strategies:

Land Use Chapter:

“Maintain Waterford’s rural setting, productive agricultural and forested lands.

- Identify areas where residential density should be lowered, and create density-based zoning districts that maintain low overall density while permitting smaller lot sizes to increase energy efficient development and to protect important natural resources”

Housing Chapter:

“Provide options for affordable housing that is in keeping with the character of Waterford’s rural setting, and which retains the pristine water quality, scenic and historic areas, and natural resources.

- Provide for density-based zoning or planned unit development regulations that permit smaller house lots while preserving significant blocks of rural land and maintaining a low overall residential density.”

2016 Town Plan goals and strategies (continued):

Energy Chapter:

“Conserve forested lands in Town as a valuable renewable fuel source.

- Develop standards for density-based zoning regulations that require preservation of important blocks of forested lands while allowing smaller lot sizes.”

Economic Development Chapter:

“Retain and promote agriculture and forest-based industry as the prime economic base within the town.

- Provide assistance to residents seeking to establish on-farm enterprises, through the use of land use regulations or incentives.”

“Maintain enough forest land to support wood-related industries, retain the town’s natural beauty, promote recreational usage, and maintain a healthy, sustainable forest based economy.

- Encourage the use of “planned unit development” coupled with low density zoning and other tools to preserve agricultural and forest resources. “

Current Conditions

- 2% percent of land area, 502 acres, are within State-delineated river corridors
- 3% of the land area, 727 acres, are within wetlands
- 16% percent of the land area, 3,960 acres, have slopes steeper than 25%
- 5% of land area is permanently conserved
- 30.5% of land is enrolled in Current Use (both agricultural and forestland)
- **92% percent**, or 23,507 acres of land are **in parcels of 10 acres or greater**.
- **82% percent**, or 20,794 acres of land are **in parcels of 25 acres or greater**.



Development Trends:

Statewide:

In 2008, the Center for Rural Studies reported that the rate of development in Vermont (measured in housing units and developed acres) was **increasing twice as fast as the state's population.**

Waterford:

Housing units **increased 22%** from 477 to 580 units from 2000 to 2010, while the population increased 16%. Estimated 2015 housing unit count in Waterford was 625.

Over the four year period 2014-2017 :

- 20 new single-family houses were built
- ten new house lots were created by subdivision.
- four “primitive camps” were built.

What the experts say...

A May 2014 study by the VT Natural Resources Council (NRC) found that most subdivisions in towns with zoning and subdivision regulations are not large enough to trigger Act 250 review – therefore, **local regulations are critical to preserving land resources.**



Recommendations of the NRC study included the use of **conservation subdivision design**, and zoning that fosters **small house lots** and maintains **low overall development densities.**

Seeking Public Input:

- An online survey was posted on the Town of Waterford website on May 19th 2017
- Announcement sent home with Waterford School students in Friday Folders on May 19th, encouraging families to take the survey
- Article published in the May 22 *Caledonian Record*
- Link to survey provided in the Davies Memorial May 24th emailed newsletter
- **59 residents responded, about 5% of Waterford's adult population.**

Of those who responded...

85% were in favor of allowing more flexibility in dimensional regulations to better protect forested and agricultural land, to reduce impacts to wildlife habitats, to reduce the length of needed access driveways and roads, and to preserve scenic views.

78% were in favor of reducing overall permitted residential density in areas with important agricultural and forest resources

75.9% favored limits on impervious surfaces on lots.

61.8 % favored clearing limits on lots.

Proposal:

Resource Value Districts 10 and 25

- Boundaries are based on the “Forest Block” and “Habitat Block” GIS layers.
- Maximum density in habitat blocks rated less than “5” is 10 acres per dwelling, with the remaining parcel (after conservation subdivision) retaining at least 27 acres.
- Forest Habitat Blocks rated “5” or greater have a maximum density of one unit per 25 acres.
- Conservation Subdivision design is required, new house lots must be within 1000 feet of a Town Highway to mitigate “edge effect.”
- Only farming, forestry, single-family dwellings and primitive camps are permitted. No Conditional Uses permitted, except recreation or forestry-based businesses.

Proposal (continued):

Village District

- dwelling per 2 acres) *Increase* permitted density to 1 dwelling per acre (currently one
- Establish new location on Higgins Hill Road
- Reconfigure existing district in Lower Waterford to extend 500 to 1000 feet from centerlines of Lower Waterford Road and Rt. 18
- Establish impervious coverage limits (e.g., 25%)

Rural Residence 5 District (5-acre density)

- Applies to all lands farther than 1000 feet from a Town Highway Class 1-3, that are not within a Village District or Resource Value District

Rural Residence 2 District (existing 2-acre density)

- Applies to all lands within 1000 feet of a Town Highway Class 1 - 3, that are not within the Village District or Resource Value District.

