

# Reading Town Plan



Adopted July 18, 2005

Planning Commission Hearing: **June 6, 2005**  
Selectboard Hearing: **July 18, 2005**  
Approved by the board of SWCRPC: **September 20, 2005**

# Chapter I

## INTRODUCTION

Since the last Reading Town Plan was adopted in 1996, the Town has undergone gradual growth and change, not unlike other towns in southern Windsor County. Changes in the economy, including the continuing decline of the machine tool industry in Springfield and Windsor over the last ten years, have affected the regional economy and the populations of towns in the region. The contrasting strength of the economy of the Upper Valley and the draw of the resort towns of Ludlow and West Windsor have also affected the town of Reading and surrounding communities.

In 2003, the Reading Planning Commission applied for and received a Municipal Planning Grant to complete a community-wide Town Plan Survey, to collect and update Census data, and to hold a public Town Plan Forum in preparation for updating the Town Plan. The purpose of this project was to look at trends that have occurred in the region during the 1990s and to gather input from the community about how to plan for the future of the town. Results of both the survey and forum are integrated in the chapters of the 2004 Town Plan. Census data is used to demonstrate how the town has changed over time.

### **Purpose of a Town Plan**

Towns have the authority to adopt Town Plans under V.S.A. title 24, Section 4381. A Plan expires after five years unless it is re-adopted by the legislative body of the town. A Town must have a duly adopted Town Plan in order to make amendments to zoning or subdivision regulations; an adopted Town Plan is also used for review of development projects under Act 250. A Plan that is approved by the Regional Planning Commission enables the Town to receive municipal planning grants from the Department of Housing and Community Affairs. In order to be approved by the Regional Planning Commission, the Town Plan must comply with the goals under Act 200 (V.S.A. title 24, Section 4302) and must contain the elements listed in V.S.A. title 24, Section 4382.

This Plan is intended to:

- Protect traditional land use patterns, as identified in the Goals and Policies sections of each chapter. These include not only historic patterns within the Town of Reading, but also regional patterns that have helped to define Reading's unique and valued character;
- Reinforce Reading's role as a small, rural community, and allow the most concentrated and extensive development to occur in the established village centers;
- Promote the statewide planning goals identified in 24 V.S.A. §4302, and allow for the effective and coordinated implementation of plans developed under Title 24 in adjacent communities and regions;
- Support and complement the land use and development goals of the Southern Windsor County Regional Plan.

### **Landscape and History**

Reading's rural character is defined by its compact, historic village centers surrounded by a rural landscape of farms and forest land. Reading's landscape is primarily hilly, with the exception of

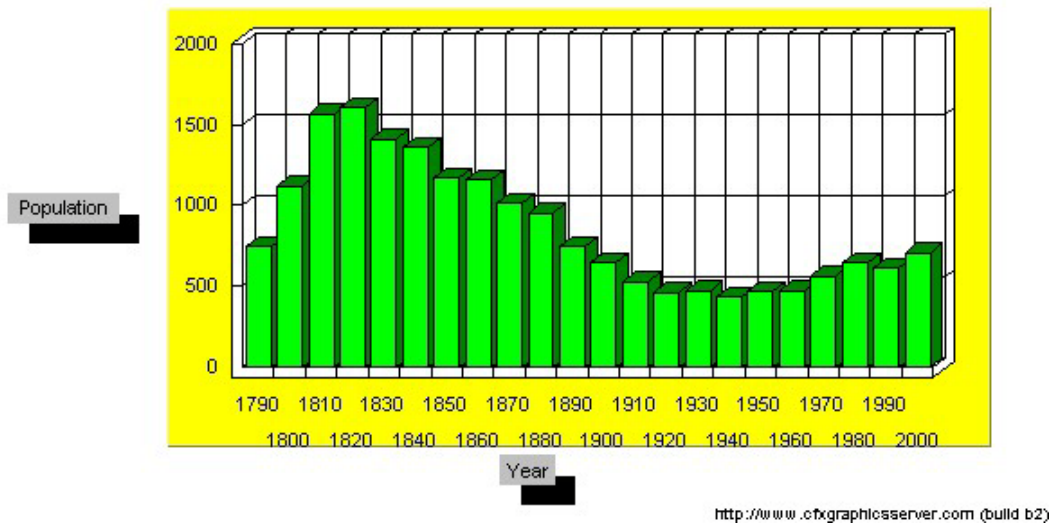
several tracts of flat agricultural land in the southern end of the Route 106 corridor. The town boasts several scenic working hill farms including Springbrook Farm, the Jenne Farm, the Newhall Farm, and others listed in Table 2.1 (page 10).

The village of Felchville is the commercial and activity center for the town. The town offices, post office, general store, greenhouse, and school are all located in Felchville, within comfortable walking distance of higher density, historic residential structures. The Tyson Road leads westward up the hill out of Felchville and into the small historic hamlet of South Reading. The Stone Schoolhouse, a historic structure owned by the town, no longer operates as a school but offers a glimpse of a more bustling village center in previous centuries. Hammondsville, north of Felchville on Route 106, is another historic hamlet that is now home to a restaurant at the site of the former Hammondsville store.

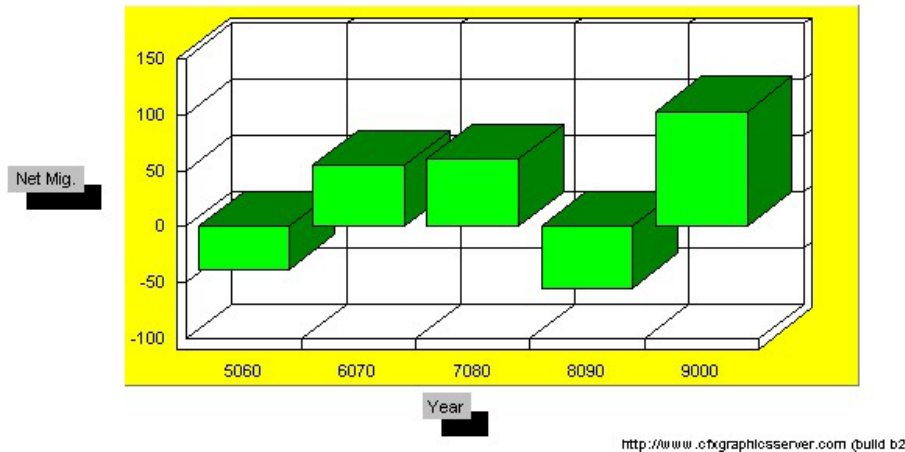
### Population and Demographics

Reading’s population has grown steadily since the town’s all-time low of 437 residents in 1940. At its peak in 1820, the town was home to 1603 people. The draw of farmers to the Midwest led to a mass loss in population in Reading and other towns in Vermont until the early 1900’s. At that time, the machine tool industry began to move into the region and population rose steadily for a number of decades. The closure of several large plants in the 1980s led to a slight decline in Reading’s population between 1980 and 1990, but the decade between 1990 and 2000 showed a population growth of 15%. According to Census data, this rise was strictly due to people moving into town. The “natural increase” (births minus deaths) showed a drop of 9.5 persons between 1990 and 2000.

**Figure 1.1 – Population (Reading, VT) 1790-2000**

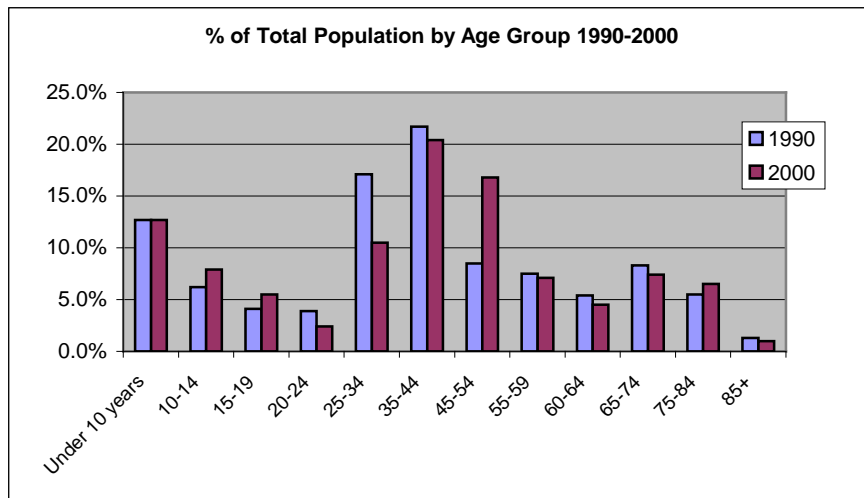


**Figure 1.2 – Net Migration (Reading, VT)**



The age of town residents has shifted toward the older set. The 25- to 34-year-old age group showed a drop of over 25% between 1990 and 2000, while the 45- to 54-year-old age group grew by 128%. This trend is prevalent throughout the region, indicating the shift in the baby boom population. The 35- to 44-year-old age group makes up the greatest percentage of the town’s population. However the number of individuals in this age group is increasing at a slower rate than the 45- to 54-year-old group.

**Figure 1.3 – Population by Age Group (Reading, VT)**

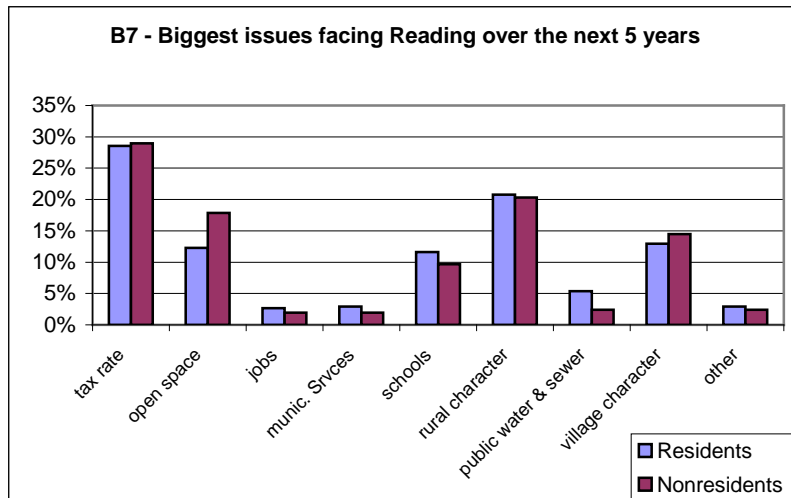


Approximately 22% of the housing in Reading is seasonal. The number of seasonal housing units declined by 20% since 1990 as units were converted to year-round units. Throughout the Upper Valley and the state as a whole, demand for housing has increased faster than the supply, creating a shortage especially for low to moderate-income households. Between 1990 and 2000, housing costs in Reading rose by 43%. The median housing cost in Reading was \$127,900 in 2000.

## Town Plan Survey

In March of 2003, the Planning Commission sent out a survey to 750 residents and property owners of Reading. The survey received 228 responses, or approximately 30% of those who received the survey. Of those who responded, 69% were full-time residents and 31% were

**Figure 1.4 – Biggest Issues Facing Reading in Next 5 Years**



nonresident property owners.

19% of respondents had school-aged children. Approximately 58% were employed and 36% of those worked at home or were retired. Just over half of those who commute to work responded that their commute time was between 15 and 30 minutes.

The purpose of the survey was to gauge the feeling of the community on issues typically discussed in a Town Plan. By far, the most important issue facing the town over the next five years was the tax rate. This concern also

came out in the Town Plan Forum as the greatest challenge facing the town. Most survey respondents were happy with the rate at which Reading has been growing. Almost 60% chose “preserving rural character” as the biggest issue facing the town, while approximately 40% chose preserving open space and the character of the villages.

## Town Plan Forum

The purpose of the Reading Town Plan Forum was to present the results of the Town Plan Survey as well as trends that became apparent through an analysis of survey data. Participants were asked to list major challenges that Reading is likely to face in the short and long-term, and to vote on which of those challenges are the most important. A full summary of the Town Plan Forum is included in Appendix C.

The compiled responses from the Town Plan Forum revealed that the Town’s rural character is what makes the town a special place for most of the forum’s participants. Related responses included: the small size of the town that make it possible to know almost everyone, open spaces, village centers, location, and scenic attributes. Other responses included safety, dirt roads, trees and wildlife conservation areas, slow pace, history, government, and the school.

“Lower taxes” was by far the most popular answer for what would make Reading a better place to live. Related answers included more economically sound ways to educate children, or better schools. Education was an area of much discussion during the forum, as enrollment at the elementary school has been falling over the last several years. The rising cost of land and the need for a diversity of housing types were both listed as challenges for the town. Education discussions led to the formation of a subcommittee called the Reading Futures Committee, which

is looking into the choices the town faces concerning the future of the Reading Elementary School.

Preserving open land and historic resources, including wildlife habitat and ridgelines, were topics of discussion at the forum with respect to future challenges. Participants also discussed the problems of controlling junk cars and clutter, and the need to support small businesses. A few participants listed additional town services (including rubbish disposal), village revitalization, transportation issues (bus service to Springfield, Woodstock and Windsor), regulations (concern about mini estates and other residential development), and affordable housing as problems the Town faces in the near future. In discussions about Village Centers, the three most important issues according to participants were promotion of small businesses, water and sewer in the village centers, and preserving historic character of villages and historic structures.

The following chapters provide in-depth background and discussion of the issues identified in the Town Plan Forum and Survey. Each chapter presents a number of goals, action steps, and policies for the topics discussed in that chapter. The final chapter lists the action steps that the Reading Planning Commission felt were the highest priority in terms of implementing the goals of the Town Plan.

The following are the overarching goals of the Town Plan as they were stated in the Town Plan Survey and Forum. These goals will be repeated and supported by the goals, action steps, and policies in the remaining chapters of the Plan.

## **Goals**

1. Maintain Reading's rural character as defined by:
  - Undeveloped fields and woodlands;
  - Historic settlement patterns of compact village centers surrounded by rural farm and forest lands;
  - Historic structures;
  - Scenic views of rolling hills and open fields and ridgelines.
2. Strengthen the capacity of village centers to serve as centers of community and commercial activity.
  - Ensure that buildings and properties maintain historic and scenic qualities that make the village an inviting place to congregate.
3. Provide recreational opportunities consistent with the character of the town.
4. Provide a safe and efficient transportation network that follows the historic settlement patterns of the town and encourages these patterns to continue in the future.
5. Protect significant natural resources.
6. Allow for growth to the extent that the Town and local residents are not disproportionately affected by the costs of that growth.
7. Investigate ways to address decreasing enrollments in the Reading Elementary School and the increased burden this has on residents and businesses.

## Chapter 2

### NATURAL AREAS, SCENIC AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

#### Town Setting

The town of Reading sits in the headwaters of the Mill Brook, the Ottauquechee, and the North Branch of the Black River. Much of the town is hilly with elevations over 1,500 feet. The land along Route 106 on the eastern side of town is fairly flat as the floodplain for the North Branch of the Black River widens out in the village of Felchville and south. North of Felchville, the Mill Brook and Reading Hill Brook parallel Route 106 as it heads north. The northwest part of town is included in the headwaters of a small tributary of the upper Ottauquechee River and is accessible by car only from the north.

Higher density housing and commercial activities are located primarily in the village of Felchville on Route 106 and, to a lesser extent, in the hamlet of Hammondsville. South Reading is also an historical hamlet with a cluster of homes and a historic schoolhouse but with no commercial activity. Felchville is bordered on the south and east by flat agricultural land. Several active farms still exist in town (see Table 2.1 on page 10).

Almost 25% of the town's 26,624 acres are owned by the State including the Arthur Davis Wildlife Management Area (5,226 acres), Coolidge State Forest (1,008 acres), and the Knapp Brook Wildlife Management Area (322 acres).

#### Geology

##### Topography and Soils

Reading's topography is defined by steep slopes and ridgelines of hills that reach as high as 2,500 feet. The steepest areas are mainly forested and include a large area owned by the state for wildlife management. Much of the flatter land along existing roads is designated prime agricultural soil by the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Within many wooded areas are pockets of deeper, more fertile soils or "enriched sites." These provide excellent conditions for forest growth. Soils found in Reading's wooded areas can generally be divided into shallow (10 to 20-inch depth to bedrock) to moderately deep (40 inches to bedrock) forested soils. Glover, Vershire, Lyman, Pomfret, and Tunbridge soils dominate these woodlands.

As elevation decreases on the hill slopes, soils with deeper profiles are not uncommon. Berkshire and Dummerston soils are deep well-drained soils. Soils with a "hardpan" and what is locally known as "blue clay" include the less well-drained, but still productive, Buckland, Peru, and Cabot soils. Near streams and outwash areas of the major streams are the best soils for all uses. These include Agawam, Windsor, and the less well-drained Podunk and Grange soils.

##### Agricultural Soils

The soils that are best suited for farming are classified as prime and statewide agricultural soils. Soils in the prime (or high) category are those which, due to chemical and physical properties,

are the most fertile and exhibit the fewest limitations for farming. They have high potential for sustained agriculture and little or no limitation for a wide variety of crops adapted to Vermont's climate. Soils classified as being of statewide significance (or good) have good potential for growing crops, but one or more limitations will restrict the choice of crops and require more intensive management than soils in the prime category. Both soils categories are a finite resource upon which the future viability of agriculture depends.

Approximately 768 acres of prime and 2,441 acres of statewide prime agricultural soils are located in Reading. Cultural, economic and environmental issues related to agriculture and the preservation of farmland are discussed in more detail below.

### **Development Capability and Septic Regulations**

Vermont Wastewater System and Potable Water Supply Rules were revised on August 16, 2002. The new rules allow for installation of septic systems on 30% slopes (the old regulations allowed systems only on 20% slopes) and in shallower soils. Land that was previously considered unacceptable for on-site septic systems may now include areas that can be developed once the new regulations go into effect unless communities choose to adopt regulations that are more restrictive than the state's.

Reading adopted municipal "Health Regulations relating to On-site Sewage Disposal Systems" in May of 2001, but is in the process of revising these regulations to coincide with the new state rules.

