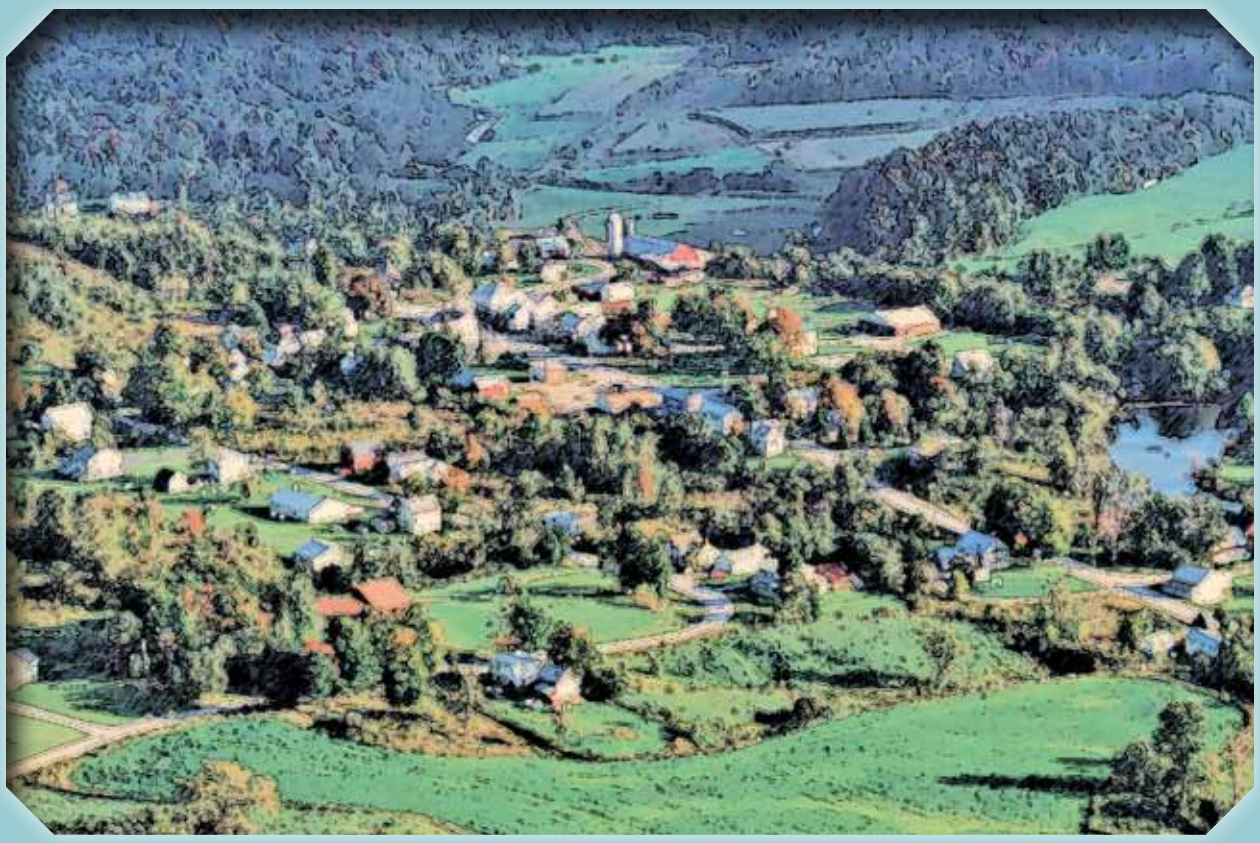

Fairfield, Vermont
Town Plan

Draft for Public Hearing (7 May 2009)

Funded with a Municipal Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs. Technical assistance provided by PlaceSense.

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1. introduction

Community Profile

Fairfield, having about 47,000 acres, is the largest town in Franklin County. It is situated about 30 miles northeast of Burlington and is bounded north by Sheldon, east by Bakersfield, south by Fletcher and Fairfax, and west by St. Albans and Swanton.

The Town of Fairfield lies in the rolling hills of northwestern Vermont. Black Creek, a tributary of the Missisquoi River, flows through the town in a major valley formation. Soils in the town range from thick alluviums along the river to thin soils barely covering some of the rock ridges. These ridge areas are located predominantly in the southeast corner of the town with a few also in the northeast corner.

