

Town Plan: Democracy at it's Source

After several years and countless hours of work, the volunteers on the Planning Commission have submitted the single most important document affecting the Town's future: the Strafford Town Plan (STP). The Town Plan provides the framework for development and conservation initiatives. It is the standard by which all applications will be assessed and evaluated. The Town Plan is the clearest articulation of the WILL OF THE PEOPLE with respect to what kind of community we want to live in, and how we will sustain our aspirations.

As such, it is crucial that we, the people, become familiar with the contents of the plan, and come together to discuss it. The Selectboard has 120 days to hold hearings, listen to citizens' concerns, emend, and eventually approve the Town Plan. One hearing is required by law. The Selectboard has opted to hold three over the course of the summer. These hearings are exactly that: your chance to voice your thoughts, to offer ideas, and express your concerns. Your informed input is critical to the expression of our values as a community. We need to HEAR from you. This is the essence of self government and the cornerstone of our democracy. In short, it's a very big deal.

This is the first of a series of "Digests" to give those many among us who won't read the entire 100-plus page Plan an idea of what is covered and how you can locate specific interests in the Plan itself. These will be informal, bite-sized pieces intended to make the contents of the STP digestible by all. By no means will the Digests offer a comprehensive analysis of the Town Plan. They will merely outline the contents of the Plan, as submitted. The aim is to stir up interest in the widest possible discussion before the Selectboard gives its final approval. The Strafford Town Plan is available on the Town web site, or by pdf file from the Town Clerk. With adequate notice you may also request a printed copy from the Town Office.

Digest

#1

Notes on Population and Housing (from STP, Chapters I, II, and III)

The first US Census in 1790 puts the population of Strafford at 844 brave souls. After a steady ascent to an all-time high of 1,935 residents in 1830, the numbers dropped over almost a century-and-a-half to an all-time low of 598 citizens in 1970. Between 1970 and 1990, the Town grew by about 200 people per decade. The 2000 Census pegged us at just over 1,000. Ten years later, we had grown by 49 newcomers to 1,098. That was not enough to strain the Town's resources beyond our capabilities, but it was notably the highest increase of all the towns in Orange County.

The influx of the past few decades is primarily attributed to the Baby Boomers in the 70's and thereafter, and to an increase in the number of people retiring to the state. The one obvious effect is that we are an aging community, with the number of people over 65 constantly climbing. The oldest Boomers (born in 1946) will be 84 in 2030.

As for young people, the familiar lament over the past several decades has been that Vermont's youth are leaving the state. It would seem to be a no-brainer that we would want to go to some lengths to keep young people active and productive in the state they call home. It is interesting to note, however, that the problem of young adults leaving is mitigated by the positive effects of young families moving in. An analysis of IRS and Census migration patterns reveals a net population loss of zero (STP page 5).

This doesn't leave us any laurels to rest on. We still need to think creatively about how to maximize the opportunities that will keep our young people in Vermont. We need to marshal our priorities for sustainable uses of the land. We need to provide affordable housing for young people and the elderly alike. We need to keep the education of our children and citizenry among our highest priorities. We will need to identify and support appropriate avenues of economic development.

Next up: Chapters IV, V, VII — Education, Utilities & Facilities, Transportation