### **Slope and Elevation**

Slope is the inclination of the land surface and is an important factor determining suitability for development. The Natural Resources Conservation Service has divided slope classifications into the following categories:

- 0-3% generally suitable for most types of development, but may require drainage;
- 3-8% most desirable for development, having the least restrictions;
- 11-15% suitable for low-density development when particular attention is given to erosion control, runoff, and septic design;
- 15-25% unsuitable for most types of development and septic systems, construction is costly, erosion and runoff problems likely;
- >25% all types of construction should be avoided, careful land management for other uses needed.

Generally, in Vermont, land above 2,500 feet in elevation is considered a fragile environment and development there should be strictly discouraged. The land tends to be steep with an extremely shallow soil depth to bedrock, low recovery rates of damaged vegetation, and high susceptibility to erosion. These highland areas are largely in forested areas and contribute to the capture and filtration of clean water to lower elevations.

The Natural Resources map shows steep slopes (over 25%), high elevations (mostly over 1,800 feet), and ridgelines. Careful consideration should be given to the fragile and scenic nature of these areas when determining what kinds of development should be allowed there.

## **Earth Resources**

Talc has historically been mined on the east side of Route 106, north of Hammondsville. The mine closed many years ago, however, leaving the area with pits and caverns that make the land unfit for residential development. The former mine area has been zoned for industrial or mining use. Land to the north and east of Felchville is also zoned for industrial and mining use and was the location of a talc processing facility for many years. As some of the land formerly owned by the talc processing facility is considered deer wintering habitat and contains steep slopes, the Planning Commission has removed the industrial/mining designation from this area on the Future Land Use Map. Part of the property within the district that is owned by the Town is being used for a new fire station.

Mineral extraction is allowed as a conditional use in many other zoning districts in Town. The Town should consider adopting performance standards for such activities so that they do not negatively impact residential or other adjoining uses. Dust, noise, and wear and tear on roads are some typical negative impacts associated with earth extraction activities.

## **Fragile Areas**

### **Wetlands**

Wetlands are a unique and valuable natural resource. Such areas are generally defined as permanently or seasonally wet areas which exhibit saturated soils at least part of the year, support wetland plant species and contain aquatic life. Marshes, swamps, bogs, ponds, fens, and seasonally flooded fields are examples. In the Vermont landscape, wetlands often occur in association with lakes, ponds, rivers and streams. They may also, however, be isolated from any obvious connection to surface water. In all wetlands, the presence of water creates conditions favorable to the growth of specially adapted plants such as cattails, water lilies, alders, dogwood, red maple and swamp oak to name just a few. Wetlands serve many functions and benefit the health, safety, and welfare of the general public. Primary wetland values include fish and wildlife habitat, flood and erosion protection, nutrient and pollution filtration, ground water recharge, aesthetic diversity, and sites for educational and recreational activities. It is estimated that less than 5% of Vermont is wetland and that nearly 50% of Vermont's original wetland area has been lost or severely impaired due to draining, dredging, filling, or excavation activities associated with industrial and residential developments and agriculture (VT Dept. of Environment and Conservation 1999). The most effective way to assure the continuation of wetland values is to protect these areas that remain. Several state and federal laws provide protection for wetlands including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 permits, Vermont's Act 250, and Vermont's Significant Wetlands Regulations (S95).

The degree to which a particular wetland fulfills the above functions, rather than its size, determines its significance. The wetlands mapped on the Natural Resources Map include the National Wetlands Inventory prepared by the US Department of the Interior and smaller wetlands mapped by the SWCRPC from aerial photos. Wetlands on the NWI maps include Class I and II wetlands (generally those over five acres in size). Class III wetlands are smaller or not deemed significant by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation. These smaller wetlands are not protected under the Vermont Wetlands Rules, but may be protected in an Act 250 review or by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (review required for large or federally funded projects).

It is a violation of Section 404 (administered by the Army Corps of Engineers) to fill in or excavate a wetland over one-third of an acre in size.

**Vernal Pools**

Seasonal or “vernal” pools are generally defined as depressions with no inlet or outlet. Because these depressions fill up with water either from snow melt or rainfall, most seasonal pools are only wet in the spring months and dry up during the summer months. Vernal pools may be overlooked in site evaluations because they are only wet for a few months out of the year. However, these pools provide critical breeding habitat for many amphibians and invertebrate species. The Town should consider mapping vernal pools in order to protect these valuable habitat areas.

**Table 2.1 – Inventory of Natural and Cultural Resources**

<b><u>INVENTORY OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES</u></b>	
<b>Rare/Irreplaceable natural areas</b>	
1. Significant stand of Northern White Cedar, in the headwaters of Bailey’s Brook watershed: unique to the Town and Region, situated at the southern edge of its natural range.	
2. Reading Hill Bog	
3. Reading Pond	
4. High elevation areas and ridgelines shown on the map, generally above 1,500 feet	
5. Class II wetlands as identified by the Vermont Wetlands Office	
6. Moose Crossing area	
<b>Historic and cultural resources</b>	
1. Felchville cemetery	
2. Weld Cemetery	
3. Spear Cemetery	
4. South Reading Cemetery	
5. Amsden Cemetery	
6. Bailey’s Mills Cemetery	
7. Buck Cemetery	
8. Sawyer Cemetery	
9. Swain Cemetery	
10. Historic sites listed in the Vermont Historic Sites and Structures Survey	
11. Stone Chimney	
12. Historic birch tree located at Stone Chimney (reported to be one of the oldest white birch trees in the world)	
13. All existing stone walls and cellar holes	
<b>Scenic resources</b>	
1. Various stretches of scenic roads, including: sections of Tyson Road in and west of South Reading village, North Puckerbrush Road, all of Caper Hill Road, and Jenne Road.	
<b>Active agricultural and silvicultural land</b>	
1. Bailey’s Mills area	8. Barnleigh (Cook Farm)
2. Reading Farms	9. Happy Acres
3. Springbrook Farm	10. Hobbs Farm
4. Jenne Farm	11. Oleo Acres
5. Newhall Farm	12. Sylvan Acres
6. Rowlee Farm	13. Reading Center area
7. Lexington Farm	14. Gonyea Farm

## **Surface Waters**

Reading sits in the headwaters of the Mill Brook, the Ottauquechee, and the North Branch of the Black River. Problems in these higher elevation streams can impact water bodies far downstream, therefore it is critical that these resources be protected.

There are no known direct discharges of pollutants or “point sources” into any of the water bodies in the town of Reading. Nonpoint source pollution such as runoff from agricultural practices located too close (or in) fragile streams, failed septic systems, land development, road maintenance or poor forestry practices could threaten waterways in Reading.

Reading Pond is the most significant lake or pond in Reading. The northern end of Knapp Pond is also located in town, although its access is located in Cavendish. There is an access area for Reading Pond owned by the State Fish and Wildlife Department, but it is only accessible by a trail (which is not open to motorized vehicles).

## **Fisheries**

The surface waters of the town of Reading are rich in coldwater fishery resources. Streams from the small headwater brooks to the more lowland rivers support both wild and stocked trout populations. The North Branch of the Black River upstream of the falls at Felchville, including its tributaries (Darby and Alder Meadow brooks) provide habitat for naturally reproducing brook trout. Below the falls, where the waters tend to be warmer, wild brook trout are largely supplanted by brown trout. Similarly Mill and Bailey brooks are habitats for wild populations of both trout species. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department stocks lower reaches on the North Branch and Mill Brook to supplement natural trout production, as well as provide additional sport fishing opportunities.

Unlike the streams, Reading and the Knapp ponds do not provide habitat conditions capable of supporting sustainable wild trout populations. Therefore, the two Knapp Ponds are stocked annually with yearling trout: the more downstream impoundment, Pond #1, stocked with rainbow trout, and Pond #2 with brook trout. Reading Pond is not stocked but is populated with several warm water fish species.

The ability of streams in Reading to support wild trout populations is dependent on the quality of the water (e.g., absence of pollution), adequate seasonal stream flows, maintenance of cool water temperatures through the summer months, and provisions for spawning areas and an abundance of fish cover (i.e., places for fish to find safe refuge). Stable stream banks, which are vegetated with trees, shrubs and other plants and left largely in an undisturbed, natural condition are critical to maintaining habitat necessary to the health and survival trout populations.

## **Shoreland Buffers**

A buffer is a band of vegetation located next to a body of water such as a brook or stream. Maintaining vegetated buffers of native trees and shrubs is the easiest and most cost effective way to improve water quality in streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds. Buffers filter runoff from roads, lawns, stables, farms, junkyards, and construction operations that may carry fine sediment, nutrients, oils, fertilizers or other pollutants. The roots of vegetated buffers can also help to hold stream banks in place preventing erosion. By reducing the speed of runoff, buffers allow water

to infiltrate into the soil and therefore reduce the volume of runoff into the brook. This has the combined effect of preventing flooding and recharging the groundwater supply.

The effectiveness and functions of buffers vary according to soil type, slope, and the type of vegetation. Generally, the wider the buffer, the more effective it is in filtering pollutants, protecting banks, and providing habitat areas for birds and other wildlife. Vegetated banks also provide shade which keeps waters cool for native fish populations. A minimum of 50 feet of natural vegetation (measured from the top of the bank) should remain next to all streams, rivers, lakes and ponds.

Buffers can clearly provide benefits to water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and can offer some protection against flood damage and erosion. However, some flexibility in buffer type, width and/or construction materials should be considered for projects or activities that provide significant public benefits (such as agriculture and forestry; recreation paths, parks, and other recreational uses). These activities should be allowed as long as they do not harm the functions of a shoreland buffer.

### **Floodplains**

The floodplain for the North Branch of the Black River and tributaries that run into the North Branch widens out just south and east of the village of Felchville. According to soils maps from the Natural Resource Conservation Service, this area also contains prime agricultural soils. North of Felchville, the Mill Brook enters Reading near the intersection of Routes 44 and 106. Flood hazard areas next to the Mill Brook, Reading Hill Brook and Bailey Brook extend northward. The Town adopted flood hazard regulations as an element in the zoning bylaws in order to make properties located in flood hazard areas eligible for flood insurance. Maintaining an undeveloped floodplain can provide a holding area for flood waters and can be important for filtering storm water runoff before it enters a waterway. Maintaining this area can also ensure that the natural changes in the flow of the river can be accommodated by the landscape. This natural re-adjusting that a river makes can prevent problems downstream in the future.

### **Significant Wildlife Habitat**

Wildlife is plentiful throughout the town of Reading, and all of the land in town is habitat of some kind. Yet some habitat areas are more important, or “significant” than others. Habitat is considered more significant when it supports rare species or an unusually large number of species; provides an abundance of food, maternity sites or other resources; provides a buffer for wildlife against the effects of development; or when it represents a small percentage of the landscape. The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) may consider protection of significant habitats as Necessary Wildlife Habitat under criterion 8(a) of Act 250. Several of the significant habitats that exist in Reading are listed below.

### **Deer Wintering Areas**

Deer wintering areas vary in size from a few to over a hundred acres. These areas offer essential relief for deer from harsh climatic conditions by providing protection from deep snow, cold temperatures and wind chill. Deer wintering areas are characterized by dense canopy coverings of softwood trees, a favorable slope, usually southerly or westerly aspects, generally moderate elevation, and low levels of human disturbance in winter. The softwood trees that comprise

these areas are most commonly hemlock and white pine. Wintering areas do not change significantly from year to year and can be utilized by generations of deer over many decades if appropriate habitat conditions are maintained. Deer annually migrate, often several miles, from fall habitats to wintering areas. A single winter range often serves deer from large areas of town and in some cases from surrounding towns as well. Residential, commercial or industrial development within or adjacent to a deer wintering area decreases the amount of land available to deer and impacts the town's deer population, eventually decreasing the number of deer within our town. Snow machine and cross-country ski trails located within deer wintering habitat can also lessen the effectiveness of the habitat for deer. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department has mapped portions of eight deer wintering areas in Reading (see Natural Resources Map). Most of these areas, especially the higher elevation ones, are of poor quality and do not usually contain many animals. The best remaining winter habitat is found in the vicinity of where Route 44 meets with Route 106 along the border that the town shares with the town of West Windsor.

In addition to benefits for deer, dense softwood stands provide critical winter food supplies for a variety of other wildlife including porcupines, snowshoe hares, fox, fisher, coyotes, bobcats, crows, ravens, and red and white-winged crossbills. Other wintering birds routinely find shelter from winds in these conifer stands. Logging can be either detrimental or beneficial to the habitat depending on the harvest method employed and the overall sensitivity shown by the logger and landowner to maintaining these areas of dense softwood cover. Deer wintering areas should be protected from development and winter recreational trails whenever possible.

Through Vermont's Act 250, some protection is available under Criterion 8(A) - Wildlife Habitat and Endangered Species, which provides a detailed system to weigh evidence for a project and determine if a permit can be allowed. Only commercial development projects over one acre in size or subdivisions of more than six lots are reviewed under Act 250.

### ***Bear Habitat***

Bears range over very large tracts of land in search of food. An adult male will range over a 25- to 50-square-mile area, while a female will cover between 10 and 15 square miles. Since bears are naturally wary animals, they rely on undeveloped travel corridors to link and provide access to suitable habitat. If travel corridors are fragmented, the bear populations will be threatened. According to the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, the more remote forest land portions of Reading are important as "bear production habitat" where adult females live with their offspring and "seasonal bear habitat" which are frequently used by bears, including some cub-producing females. These habitats frequently contain critical seasonal feeding areas (see Natural Resources Map). Reading also has two regionally important road crossing areas within bear travel corridors; one of which occurs in the vicinity of the moose crossing area on the Reading – Tyson Road and the other on Route 106 just south of the new firehouse and emergency building.

In order to promote the stability of the multitude of animal species that rely on contiguous or interconnected wooded areas, local and regional planning should consider remoteness and connectivity as important environmental qualities. Such areas may host a number of compatible uses such as forestry and recreation.

### **Moose Habitat**

Like bears, moose range over large areas in search of food. High elevation conifer forests and beaver ponds and other wetland areas are particularly important as they provide the food and water moose need to survive. In Reading, the area known locally as “Moose Crossing” on the Reading-Tyson Road is a popular viewing area for moose. The area is part of the state’s Arthur Davis Wildlife Management Area while the road is owned by the town. “Moose Crossing” signs warn drivers to slow down in this section as there have been numerous collisions of automobiles and moose.

### **Habitats for Rare and Endangered Species**

Rare plants and animals are important for a variety of reasons. Some are indicators of unusual habitats or of colder (or warmer) climates in Vermont’s distant past. Some can serve as indicators of declines in environmental quality. Some species may provide compounds for medicines and agricultural or industrial products. Finally, some are attractive and add beauty to the landscape. Many uncommon species will disappear if not recognized and given some form of protection. The Vermont Nongame and Natural Heritage program has identified and mapped rare and endangered species and natural communities throughout the state. Only one site in Reading is known to have a rare or endangered species although more may be discovered in the future. In order to protect these important natural areas, habitat areas or natural communities have been identified by points on the map but do not reveal which species reside in those areas (see Natural Resources map). These natural resources may provide recreational and educational opportunities to town residents. Most rare species are protected by State or Federal laws.

### **Forest Resources**

Forests serve a variety of functions and uses, and contribute significantly to the town’s rural character. Forests protect air and water quality and support biological diversity. Woodlands provide critical habitat for many species of wildlife, including white-tailed deer, moose, black bear, wild turkey and a variety of songbirds. Forests are also important to the local economy by providing products such as lumber, pulpwood, fuel wood, and maple sugar. Outdoor recreation is a way of life for most of the town’s residents and is an attraction for tourists. Woodlands support a variety of recreational pursuits including hunting, trapping, hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and nature and foliage viewing. Forestland in Reading also supports some low-density residential uses.

According to the current land use/land Cover Map that was based on 1994 orthophotos, approximately 89% of Reading’s 26,652 acres are classified as forested. The dominant forest types in decreasing order of abundance are northern hardwoods, spruce-fir, hemlock, and pine. Oak stands occur within the town as isolated pockets. A stand of northern white cedar is located in the headwaters of the Bailey Brook watershed and is at the southern limit of its range in the state.

Most of the forests in Reading are under private ownership. However, significant acreage is publicly owned. In total, the State of Vermont owns and manages 6,556 acres in the town. These include the Arthur Davis Wildlife Management Area (5,226 acres), Coolidge State Forest (1,008 acres), and the Knapp Brook Wildlife Management Area (322 acres). Within the Knapp Brook area are nearly 121 acres on which the Town owns the timber rights and receives the revenues generated by the sale of timber.

Forests are threatened by fragmentation caused by roads and residential development, and irresponsible logging practices. Development in forested areas should be encouraged to occur at the periphery where access can be provided by existing roads. Development should avoid critical wildlife habitats and other biologically sensitive areas.

Sylvan Acres in South Reading is an example of a well-managed forest and is an example of the type of management practices that should be supported and encouraged by the town. The Bailey Brook northern white cedar swamp community is unique to this part of the state and is worthy of special protection.

### Use Value Appraisal Program

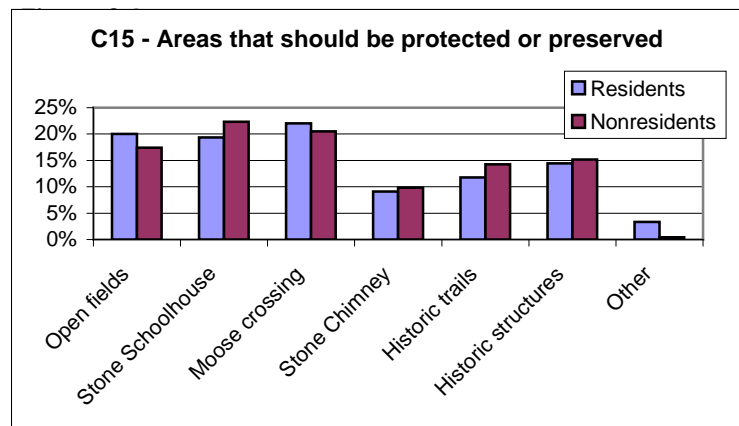
The Use Value Appraisal program provides an incentive for private landowners to properly manage woodlands throughout the state. The program provides reduced property tax assessment for qualifying owners of forest and agricultural land. The State of Vermont reimburses communities for some of the tax revenue that is lost due to enrollment of land under the program. In 2003, Reading had 55 parcels or 9,371 acres enrolled in the program. Combined with state-owned land 16,087 acres or 60.4% of the land in Reading is being managed for forestry or wildlife management. The Use Value Appraisal Program and conservation easements protect forest and agricultural lands and the uses they support.