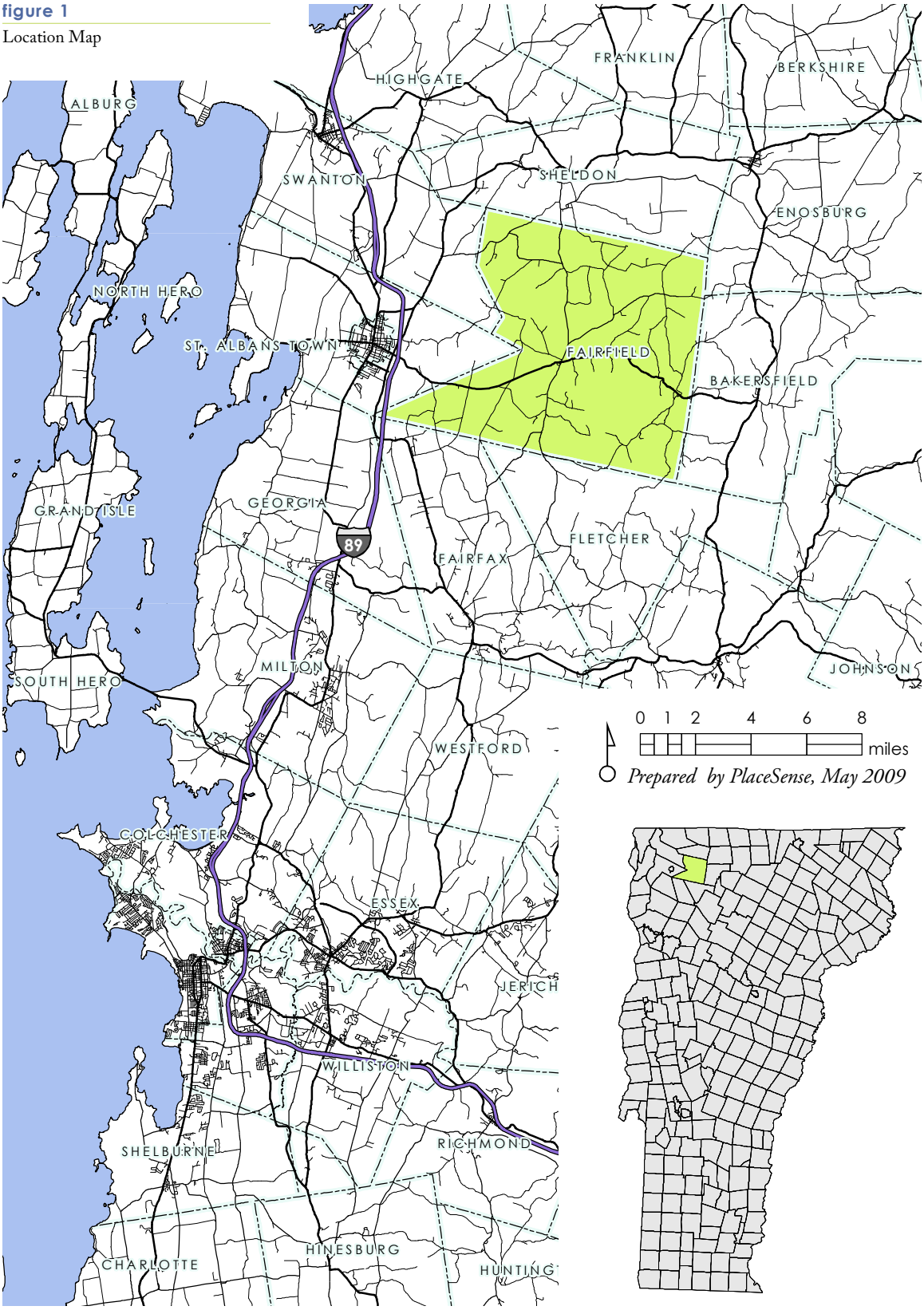
Extending generally north south across the western side of the town is zone of predominantly wet and marshy land. Fairfield Pond, reserve water supply for the Village of Swanton, and the location of several water-based recreational activities, occupies the northern part of this zone. Running southerly from Fairfield Pond, an extensive swamp cuts across the town. A large portion of this swamp is encompassed in the state-owned Fairfield Swamp Wildlife Management Area. However, these wet areas represent less than five percent of the area of the town.

The major portion of the town, representing nearly seven-eighths of its total area, is very evenly divided between agricultural land and woodland. Residents are quite evenly dispersed throughout the entire town with many homes associated with active farms. Except for a concentration of seasonal housing around Fairfield Pond, the only population centers occur in the villages of Fairfield and East Fairfield.

Fairfield possesses a long and proud tradition of productiveness. The town has avoided many of the blights of over development and the accompanying loss of agricultural and open land to date, reflecting the stability its generations of residents have given the town. In fact, the beauty of Fairfield and the productiveness of its lands stand as a monument to the achievements of earlier generations who have lived here.

figure 1

Location Map



Planning

Purpose

Under Vermont's Planning and Development Act, the Fairfield Selectboard has established a Planning Commission to prepare a town plan and land use regulations. Fairfield's first town plan was adopted in 1972. State law now requires that the town plan be updated every five years, to reflect any changing conditions that may be affecting the community. Fairfield's plan was updated in 1977, 1986, 1996 and 2002. Fairfield adopted zoning regulations in 1968 and revised them in 1973, 1986, 1996 and 2004. This amended town plan is consistent with the goals established in 24 V.S.A. § 4302.

A comprehensive town plan and land use regulations allow Fairfield to control growth and types of land use. Not only is a current town plan necessary should any amendments to the zoning be desired, but major projects that come under Vermont's Land Use and Development Act (Act 250) must conform to a current town plan.

Changes are coming at an increasing rate. The problems posed by these pressures must be addressed by comprehensive forethought to ensure that future decisions will provide long-term solutions rather than stopgap measures. Since communities exist primarily for the health and enjoyment of those who live in them, it follows that the nature, location and timing of community growth should be determined by the people of Fairfield rather than left solely to chance or to the decisions of non-resident developers. The intent of this plan is not to eliminate any existing land uses or to stop all future development, but rather to channel the desired growth to appropriate locations within the town.

Citizen Participation

Over the years, citizen participation has been encouraged throughout the process of developing of the plan and bylaws. At the start of the 2001 revision, the Planning Commission conducted a survey at 2001's town meeting to gauge public views on issues from the permit cap to public services. Unfortunately, there were only 17 surveys returned. While the responses were very insightful, it was difficult to make broad generalizations on Fairfield's future.

At the start of this most recent plan revision, the Planning Commission hosted a public workshop, which was attended by around 40 town residents. At the meeting, participants were asked to brainstorm issues affecting the town and its residents. Some of the main themes that emerged were: limiting growth outside the villages and maintaining working lands; improving water quality in streams and ponds; enhancing the sense of community through volunteerism, community facilities and activities; and encouraging economic development, especially small-scale businesses and value-added agriculture.

