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## **Land Use**

### ***Background***

Weston's existing land use pattern is similar to many Vermont towns: rural residential settlement in outlying areas with a compact historic village center. Historically, much of the residential development in Weston was associated with farming and related agricultural uses, while recent rural settlement has been primarily associated with the construction of single-family homes as permanent residents or second homes. This type of housing and country lifestyle is highly valued, yet usually breaks up continuous tracts of land formerly used for agriculture or silviculture, and can contribute to sprawl.

The village center on the West River is the focal point of the Town, containing a high density grouping of buildings. The Town Office, library, two churches, an inn, two restaurants, Town Green, Weston Playhouse, Fire Station, two museums, and several retail uses are all located in the village, in addition to many residences. The village center provides a center for community interaction and a sense of community place. Recent significant events in the village include the opening of the Weston Theater Company's Walker Farm venue in 2017, and the July 2023 flood, which damaged several residential properties, the Weston Theater, and forced the closure of the Weston Market Place and gas station.

Forestland, open fields, and agricultural uses continue to be a significant land use in Weston. Approximately 44% of the Town's total land area is within Green Mountain National Forest or State Forest land, primarily along the highlands and ridges on the western and eastern parts of town. Open fields are primarily located along the West River valley and along Route 100 south of the village. Agricultural uses continue in Weston today, including cheese production and haying operations.

### ***Prospective Land Use***

The land use districts, defined in the following paragraphs, are a guide for the growth and development of Weston. Currently, Weston has 6 land use districts: Village, Residential, Rural Residential, Conservation, Shoreland, and Commercial. These land use areas provide for a variety of residential, commercial, agricultural, and recreational opportunities for the future while considering local environmental constraints as well as existing land use patterns. While the Town Plan is not a zoning bylaw, it does provide guidance for future zoning changes and updates. The Proposed Land Use Map, designating the boundaries of each district, is an integral part of the future land use plan.

#### **Village District**

The Village District includes the core village area around the Town Green on Route 100, and extends north and south along Route 100 and to the west on Lawrence Hill Road. The purpose of the Village District is to maintain the existing settlement pattern of the village and reinforce the village center as the focus of the town. This district provides for a mix of compatible commercial, moderate and high density residential, civic, and cultural uses. Planning for safe pedestrian travel within the village is critical for supporting this district given the proximity of residences, businesses, and services, and due to limited parking.

While the Village District should continue to be the primary area for commercial and residential growth, there are limitations to development due to the lack of a wastewater system and flood vulnerability. Growth and development in the village will need to be undertaken with these constraints in mind. To support the continued vitality of the village, the Town should consider completing a wastewater capacity study that would determine the need for, and feasibility of, developing a wastewater facility to service this area.

#### **Residential District**

The purpose of the Residential District is to provide for moderate density residential development and compatible land uses in areas with convenient access to existing public roads and services. This district includes lands already subdivided and committed to low and moderate density development,

including the residential areas on Slawson Road; Route 100 north of the village; the Piper Hill Road, Dale Road, and Tavern Hill Road area; and the Highland View Road and Summit Road area. Within these areas, there are opportunities for infill residential development in existing neighborhoods. This district is expected to accommodate the majority of additional residential development in Weston outside of the Village District.

#### Rural Residential District

The purpose of the Rural Residential District is to provide for agriculture, forestry, low density residential development, and other compatible land uses that maintain the Town's rural character, scenic landscape, and natural resources. Many of the properties in the Rural Residential District are larger lots with established single-family dwellings, but that still remain primarily undeveloped forest or open space land. These lands are located outside of the Conservation District and the more densely settled Residential and Village Districts.

#### Conservation District

The Conservation District contains lands that are very sensitive to development for a variety of reasons. They are usually characterized as significant resources such as productive forests, high elevations, steep slopes (often with shallow soils), wetland areas, and stream banks, among others and areas of scenic, ecological, cultural or historical significance. They are essentially undeveloped and may lack access to improved public roads or utilities and services. The Federal and State governments own most of the land in this District. This District also contains lands above 2,500-foot in elevation that require an Act 250 permit for development.

The District includes some lands that have already been developed for very low-density residential uses. These areas are typically either surrounded by or adjacent to Federal or State forestlands. However, these residential lands still provide important wildlife functions and are appropriate to be included in the Conservation District.

In general, lands in this district are suitable for silviculture, including logging, low impact recreational uses, such as nature and hiking trails, cross country skiing and hunting, and very low-density residential uses. Large contiguous open spaces should be preserved in the Conservation District.

#### Shoreland District

The purpose of the Shoreland District is to maintain the scenic and ecological resources of Wantastiquet Pond, and preserve and enhance water quality and wildlife habitat through the careful regulation of the location, design, and intensity of land use activities.