## Cultural Features

### Historic Sites and Structures

Table 2.1 includes eight places that are of local historic significance that are not listed on the State Historic Sites and Structures Survey. The Sites and Structures Survey includes 28 properties that have been considered by the State Department of Historic Preservation to be historically significant. Two sites, Indian Stones and the Stone Schoolhouse are included on the National Register of Historic Places. Eleven of the sites on the survey are located in the village of Felchville and four in the village of South Reading. On the Town Plan Survey, historic sites were the resource that most respondents said should be preserved through local regulations. Specific sites that survey respondents said should be protected or preserved included the Stone Schoolhouse, historic trails, and historic structures.

Zoning was one tool that survey respondents said should be used to protect important areas or resources such as historic sites and structures. Survey respondents also supported the development of design standards for the villages of Felchville, Hammondsville, and South Reading in order to preserve the historic character of these areas.



Source: 2003 Town Plan Survey

## **Archeological sites**

Generally, flat land immediately adjacent to rivers is considered an archeologically sensitive area due to the likelihood that Native Americans would have used these areas for camps. These areas often require an archeological survey prior to being developed. The “Indian Stones,” on the National Register of Historic Places, mark a site of an Abenaki Indian encampment where Susannah Johnson gave birth to a daughter while held captive with her family by the Indians in 1754. The encampment was thought to be on Knapp Brook, upstream from where it crosses under Route 106. Stone walls and stone structures from early settlements should also be considered for special protection.

## **Scenic Views**

Several areas in Reading are known regionally for their scenic views and landscape. Scenic roads that have been identified in previous town plans include sections of Tyson Road in and west of South Reading village, North Puckerbrush Road; all of Caper Hill Road and Jenne Road. On the 2003 Town Plan Survey, a high percentage of both resident and nonresident respondents answered that scenic views, wildlife habitat, historic sites and ridgelines should be protected. Future development should be sited so as to preserve these areas for future generations.

Siting of telecommunications towers and wind towers can significantly harm scenic views such as ridgelines. See the Utilities and Facilities chapter for more discussion on policies for locating these structures in Reading.

## **Agricultural Land**

Land presently in agricultural use may also be of natural, historical, cultural, and scenic significance. The Natural and Cultural Resource Map shows land that is significant for its agricultural use and historic value, as well as soils that the Natural Resource Conservation Service has determined are “prime agricultural soils.” The inventory of significant natural and cultural features (Table 2.1) lists thirteen farms that are in active agricultural use. On the 2003 Town Plan Survey, 20% of resident respondents and 18% of nonresidents said that open field should be protected or preserved. The application of local and state laws should reflect Reading’s desire to protect this important part of its heritage.

Higher density residential development should also take place in and around the villages. Alternatively, this development should blend into the surrounding rural areas to the greatest extent possible, helping preserve open space and historic land use patterns. The use of “clustering” techniques in design is encouraged where appropriate. The placing of structures in the center of large lots, especially in existing fields and other open spaces, is specifically discouraged.

## **Recreation**

Residents of Reading have traditionally maintained a strong connection to its land, water, and wildlife resources through outdoor activity and recreation. This tradition is essential to the nature of rural life, and the Town should strive to preserve it. Lakes, ponds and streams offer fishing for residents and visitors. Legal trails and Class 4 (unmaintained) town roads are important resources for resident and visiting recreationists for hiking, skiing, mountain biking, and snowmobiling. The Town should work to ensure that these areas remain accessible for a variety

of recreational activities. Some activities, such as operating all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) may be harmful to fragile habitat areas such as wetlands and steep slopes, and should be limited or avoided in these areas.

The topography, natural resources, and rural nature of Reading make it a particularly attractive place to locate recreational and other visitor-based facilities, such as campgrounds, residential summer camps, or hunting camps. It is important that the Town realize the benefits of these facilities. At the same time the Town must make sure that their presence does not detract from Reading's character or quality of life. Therefore, these types of facilities should be supported provided that they:

- C Do not result in a volume or type of traffic on local roads which those roads are not designed to carry;
- C Do not substantially diminish access to an established public recreation resource;
- C Do not require an unreasonable investment in public utilities;
- C Do not threaten surrounding drinking water supplies, critical habitat or other fragile areas;
- C Maintain Reading's rural character and employ design methods consistent with the Objectives of this Plan.

Natural and cultural resources that are identified in the Natural and Cultural Resource Inventory of this Plan, or that are otherwise significant, should be protected and preserved whenever possible. Development of these resources should only take place in the manner least harmful to them.

### **Preservation Strategies**

It is the policy of the Town of Reading to preserve and protect rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and cultural resources, and significant historic features. Such places are real and tangible assets. Therefore, altering or destroying these assets is detrimental to the Town, and is discouraged by the Town. The Town encourages land stewardship, so that present and future generations can use and enjoy these assets.

Natural areas, scenic and cultural resources, and historic features considered significant and worthy of protection include, but are not limited to, those included in the Plan's Inventory of Natural and Cultural Resources, and shown on the Natural Resource Map and Cultural and Historic Resource Map. Features of similar type and character may also be significant, and should be protected when discovered. Specific policies regarding each of the categories are below.

The goals and objectives below are designed to provide the Town and its residents with a framework and a resource guide for protecting Reading's important natural, historic, and scenic features. They should also serve as a tool for increasing local input into the application of state and federal regulations. While they may be used to apply and interpret land use restrictions when appropriate, these policies are not meant to be restrictive in and of themselves. Instead, they should help to create opportunities for maintaining Reading's unique and valuable quality of life. The final, and most important, intent of these policies is to instill and encourage a responsible land stewardship ethic in Reading's residents and visitors.

## **Goals and Action Steps** (Goals are numbered, Action Steps are indicated by an arrow)

1. Protect rare/irreplaceable natural areas from development. These include unique forests or ecosystems, rare or endangered species habitat, deer wintering areas, bear and moose habitat, streams and shoreland buffer areas, geologic features, high elevation areas (see Table 2.1).
  - Revise Reading's zoning bylaws where necessary or appropriate, and consider the use of subdivision regulations.
  - Help public and private entities design development or resource management plans that will protect or enhance important natural and cultural resources.
  - Identify parcels that are of particular importance to the Town and work with land trusts to preserve these lands.
  - Initiate the development of educational programs in the local school system to teach Reading's children the benefits of and threats to important local resources.
  - Protect and conserve rare and endangered plants, animals, and habitats by encouraging landowners to develop a protection plan in cooperation with the Town and the Vermont Natural Heritage Program.
  - Perform regular updates to the Inventory of Natural and Cultural Resources.
2. Preserve and protect important historic, scenic and cultural features whenever practicable. These include stone walls, cellar holes, cemeteries, historic buildings and districts, and archaeological sites.
  - Work with the Regional Planning Commission, the Vermont Department of Historic Preservation and the Reading Historical Society to assess the possibility of including additional buildings, structures, or districts on the State or Federal Register of Historic Places.
  - Investigate the possibility of using the Vermont Scenic Byways program to promote and/or protect outstanding scenic roads in Reading.
3. Protect scenic views wherever possible.
  - Amend zoning bylaws to maintain historically significant scenic views to the fullest extent possible.
4. Keep active agricultural and silvicultural lands productive, ecologically healthy, and economically viable.
5. Protect streams from pollution and erosion caused by development or road maintenance.
6. Provide recreational opportunities consistent with the character of the Town, such as:
  - Hunting, trapping and fishing;
  - hiking;
  - wildlife viewing and nature study;
  - cycling, horseback riding, skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling.

## Policies

1. Rare and irreplaceable natural areas within the town shall be protected from development activities and uses that threaten their biological integrity and ecological value. Development in and around these areas may be limited in scope and intensity; soil erosion and pollution of water resources must be controlled in these areas.
2. Private development, along with construction and maintenance of the public infrastructure, shall be designed to preserve important historic and cultural features in their historic state and to enhance the public's access and appreciation of these resources where appropriate.
3. Scenic views, especially from public roads and trails, are important social and economic resources to the Town. Development within these viewsheds shall occur in a manner that does not diminish their scenic value. Innovative development design, including appropriate placement of structures and adequate visual screening may be required to protect these scenic views.
4. The Town shall encourage and support the use of Vermont's Accepted Agricultural Practices in order to maintain productive and economically viable agricultural land while protecting environmental quality and natural resources.
5. The Town recognizes the importance of healthy native forest ecosystems to the forestry economy, and therefore encourages the application of Acceptable Management Practices in all silvicultural projects within the Town. Sustainable and sensible logging practices are encouraged.
6. The Town should encourage landowners to conserve and properly manage woodlands utilizing education and awareness of State resources or through the assistance of a Town sponsored Conservation Commission.
7. Where development of forested land threatens critical wildlife habitat and other biologically sensitive areas, the Town shall encourage, or specify as necessary, the placement of structures toward the periphery of the property, leaving interior areas contiguous and undisturbed.
8. The Town shall work with state and federal agencies, whenever possible, to develop and implement strategies to protect important natural, scenic and historic resources from detrimental effects of development.
9. The Town shall give careful consideration to the fragile and scenic nature of steep slopes (over 25%) and ridgelines when determining what kinds of development are appropriate in these sensitive areas.
10. Winter recreational trail locations should consider deer wintering areas, fragile habitats and the guidelines and policies of local and State agencies.

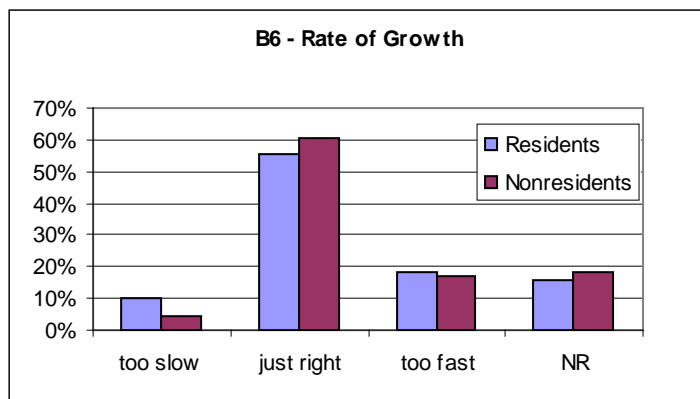
## Chapter 3

### TRANSPORTATION

As stated in the first chapter of the Plan, transportation and land use have an interdependent relationship. Changes in land use that create significant increases in traffic may require improvements in transportation facilities such as roads and bridges. These improvements can have high financial, social, and environmental costs. Conversely, improvements in transportation facilities can create enormous development pressures on adjacent or nearby land. With careful planning, those improvements can create beneficial development opportunities, as well.

According to the Reading Town Plan Survey, the issues of greatest concern over the next five years are taxes, preserving the rural character of the town and the character of the village centers, and preserving open space (see Figure 1.4). Most of both resident and nonresident respondents to the survey felt that the town was growing at an acceptable rate (Figure 3.1). Just over 10% of residents felt the town wasn't growing fast enough, while almost 20% of residents and nonresidents felt that it was growing too fast.

**Figure 3.1 - Rate of Growth**



From the survey responses and from the Town Plan Forum held in November of 2003, it is clear that those in the community who participated in these events were more concerned about keeping the rural character of the town intact and addressing some of its immediate needs rather than widening roads to encourage additional development and traffic.

### Road Network

Because of Reading's small population and limited financial resources, its transportation facilities consist almost exclusively of its road system. Roads are shown on this Plan's Base Features map, by type (state and local public roads vs. private). There are 3.8 miles of named private roads in town, and 63.76 miles of public roads. Mileage of public roads is distributed as follows:

**Table 3.1**

State Highway	7.48 miles
Class 1 Town Highway	0.0 miles
Class 2 Town Highway	9.1 miles
Class 3 Town Highway	30.24 miles
Class 4 Town Highway	16.94 miles

The Town discourages the widening or straightening of State Highways in Reading. Most of the roads in town are gravel and must be maintained frequently. In the Town Plan survey, several respondents wrote in that maintenance of dirt roads was an important issue. Related issues include concern for water quality (i.e. the surface waters that are located next to many dirt and paved roads), and an interest in prioritizing maintenance of roads according to use. The Better Backroads program, a partnership between the Water Quality Division at the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the Vermont Local Roads Program, and the Resource Conservation and Development Councils, provides small grants and technical assistance for towns regarding maintenance of dirt roads as it relates to improving water quality. The town should consider developing an inventory of erosion sites on gravel roads and implementing ways to improve road maintenance practices.

According to Table 3.1, the Town has almost 17 miles of Class 4 Town Highways. These are roads that belong to the Town, but are not maintained or are maintained infrequently. Class 4 roads are valuable recreational resources for mountain bikers, snowmobilers, and cross-country skiers.

## **Access Management**

Access management is the design and spacing of driveways and street connections (“curb cuts”) to public roadways. Towns can use it to preserve safety, reduce congestion, and promote desirable land use patterns.

In a 2001 access management study, the Regional Planning Commission designated the section of Route 106 as it passes through Felchville as Category Six (Urban) of the State’s Access Management Categories. According to the VTrans Access Management Guidelines, Category Six highways “have the capacity for moderate to low travel speeds and moderate to high traffic volumes over medium to short travel distances.” The VTrans design standards for these roads state that “the design of all Category Six highways should be capable of achieving a posted speed of 25-40 MPH and there is little or no possibility of achieving higher speeds.” Access permits may be denied where a property has other reasonable access. Accesses that would allow left turns onto the state highway will only be permitted if the applicant can establish that the left turn would not cause unreasonable congestion or safety problems. Because Reading does not currently experience congestion, additional accesses are not likely to cause many problems in Felchville. Whenever possible new developments in village centers should share access with other properties.

## **Village Transportation Issues**

Within the village of Felchville, Route 106 narrows substantially and speed limits are reduced. The narrower road serves to remind motorists to slow down, but creates dangerous conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians as they share the road with cars and trucks. The Town may wish to look into “traffic calming” devices to further slow down traffic as it goes through the village. The Vermont Agency of Transportation recently published the “Traffic Calming Study and Approval Process for State Highways” (September 2003). This publication offers standards and several examples of traffic calming devices that have proved effective in village centers throughout the state. Some examples of traffic calming devices are as follows:

- Curb extensions that make the travel-way narrower. These are effective for slowing traffic at crosswalk locations as well.
- Raised and textured crosswalks
- Median islands
- Roundabouts

Several survey respondents noted that parking at the corner of Route 106 and the Tyson Road creates a dangerous situation. If additional commercial activities move into Felchville, on-street parking may not be able to support the demand. If new areas for parking do become necessary, they should be located behind buildings wherever possible so as to maintain the historic character of the village.

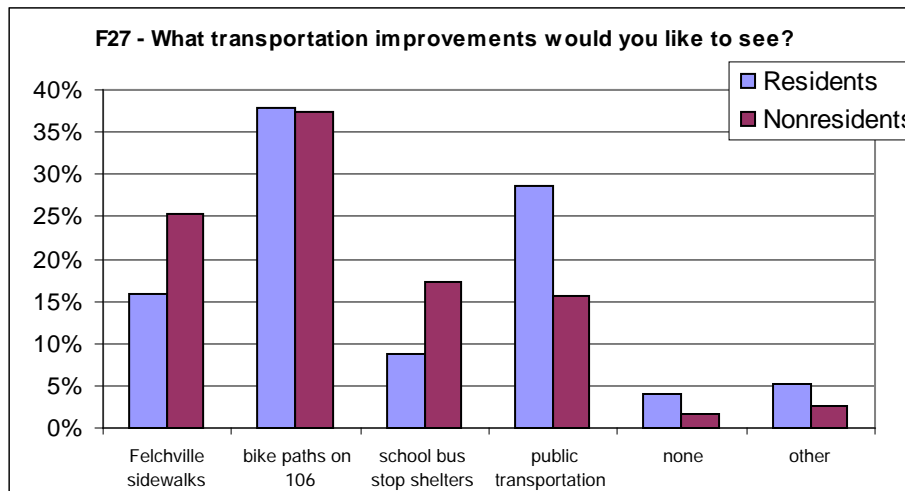
The breakout group at the Town Plan Forum listed junk cars as a top priority issue concerning transportation. While this is also a land use issue, the visual impact of junk cars is especially significant in village centers and on highly traveled roads.

### Public Transportation and Ridesharing

Although a survey completed by the Regional Planning Commission in 1993 indicated that public transportation was not a significant issue for people in Reading, participants at the Town Plan Forum in the Fall of 2003 noted the need for residents without cars to get to stores and doctor’s appointments. This need was also mentioned in regard to elderly residents. While the age groups between 55 and 74 decreased between 1990 and 2000, the over 75-year-old age group increased slightly, and the number of residents between 45 and 54 more than doubled.