Much of the evening's discussion was focused on the pattern and rate of future development. The overall preference of those in attendance was for development focused within the town's existing village centers and areas close to the interstate and employment in neighboring St. Albans. Most participants felt that even an average annual growth rate of one percent was too high and would prefer to maintain the status quo with little to no new home construction. Several attendees spoke to the need for housing that would meet the changing needs of current residents as they grow older, as well as affordable housing that would allow young people to choose to live in town as they enter the workforce. Questions were raised as to whether the town's current regulations adequately provide for higher-density development in village areas.

figure 2
2008 Planning Workshop

Vision Statement

1. It is the primary and fundamental intention of Fairfield to remain a rural, agricultural town.

Every effort should be given to the maintenance and furtherance of agricultural enterprise in Fairfield. No activities in Fairfield should be allowed that are detrimental to this primary objective.

Agriculture, primarily dairy farming and sugaring, dominate the land use of Fairfield. Agriculture is the activity of which all other land uses must be supportive. Fairfield is one of the largest dairying communities in Vermont. The maintenance of a large dairy industry in a community such as Fairfield requires a basic terrain and soil type which are supportive of efficient cropping and pasture, a group of farmers who are able to produce milk profitably in the context of present day costs and opportunities, and equally important, an appropriate, supportive social climate. Simply put, dairying and suburbanization ultimately cannot co-exist peacefully. In addition, the necessary supportive inputs to farming must also be present, including veterinary services, processing plants, farm implement dealers, artificial inseminators, et cetera.

Maple sugaring is also an important activity in Fairfield with more than 50 families involved in making maple syrup on a large scale. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are more than 500,000 taps producing sap in Fairfield. This activity is an excellent companion enterprise for dairying, providing some degree of diversification to the agricultural base of the town.

In addition, farm woodlots are supportive of agricultural activities, providing fence posts and lumber for building materials. Many buildings in town continue to be constructed of materials largely provided by the nearby woodlots. Through woodlot management techniques, it is possible for Fairfield to continue to improve the quality of its timber stands, while harvesting saw logs, maple syrup

and firewood on a sustained yield basis. The use of firewood for home heating and boiling maple syrup is a use of our resources which will continue to become more important as other energy sources continue to increase in price more rapidly than the overall rise in farm income.

Although dairying continues to dominate the agricultural economy of the town, other agricultural enterprises such as beef, sheep, hogs, truck gardening, et cetera should be encouraged. Such diversification and value added products would tend to further stabilize the agricultural base of the town. This goal will ensure a strong, diverse economy maintaining high environmental standards and be supportive of efforts in our schools for broader access to appropriate vocational training.

2. Fairfield will maintain a controlled rate of orderly growth of the town, at a pace slow enough that Fairfield's dominant agricultural and rural character is protected.

With the continued growth of neighboring Chittenden County to the south and the possibility that major industries will continue to locate in neighboring St. Albans, the pressure for construction of new homes in town will continue. A wise land ethic implies that the placement of new houses on prime croplands ought to be prohibited, as there is enough agriculturally marginal land in Fairfield that can provide suitable locations for new dwellings.

Placement of new homes on sites with trees already present creates a pleasant setting for residents and helps blend new development into the surrounding landscape. Such sites are also more appropriate for our climate, with trees providing shade in the summer and creating a windbreak in winter, which conserves energy.

3. It is our intent to allow the use of agriculturally marginal areas of Fairfield for conservation and recreation.

Such uses of these areas can interact positively with adjoining agricultural lands, as field and forest combine to provide suitable habitat for hunting, nature enjoyment, hiking, snowmobiling, cross country skiing and snow shoeing. Other areas for conservation protection are the lands adjoining the Fairfield Swamp Wildlife Management Area and Fairfield Pond. Concern continues for the improvement of water quality in Fairfield Pond and the wise management of the many pressures on the lake for use by swimmers, boaters, anglers and seasonal homeowners. Growth should not be permitted in these areas if it will diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.

4. Fairfield will encourage the development of small-scale enterprises in the village centers of Fairfield and East Fairfield that will offer basic goods and services for town residents, that will provide employment locally and that will enhance the town's rural way of life.

These two villages continue to be important focal points of the social and commercial life of the town, and serve as rural service centers. Light industry and manufacturing and other businesses appropriate in scale and character, can be further ways to enhance the rural character of Fairfield. Economic growth should be encouraged in and adjacent to these existing villages as growth centers.

5. Fairfield will encourage the placement of permanent, year round dwellings on land with frontage on Class 3 or better roads maintained by the Town of Fairfield, and discourage the placement of permanent, year-round dwellings on roadways not maintained by the town.

Not only does this allow for the protection of some of our areas set aside for conservation, but it is also logical in our climate, ensuring more ready access to homes in a region characterized by long winters with the attendant realities of continued snowfall and accumulations to deep levels by mid-winter. Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to our village centers and strip development along highways should be discouraged. This goal will also ensure adequate energy efficient transportation systems, respecting the integrity of the natural environment.

6. It is Fairfield's intent to require that all development in the town, whether residential, commercial, agricultural, industrial, or recreational be pursued with strict regard to soil capability, significant natural and fragile areas, areas of outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, wetlands, aquifers and shore lands.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service carried out a detailed soil capability survey of Fairfield. These findings are important input to this plan, as is the natural resources inventory completed by students at the University of Vermont. Their maps are available for use in planning at the Town Office.

7. Archeological sites and historic structures, which offer a connection to our past, need to be preserved for Fairfield's future residents. Further, our historic settlement pattern of compact village centers surrounded by rural countryside must continue in order to maintain the scenic landscapes that exist today.

