

FERRISBURGH TOWN PLAN



2006

Ferrisburgh Town Plan

July 6, 2006

Thanks to all those many townspeople who contributed to the up-dated Town Plan.

The hundreds of citizens who answered the survey and provided important guidance, including several classes at the Ferrisburgh Central School; Planning Commission members; Selectboard; Zoning Board; teachers and school principal at the Ferrisburgh Central School; the Volunteer Fire Department, Conservation Commission, Historical Society and those who volunteer with the Lewis Creek Association; Rokeby Museum; Lake Champlain Maritime Museum; the Road Foreman and Tree Warden; farmers and other businesses in town; those who attended planning meetings, edited sections of the plan, and provided information and ideas; the Addison County Regional Planning Commission and Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development Municipal Planning Grant; the Greenbelt Alliance, Vermont Land Trust, and Preservation Trust of Vermont; and all those others who provided information and creative solutions to address the complex issues facing rural town planning today.

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Rowland E. Robinson, *Camel's Hump*. c. 1875. Oil on board.

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1. FORWARD

1.1. INTRODUCTION

A. General Description

The Town of Ferrisburgh, Vermont, comprises roughly 61 square miles or 39,000 acres of land in the Lake Champlain Valley. It is ranked as Vermont’s ninth largest town in area. Like much of the Champlain Valley, the town’s landscape is generally flat to rolling, with few hilly areas, some fine forestlands and extensive areas of excellent, productive agricultural soils. Ferrisburgh is well watered by the Lewis, Little Otter, Dead and Otter Creeks; it also has large areas of ecologically significant wetlands. Ferrisburgh enjoys the longest shoreline frontage of any Vermont town bordering Lake Champlain, 21 miles.

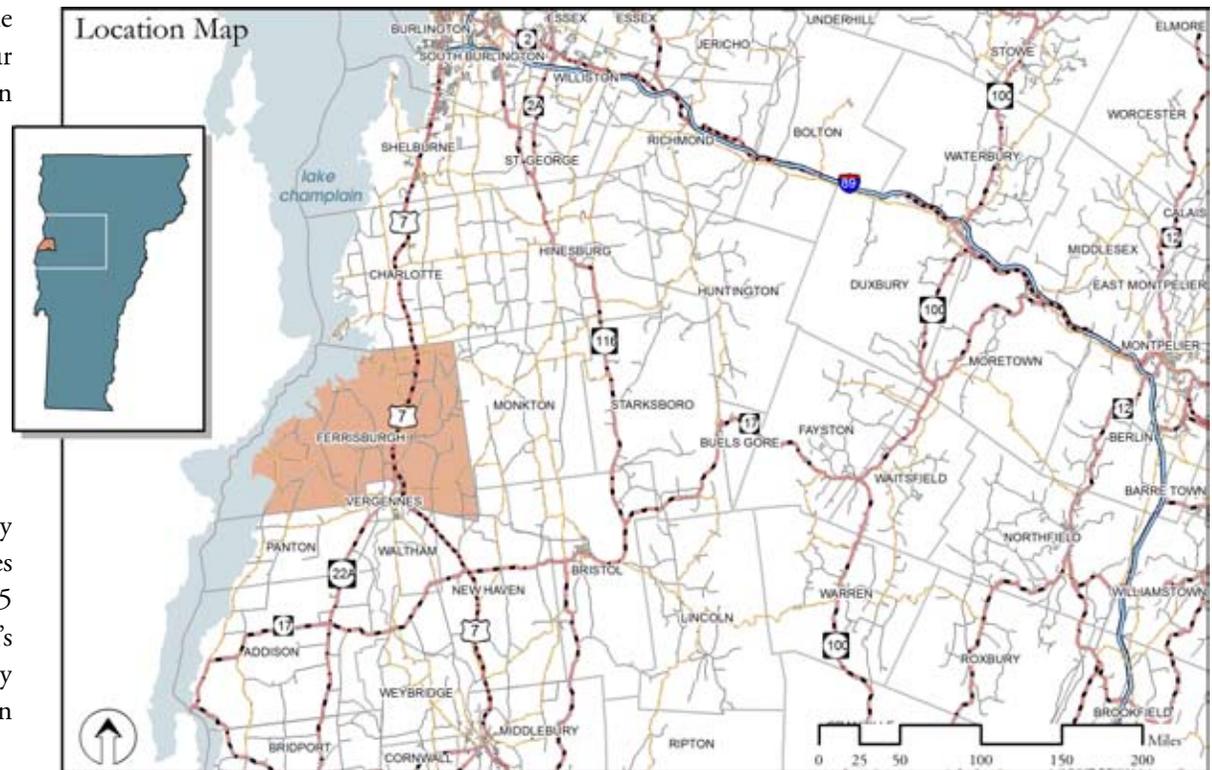
Founded in 1762, Ferrisburgh has a rich history, especially from the pre-colonial era through the Revolutionary War, which is celebrated in our nationally renowned museums, the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum and the Rokeby Museum. Many of the earliest European settlers still have descendants living and working in town or in neighboring communities. Farming, forestry and sugaring are still significant land uses in Ferrisburgh. The town also serves as a rural “home town” for hundreds of residents who work in nearby communities, and as a summer vacation spot for hundreds more from around the nation who seek rest from urban areas.

The busy, north-south U.S. Route 7 highway corridor bisects the town. The communities of Burlington and Middlebury lie roughly 15 miles north and south, respectively. Ferrisburgh’s nearest commercial and service center is the City of Vergennes, about 2.5 miles south of the Town Clerk’s Office.