In the Town Plan Survey completed in March of 2003, public transportation was second only to bike routes on Route 106 as a transportation improvement resident respondents said they would like to see. Over 25% of residents and 15% of nonresidents checked off this category (see Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2**



Connecticut River Transit (CRT), a scaled-back version of Town and Village Bus, is the nonprofit transportation provider for the southern Windsor County Region. CRT buses connect with Advance Transit buses to provide bus service from Park and Ride lots in Ascutney and

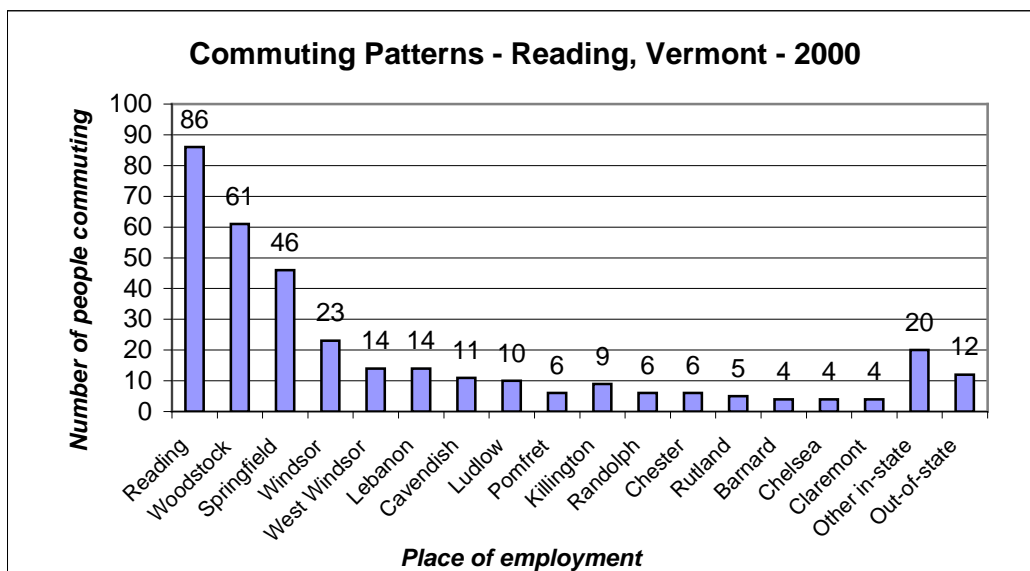
Hartland to employment centers in the Upper Valley. This bus system also provides service from Springfield, Chester and Cavendish to Ludlow, and “on-demand” service for those unable to walk to regular bus stops in Windsor and Springfield. The Town should determine the extent of the need for public transportation in Reading, and work with Connecticut River Transit to determine if an additional stop would be warranted.

Volunteers in Action out of Windsor provide rides to medical appointments and other necessary destinations for seniors and otherwise disabled individuals who cannot drive and for whom the bus system is not flexible enough. This organization also transports meals from Stoughton House to the Reading Town Hall where volunteers take them to individual households in town.

Those who commute to work and are seeking alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle, may want to consider starting a ridesharing program. One participant at the Town Plan Forum suggested using the Town web site for the purpose of organizing ride shares. According to the Town Plan survey, 36% of respondents work at home or are retired. Of the 85 respondents that said they commute to work, 15% travel less than 15 minutes to work, 55% travel between 15 and 30 minutes, and 31% travel between 31 and 45 minutes.

Figure 3.3 shows the Census 2000 data for the number of people who live in Reading and commute to other towns in Vermont and to towns in New Hampshire.

**Figure 3.3**



## Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

The scenic quality of Reading’s roads makes them popular with recreational bicyclists. Unfortunately, the same qualities that make roads attractive to cyclists (narrow, winding roadways with scenic views, and little or no shoulder) can also lead to conflicts between bikes and automobiles. The development of a bike path or bike lane along Route 106 was the transportation improvement that received the highest score on the Town Plan Survey. Although a separate path might be difficult to construct due to the flood plain and/or steep slopes, the Town could increase mutual awareness and understanding between cyclists and drivers by

placing “share the road” signs along Route 106 and ensuring that repainting and repaving of the road include wide shoulders for bicyclists.

Reading’s villages grew up along narrow roadways which were not designed to carry car and truck traffic. The lack of sidewalks in the village areas, particularly around the school, concerns many people in Reading. Building sidewalks in Felchville was the second most popular transportation improvement for nonresidents and the third for residents. Several years ago a design was developed for sidewalks in Felchville. At the time, however, residents of the town voted not to pursue funding to construct a sidewalk. Before moving forward on such a project again, public support for the project should be measured. As traffic through the town increases over the years, the need for sidewalks may become more apparent and receive greater support from the community.

## **Rail and Air Transportation**

There are currently no rail facilities in the Town of Reading. There is a private airstrip in town. The only other airport in the Southern Windsor County Region is Hartness State Airport in Springfield. For commercial air travel, people in Reading use airports in Lebanon and Manchester, NH; Boston, MA; Hartford, CT; and Burlington.

Passenger rail service is available to Reading residents through Amtrak’s “Vermont” train at Windsor. The train runs between Washington, D.C. and St. Albans, stopping in Windsor twice daily, once northbound and once southbound. Rail service is also available from Rutland to New York City and points in between.

In addition to passenger rail service, there is bus service available regionally through Vermont Transit. A Rutland to Boston bus makes scheduled stops in Bellows Falls, while a White River Jct. to Springfield, MA bus stops in Ascutney.

Reading does not currently have a significant need for local rail, air, or bus and does not anticipate a need in the near future. The Town should continue to support regional efforts to maintain the present level of services.

## **Goals and Action Steps** (Goals are numbered, Action Steps are indicated by an arrow)

1. Preserve the character of Reading’s rural roads.
2. Preserve the rural character of the town, including historic features, scenic views and historic structures, while considering transportation improvements.
  - Work with VTrans to ensure that State-funded transportation projects do not adversely affect Reading’s character or frustrate the goals and objectives of this Plan.
  - Investigate the possibility of using available state and federal programs to protect outstanding scenic roads in Reading.
3. Maintain and improve the quality of surface waters through better road maintenance practices.
  - Develop an inventory of erosion sites on gravel roads and implement ways to mitigate erosion problems at these sites.

- Improve road maintenance practices to protect surface waters from road runoff and sedimentation..
  - Seek out state and federal programs that address the water quality issues of road runoff from paved and unpaved roads into nearby waterways.
4. Maintain town ownership of Class 4 roads and trails for recreational use.
  5. Ensure that there is adequate parking in village centers to serve commercial establishments and to maintain safe travel on state and local roads.
  6. Ensure that public transportation services are available to the elderly and other residents who do not have access to cars.
    - Investigate the need for public transportation services in Reading.
  7. Improve access to ride share programs for commuters.
    - Implement a ride-sharing network through the Town’s web site
  8. Create or maintain safe routes for bicycles and pedestrians, especially in village centers.
    - Monitor the need and local support for the installation of sidewalks to the school and other destinations in Felchville.
    - Work with the Regional Planning Commission to use the Vermont Agency of Transportation pavement management program to install bicycle lanes along Vermont Route 106.
    - Increase mutual awareness and understanding between cyclists and drivers through signage and traffic calming measures, if necessary.
    - Study the benefits and drawbacks of designating certain roads as bikeways, and/or creating separate travel lanes for bicycles on certain roads or portions of road.
  9. Reduce traffic speeds through village centers.
    - Designate Felchville as a “Village Center” through the Vermont Downtown Program in order to be eligible to reduce speed limits to 25 mph.

## **Policies**

1. Shared access points, including driveways, shall be encouraged on Route 106 outside village centers.
2. Road development, maintenance and improvement projects shall preserve the natural and cultural resources of the Town, such as stone walls, tree canopies, streams, and wetlands.
3. The Town shall encourage growth to take place along roadways that are capable of supporting the growth in their present condition.
4. The Town shall work with the Regional Planning Commission to maintain a viable regional transportation plan.
5. The widening or straightening of state highways within the town shall be discouraged.
6. The Town shall incorporate road maintenance and improvement guidelines described in the Better Back Roads Program and the current VTRANS Bicycle and Pedestrian Design Handbook to the extent practicable.

## Chapter 4

### UTILITIES AND FACILITIES

Reading's small size and rural nature make it difficult for town taxpayers to justify funding many public utilities, facilities and services that might be found in larger towns. Most Reading residents would like to maintain the rural character of the town and its villages. Many also support higher density residential and commercial development in the village centers. In order to direct growth to village center areas, the Town needs to look into innovative ways to approach sewage disposal while maintaining good drinking water supplies. While growth outside of the village centers would make public water and sewer unnecessary, development that is spread out (rather than compact, as in village centers) has a greater impact on roads and emergency services, and could negatively impact wildlife habitat.

Reading residents are also faced with a declining school population. The Town must decide whether to look at ways to keep the elementary school in town while maintaining a reasonable tax rate, or to send students to other towns for elementary school. There is no high school in Reading, therefore all high school students must attend schools in other towns.

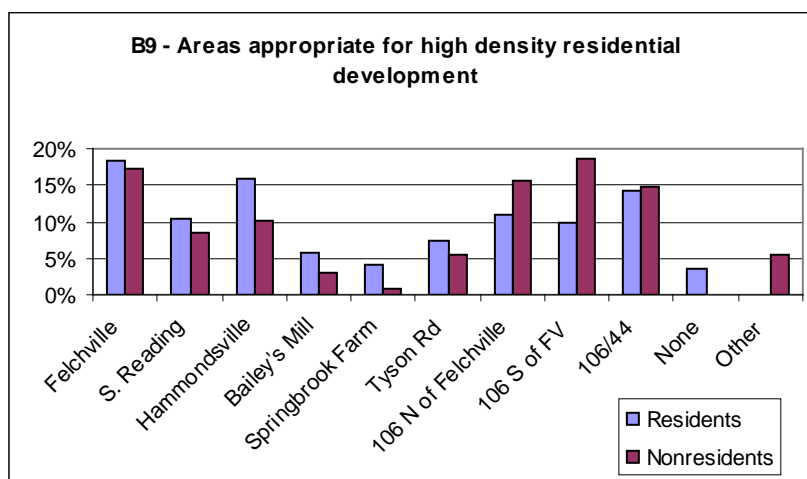
In the Town Plan Survey, there were a variety of responses regarding additional services that respondents thought that the Town should provide. Several written responses related to utilities and facilities indicated the need for more police protection.

#### Water and Sewer

Water supply and sewage disposal facilities are provided on an individual basis with on-site systems throughout the town. While this system works well in the more rural parts of town, small village lots are often too small to achieve the desired distances between private septic systems and wells.

Public water and sewer could make it possible for growth to occur in village centers rather than in the more rural areas that surround the village centers. Figure 4.1 shows that most resident respondents felt that Felchville and Hammondsville were appropriate for high density residential

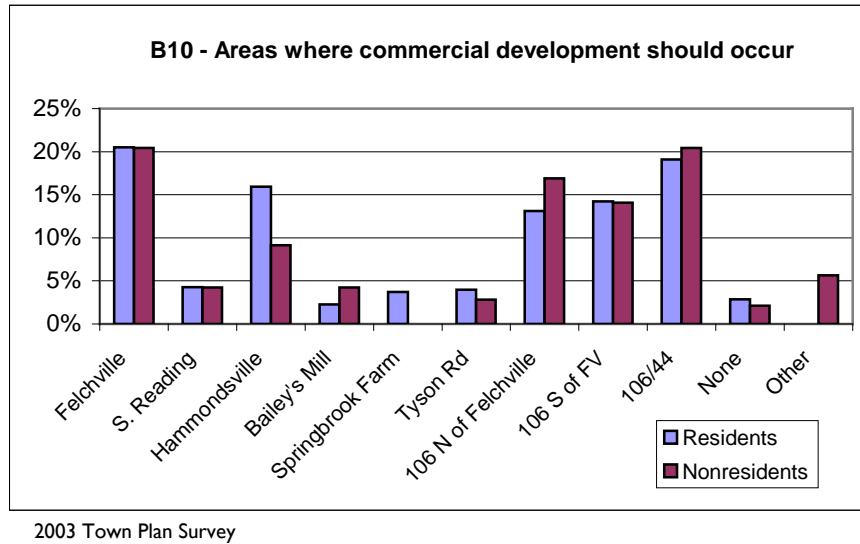
Figure 4.1



2003 Town Plan Survey

development. More nonresidents supported high-density residential development on Route 106 north and south of Felchville. Similarly, respondents thought that commercial development could be appropriately sited in Felchville, Hammondsville, and on Route 106 at the intersection of Route 44 (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2



Most respondents to the Town Plan Survey were opposed to studying the costs and feasibility of a public water and/or sewer system in Felchville. But if the Town wishes to see development occur primarily in village centers, such studies will have to be completed. The Town may also wish to consider looking at alternative approaches to sewage disposal in village centers, such as “decentralized systems” which include a combination of individual and shared septic systems. Health regulations should be amended to accommodate such systems if they seem practical for village center locations.

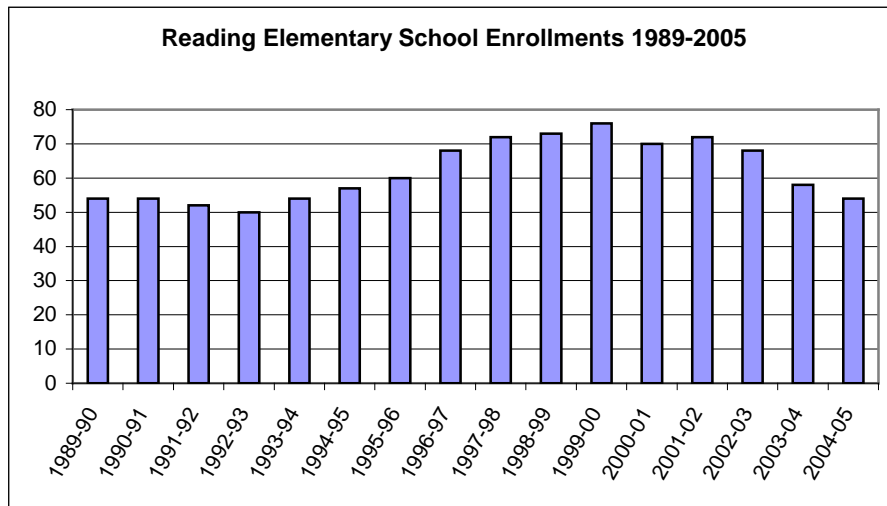
## Education

### Elementary Education

When asked “What is the biggest issue facing the town in the next five years?” on the 2003 Town Plan Survey, respondents answered that the school was the fifth biggest issue behind high tax rates, rural character, open space and village character. Reading’s only educational facility is the Felchville School. The school serves K-6, and has a 2004-05 enrollment of 54 students. Enrollment has decreased substantially since the high of 75 students in 1999, reflecting a trend that is affecting many small towns in Vermont. The population of school-aged children is declining statewide. As school populations decrease, towns are faced with the decision of either closing the school or finding more students to attend it to help spread out the costs. The task of finding more students can be addressed either by enrolling students from neighboring towns, or encouraging families with school-aged children to move into town.

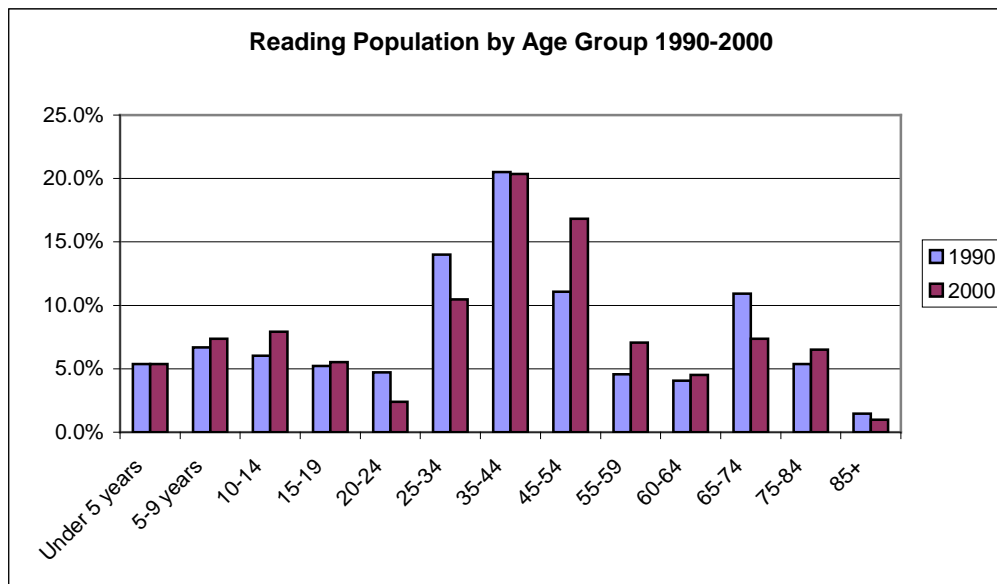
The land on which the Felchville School was built was given to the Town in 1936, and the original school was built shortly thereafter. An addition was completed in 1994, bringing the total capacity of the school to 80 students. There is no foreseeable need for infrastructure improvements to the building in the near future, as enrollments have been falling. The Town may wish to analyze the costs and benefits of several alternatives in making the decision about the future of the school: 1) sending students to other towns for elementary as well as high school, 2) regionalizing, or 3) attracting more families with children to the town in order to increase the school population and spread out costs.

**Figure 4.3 – Reading School Enrollment**



Reading Elementary School - 2003

**Figure 4.4 – Population by Age Group**



Census 2000

There were 61 Reading students enrolled in grades 7-12 at the Woodstock Junior & Senior High School during the 2004-05 school year. These students attend school in Woodstock since Reading is a member of the Woodstock Union High School. The Hartford Technical Center offers vocational training for high school students who live in Reading. The Howard Dean Educational Center in offers college and continuing education classes through Vermont Community College, the New England Culinary Institute, and the University of Vermont.

## **Child Care Facilities**

Childcare is an increasingly important factor in an economy where households are often supported by two incomes. The need for child care during working hours is particularly important to single parent households. According to Census 2000, there were 33 children in single parent households in 2000 compared to 20 in 1990. Slightly more than 5% of the town's population was under 5 years of age.

There is a facility licensed for up to ten children on the Tyson Road, and a daycare center at Ascutney Mountain Resort. The Town should include a survey question on the need for more child care facilities on the next Town Plan survey.

## **Public Buildings**

### **Town Hall**

Also called Robinson Hall, this building houses the Town Clerk's office, the Post Office, and a kitchen and dining room on the first floor for public functions. On the second floor is a meeting room, a stage, and men's and women's bathrooms. Robinson Hall is owned by the Robinson Trust. The Town may use the building for free as long as it is used as the town offices, otherwise ownership of the building returns to the Robinson Trust. The Town pays for upkeep of the building. The Town has plans for new siding on the outside walls within the next year.