A historic district located around the Chester A. Arthur birthplace was created when the town plan was updated in 1986. We also now recognize the architectural legacy in our two village centers, and through a design control mechanism, will establish in our zoning ordinance further means to protect the integrity of the appearance of the two villages and the Chester A. Arthur Historic District. Other historic districts may be added in the future within the villages.

There are also individual residences, farm structures and public buildings that meet state and federal requirements for historic preservation. Individual owners will be encouraged to pursue placing these buildings on the historic register, allowing them to qualify for the tax credits and any other incentives available for the restoration of historic structures.

Although less visible than the historic structures, archeological sites hidden below ground need to be protected. Archeologically sensitive areas should be documented and development should not be permitted until the area has been found to be clear of any sites.

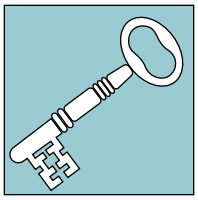
Our historic settlement and use of land creates a scenic landscape which both residents and visitors enjoy every day. Many times this valuable resource is taken for granted and, once lost to inappropriate development, is difficult to recapture. The key to success in protecting scenic resources is to have future development compliment existing neighborhood character and the surrounding landscape.

8. Fairfield will work to ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing.

Fairfield has a range of housing to meet a diversity of social and income groups. The town will work to site new houses near village centers, including multi-unit, rental and senior housing.

9. The town will strive to ensure adequate public facilities and services and to maintain a rate of growth that does not exceed the ability of the community and area to provide facilities and services.

Over the last 10 years the first town recreation/playground and town library have been developed on the Center School site. It must be kept in mind, though, that the town remains fairly poor. Fire and medical services are minimal, and other services are very limited. For these reasons, growth must be carefully controlled so as to not exceed available services.



2. yesterday

Formation & Settlement

Fairfield was chartered August 18, 1763 and granted to Samuel Hungerford and his associates. The town was not settled until the spring of 1787, when Joseph Wheeler erected a cabin in a clearing in the forested wilderness near the Fairfax line. Others quickly followed, many of who made their way northward from Fairfield, Connecticut.

The town was organized in March 1790 and the first town meeting was held on March 30, 1791, at the home of Joseph Wheeler who was chosen moderator and town treasurer. Edmund Town was elected town clerk, Levi Wakeman, constable; Edmund Town, Thomas Northrup and Ralph Gregory, selectmen; Salmon Wheeler, Abram Northrup and David Hoit, listers; and Nathan Lobdell, collector of taxes. The Federal Census of 1791 recorded 176 residents in Fairfield and neighboring Smithfield. These two towns were merged together in 1792 to create present-day Fairfield – one of the state's largest towns at 60 square miles.

First Settlers

Fairfield's first settler, Joseph Wheeler, brought his family to live in the cabin he had built the previous year in March 1788. In 1789, Hubbard Barlow and Andrew Bradley, with several others, settled here. Polly Hoit was the first child born in Fairfield on July 14, 1788. Smithfield Beaden was the first male child born here, in the part called Smithfield. The proprietors made him a present of 100 acres of land.

In about 1789, Jabez Burr came to Fairfield, bringing his family to the house of one of the Hoits where they remained one night. The next morning the two men started to find the lot upon which Burr was to locate. This was three or four miles from Hoit's. The lot was found with but little difficulty, and the two sturdy fellows immediately went to work to build a house; when night came the building was ready for occupancy; the men returned to Hoit's, and Burr and his family took possession the next morning.

This wooden dwelling contained parlors, dining room, kitchen, dormitory, pantry and scullery all in one. The house was twelve feet

square, built of split basswood logs, notched at the ends to insure stability and tightness of the walls, and about seven feet to the roof, which was constructed by using poles for the support of the outer roofing made of bark peeled from the logs which constituted the sides. The doorway was closed, when necessary, by hanging a blanket over it. The "windows" were small holes covered with greased paper as soon as it could be afforded. This was not fancy; there were many similar houses.

Early Family Histories

The Vermont Gazetteer of 1882 records the following family histories:

> John B. Mitchell served seven years in the revolutionary war, returned home to Hartford, Conn., and was married to a young lady sixteen years of age, and when the settlers first commenced to come into this town started on foot with his wife to make for himself a new home here. This they accomplished by locating upon the farm now owned by Samuel H. Soule. Their first house was built on the low bottomland along the creek, but the first overflow of the stream caused them to seek higher land as a site for their residence. Here they remained until their death, at an advanced age, Mrs. Mitchell attaining the great age of 106 years. They reared a family of eight children, none of whom are living, though several grandchildren represent the family here.
>
> Thomas Northrup, from Sherman, Conn., came to the forests of Fairfield in 1790, and settled upon a farm of 140 acres which he had purchased from one of his brothers, an original proprietor of the town, paying therefore $100.00. Upon this he made a small clearing, planted some corn, and cut some hay from a beaver meadow, and also erected a small log cabin, then returned to Connecticut. In the following spring he started for his new home with a yoke of oxen and one horse hitched to a heavy sled, upon which was placed his household effects and provisions for his family, consisting of his wife and three children. After a long and tedious journey, he arrived here and commenced his useful life, remaining in this town until his death. He had a family of four sons and seven daughters, only one of whom, Harmon Northrop, is now living, at the age of eighty-seven years. Harmon has been a deacon of the Congregational church, to which he has been a pillar for the past fifty years. He has held nearly all the offices in the gift of the

town, and has also held the office of county commissioner four years, and was president of the Franklin County Agricultural Society three years. The great regard felt for his opinion and advice is attested by the fact that he has assisted in the settlement of, or settled independently, sixty-one estates.