B. Purpose of a Town Plan

Since the late 1960s, the citizens of Ferrisburgh have regularly assessed the natural and human resources in town and updated their town plan and the associated zoning bylaws and other regulations. The statutory authority for this planning work can be found in Chapter 117 of Title 24 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated (V.S.A.). This chapter was considerably amended in 2004 to meet changing land uses and demands for resources in Vermont. Under state law, town plans must be updated every five years.

A town plan is required to establish the goals and policies that guide future growth, development of land, provision of public services and facilities, and





protect the environment. The plan must include a map of prospective land uses and provide policy guidance for the town's land use regulations and other implementation tools. Thus, local citizens are empowered, through their interpretation of the policies in the town plan, to regulate the manner in which development proceeds in their town. Ferrisburgh residents run this planning and zoning process in order to protect the public health and welfare of the community, while protecting the town's natural resources for future generations.

In recent years there has been considerable development in Chittenden County to the north of Ferrisburgh and it is reasonable to assume that our town will experience increased development over the next five years, especially in connection with growth in employment opportunities in the Greater Burlington area. Since communities exist primarily for the health and enjoyment of those who live and work in them, it follows that the type, location and timing of community growth should be determined by the people of Ferrisburgh rather than left solely to chance or to the decisions of non-resident developers. Comprehensive planning is always better than stopgap measures. The intent of this plan, as others before, is not to propose policies or make recommendations that would eliminate any existing land uses or to stop all future development. Instead, the purpose of this plan is to channel desired growth to appropriate locations within the town, while conserving other more fragile areas.

C. Interpreting the Plan

Goals are long-range aspirations that serve as a broad planning and development guide. A goal describes the end condition that is sought.

Objectives are narrower in scope than goals. They can be either short- or long-term in their description and are achieved by implementing one or more policies. Objectives are measurable components of a goal.

Policies are specific, required actions that, when followed, will result in attainment of an objective. Policies are to be strictly adhered to in all regulatory actions and decisions involving development.

1.2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Goal A: To ensure and protect an active, working agricultural and rural landscape with a strong, diverse local economy.

1. Support and promote agriculture of all types, and encourage preservation of farm and forestlands for future generations through conservation easements and other mechanisms.
2. Minimize loss of primary agricultural soils.
3. Promote the adaptive reuse of vacant agricultural buildings, and encourage preservation of old and historic rural buildings.
4. Promote development that directly supports farming and its supporting businesses.
5. Promote and support home occupations and accessory uses of private property for small business growth, especially as it relates to the agricultural and rural nature of the local economy.
6. Promote local-grown food and fiber, farmers' markets and expanded market opportunities for value-added agricultural products and organic food.

Goal B: To preserve and protect significant natural areas, habitats, ecological corridors, wetlands, shorelines and historic features; protect the environment; and provide for recreation.

1. Work with groups – such as the Ferrisburgh Conservation Commission, Lewis Creek Association, Lake Champlain Trust, Champlain Valley Greenbelt

Alliance and the Vermont Land Trust – to protect natural resources, open space, forestland and farmland.

2. Maintain an inventory of critical habitats, wildlife corridors, areas with state rare or endangered species or ecological communities, deer wintering yards and wetlands, and establish policies for their protection.

3. Promote the preservation of historic structures and areas including villages, agricultural structures, public and private historic buildings, and remote areas of town.

4. Protect the Lake Champlain shorelands, wetlands, rivers, watersheds and aquifers; and maintain capacity studies on aquatic systems and wetlands.

5. Provide for recreation in town, including public access to Lake Champlain, Otter Creek, Little Otter Creek and Lewis Creek, walking trails, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobile trails, bicycle paths, boating and parks.

6. Identify and protect scenic waterways, scenic roads and scenic views.

7. Encourage new development that does not diminish the value of outdoor recreation.

8. Limit development in areas of town where significant environmental and natural resources are located, while promoting development in clearly identified areas away from those critical areas.

Goal C: To provide adequate and safe transportation facilities.

1. Maintain and improve town roads to high levels of safety, including increased pedestrian pathways and bicycle lanes where feasible.
2. Work with the Agency of Transportation (AOT) to limit new highway accesses onto US Route 7.
3. Work with AOT to ensure safety at road intersections, especially those that intersect with US Route 7.
4. Support public transit, car-pooling, and park-and-ride facilities.

Goal D: To plan to meet future needs for utilities, public facilities and educational facilities.

1. Work with local school boards to ensure provision of adequate school facilities to meet needs of students and mandated requirements, and broaden access to educational and vocational opportunities.
2. Improve and maintain all public buildings and facilities, and plan for future needs through ongoing capacity studies and development policies.
3. Assess future potential needs for municipal water and sewer services, and solid waste disposal.
4. Support Ferrisburgh's Volunteer Fire Department and the Vergennes Area Rescue Squad.

Goal E: To encourage energy conservation and light industry.

1. Encourage homes and businesses to conserve energy, reduce waste and recycle.
2. Encourage commercial and industrial uses that are low impact and compatible with the rural character of the town.
3. Provide access for transmission lines, while ensuring private landowner rights.
4. Promote clean, light industry and commercial development in clearly defined areas of the town, while protecting agriculture and associated farming businesses.

Goal F: To ensure low and moderate income housing is available.

1. Regularly assess housing needs of those persons with low and moderate incomes.
2. Permit and encourage density bonuses and other mechanisms in those subdivisions or PUDs that include affordable housing.
3. Permit accessory dwelling units, multi-family housing and manufactured houses.