### **Gilbert A. Davis Library**

The library is owned by the Town and has a collection of 6,500 books. The library has plans to add a handicapped-accessible bathroom, which it will build within the existing building or as part of an addition if the Town can acquire a neighboring property and expand the building.

### **Town Garage**

This building is located on five acres of land in South Reading. It has six vehicle bays. The Town operates two dump trucks, snowplows, sanders, a grader, a loader, etc. The Town budgets funds for equipment repair and replacement each year. The Town's sand and salt supply is stored at the Town Garage in Hammondsville and the salt supply is covered.

## **Cemeteries**

The Town currently administers and maintains six cemeteries: Amsden, Bailey's Mills, Spear, South Reading, Sawyer, and Swain. Plots are available in the New Amsden Cemetery.

## **Town Highways**

Maintenance and improvement of town roads, bridges and culverts is accomplished through state grants and local taxes. In 2004, the Town plans to resurface the Tyson Road and replace two large culverts, one on Twenty Mile Stream Road and one on the west end of Tyson Road. Generally the Town applies for state grants to cover most of the costs of major road and bridge projects. Regular maintenance of gravel roads is a large part of the town budget.

## **Emergency Services**

### **Fire**

The Reading Fire Dept. has four trucks. The Town is building a new firehouse off Route 106 near the intersection of Route 44. The total cost for the new building (including land, etc.) is estimated at \$300,000. Once the new fire station is built, the Town plans to tear down the old firehouse in Felchville. The Town should apply for a planning grant to look into the best use for the lot. Traditionally, July celebrations have been held at the site. The Fire Department is a member of Connecticut Valley Mutual Aid.

### **Police**

The Town employs the Windsor County Sheriff's office for local law enforcement, and the Vermont State Police provide all other police services. In the past, a constable was elected for local law enforcement. Several respondents to the Town Plan Survey wrote in a need for more police protection.

### **Rescue**

Reading Rescue will operate from the new fire station as soon as it is built. It owns an ambulance that was converted to a Fast Squad vehicle. Reading is also served by the Windsor ambulance service.

### **Hospitals**

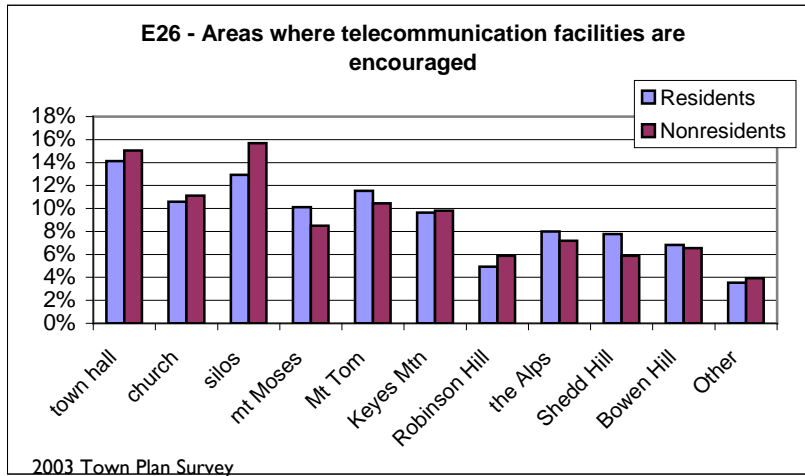
Reading is served by two hospitals within the Southern Windsor County Region: Mt. Ascutney Hospital in Windsor and the Springfield Hospital. Residents are also served by the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon, NH, and the Ottauquechee Health Center in Woodstock.

## **Telecommunications Towers and Electrical Transmission Lines**

The use of cell phones and the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 has led to the proliferation of telecommunication towers and facilities. The purpose of the Act was to make telecommunication possible from anywhere in the United States to anywhere in the world. The siting of electrical facilities, electrical transmission lines and telecommunications towers is a controversial subject that involves health, safety, and aesthetic issues. The placing of towers on mountains and ridgelines detracts from scenic resources. Electromagnetic fields (EMF) emitted by communications towers and high-voltage electrical transmission lines are suspected of contributing to human health problems, including some types of cancers.

In the 2003 Town Plan Survey, residents and property owners were asked to check off areas where towers should be encouraged or discouraged. There were several comments from people who felt that towers should be discouraged in all locations. However, some locations appeared more favorable than others. Figure 3.5 shows that the areas most favored for telecommunications facilities included the Town Hall and silos, where antenna would likely be less conspicuous. Specific language regarding siting of telecommunications facilities is included in the Goals and Policies section at the end of this chapter. The Planning Commission intends to revise the zoning bylaws to include this language in the near future.

**Figure 4.5**



### Solid Waste Disposal

Solid waste in Reading goes to the NH/VT Solid Waste District facility in Claremont, NH. Garbage and recycling is taken to the transfer station and recycling center in Weathersfield. The Town of Reading should continue these arrangements and should take an active role in local and regional efforts to reduce the solid waste stream and increase recycling.

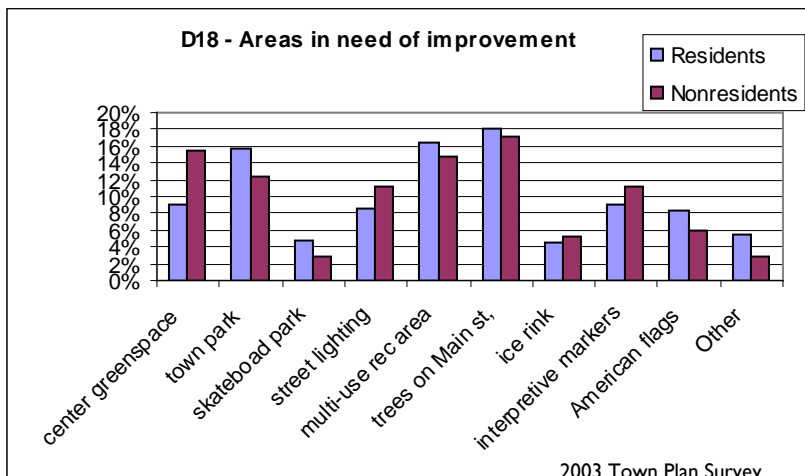
Several respondents to the Town Plan Survey wrote in “garbage pickup” as an additional service that the Town should provide. Currently residents can hire a private vendor to pick up their garbage and recyclables.

### Recreational Facilities

Reading’s only municipal recreation facility is the Claude Bartley Memorial Field. It is located in Felchville and consists of a 5-acre baseball field. Many other recreational opportunities are available to the public in Reading on both private and state-owned lands. See the Natural and Cultural Resources chapter for more discussion on recreational trails.

When asked about areas in town that are in need of improvement, Town Plan Survey respondents answered that a multi-use recreation area, and town park would all be desirable facilities for the Town to pursue. Respondents also showed support for more trees on Main Street.

**Figure 4.6**



## Public Lands

The State of Vermont owns 6,716 acres , or over 25% of the land in Reading. Much of this land is either wildlife management area (around Knapp Brook Pond and the Arthur Davis Wildlife Management Area) or attached to the Calvin Coolidge State Forest. The Town Forest is located north of Knapp Pond, and recently the state purchased land around 20-Foot Hole, a popular swimming hole on the North Branch of the Black River. There are many trails in these areas, offering recreational opportunities for hiking, skiing, snowmobiling, etc. State lands should continue to be managed for recreational use as well as for wildlife habitat.

## Goals and Action Steps (Goals are numbered, Action Steps are indicated by an arrow)

1. Explore options for public water and sewer in Felchville in order to allow for higher density development while maintaining public health.
  - Allow decentralized septic systems in village centers where possible to enable high-density housing and commercial development.
2. Address the problem of decreasing enrollment in the Elementary School.
  - Develop a cost-benefit analysis for the alternatives to maintaining an elementary school in town. Such alternatives could include sending students to other towns or developing a regional school system.
3. Maintain all Town-owned and leased buildings and recreational facilities on a regular schedule; institute an energy conservation plan to ensure that repairs will increase efficiency and savings wherever possible.
  - Develop a plan to upgrade the Library facilities to maintain the quality of the collection and accommodate new books and publications.
4. Maintain the highway system in a safe condition and according to the Vermont Local Road and Bridge Standards.
5. Maintain Town-owned and administered cemeteries and provide for future acquisition of abutting lands as the need develops.
6. Develop a comprehensive capital improvements plan to guide the planning for public buildings, equipment, and roads. The plan should include future needs, priorities, costs, and financing methods.
7. Ensure that areas where vehicles are maintained or sand and salt is stored meet new state and federal stormwater regulations.
8. In order to provide residents with the benefits of an integrated and modern communications network, while minimizing the economic, environmental and cultural costs of its development, the Town will amend its zoning bylaws to reflect the policies listed below.

## Policies

1. The Town shall support the ongoing repair and maintenance of historic buildings and structures to the extent practicable.
2. The Town offices and Post Office shall continue to be located in the village of Felchville.

3. Town-owned equipment shall be maintained and replaced as necessary to ensure that they are in safe operable condition.
4. New or expanded wireless communications services must be co-located on existing facilities or be sited on existing structures and employ “stealth” design and structural techniques wherever possible. Owners or operators of existing tower space shall be encouraged to facilitate the sharing of that space unless sharing or co-location is prohibited due to frequency interference, adverse aesthetic impacts, or a demonstrated risk to public health.
5. When co-location is not possible, the siting and design of new communications towers and other facilities (including support, maintenance, and access facilities) shall be done such that impacts on wildlife habitat and travel corridors, wetlands, rivers and streams, and other natural, scenic and historic resources of the Town are minimized or avoided. The location of wireless communications facilities on ridgelines is to be discouraged; however, where such a site is considered to be necessary under the requirements of the Telecommunications Act, “stealth” technology must be incorporated in the design, construction and maintenance of the facility.
6. Applicants for communications facilities at new or existing sites shall demonstrate to the Town that public exposure to electro-magnetic radiation will not exceed the applicable FCC standards.

## Chapter 5

### ENERGY

State and federal governments have more control over energy supplies, sources, and pricing than do most municipalities, but local efforts can play a role in energy development, conservation, and land use decisions. Reducing local dependence on outside energy sources and reducing overall energy demand are in the best interest of the residents of Reading.

In order to reduce local energy demand, development and settlement patterns should minimize vehicular transportation requirements and encourage land use that conserves energy. Zoning bylaws, subdivision regulations, and the Act 250 process are vehicles by which municipalities can promote energy-efficient development at the local level.

#### Heating Fuel

Vermonters and local residents use a variety of fuels to meet energy needs, but by far the predominant fuel used is petroleum. According to Census 2000 data, 62.5% of Reading residents use fuel oil and kerosene for heating. This is slightly higher than the percent of state residents that use fuel oil for heating. A greater percentage of Reading residents (22.1%) use wood for heating than do residents statewide (9.4%). The remaining population of Reading uses gas (14%) or electricity for fuel (1.4%). According to the Census, no residents currently use solar power for their primary source of heat, though it is quite possible that passive solar heat is used as a secondary source.

**Table 5.1 Heating Fuel Types (Census 2000)**

	Reading		Vermont	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>Occupied housing units</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100.0</b>	240,634	<b>100.0</b>
Utility gas	0	0.7	29,234	12.1
Bottled, tank, or LP gas	40	14.0	34,715	14.4
Electricity	4	1.4	11,363	4.7
Fuel oil, kerosene, etc	178	62.5	141,041	58.6
Coal or coke	0	0	427	0.2
Wood	63	22.1	22,616	9.4
Solar energy	0	0	90	0
Other fuel	0	0	817	0.3
No fuel used	0	0	331	0.1

#### Alternative Energy Resources

Wind and solar power are potential alternative sources for generating electricity. Building location and design are very important for taking advantage of these resources. Installation of insulation, weather-tight windows and doors, and highly efficient appliances can dramatically reduce the amount of conventional fuel needed and/or ensure efficiency of alternative sources of

energy. Passive solar energy and solar cells that generate electricity generally are most effective for southern and western exposures. Passive solar energy makes immediate use of the sun's light and heat through windows and skylights, while solar cells store energy in batteries and convert it to electricity for later use.

Wind is an excellent alternative source of electrical energy for homes, under the right conditions. Wind generators must be mounted on towers above treeline and need an average wind speed of nine miles per hour (mph). Better conditions can require shorter towers and smaller turbines, creating less of an impact on scenic views. According to a wind energy map produced for the Vermont Department of Public Service, the ridgeline on the western side of town and elevations over 1800 feet generally have average wind speeds of at least 11 mph. The ridgeline leading up to Mount Moses has wind speeds of at least 14.5 mph while the peak gets winds up to 17 to 18 mph. While it is not likely that these areas would be attractive for a large-scale wind generating facility, smaller towers serving individual or even multiple residences are feasible and are encouraged.

In more remote locations, the impact caused by wind towers should be weighed against that caused by the clearing that the extension of power lines would require. Any new infrastructure required for generation or transmission of electric power should be sited so that it takes advantage of the sun or wind with the least possible negative impact on natural and scenic resources.

## **Energy Conservation and Efficiency**

The Town of Reading should take the initiative to promote energy efficiency. Measures to achieve reduction in energy demand in residential areas include the use of cost-efficient alternative energy resources, including renewable resources, for both new homes and additions/renovation of existing homes; the construction of energy-efficient new homes; increasing awareness among town residents of the link between the cost savings potential and the practice of energy conservation and the use of alternative energy resources. Architects and builders should be encouraged to examine alternative energy resources in the design and construction phases of residential development. Efficiency Vermont is available to assist builders and homeowners with making homes energy efficient. Efficiency Vermont is a statewide provider of energy efficiency services. It is operated by an independent, non-profit organization under contract to the Vermont Public Service Board. Where feasible, residential units should be located to maximize the benefits from alternative energy resources and take advantage of existing infrastructure.

## **Transportation and Energy Use**

Along with residential consumption, energy use for transportation is anticipated to account for the greatest demand over the next 20 years. Efforts to reduce transportation demand should focus on reducing single passenger transportation, reducing the costs for the construction and maintenance of the town road network, maintaining public vehicles and roads, and public education. In an effort to minimize energy costs, the expansion of roads should be limited and public vehicles should be regularly maintained and replaced. In addition, the Town should

promote the use of energy efficient vehicles and encourage residents to use car and van pool programs.

Energy consumption can also be reduced by promoting pedestrian and non-motorized traffic through the development of pedestrian walkways, the location of goods and services in close proximity to higher density residential areas, and the development of bikeways and greenways.

## **Energy and Land Use Patterns**

When land use patterns do not relate to existing infrastructure and development, energy can be lost through excessive travel distances and unnecessary expansion or extension of facilities and systems. Wherever possible, development should be concentrated in order to reduce the costliness of dispersing energy over large geographic areas. The location of community service structures, retail sites, public utilities, day-care centers, state and municipal offices, and other frequently visited sites should be encouraged within walking distance of residential areas. In addition, new roads and other utilities should be located, when feasible, to coincide with existing and recommended land use patterns as set forth in this document.

## **Goals and Action Steps** (Goals are numbered, Action Steps are indicated by an arrow)

1. Work to ensure the most efficient use of municipally owned equipment and vehicles, including the use of fuel.
  - Maintain public vehicles and roads, and educate residents about the importance of maintaining their own vehicles. In an effort to minimize energy costs the expansion of roads will be limited and public vehicle maintenance will be cost effective and maximize efficiency.
2. Promote the most efficient use of electricity, and heating and cooling equipment in all municipally owned buildings.
  - Conduct an energy audit to determine specific energy conservation measures to improve efficiency in town buildings. Evaluate the suggested energy improvements for cost effectiveness.
3. Encourage all new development to employ the most energy-efficient designs practicable.
  - Require new construction to follow the Vermont Residential Energy Code.
4. Encourage energy conservation in businesses and residences.
  - Increase awareness among town residents by providing information concerning alternate resources and methods of reducing energy consumption in the home (such as weatherization and upgrading to energy efficient appliances).
5. Encourage new development to take place in areas most easily served by public utilities.
6. Encourage energy conservation in transportation through expanded use of public transit and ride-sharing.
  - Research the possibility of locating a Park and Ride in Reading.

## **Policies**

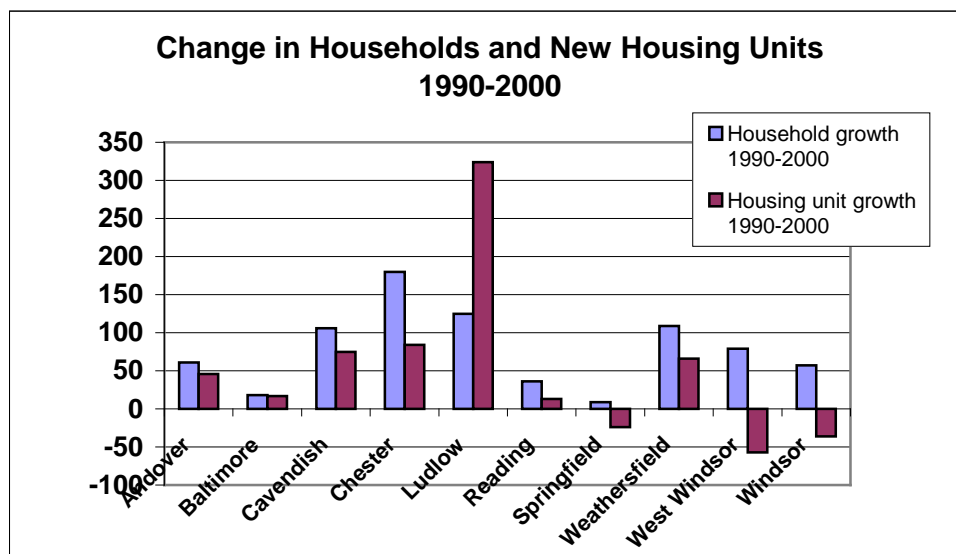
1. The Town shall encourage the use of cost-efficient alternative energy resources, including renewable resources, for new homes, additions/renovation of existing homes, and for commercial and industrial buildings.
2. Where feasible, developers of residential units shall be encouraged locate new homes in locations that will maximize the benefits from the sun and/or take advantage of existing infrastructure.
3. The Town shall ensure the acquisition of energy efficient municipal equipment and vehicles and the efficient use of this equipment.
4. The Town shall promote energy awareness and education.
5. The location of community service structures, retail sites, public utilities, day care centers, municipal offices, and other frequently visited sites shall be encouraged within walking distance of high-density residential areas.
6. The Town will ensure that new construction of electrical transmission or distribution lines take into consideration impacts on natural, scenic, and historic resources and shall not adversely impact fragile soils.
7. The Town shall support local and regional initiatives designed to promote ridesharing, carpooling, and public transportation.
9. The use of locally produced energy sources such as wood, wind, and solar, are supported provided that they are supplied and used in ways that protect air quality and are compatible with this Plan's Natural Resource and Land Use policies.
10. The use of catalytic converters on woodstoves to burn fuel wood more efficiently and to improve air quality shall be encouraged.