#### Commercial District

The purpose of the Commercial District is to accommodate commercial uses outside of the Village District. The Commercial District is located on the west side of Route 100 between Maple Hill Road and Benson Lane and currently includes a multi-family residential property and the Weston Rod & Gun Club property. New businesses and/or expansions of existing businesses in the Commercial District shall be consistent with the policies and goals of this Plan and shall be in a scale appropriate to other businesses in the district and in keeping with the character of the neighborhood.

#### ***Land Use Implementation***

The proposed land use plan is implemented primarily through the Town's zoning and subdivision bylaws. This section provides additional detail on several land use implementation strategies the Town is currently using or may consider in the future to implement the Town Plan. Additional strategies to support housing development are provided in the Housing Chapter.

#### Village Center Designation

The Town of Weston received approval from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development for renewal of the Weston Village Center Designation in March 2024. Village revitalization efforts have focused on community and economic development and improving pedestrian safety. The State designation offers financial assistance to property owners of income-

producing buildings through tax incentives for historic buildings, façade improvements, and building code improvements. Additionally, the designation gives Weston priority consideration for several State grant programs. The designation supports the Town Plan goals to maintain and reinforce the village center as the focus of the community, to preserve significant historic and cultural properties, and to plan for safe pedestrian traffic circulation in the village.

Planned Unit Development (PUD):

The Town of Weston has adopted both zoning and subdivision bylaws that permit clustering of rural residences in planned unit developments (PUDs). The number of residences/structures in a PUD is governed by the density permitted by the zoning rules for the district (i.e., 5 residences on a 10-acre tract in a two-acre zone), but the structures can be placed close together. This permits the conservation of open space on the remaining portion of the parcel. This tool is especially effective for residential development in the Rural Residential District and Residential District.

In contrast to typical subdivisions, PUDs encourage flexibility of design and development that promotes the most appropriate use of land, facilitates the economical provision of streets and utilities, and preserves the natural and scenic qualities of the open lands and forests of the town. When updating the zoning and subdivision bylaws, the Planning Commission will re-examine and update the sections pertaining to PUD and subdivisions. Density bonuses should be explored by the Planning Commission for PUD developments that protect natural resources, scenic vistas, or agricultural lands, and/or provide affordable housing.

Overlay Zoning

When updating the zoning bylaws, the Planning Commission should consider whether zoning regulations should contain overlay districts that include provisions that would limit subdivision of large lots in prime agricultural areas into residential parcels unrelated to farming.

The Planning Commission should also consider a Ridgeline/Hillside Overlay or other zoning bylaws to protect scenic vistas and ridgelines, particularly with respect to exterior lighting. The Planning Commission should explore the possibility of linking development restrictions to topography and elevation.

***Land Use Policies***

1. Encourage land use and development that is consistent with the Town's historic settlement pattern of a compact village center surround by rural countryside.
2. Provide for safe pedestrian travel in the village, including the development of sidewalks, crosswalks, and other traffic calming measures to slow traffic, particularly on Route 100.
3. Encourage the preservation of scenic vistas, natural resources, agricultural lands, large tracts of forestland, and open spaces.
4. Clustering homes through the Planned Unit Development process should be encouraged to conserve open space and agricultural land, and provide for municipal facilities and services in an efficient manner..
5. Require that structures be sited so as to avoid impact on scenic vistas. Exterior lighting shall be designed so the light source is not visible from public roads, adjacent residences, or distant vantage points.
6. Require that all land development (excluding outdoor recreation, forest management, and agriculture) be sited so as to avoid and protect critical resource areas, including wetlands, floodplains, river corridors, and significant ridgelines.

7. Home businesses suitable for the Village, Residential, and Rural Residential Districts should be encouraged.
8. Lands in the Conservation District are not suitable for any moderate or high-density development because of their attributes. The primary use of lands in the Conservation District should be for agriculture, forestry, open space, and low-impact recreation. Ensure that any development does not diminish the scenic and ecological resources within these areas.
9. Continue to support and encourage working landscapes that are actively used for farming, agriculture, forestry, and outdoor recreation.
10. Maintain the scale of the Commercial District to be consistent with other Town policies and goals while seeking to find adequate space/land for future commercial growth.

***Recommendations for Action:***

1. Review and update zoning bylaws for conformance with the Town Plan, with an emphasis on lot sizes, setbacks, density standards, and allowed uses..
2. Maintain the Village Center Designation for the village.
3. Conduct a wastewater capacity study to determine the need for, and feasibility of, developing a wastewater facility to service the village.
4. Evaluate the designation of additional locations for commercial growth adjacent to or in close proximity to the village center, and complete Town Plan and zoning bylaw updates if needed.
5. Review and update the Planned Unit Development provisions in the zoning bylaws to include density bonus incentives for clustered and conservation development.
6. Consider the use of overlay zoning districts to protect agricultural lands, scenic vistas, forest, and ridgelines.
7. Consider the development of architectural and site design standards for commercial development that would maintain existing community character.