Thomas Ryan came to Vermont from Ireland, about the year of 1812, and worked at his trade of tailoring at Burlington for a time, then removed to this town and located upon the farm now owned by his son, John H. Soon after locating here he married Catharine Belfort, the union being blessed with six children, two of whom are now living. Mr. Ryan was a man of intelligence, and much respected for his integrity and gentlemanly character. He died in 1872, aged seventy-two years.

Joseph Soule, who served in the revolution, had a family of six sons and two daughters, all of whom settled in this town and in Fairfax. The Soule family is of French Huguenot extraction, and came to America in the "Mayflower." Timothy, the oldest son, came to Fairfield from Dover, Connecticut, about the year 1792. He was twenty-two years of age when he settled in his wilderness home, and remained until his death, December 27, 1861, aged ninety-three years. His youngest child, James M., now resides on the old homestead. Salmon Soule, brother of Timothy, came to Fairfield a year or two after his father, and located upon the farm now occupied by his son, C. Rollin, where he carried on the business of blacksmithing, in addition to conducting his farm. As a blacksmith he made himself particularly useful to the early settlers, and was noted for the fine axes he forged. He died on the old farm, aged eighty-six years and six months.

Joseph Field, Jr. came here with his father, and settled at what is now the village of Fairfield Center. He was a carpenter and joiner, and subsequently engaged in mercantile pursuits, and carried on a distillery and starch manufactory. In business he was quite successful, and succeeded in gaining the regard and esteem of his townsmen, whom he honorably represented in many offices of trust. He died in 1863, aged eighty-four years. Of his family of eleven children, only three, A. G., Samuel H., and Mrs. A. A. Farrand, are now living.

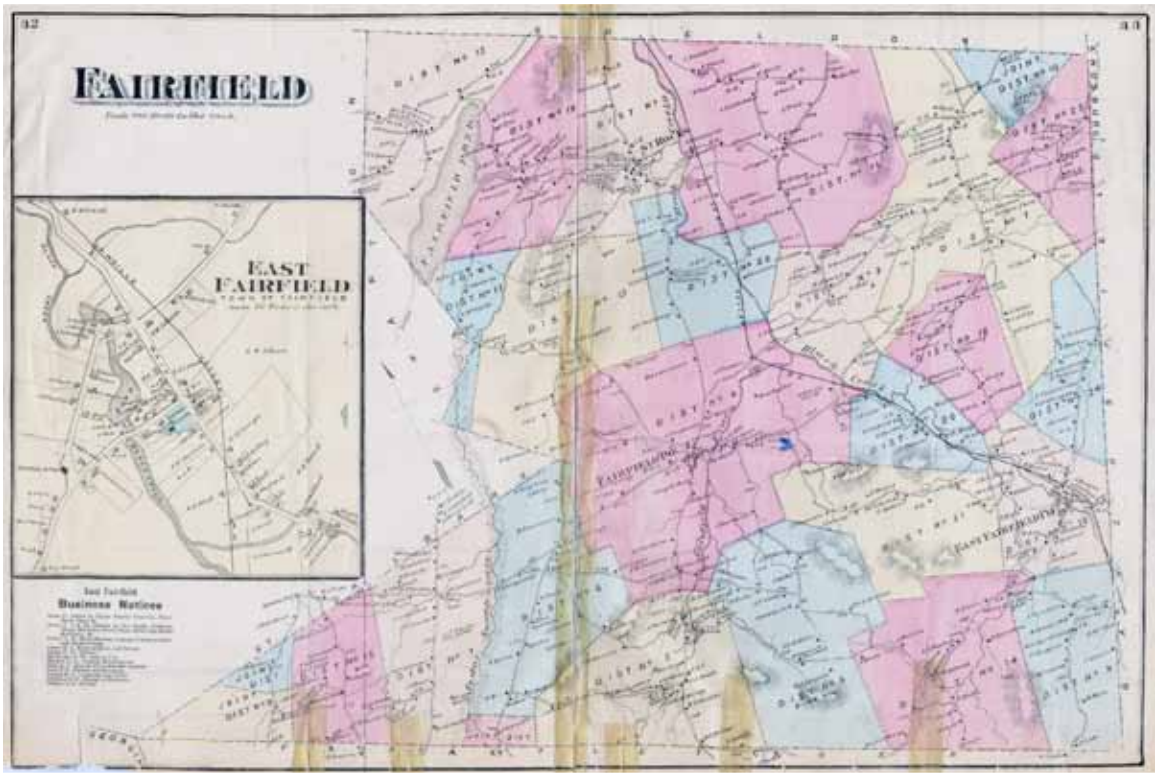
John Leach, Sr., was born as New Fairfield, Connecticut, in 1735, and came to Fairfield, Vermont, in 1789, locating in the southern part of the town. He reared a family of fourteen

children, all but two of whom settled in the town, and died in 1811. John Leach, Jr., born at New Fairfield, in 1761, came here in 1788, made some improvements on a farm, and returned to Fairfield, Connecticut. In the spring of 1789, he returned, bringing his wife and two children, and located permanently upon the farm now owned by Mr. Oliver, on road 21. His honorable life was brought to a close in 1844, in his eighty-fourth year.