## Chapter 6 HOUSING

The Town recognizes that housing that is affordable to working Vermonters is important for a successful community. Housing is considered affordable if rent or mortgage, taxes, and insurance costs are no more than 30% of a household's annual income. Affordable housing is necessary to attract and sustain permanent residents who will send their children to the school, participate in community affairs and make Reading a better place to live.

Historically, the Town of Reading has been a community that had neither a large commercial or industrial sector. Residents worked on their farms in town or traveled to work in the surrounding communities of Woodstock, Windsor, Springfield and other places in the Upper Valley. In the last ten years, a housing crisis has emerged in the Upper Valley, centered in the core communities of Hanover and Lebanon, NH. A successful economy in this region has led to economic growth. However, housing growth has remained fairly stagnant, sending housing prices up and vacancy rates down. Many businesses in the Upper Valley are having difficulty hiring new employees because of the housing shortage. The impact of the housing crisis may be felt in Reading as well. Those who work in the Hanover/Lebanon area must go farther afield to look for housing, and make longer commutes. There are very few houses available to buy, and rentals remain full. As the school population continues to decrease (see Education section in the Utilities and Facilities chapter), the Town may wish to consider pro-active measures to ensure the availability of housing for working families. Figure 6.1 illustrates how the housing demand (growth in the number of households) has overtaken supply in many towns in southern Windsor County. The chart shows a loss of housing units in some towns in Springfield, Windsor and West Windsor. In Springfield, much of the loss came from decreasing the number of units in the Westview housing development; in Windsor and West Windsor, it is likely that the change is related to new ways that housing units were defined and counted for Census 2000.

**Figure 6.1 - Housing Demand and Supply in Southern Windsor County**



In Reading and other towns throughout the region, many seasonal homes have been converted to year-round homes as the demand for year-round homes continues to grow. Census data (Table 6.1) shows that the number of seasonal homes dropped by 20% between 1990 and 2000. Currently 23% of housing units in Reading are second homes.

**Table 6.1 – Household and Housing Unit Data, Reading, VT (1990 and 2000 Census)**

	1990	% of 1990 Total	2000	% of 2000 Total	% Change 1990-2000
<b>Total Households</b>	250	100.0%	286	100.0%	14.4%
Family households (families)	178	71.2%	204	71.3%	14.6%
Married-couple family	151	60.4%	170	59.4%	12.6%
Nonfamily households	72	28.8%	82	28.7%	13.9%
Householder living alone	55	22.0%	63	22.0%	14.5%
Householder 65 years and over	29	11.6%	26	9.1%	-10.3%
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	394	100.0%	407	100.0%	3.3%
Occupied Housing Units	250	63.5%	286	70.3%	14.4%
Owner Occupied	199	50.5%	235	57.7%	18.1%
Renter Occupied	51	12.9%	51	12.5%	0.0%
Vacant Housing Units	144	36.5%	121	29.7%	-16.0%
Seasonal, recreational or occasional use	115	29.2%	92	22.6%	-20.0%
Total ownership units	209	53.0%	243	59.7%	16.3%
Total rental units	53	13.5%	56	13.8%	5.7%
Vacant ownership units	10	2.5%	8	2.0%	-20.0%
Vacant rental units	2	0.5%	5	1.2%	150.0%
Median Value (\$)	88,900	-	127,900	-	43.9%
Median Contract Rent (\$)	404	-	396	-	-2.0%

## Housing Values

The table below (Table 6.2) shows that the median price of residences sold in Reading has jumped around quite a bit, depending on the type of houses sold. Since 1987, an average of 5 houses were sold each year in Reading (see Table 6.3). In the last few years, however, numbers of houses sold have increased slightly to between 6 and 10 residences per year.

**Table 6.2 - Median Price of Primary Residences Sold**

Year	Reading	Windsor County	Vermont
1987	63,500	78,000	75,000
1988	119,000	86,125	80,000
1989	125,000	91,000	88,000
1990	247,500	85,500	88,500
1991	82,500	89,000	91,500
1992	113,804	87,500	92,500
1993	138,250	89,500	94,000
1994	80,000	89,900	95,000
1995	89,000	92,400	95,000
1996	81,000	90,500	95,000
1997	98,500	95,000	100,000
1998	102,000	97,000	106,000
1999	127,500	95,000	105,785
2000	111,500	107,750	112,500
2001	79,000	117,250	122,688
2002	165,000	123,500	131,250
2003	145,000	137,975	145,950

**Table 6.3 – Number of Primary Residences Sold**

Year	Reading	Windsor County	Vermont
1987	7	872	8,207
1988	7	656	7,631
1989	3	517	6,937
1990	4	330	4,374
1991	3	251	3,704
1992	3	298	3,971
1993	4	372	5,016
1994	6	590	6,759
1995	4	456	5,499
1996	6	457	5,279
1997	2	450	4,706
1998	4	540	5,788
1999	8	611	7,046
2000	8	634	7,477
2001	6	684	7,476
2002	10	711	7,736
2003	13	750	8,314

(from Vermont Housing Data – [housingdata.org](http://housingdata.org) )

Table 6.4 shows that one-third of Reading’s residents moved to town between 1995 and 2000, and most of those people had previously lived in a different state. The percentage of people who recently moved to Reading is similar to those at the County and State level, although a slightly larger percentage had lived in the same house since 1995.

**Table 6.4 – Moving Patterns**

	Reading	%	Windsor County	%	Vermont	%
Population of residents more than 5 years of age, 2000	665	100%	54,603	100%	574,842	100%
... Lived in same house in 1995	438	66%	33,434	61%	339,599	59%
... Lived in different house in 1995	227	34%	21,169	39%	235,243	41%
... Were living in U.S. in 1995	220	33%	20,674	38%	227,850	40%
... in same town or city	0	0	1,266	2%	28,418	5%
... in different town or city	220	33%	19,408	36%	199,432	35%
... in same county	93	14%	8,733	16%	93,575	16%
... in different county	127	19%	10,675	20%	105,857	18%
... in same state	20	3%	2,508	5%	36,109	6%
... in different state	107	16%	8,167	15%	69,748	12%
... Were living outside U.S. in 1995	7	1%	495	1%	7,393	1%

(from Vermont Housing Data – [www.housingdata.org](http://www.housingdata.org))

### When is Housing Considered Affordable?

Housing is considered affordable if a household has to spend no more than 30% of their annual income on housing. Housing costs for homeowners include mortgage payments (principal &

interest), property taxes and insurance. An affordable house is generally three times the annual household income. Costs for renters include rent and utilities. The median household income in Reading in 1999 was \$44,306. The median income for Windsor County was \$40,688 and for the State was \$40,856. Therefore, an affordable house for someone of median (moderate) income in Reading would be approximately \$132,918. Table 6.2 indicates that in 1999, when the median income figures were measured, the median housing price was affordable to those of median income. In recent years, however, the median price of a house sold in Reading has increased dramatically, likely shutting out those making at or less than the median income of \$44,000. Since wages in Vermont are still low compared to many other places, the housing prices are quickly becoming less affordable to working Vermonters.

According to the 2003 Town Plan Survey, most respondents felt that Reading had a sufficient diversity of housing types and should not work to promote the development of affordable housing in town. Changes to the state's Municipal and Regional Planning and Development law (Chapter 117), encourage towns to allow for the development of housing types that would be affordable to low to moderate income Vermonters. These changes include allowing multifamily housing in certain areas of town, and allowing accessory apartments to be built in all single-family homes or accessory structures.

## **Goals and Action Steps**

1. Allow for the development of a diversity of housing types that will serve all income levels.
  - Review zoning regulations to determine whether they discourage the development of affordable housing.
  - Make changes to zoning bylaws in accordance with changes to Chapter 117, including allowing for multifamily housing and greater flexibility in allowing for accessory apartments.
  - Work with the Rockingham Area Community Land Trust and other state and regional housing providers to determine the feasibility of developing affordable or mixed income housing projects in town.
  - Research the need for housing for low-income elderly residents.
  - Consider providing density bonuses for low-income, clustered housing developments.

## **Policies**

1. The development of housing in Reading shall be consistent with the Town Plan.
2. The development of multi-family housing, and especially the conversion of older, larger homes in the villages, shall be encouraged.
3. The development of cluster housing with covenants for long-term affordability of some units shall be encouraged.
4. Regional affordable housing programs shall be encouraged and supported.

# Chapter 7

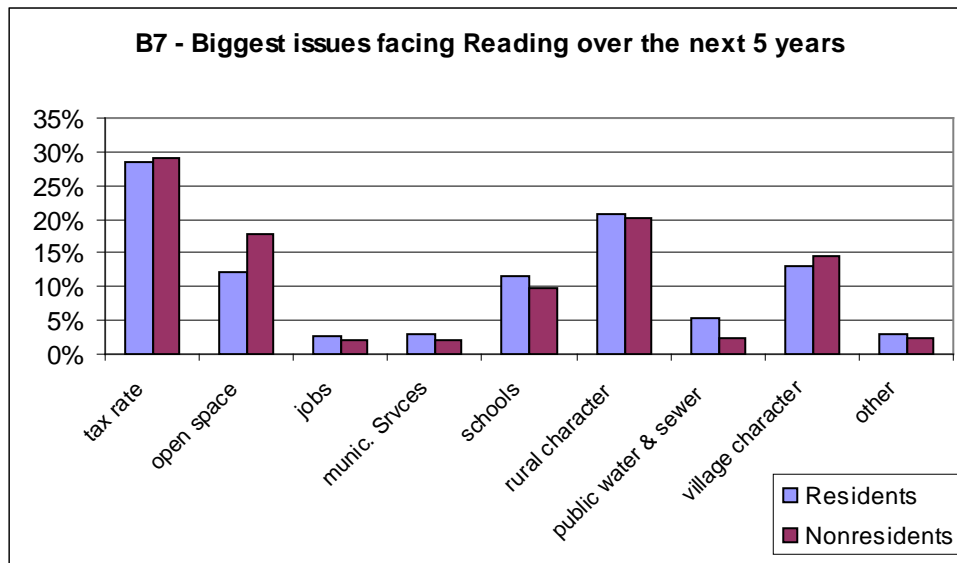
## LAND USE

The two basic considerations for deciding the most appropriate use of land in Reading are first, what use(s) best serve Reading’s residents, and second, what use(s) the land can reasonably support. Additional considerations are historic land use patterns, cultural values, and the relationship between development and the efficient provision of public services. Together, these factors form the basis for Reading’s land use plan. One of the primary purposes of land use planning is to balance the legitimate interest of the community, as expressed through the planning process, with the rights and expectations of individual landowners. Achieving this balance is a difficult yet necessary function of the Town Plan.

### Rural Character

One of the biggest issues facing Reading over the next five years is preserving the rural character of the town, according to the results of the 2003 Reading Town Plan Survey. This issue was second in importance after the tax rate. Survey respondents were also interested in preserving open space and the character of the villages.

Figure 7.1



2003 Reading Town Plan Survey

How is rural character defined in the context of this Plan? A general definition of rural character includes the following:

- Working landscapes, defined by the sustainable development and use of land-based resources, especially farming and forestry;
- A sustainable natural environment, including clean air and water, expanses of open land, healthy wildlife populations and habitats, and a common commitment to the protection of those shared resources;

- Diverse cultural amenities, including historic buildings and settlement patterns, small-scale local institutions and organizations; and commercial, recreational and social opportunities that engender a sense of community.
- A rural lifestyle, marked by relative privacy; peace and quiet; access to the land and nature; lack of formality; and a strong sense of independence and individualism that is coupled with, though sometimes at odds with, a perception of community spirit and shared responsibility.

The challenge of this Plan and the Planning Commission is how to implement strategies to preserve rural character while allowing for growth.

## **Reading's Rural Economy**

Reading's economy is made up of several small businesses, primarily located in the village of Felchville. A restaurant is now located in Hammondsville in the place of the former General Store, and several bed and breakfasts are located throughout the town. A large percentage of Reading's residents either work at home or are retired. A little over one-third of the Town Plan Survey respondents reported that they were either self-employed or worked at home. Since the survey did not ask whether respondents were retired, it is possible that retirees made up a good portion of this category. Over half of survey respondents were over the age of 55.

### **Village Businesses**

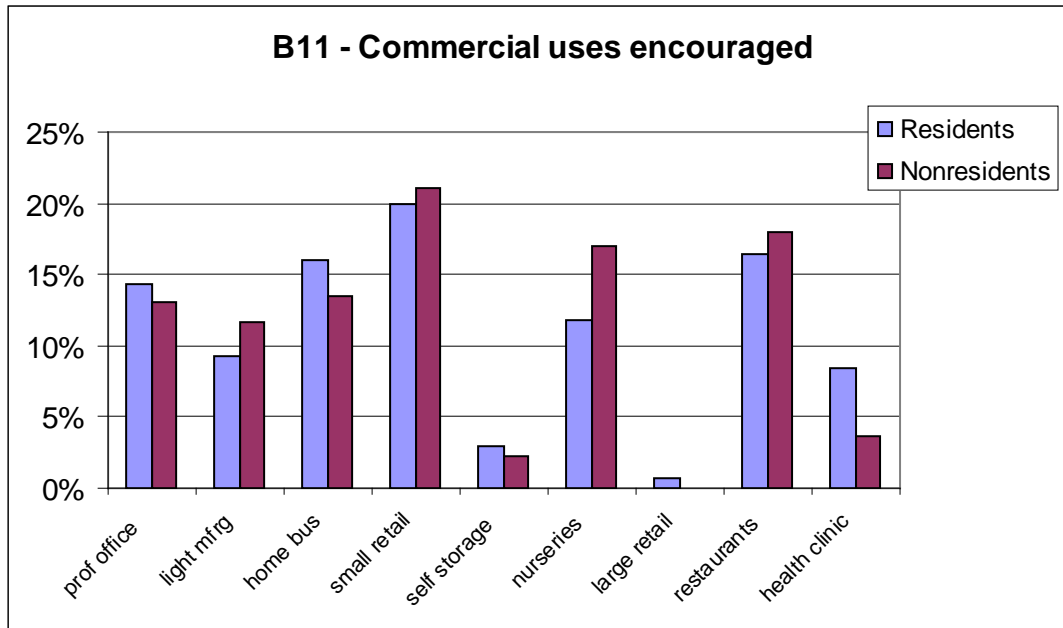
Survey respondents named Felchville as the most likely place for high-density residential and commercial development. Hammondsville and the intersection of Routes 106 and 44 also received favorable response from many for commercial development. For these areas, the commercial uses encouraged included small retail activities, restaurants, nurseries, and professional offices. Home businesses also received a high score on the Survey (See Figure 7.2).

Several participants in the Town Plan Forum voted for support of small businesses and existing businesses as a priority for the next few years in Reading. The businesses in the villages of Reading serve as focal points, gathering places, and message boards in addition to providing local access to the goods and services they market. One of the main elements of "Smart Growth," the latest term for good planning and healthy communities, is that residents be able to walk to businesses and services. Felchville offers such a pattern, although walking along Route 106 can be treacherous due to the lack of sidewalks.

As mentioned in the Utilities and Facilities chapter, there was not widespread support for investigating the feasibility of installing public water and sewer in Felchville. Some innovative programs may be available, however, that would not be too costly for the town. Public water and sewer could enable Felchville to encourage uses that would enhance the village center.

Junk and junk cars on properties in the village centers were listed as major challenges in both the Town Plan Survey and at the Forum. The Town should consider adopting a junk ordinance that would allow the Town to fine noncompliant property owners.

Figure 7.2



2003 Reading Town Plan Survey

### Home Occupations

With the versatility of high-speed internet (currently available in Reading through satellite service providers) many more people are able to work at home than in previous decades. In addition, it is both traditional and practical for residents of rural areas to start up small businesses in a home office or garage. Home occupations are an encouraged use in Reading. According to Chapter 117 (the State's Municipal and Regional Planning and Development law):

*No bylaw may infringe upon the right of any resident to use a minor portion of a dwelling unit for an occupation that is customary in residential areas and that does not have an undue adverse effect upon the character of the residential area in which the dwelling is located.*

The Town may wish to create performance standards to determine undue adverse effects. These could include standards for noise, dust, use of hazardous materials that may impact air or water, traffic, and parking.

As high-speed internet is currently only available in Reading through satellite dish networks, the Town may wish to seek funding to encourage broadband service for the town. This service is less expensive than satellite service and is accessible to those who do not have access to cable or telephone DSL service.

State law (Chapter 117) allows licensed child care providers serving six or fewer children to operate in any district. The Town may wish to consider site plan review for facilities that serve more than six children.

## Mining and Industry

Currently there is no industry in Reading. An Industrial/Mining district is located at the intersections of Routes 44 and 106 and includes land formerly occupied by a talc processing facility (see Natural and Cultural Resources chapter for more discussion on earth resources, including mining). The Town should determine whether this area continues to be the best location for industry and whether industry is desired in any district in the town. The 2003 Town Plan Survey indicated that light manufacturing is fairly low on the list of priorities for those who responded to the survey.

## Historic Patterns of Land Use

The majority of land in Reading is characterized by steeply sloped mountains, narrow stream valleys, and relative inaccessibility. There is little flat land, but some has slopes of ten percent or less. Elevations range from 700 feet along the banks of the North Branch of the Black River to 2,600 feet on Long Hill. These and other factors have naturally focused the most intensive development within a few small settlements.