Proposal (continued):

Agricultural Overlay

- Based on the presence of agricultural soils and/or historic use for farming.
- Underlying zone sets permitted density
- Conservation Subdivision required, and at least 27 contiguous acres must be retained.
- Only selected Conditional Uses Permitted

Conservation Subdivision Standards

- **Yield plan** establishes lot count, excludes area of steep slopes and wetlands.
- 50-75% of original parcel must be preserved for open space/working lands
- **Impervious coverage restrictions** apply to lots 1 acre or smaller
- Lot design minimizes disturbance, sites house lots close to existing road infrastructure, facilitates agricultural and forestry vehicle access to open lands.

Conservation Subdivision Design – Land Use Planning

Helps protect natural resources:

- Agricultural Soils
- Forest and Habitat Blocks

...while overcoming existing constraints to development:

- Steep Slopes
- Wetlands
- Soils not suitable for conventional septic systems
- Limited road infrastructure



Conservation Subdivision Design -- Economic Benefits:

- Reduces energy costs by limiting the length of roads and power lines in a subdivision development.
- The retention of large forest blocks supports the viability of forest-based businesses. The harvest and manufacturing of forest products contributes **\$1.4 billion** in annual economic output to Vermont's economy.
- Fall foliage accounts for **\$460 million** in tourism spending.
- Forest-base recreation supports **10,050 jobs** and generates **annual revenues of \$1.9 million**.

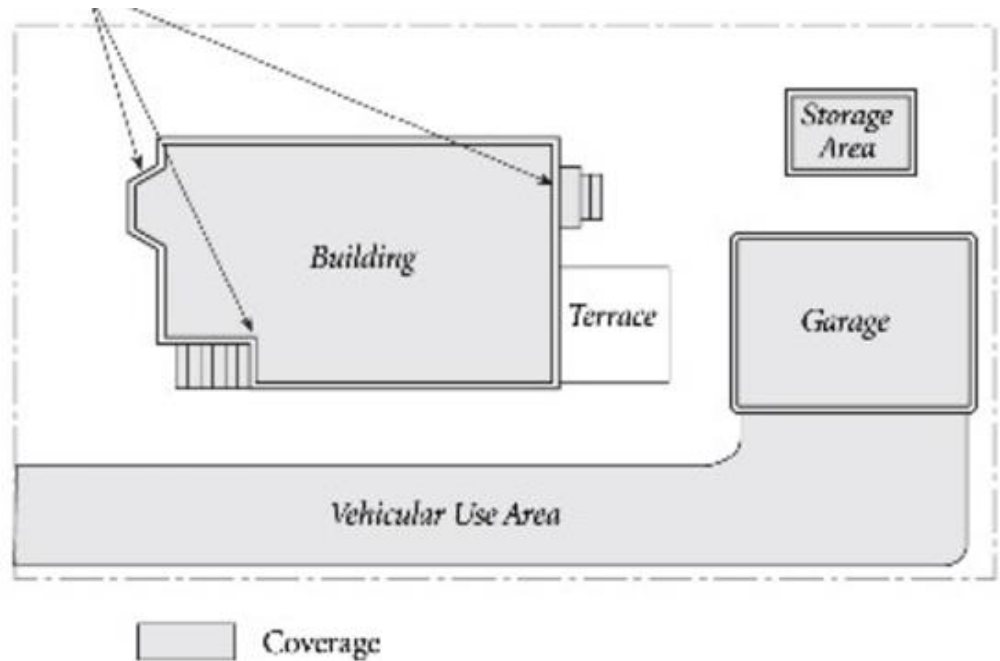
Conservation Subdivision:

- Typically 50 to 70% of the tract is conserved, including at least half of the “buildable” land.
- A “yield plan” determines the number of lots.
- Design standards direct how the subdivision is laid out.



Maximum Lot Coverage: The percent of total building footprint and impervious surface area to total lot area.

- Controls the density of development on a lot
- Useful for managing stormwater retention and runoff on-site.



The “Typical” Rural Subdivision

- All the parcel available for development
- Based on minimum lot size
- Road frontage determines layout



Too big to mow, too small to plow

- Linear development along roadway
- Spaghetti lots
- Parcels are too small for agricultural uses
- Fragments forested lands



The Alternative

- Creates open space adjacent to open space on other lands
- Maintains road access to open space (for forestry or farming)
- Shared driveways/ accesses