A small, relatively flat corridor along the upper reaches of the North Branch of the Black River and Mill Brook is home to the villages of Felchville and Hammondsville. Outside of the areas of most concentrated development, especially along roads leading out of the villages, are lands that were traditionally used for agricultural purposes. Some of this land on the gentler hillsides and upland plateaus is still farmed, and much of it has been converted to residential use, both year-round and seasonal. The village of South Reading is at the center of one of these areas.

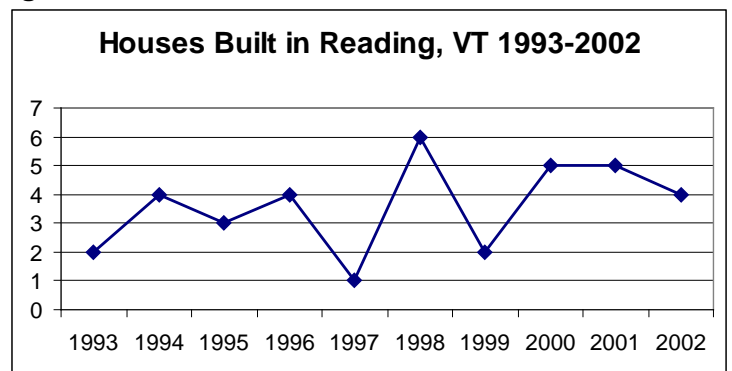
Most of the land in Reading – the more rugged and inaccessible areas mentioned above, along with other land such as long-abandoned farms – remains undeveloped and is used mainly for forestry, recreation, and conservation. Much of this land is publicly owned, either as Town or State forest, and much of it is at elevations above 1,500 feet. The topography of the land and limited access probably mean that Reading will remain a small community with its most intense development largely confined to the valley lands along Route 106.

**Table 7.1 - Distribution of Existing Land Use\***

Land Use Class	Acres	% of Total
Residential	336	1.3
Commercial/Public	65	.2
Roads	304	1.1
Agricultural	1,217	4.6
Open, non-agricultural	643	2.9
Forest	23,803	89.3
Lakes and rivers	112	.4
Wetlands	172	.6
Total	26,652	100

\*Based on Land Use/Land Cover GIS coverage by Microdata, 1994

**Figure 7.3 – Number of Houses Built 1993-2002**



In recent years, growth has been fairly slow. According to town records, between one and six houses were built in Reading each year since 1993. Subdivisions tend to be small, and growth incremental. There is a housing crisis in the Upper Valley of Vermont and New Hampshire that

could potentially change that trend in Reading, so the Town may want to consider adopting subdivision regulations in case a larger development is proposed.

## **Future Land Use**

In order to implement the goals, objectives, and policies of this Plan through zoning, controlled provision of public services, and other measures, the following land use categories are established and shown on the Future Land Use Map. Generally, land within the delineated areas is suitable for the uses and densities proposed in this Plan. However, the physical characteristics of certain individual properties may be such that engineering or environmental considerations will further limit development. Therefore, the descriptions of appropriate land uses and densities should be interpreted generally – individual properties may have additional limitations.

Along with the development capability of the land and protection of valuable natural resources, the efficient provision and expansion of public services is the basis for Reading's land use categories. Directing growth to areas most effectively and efficiently serviced by utilities, roads, and schools will help the Town achieve its stated objectives of maintaining its rural character and controlling the cost of public services. Policies and regulations which discourage growth far from the village areas are consistent with these objectives. In general, commercial development and high density residential development should be limited to the three existing village areas, where services such as public water and sewer systems can be most efficiently built and expanded. Medium density residential development should be allowed in areas along Rte. 106 and the Tyson Road that are relatively flat and accessible. Development on the remaining, more remote, land should be limited to the lowest density uses because of the steeper terrain, higher elevations, more fragile environments, wildlife habitat and limited access to roads and other services.

## **Future Land Use Categories**

### **Forest**

The forest category represents land that is currently dominated by forest cover. Forests serve a variety of functions and uses, and contribute significantly to the town's rural character. Forests protect air and water quality and support biological diversity. Woodlands provide critical habitat for many species of wildlife, including whitetail deer, moose, black bear, wild turkey and a variety of songbirds. Forests are also important to the local economy by providing products such as lumber, pulpwood, fuel wood, and maple sugar. Outdoor recreation is a way of life for many of the town's residents and is an attraction for tourists. Woodlands support a variety of recreational pursuits including hunting, trapping, hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and nature and foliage viewing. Forest land in Reading also supports some low density residential uses.

Because of its inherent value, and because of its remoteness from most roads and other infrastructure, land in the forest category should continue to be used primarily for recreation, conservation, and sustainable logging.

A plan shall be prepared for any clearcutting project above 1,900 feet in elevation, and posted in the Town Clerk's office. Plans shall be submitted to county foresters for review with regard to aesthetic and water quality issues. Clearcutting plans should also be submitted to the Town Tree

Warden. The Town wishes to discourage “liquidation” logging operations, unless they are specifically necessary to preserve forest health.

Sylvan Acres in South Reading is an example of a well-managed forest, and may be considered an example of the type of management practices supported and encouraged by the Town. The stand of Northern White Cedar in the headwaters of the Bailey Brook watershed is a unique and especially valuable resource to the Town, being at the southern limits of its natural range. This resource is listed in the Plan’s Natural and Cultural Resource Inventory, and is worthy of special protection.

### **Agriculture**

Agricultural lands, as shown on the map, have traditionally been in agricultural use or have been identified as having especially good potential for agricultural use due to their soil type. The use of land for agricultural purposes has declined sharply in Reading over the past several decades as farm values dropped and development pressures increased. Local agricultural production is beneficial to the local economy, is a significant part of Reading’s traditional rural lifestyle, and helps maintain an appreciation for local culture and history. Therefore, development in agricultural areas should occur only in ways that avoid or minimize any reduction in agricultural potential.

In the future, the Town should consider the creation of agricultural zones as a part of its zoning ordinance. Areas that could be so designated include the Bailey’s Mills area, Reading Farms, Springbrook Farm, the Jenne Farm, Newhall Farm, Lexington Farm, Rowlee Farm, and Barnleigh (Cook) Farm.

The Town encourages local farmers to focus their efforts on the development of sustainable methods of farming that are productive and profitable. Specifically, the Town encourages farmers to pursue the following goals where feasible and practicable:

- Use farming methods that prevent water pollution, prevent soil erosion and degradation, and protect public health and safety;
- Stabilize and increase farm incomes through crop and enterprise diversification.

The intent of agricultural planning is to increase the number of economically viable employment opportunities in agriculture, and to protect Reading’s agricultural heritage.

### **Rural Residential**

Rural residential areas have been identified as being well-suited to residential development at low overall densities. They were designated residential because of factors such as existing settlement patterns, access to existing improved roads, the cost-effectiveness of providing public services in the future, slope, soil conditions, and others. “Cluster development” should be encouraged where appropriate, provided that overall density remains low (i.e. 3-acre density could be three houses on three acres of land with six acres left as open space). Some limited home-based commercial activities may also be appropriate, provided that they do not have an undue adverse affect on the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

### **High Density Residential**

Higher density residential development should take place in and around the village areas. The Town should investigate the possibility of allowing for shared septic systems and/or consider implementing a public water supply for areas of dense development.

### **Mixed Use**

These areas are suitable for commercial and higher density residential development consistent with the goals of this Plan. Typically, mixed-use development is characterized by a mix of commercial or retail uses on the first floor with residential units on upper floors. In Reading, the pattern has been a mix of residential and commercial uses on separate small lots within village centers. In order to maintain the Town's character, provide necessary public services at the lowest cost, and maintain appropriate traffic volumes and patterns on all roads, mixed use areas have been restricted to the existing village areas of Felchville and Hammondsville. Access to public roads should be actively managed to prevent traffic congestion and sprawl in mixed-use areas.

### **Industrial/Mining**

Reading's topography, limited transportation facilities, and environmental limitations will likely prevent any significant industrial development from ever taking place in the Town. Therefore, this category has been limited to those areas that have been used for mining or industrial use in the past. Should any significant earth resources be discovered in the future in areas well-suited to industrial development, the Town should consider designating those areas as Industrial/Mining as well, as long as such activities would not have an undue adverse effect on neighboring properties.

### **Conservation**

Conservation lands have been determined to have unique and/or outstanding environmental or recreational qualities. They represent high elevation ecosystems, unique forest types, especially valuable wetlands, wildlife habitat, potential drinking water sources, and other lands that the Town considers to be irreplaceable and worth preserving in their present condition. Aside from limited and sustainable forestry practices, and recreational uses, activity in these areas should be strictly limited.

## **Timing of Development**

While the Town does not wish to establish a schedule or a timetable for growth, it is the intent of this Plan to encourage the most intensive development to occur in and around the village areas. Past development trends show that between one and ten houses have been built in Reading each year. The Town may want to consider phasing of larger developments as part of a subdivision regulation to ensure that town services have the capacity to accommodate the growth.

## **Goals and Action Steps** (Goals are numbered, Action Steps are indicated by an arrow)

1. Protect and enhance Reading's scenic landscape and rural character.
  - Revise zoning bylaws where necessary and consider the use of subdivision regulations to require that residential development be configured in a manner that preserves scenic resources, meadowland and fragile features and be clustered such that the majority of development activity is located on the least sensitive portion of the land.

- Develop landscaping and site design standards in the zoning bylaw for commercial and industrial development.
- Consider the creation of agricultural zones as a part of the zoning bylaw. Areas that could be so designated include the Bailey’s Mills area, Reading Farms, Springbrook Farm, the Jenne Farm, Newhall Farm, Lexington Farm, Rowlee Farm, Barnleigh (Cook Farm), and existing specialty crop operations.
- Consider the creation of an overlay district for ridgelines to protect these scenic amenities from development.
- Adopt a junk and junk car ordinance and appoint an official to enforce the ordinance and impose fines for violators.
- Create strict standards to minimize potential conflicts between current land uses and the extraction of renewable and finite resources. These standards should address the operation, maintenance, and use of extraction sites based on the unique conditions of the area affected.

## **Policies**

1. The sustainable development and use of land-based resources, such as farming and forestry, consistent with other goals and policies of the Town Plan shall be encouraged.
2. Home occupations shall be encouraged as long as they are appropriate to adjoining land uses, and do not adversely affect air, water, or scenic resources or cause noise that is offensive to surrounding neighbors. In addition, the following must be shown:
  - a. The home occupation is customarily conducted within a residence.
  - b. The home occupation is clearly incidental to the use of the building as a residence.
3. Cultural features, such as farm and logging roads, stone walls, tree and fence lines, cellar holes and agricultural buildings, shall be preserved where appropriate. Any cultural features that are modified or removed should be photographed or field surveyed by the Town’s Historical Society or by a Conservation Commission.
4. The Town shall work with public and private entities to prepare development or resource management plans that will further the aims of this chapter.
5. The Town shall work with the Upper Valley Land Trust or the Vermont Land Trust to assess and implement easement programs to preserve agricultural and ecologically sensitive land.
6. The Town shall work with the Vermont Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation and the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department to update management plans for State lands located in Reading.

## Chapter 8

### IMPLEMENTATION AND RELATIONSHIP TO LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLANS

Each chapter of the Reading Town Plan lists goals, policies and action steps for implementing the goals outlined in the chapter. This chapter presents the action steps that the Reading Planning Commission has prioritized for implementing the goals of the Town Plan over the next five years. This chapter also considers the relationship of the Reading Town Plan to the plans of the Regional Planning Commission and surrounding towns.

#### Relationship to Local and Regional Plans

In order for local land use planning to be effective, it must be done with the understanding and consideration of land use and development trends in areas outside town boundaries. Local goals can only be reached if they are identified and pursued within the context of a community's place in the surrounding region. Reading is surrounded by the towns of Plymouth, Woodstock, West Windsor, and Cavendish. Reading is located in the northwest corner of the Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission's ten-town region, is served by the District 2 Environmental Commission, and is located in Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Maintenance District 4.

The towns surrounding Reading are faced with varying degrees of development pressure. All of these towns have town plans, and all have zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations with the exception of the town of Cavendish. None of the town plans of these surrounding towns is in conflict with the Reading Town Plan. Reading shares a large piece of land on the border of West Windsor that was formerly owned by a large talc processing facility. Much of this land will be given to the Town of West Windsor for conservation and recreational purposes, so the land use map may change in that area. Currently the town of Reading is building a new fire station on part of the land that was zoned for industrial use.

The Southern Windsor County Regional Plan provides guidelines for planning, coordination and review of the natural, cultural, social and economic features of the Southern Windsor County region. The Southern Windsor County Regional Plan, Regional Transportation Plan and Regional Bicycling and Walking Plan provide a broader framework and context for local planning efforts. The Town Plan should support and complement the land use and development goals of these regional planning documents.

The Future Land Use map in the 2003 Southern Windsor County Regional Plan supports the uses proposed in the Land Use chapter of the Reading Town Plan.

#### Implementation

The Action Steps and Policies outlined in each chapter of this Plan support the Goals of that chapter. Below are those Action Steps that the Planning Commission has selected as implementation priorities over the next five years.

1. Review zoning regulations to determine whether they discourage the development of

affordable housing.

2. Make changes to zoning bylaws in accordance with changes to Chapter 117, including allowing for multifamily housing and greater flexibility in allowing for accessory apartments.
3. Explore options for water and sewer in Felchville that will allow for higher density development while maintaining public health.
4. Develop a cost-benefit analysis for the alternatives to maintaining an elementary school in town. Such alternatives could include sending students to other towns or developing a regional school system.
5. Revise zoning bylaws where necessary and consider the use of subdivision regulations to require that residential development be configured in a manner that preserves scenic resources, meadowland and fragile features and be clustered such that the majority of development activity is located on the least sensitive portion of the land.
6. Consider the creation of an overlay district for ridgelines to protect these scenic amenities from development.
7. Adopt a junk and junk car ordinance and appoint an official to enforce the ordinance and impose fines for violators.
8. Develop a comprehensive capital improvements plan to guide the planning for public buildings, equipment, and roads. The plan should include future needs, priorities, costs, and financing methods.

## Appendix A

# GLOSSARY

**Clustering or Clustered Development** – Development which takes place at densities greater than those allowed by the Town Zoning Ordinance. Exceptions with regard to density requirements are made to preserve open space and allow for development that is efficient and that conforms to existing settlement patterns.

**Development** – The division of a parcel of land into two or more parcels; the construction, reconstruction, conversion, structural alteration, relocation, or enlargement of any structure; or any mining, excavation, landfill, or land disturbance.

**Home-based commercial development** – Creation of a business, by a resident, that is customary in residential areas, conducted as an incidental and accessory use in the resident's dwelling unit; or as defined by zoning ordinance.

**Sustainable agriculture** – An integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long-term: (1) satisfy human food and fiber needs; (2) enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agriculture economy depends; (3) make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls; (4) sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and (5) enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.

**Transportation facilities** – Refers to all programs and infrastructure related to publicly owned and/or controlled transportation, including roads, trails, culverts, bridges, bike and pedestrian paths, sidewalks, curb cuts, traffic signs, traffic lights, and maintenance equipment.

**Viewshed** – The area visible in a given direction from a given point. A scenic viewshed may include both natural and built features, such as mountains, farmland, forestland, and villages.

## Appendix B

### Reading Town Plan Survey RESULTS

September 15, 2003

*The following are the counts from the Reading Town Plan Survey mailed to each of you last Spring. For the narrative responses and to have more input in the Town Plan process, please come to the Town Plan Public Forum on Thursday, November 13<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. at the Town Hall (see announcement in this month's Informer).*

#### A. Respondent Characteristics

- 1) Are you a full-time resident of Reading? 157 Yes 71 No
- 2) Please indicate your age group: 5 0-17 years 6 18-34 93 35-54  
94 55-74 29 75+
- 3) Do you have school-age children? 43 Yes 187 No
- 4) If yes, what school do they attend? 27 elementary school 13 middle school 18 high school  
3 other \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Please indicate your place of employment: 47 Self-employed/work at home **OR** 85 Commute:  
13 less than 15 minutes 45 15-30 minutes 26 31-45 minutes 1 more than 45 minutes;  
95 NA (could be retired or second homeowners)

#### B. General – Growth and Development

- 6) The rate of recent residential growth in Reading has been: 19 too slow 130 just right 41 too fast
- 7) The biggest issues facing the Town of Reading over the next five years are (please check up to three):  
188 Maintaining a moderate tax rate 72 Maintaining high quality schools  
92 Preserving open space 135 Preserving rural character  
16 Attracting quality jobs 29 Developing public water and/or sewer in Felchville  
17 Improving municipal services 88 Preserving the character of the villages  
18 Other (See narrative responses)
- 8) Should there be more than one Village Center where concentrated commercial, municipal services and higher density housing should be located? 43 Yes 187 No
- 9) Which of the following areas do you consider most appropriate for higher density or concentrated residential development (check all that apply):  
86 Felchville 33 Tyson Road outside village centers  
47 South Reading 58 Route 106 north of Felchville  
68 Hammondsville 58 Route 106 south of Felchville  
24 Bailey's Mill vicinity 69 Route 106 and Route 44 Vicinity  
15 Spring Brook Farm vicinity  
19 Other (See narrative responses) \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) Commercial development (other than home occupations) should occur in the following areas (check all that apply):  
101 Felchville 18 Tyson Road outside village centers  
21 South Reading 70 Route 106 north of Felchville  
69 Hammondsville 70 Route 106 south of Felchville  
14 Bailey's Mill vicinity 96 Route 106 and Route 44 Vicinity  
13 Spring Brook Farm vicinity  
21 Other: (See narrative responses – 13 None) \_\_\_\_\_

11) The following commercial uses should be encouraged in the areas referred to in Question 10 (check all that apply):

<u>106</u> professional office space	<u>154</u> small retail	<u>4</u> large retail
<u>76</u> light manufacturing	<u>21</u> self-storage units	<u>128</u> restaurants
<u>116</u> home-based businesses	<u>101</u> nurseries/garden centers	<u>53</u> health clinic

12) Should the Town adopt design standards to maintain the scenic and historic qualities of the following areas:

❖ Felchville	<u>179</u> Yes	<u>51</u> No
❖ South Reading	<u>176</u> Yes	<u>55</u> No
❖ Hammondsville	<u>156</u> Yes	<u>74</u> No
❖ Other area:	<u>17</u> (See narrative responses)	

### C. Natural and Scenic Resources

14) Which of the following areas would you be in favor of protecting through local regulations (check all that apply):

<u>144</u> Scenic views	<u>122</u> Ridgelines	<u>28</u> None, current regulations are sufficient
<u>115</u> Small (Class 3) wetlands	<u>160</u> Wildlife habitat	
<u>81</u> Vernal pools	<u>162</u> Historic sites	
<u>8</u> Other:	<u>(See narrative responses)</u>	

15) Check up to three (3) of the following areas that you feel are important to protect or preserve:

<u>129</u> Open fields and pastures	<u>63</u> Stone Chimney
<u>137</u> South Reading stone schoolhouse	<u>85</u> Historic trails and paths
<u>145</u> Tyson Road moose crossings and adjacent habitat	<u>99</u> Historic structures and adjacent lands
<u>16</u> Other:	<u>All – 5, None – 3</u> (See narrative responses for remaining)

16) Would you encourage any of the following actions by the Town to protect the areas listed in Question 15?

❖ Restricting development through zoning bylaws	<u>153</u> Yes	<u>77</u> No
❖ Creating buffers around critical areas	<u>145</u> Yes	<u>85</u> No
❖ Creating voluntary guidelines for developers/landowners	<u>109</u> Yes	<u>121</u> No
❖ Creating a fund for the Town to purchase land	<u>84</u> Yes	<u>146</u> No
❖ Working with a Land Trust to purchase development rights on the land	<u>122</u> Yes	<u>108</u> No

17) Would you favor incentives to developers, such as density bonuses or easing of development conditions, in exchange for conservation of some percentage of the property proposed to be developed in valuable scenic or natural areas?

93 Yes 137 No

### D. Cultural, Historic, and Recreational Resources

18) Check up to three (3) of the following areas within the village of Felchville that you feel are most in need of construction or improvement:

<u>58</u> Center green space with bandstand and benches	<u>93</u> Tree plantings along Main Street
<u>76</u> Town park area or picnic area	<u>25</u> Ice rink
<u>22</u> Skateboard park	<u>51</u> Interpretive historic markers
<u>49</u> Historical street lighting	<u>39</u> American flags posted along Main Street
<u>83</u> Multi-use outdoor recreation area including athletic fields, tennis courts, etc.)	<u>24</u> Other: : <u>(See narrative responses)</u>

19) Should the Town pursue grants or other funding opportunities to build or improve the areas listed in Question 18?

189 Yes 41 No

20) Should the Town encourage landowners to provide access to private land for hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing?

137 Yes 93 No

21) Should the Town purchase easements on such trails in order to keep them in use for future generations?

120 Yes 110 No

22) If historic paths or significant trails were protected and marked as protected easements throughout Reading, would you be encouraged to use them? 159 Yes 71 No

### E. Utilities and Facilities

23) Should the Town explore the costs and availability of funds for a public water system in Felchville? 79 Yes 151 No

24) Should the Town explore the costs and availability of funds for a public sewer system in Felchville? 83 Yes 147 No

25) What additional services should the Town provide? 62 – See narrative responses.

26) The Town may be required to allow telecommunication facilities somewhere in Reading. If the Town has to allow these facilities (tower or antenna on existing structure) to be installed somewhere, in which of the following locations should they be encouraged, and in which should they be discouraged?

Town Hall	<u>83</u> encouraged	<u>147</u> discouraged	
Church steeple	<u>62</u> encouraged	<u>168</u> discouraged	
Silos	<u>79</u> encouraged	<u>151</u> discouraged	
Mount Moses	<u>56</u> encouraged	<u>174</u> discouraged	
Mount Tom	<u>65</u> encouraged	<u>165</u> discouraged	
Keys Mountain	<u>56</u> encouraged	<u>174</u> discouraged	
Robinson Hill	<u>30</u> encouraged	<u>200</u> discouraged	* Note – several people didn't know where these last few were located...
The Alps	<u>45</u> encouraged	<u>185</u> discouraged	
Shedd Hill	<u>42</u> encouraged	<u>188</u> discouraged	
Bowen Hill	<u>39</u> encouraged	<u>191</u> discouraged	
Other	<u>21</u> (See narrative responses)	_____ encouraged	_____ discouraged

### F. Transportation

27) What improvements would you like to see in Reading if funding were available (check all that apply)?

60 Sidewalks in Felchville

117 Designated bike paths along Route 106

37 School bus stop shelters

74 Access to public transportation (Town and Village Bus)

23 Other transportation improvements: 10 – None, 13 – Other (See narrative responses)

### G. Housing

28) Do you believe there is a sufficient diversity of housing types in the town? 152 Yes 78 No

29) Should the Town make an effort to promote the development of affordable housing? 74 Yes 153 No

30) If yes, the town should take the following measures to promote more affordable housing (check all that apply):

39 allow greater density in certain areas

28 provide density bonuses for projects that provide some units for low and very low incomes

41 allow more multi-family housing

54 work with a Community Land Trust to encourage the development of low income housing units

### H. Implementation

31) How effective is your planning commission in addressing your needs (check one)?

12 Very Effective 37 Adequate 17 Not effective 141 Have not had to deal with them

- 32) Do think the Town should develop and adopt regulations for subdividing land? 140 Yes 88 No
- 33) Should the Town make efforts to preserve open space in subdivision developments of three (3) or more homes? 178 Yes 50 No

**I. Optional questions**

- 34) How long have you lived in Reading? 6 Less than 1 year 48 1-5 years 27 6-10 years  
49 11 – 20 years 70 21 or more years
- 35) Do you own or rent your home? 196 own 8 rent
- 36) Additional comments: (See narrative responses)

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Would you be interested in assisting with the re-write of the Town Plan? If so, please call the Town Clerk at 484-7260, or email: [reading@tax.state.vt.us](mailto:reading@tax.state.vt.us). If you have questions about the survey or want to find out more about the Town Plan process, come to the meeting of the Reading Planning Commission on the first Monday of every month.

## **Appendix C**

### **Reading Town Plan Forum**

#### **SUMMARY**

The Reading Town Plan Forum was held on a Thursday in November of 2003 during one of the season's first big snowstorms. Over 20 people attended the forum. Some reported power outages that drove them to the Town Hall for the advertised Free Pizza, but all were willing participants in forum activities and stayed for the bulk of the 2 ½-hour program.

The Town Plan Forum began with a presentation of the highlights of the Town Plan Survey and changes in the town's demographics as demonstrated by the 1990 and 2000 Census data. After the presentation, participants broke into small groups and were each asked to write three responses to the following questions:

What makes Reading a special place?

What would make Reading a better place to live?

The compiled responses reveal that the Town's rural character (14 responses) and its people (13 responses) make Reading a special place for most of the participants. Related responses included the small size of the town that make it possible to know almost everyone in town. The Town's open spaces and village centers received the next highest number of responses at five each. Location and scenic attributes received four responses each. Other responses included safety, dirt roads, trees and wildlife conservation areas, slow pace, history, government, and the school.

"Lower taxes" (17 responses) was by far the most popular answer for what would make Reading a better place. Related answers included more economically sound ways to educate children, or better schools (7 responses). Preserving open land or historic resources received 8 responses, including wildlife habitat and ridgelines. Controlling junk cars and clutter was a big topic for the evening (7 responses). Supporting small businesses and encouraging more services from small businesses received five responses, and more activities to bring the community closer together received six responses. A few participants (3 or less) listed additional town services (including rubbish disposal), village revitalization, transportation issues (bus service to Springfield, Woodstock and Windsor), regulations (concern about mini estates and other residential development), and affordable housing.

During a discussion of the greatest challenges facing Reading over the next few years, similar topics were raised and prioritized. Several challenges came up under multiple issue areas, including junk cars and clutter. This challenge was the highest vote getter for both transportation and land use. A similar challenge, "Viewscape zoning/control eyesores" was also voted an important issue under the topic of Cultural and Historic Resources. Under Village Centers, the three most important issues according to participants were promotion of small businesses, water and sewer in the village centers, and preserving historic character of villages and historic structures. Cultural/historic resources challenges also included improvement of the Town Hall and/or school to

accommodate social or cultural events, and preserving the atmosphere of the village center (Felchville). Under Transportation, several people voted for looking at transportation to towns for people who do not have cars. There was concern in the Land Use category for protecting ridgelines, preserving large tracts of forest land, and preserving open areas.

Education was an area of much discussion, as enrollment has been falling over the last several years. The three issues that rose to the top in this category were suggested solutions to the current financial difficulties of the school. These included applying for state, federal and private grants and attracting tuition students from surrounding towns such as Plymouth. While the housing category did not receive as many votes, the link between the cost of housing and the number of students in the school was noted. The rising cost of land and the need for a diversity of housing types were both listed as challenges for the town.

The greatest challenges under Natural Resources included preserving wildlife habitat, protecting historic buildings from “inappropriate” development, and looking at the potential visual impact of cell towers on ridgelines. Intergenerational activities and reinvigorating the Reading Recreation Committee and changing the focus from sports for kids to activities for the community were two challenges under the topic of Recreation.

# Reading Town Plan Forum – Results of Breakout Groups

## Question #1 - What makes Reading a Special Place?

### **Size (4)**

Small community  
Low population  
Small enough to know almost everyone in town  
Low human population - knowing neighbors

### **Rural character (14)**

Rural  
Rural landscape and small villages  
Rural atmosphere (3)  
Rural character and a tangible sense of history  
Rural areas  
It's rural  
Rural setting  
Rural character  
Rural character  
Rural living  
No rapid growth - maintained character  
Rural character and the fact that we have a few small businesses (the Reading Store, the Greenhouse, Hardware Store) that are practical and worthwhile entities

### **Open spaces (5)**

proximity to large tracts of wildlands  
Extensive natural areas  
Open land area  
Open spaces  
Abundance of open space and forests - lots of outdoor recreation opportunities

### **People (13)**

Nice people  
Self-sufficient individuals - no need for every public service such as full-time police/fire/water, sewer, etc.  
Friendly inhabitants  
The people of Reading are what makes it a special place  
Involved citizens who contribute time and energy, provide leadership and think creatively  
Steady residents  
The people care about each other  
People  
More "old fashioned" compatibility - "good morning" "hello"  
Small town values  
Simple way of life/great friends and neighbors  
Friendly  
Townpeople are generally supportive of the young people, the school and the various needs that come along with this facet of the community

### **Safe (3)**

A safe community  
Safe  
Small, safe village in which to raise a family and people who share in the process (ie extended family, friends, teachers, library, supportive businesses)

**Government (2)**

The town "functions" well - ie govt. services  
An individual can have some impact on how the town runs

**Villages (5)**

Quaint village  
Village character, Main Street  
Village center  
Village character  
Distinct gateways to community

**Location (4)**

Location - midway between Springfield and Woodstock and relatively quick access to I91 corridor  
The location of the town is an asset  
Location away from towns  
Proximity to Woodstock

**History (1)**

Rural character and a tangible sense of history

**Dirt roads (3)**

Dirt roads  
Its dirt roads  
Back roads

**Slow pace/peace and quiet (2)**

Slow pace  
Peace and quiet

**Scenic beauty (4)**

It is peaceful and beautiful  
We can see Mt. Ascutney  
Physical attributes - scenery  
Simply put, it has a lot of natural, low-key beauty. It is a picturesque community

**Natural resources (3)**

High quality trees  
Wildlife  
Wildlife conservation areas

**School (1)**

Good school

**History (2)**

History  
Care of buildings (houses)

## **Question #2 - What would make Reading a better place?**

### **Taxes (17)**

Controlled increase in the Tax Base through additional small businesses  
Low-moderate tax rate  
Get taxes under control - perhaps by looking at different ways to educate our small number of children  
Lower taxes (8)  
A new tax source  
Getting taxes under control  
Better control of expenditures to lower taxes  
Relief on taxes for seniors who need help  
Taxes  
Get back education revenue from the state

### **Economy/businesses (5)**

More services provided by small business  
More small business  
A few more small businesses in specifically designated areas  
Encourage support of the businesses we have already  
Good paying jobs, more stores for shopping

### **Services (3)**

Better access to rubbish disposal  
A few more public services (trash pickup)  
The assurance that funding will always be available to maintain the roads, the public buildings, and the limited services that we currently have.

### **Control of junk in yards (7)**

Zoning regulations to control junk and non-essential clutter on property  
Clean corridor road areas  
Village could be cleaner with trash storage ordinance  
Junk car policy  
Individual properties maintained  
Clean up junk cars and debris  
Clean junk cars/yard cleanups

### **Village Revitalization (2)**

Revitalization of three areas - Felchville, Hammondsville and South Reading Village  
Village should look more historic  
Improvement of town buildings

### **Preserve open land/natural/historic resources (8)**

Preservation of undeveloped areas and wildlife habitats  
Encourage use of natural areas for nature study, hiking and snowmobiling  
More wildlife habitat  
Getting rid of hunting at moose viewing area on Tyson.  
Preserve ridgelines  
Preserve moose herd in South Reading  
Preserve open land/natural resources  
Improvement of historic features - Stone Chimney, Stone School, etc.

### **Closer community (6)**

Closer community  
A forum to bring people together to facilitate community  
More intergenerational activities

Allowing second homeowners a greater voice (we pay taxes).  
More participation by residents in town "business" activities  
More town activities

### **Schools (7)**

Better schools

Get taxes under control - perhaps by looking at different ways to educate our small number of children

More economically sound educational system

Try to get Plymouth to send students to the Reading school

Look into alternative ways to educate kids

A thriving school and more programs for the elderly

Schools

### **Transportation (2)**

Bus service to Springfield, Woodstock and Windsor at least once a day

Have a good gas station so we don't have to go out of town

### **Regulations (3)**

Begin to look at "site plan review" for all new residences such that each abutting neighbor has input into permit process

Encourage builders to make less expensive housing in Reading. Put a use tax on mini estates to raise revenue and lower taxes of working people.

Zoning

### **Government (1)**

More participation by residents in town "business" activities

### **Housing (1)**

affordable housing,

**Question #3 - What are the greatest short- and long-term challenges facing Reading?** (Issues of concern are listed in order of most votes by participants.)

Village Centers

1. Promote small businesses (10)
2. Sewer and water in 3 village centers (7)
3. Preserve historic character of villages and historic structures (6)
4. Refurbish Town Hall and other public buildings (2)
5. Safe streets (Route 106, Tyson Road) (2)
6. Promote large business (1)
7. Revitalization of trees, and green space
8. Encourage higher density residential units (minimize open land fragmentation)

Cultural/Historic Resources

1. Viewscape zoning ... control eyesores (8)
2. Improve Town Hall or school to accommodate social/cultural events (5)
3. Preserve atmosphere of village center (Felchville) (5)
4. Reinstigate some of the old events ... Old Time Ball, Variety Shows with local talent (3)
5. Fix Robinson Hall. Have a breakfast only café in the darn place (or at school) (3)
6. Expand library system (2)
7. Reinvigorate 4<sup>th</sup> of July events (1)
8. Create preservation funding
9. Improve the sports arena – town park theme

Housing

1. Encourage affordable housing for wider diversity in population (2)
2. Land costs go against affordable housing (2)
3. Need housing within \$100,000 to \$150,000 range (2)
4. Encourage work markets and transportation links (1)
5. Provide space for growth (1)
6. Investigate state funding to share in housing development (1)
7. Retain existing services. Keep it simple, but encourage additional housing and people, families
8. Encourage more children in village. Make it safe, attractive but affordable for others and residents
9. There is a breaking point to decide either to maintain housing here or somewhere else

Transportation

1. Too many junk cars in town (7)
2. Transportation to towns for people without cars to shop and keep appointments (4)
3. Do seniors have needs met? (1)
4. Investigate potential to tie into Moover system (Ludlow bus system)
5. Maintain current road system
6. Current road system – degradation of water resources
7. Improve roads as dictated by usage
8. Town access to sand
9. “Ride share” system on Reading web site
10. More heavily traveled roads need more attention (maintenance)

### Land Use

1. Control of junk cars, clutter, etc (13)
2. Protection of ridge lines (5)
3. Preserve large forest lands from development (4)
4. Preserve open areas/avoid sprawl (3)
5. Meaningful, useful Town Plan
6. Telecommunication towers
7. Maintain/enhance village center
8. Promote cluster development vs open land fragmentation

### Education

1. Apply for state, federal and private grants (6)
2. Remove Windsor Central Supervisory Union (5)
3. Attract tuition students (Plymouth) (4)
4. Increased cost of education with smaller population because of state funding laws (3)
5. Keep land use taxable to pay for services (2)
6. Develop real costs for operation and maintain level of scholastics (1)
7. Education/school budget being voted down
8. Towns are dealing with state mandates

### Natural Resources

1. Preserve wildlife habitat (7)
2. Protect historic buildings from “inappropriate” commercial development (7)
3. Cell towers – visual impact? (with respect to views and ridgelines) (5)
4. Preserve “mooseland” (3)
5. Preserve public areas (state land, lands held in trust) (20-foot hole) (1)
6. Housing density vs/ wildlife habitat (1)
7. Form a conservation commission (1)
8. How do we “deal” with snowmobile clubs?

### Recreation

1. Intergenerational activities: kids, adults, seniors (8)
2. Reinvigorate Reading Recreation Committee – change focus from sports for kids to activities for the community (5)
3. Create a no hunting zone in moose viewing area (2)
4. Issues for seniors: Accessibility, no sidewalks in village, public parking areas (1)
5. Create “breakfast spot” for public in school cafeteria (1)
6. Limited transportation for seniors
7. More activities like a parade, barbecue, dance
8. Promote new rec field at school
9. Skateboard rec area – off Route 106
10. Exercise room in town – “downscale”
11. After school program for kids – adult supervisors