Amos Northrop came to Fairfield, from Fairfield, Connecticut, in 1792, and located where Thomas Hale now resides. Here he resided until his death, in 1849, aged eighty-three years. During the war of 1812, he started to market, at Plattsburg, with a load of oats, and upon his arrival there was pressed into the service of the United States, and sent with his team to Sackett's Harbor, to transport soldiers and supplies, and was retained from home from January until March. During a portion of this time he was obliged to camp in the forest with no protection from the weather, and thereby had his feet frozen so badly that a portion of the right foot had to be amputated. He reared a family of four sons and three daughters, only one of whom, Horation, residing at East Fairfield, is living.

figure 3

1871 F.W. Beers Atlas



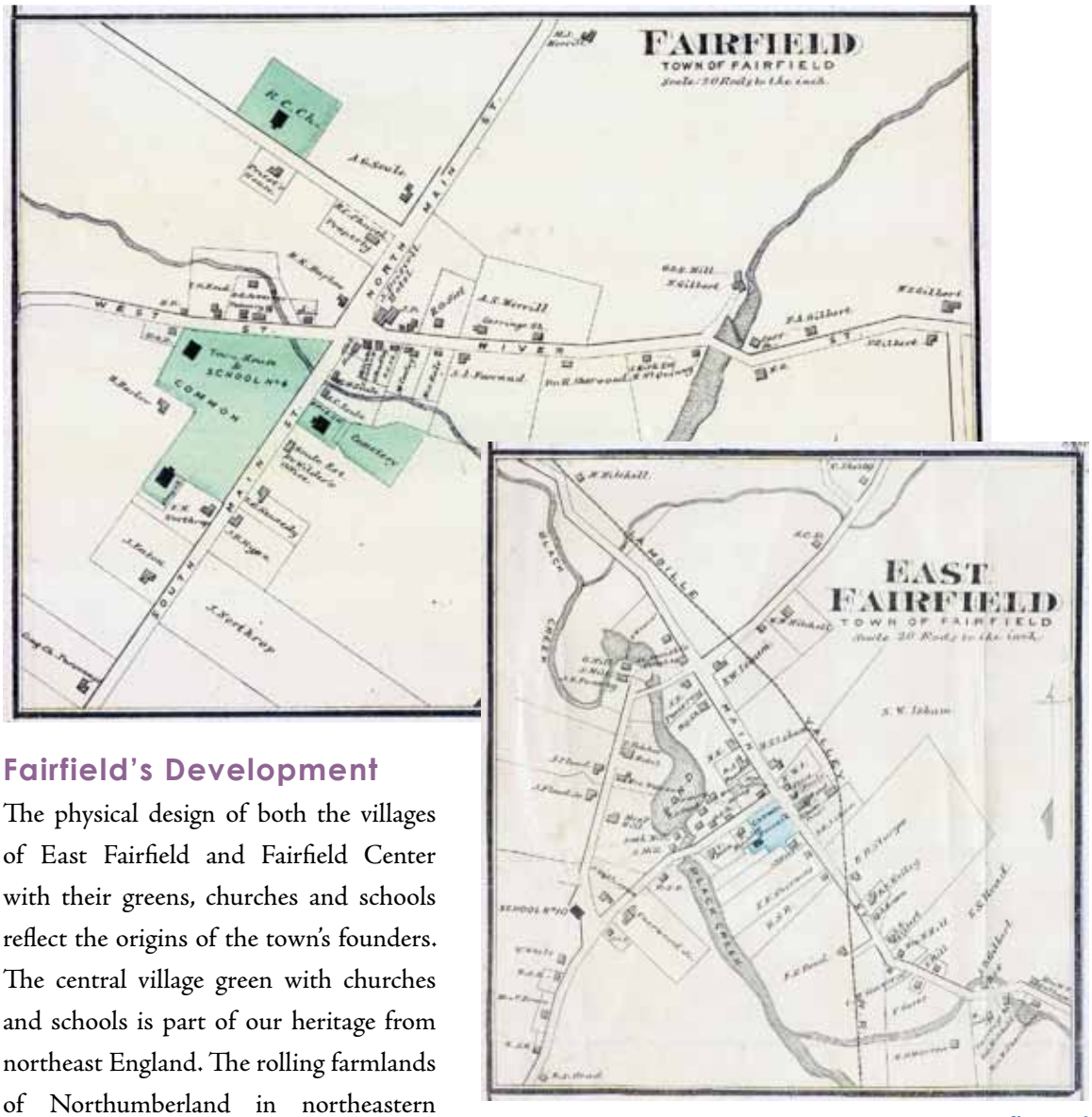


figure 4
1871 F.W. Beers Atlas

Fairfield's Development

The physical design of both the villages of East Fairfield and Fairfield Center with their greens, churches and schools reflect the origins of the town's founders. The central village green with churches and schools is part of our heritage from northeast England. The rolling farmlands of Northumberland in northeastern Old England are scattered with beautifully preserved village greens, churches, schools and village halls, focal points for the strong agricultural communities they support. Land use plans guiding development and protection of rural life are also successful templates provided for us in the original European homelands of so many of Fairfield's earliest settlers.

In the late 18th century, several villages were established near important waterpower sites in Fairfield. Fairfield Center was an important early settlement with the first mill set up in the summer of

1791 on the Fairfield River. The peak of the pioneer period occurred in 1810 when 1,618 town residents were counted in the Census. Many of these original Yankees began to migrate westward, especially after the War of 1812, and the population began to decline. A new influx of settlers, especially from Ireland began arriving in the 1820s, and in 1850 Fairfield reached a peak population of 2,591 residents. The 1842 Gazetteer included the following description of Fairfield:

> There are a Congregational, a Baptist, an Episcopal and a Methodist church in this town. The Rev. Benjamin Wooster was settled over the Congregational Church in 1805. He was the first settled minister, and died in this town February 13, 1840 aged seventy-seven years. The present minister is the Rev. T. Reynolds. The Episcopal Church, called Trinity Church, was the only one in Franklin County when the Rev. Stephen Beach, took charge of it in 1815. Several clergymen labored here more or less previous to 1840, when the Rev. Ezekial H. Sayles, the present minister, was settled. This church consists of about 60 members. An Academy was incorporated here in 1808, and a convenient building erected for its accommodation. Black Creek is a considerable stream, which issues from Metcalf pond in Fletcher, and runs through this township, affording an excellent stand for mills. Fairfield River is a small stream, which, also, takes its rise in Fletcher, and passes through the town near its center, affording several good mill privileges. These streams unite and fall into Missisquoi River in Sheldon. Smithfield pond lying in the westerly part of the town, is about three miles long and one and a half broad. At the outlet is an excellent stand for mills, and another on the same stream about two miles below. The township was originally covered principally with hard wood. The surface is uneven, but very little of it so broken as to be unfit for cultivation. The soil is generally good. The town is divided into fifteen school districts, with a comfortable schoolhouse in each. The public buildings are an Academy, townhouse, an Episcopal and a Congregational church. There are in town, three stores, four gristmills, eight sawmills, two fulling mills, one carding machine, and two tanneries.

The self-sufficient economy of the pioneering settlers shifted to grain and wool production in the early 19th century. Along with timber, these products could be transported and shipped across Lake Champlain and canals to points south and north. Starting in the middle of the 19th century, rail lines in the Champlain Valley and

eventually in East Fairfield allowed for rapid export of products to the rest of the country. In the decades after the Civil War, a decrease in the importance of wool and an increase in butter and cheese in regional economies resulted in a shift away from sheep and into dairying.

Today, Fairfield still shows the vestiges of these earlier days. The current villages of Fairfield Center and East Fairfield exist on the historic settlements from 200 years ago. The economy of the region remains the same as it has been for a hundred years, an agricultural town based around the dairy industry. Many historic structures remain including homes, barns, public buildings, and covered bridges. The population is once again growing, but remains well short of the population peak of 1850.

figure 5
Chester Alan Arthur
Ole Balling, Oil on canvas, 1881

Birthplace of Chester Alan Arthur

Fairfield is the birthplace of President Chester A. Arthur who took office in 1881. The Vermont Gazetteer of 1882 includes the following story:

> Elder William Arthur, the father of our President, was born in Ireland, finished his education at Edinburgh, Scotland, and soon after its completion came to America, and located at Dunham. He first took up the study of law; but after his marriage with Miss Stone, daughter of Rev. Washington Stone, he entered the ministry of the Free Will Baptist church, and shortly after united with the Baptist Church. He taught school and preached in several localities throughout Chittenden and Franklin counties, and Canada. In 1829, he received a call from the Baptist church of North Fairfield, which he accepted, and removed to that village. He first occupied a portion of Jonathan Bailey's dwelling, where he remained until the church built a

figure 6
Chester A. Arthur Historic Site

parsonage. The parsonage was located on a lonely by-road, some three-quarters of a mile from the church, a story and a half structure, about 18 by 24, and is still in existence, though it has been moved about one hundred rod down the hill and across the highway, where it is used as a hay-barn. In this unpretentious structure Elder passed a few years of an uneventful life, and here was born his son, Chester A., the present chief magistrate of our nation. Young Arthur was named in honor of Dr. Chester Abell, long a friend and physician of the family, and who now peacefully rests in the little cemetery near the church where Elder Arthur officiated.

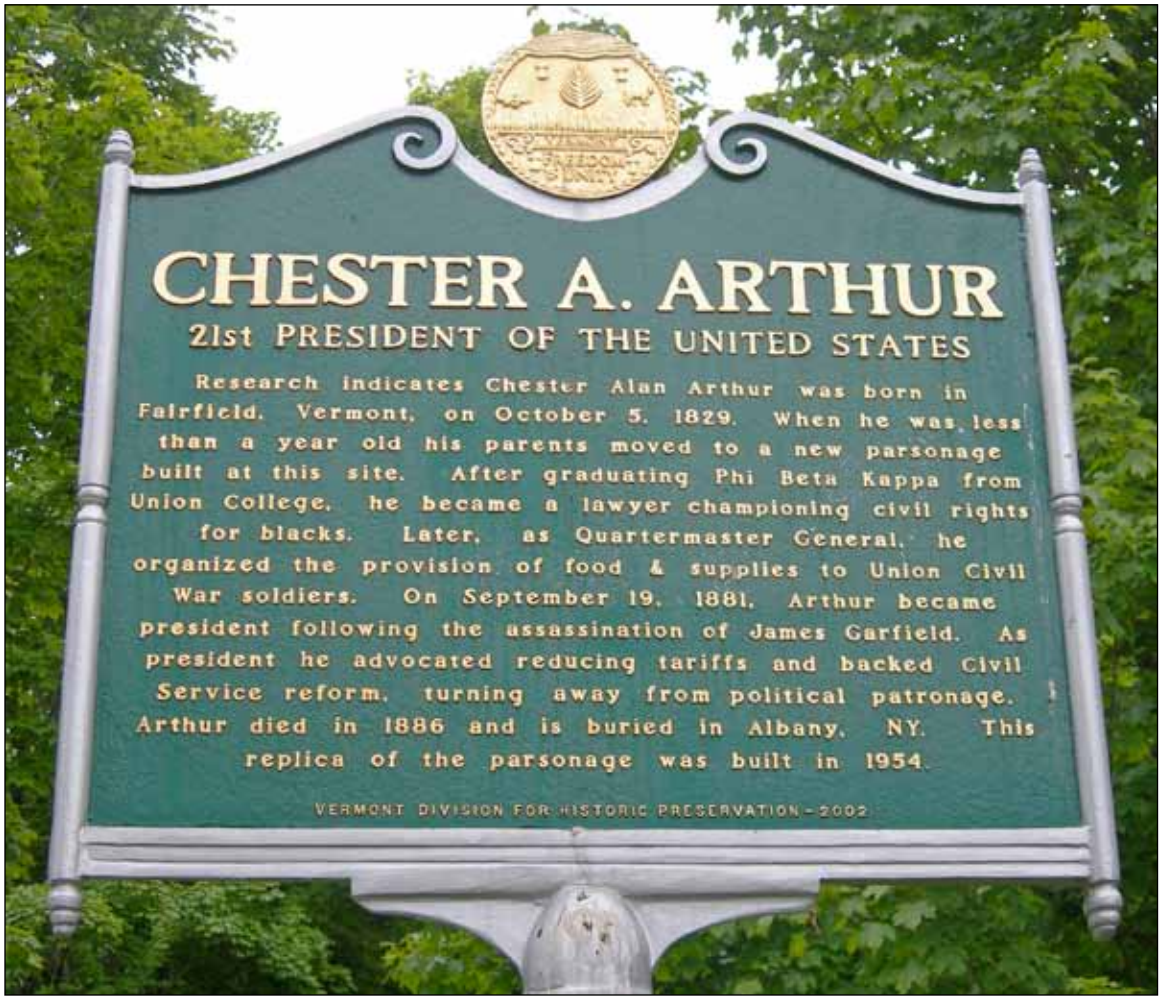
The Vermont Historical Proceedings adds this to President Arthur's story:

> The one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Chester A. Arthur, which occurred on October 5, 1930, was completely ignored in his native state. Not the slightest observance was made of the day anywhere in Vermont, and if the fact of the occurrence of the anniversary was mentioned by a single Vermont newspaper we were unaware of it. Such is fame. Will the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Calvin Coolidge be similarly ignored and forgotten, we wonder?
>
> The twenty-first president of the United States can hardly be called a typical Vermonter, to be sure, but he was a native son of Vermont and as such deserves something better than oblivion to his memory. He was not a great statesman, but he was fully up to the average of our presidents and his character was irreproachable. It was his misfortune to come into the presidency at a time of great scandal, and he was weighted with the further disadvantage of being known as a machine politician and spoilsman. Perhaps no man of the time could have done better than he did in the circumstances.
>
> Curiously, the centennial of his birth seems not to have brought forward the old story that he was not born in Vermont, but in Canada. Just before the Republican national convention was held in 1884, a writer named Hinman published How a British Subject Became President of the United States. Hinman alleged that the Rev. William Arthur and his Vermont-born wife, who was Malivina Stone, lived in Canada when their oldest

son was born. That son was Chester Alan Arthur. They moved to Fairfield, Franklin County, Vermont, where a second son was born. This son died in infancy. According to Hinman's story, it was the second child who was born at Fairfield, October 5, 1830. Up to the time that he became the nominee of his party for the vice-presidency or shortly before then Chester A. Arthur did not claim either the birthplace or the birthday now accepted, according to Hinman. When he saw the vice-presidency looming before him, with the presidency as a possibility Chester Alan Arthur quietly appropriated the birthday and birthplace of his deceased younger brother, and went to Canada, immediately after his nomination as vice president, to make sure that no records which might prove embarrassing were permitted to remain. The story was widely published, but apparently it had little to do with the outcome of the convention which denied him the Republican nomination for the presidency.

figure 7

Chester A. Arthur Historic Marker



Archeological Resources

Fairfield's archeological sites contain a fragile, complex and irreplaceable record of past human activities. Archeological resources include both prehistoric hunting camps and historic ruins of early homes, mills, and settlements. Archeological resources differ from historic structures in that the information that exists is buried. Fairfield's prehistoric archeological sites are not readily recognizable and have no apparent structural or architectural shape. Rather, evidence of prehistoric activities and occupations are contained within the soil deposits of a cornfield or a woodlot or are buried in a floodplain.

For 10,000 years Native Americans focused their activities within river valleys and lake basins. Although no Native American sites have been documented in Fairfield, the state has identified areas associated with Black Creek as archeologically sensitive. Unlike the large settlements found in Highgate and Swanton along Monument Road, any sites in Fairfield are likely to be much smaller in scale.

The ruins of 18th, 19th and early 20th century buildings, structures, and activity areas comprise historic archeological sites. Thus the ruins of homes and farmsteads, mills and settlements constitute Fairfield's historic archeological heritage. Visible remnants of these sites frequently consist of stone foundations or collapsed ruins although much of the archeological information is buried.

Our prehistoric and historic archeological sites constitute an essential link to our recent and distant past. These sites are often the only source of information for the longest part of human history in Vermont. Archeological sites are being destroyed at an alarming rate. Accordingly, archeological sites and archeologically sensitive lands should be considered during the early planning stages of land development activities and should be recognized as important, non-renewable resources.

Historic Resources

The Fairfield Historical Society was organized in 1996 in order to record and preserve the history of Fairfield. The Historical Society has a safe place to store and display some of its collection since the new President Chester A. Arthur Conference Room was constructed. Additionally, the Historical Society has as one of their goals, to secure funding in order to compile a history of Fairfield. The town supports the efforts of this organization.

The state's Division of Historic Preservation is responsible for preserving the state's historic, architectural, and archeological resources. In 1981, the state conducted a survey of sites and structures in Fairfield. In all, 61 structures were reviewed, of which 60 were later placed onto the Vermont State Register of Historic Places. The entire report can be found in the Town Office. The Chester A. Arthur monument was the lone structure from the survey not to be included in the State Registry.

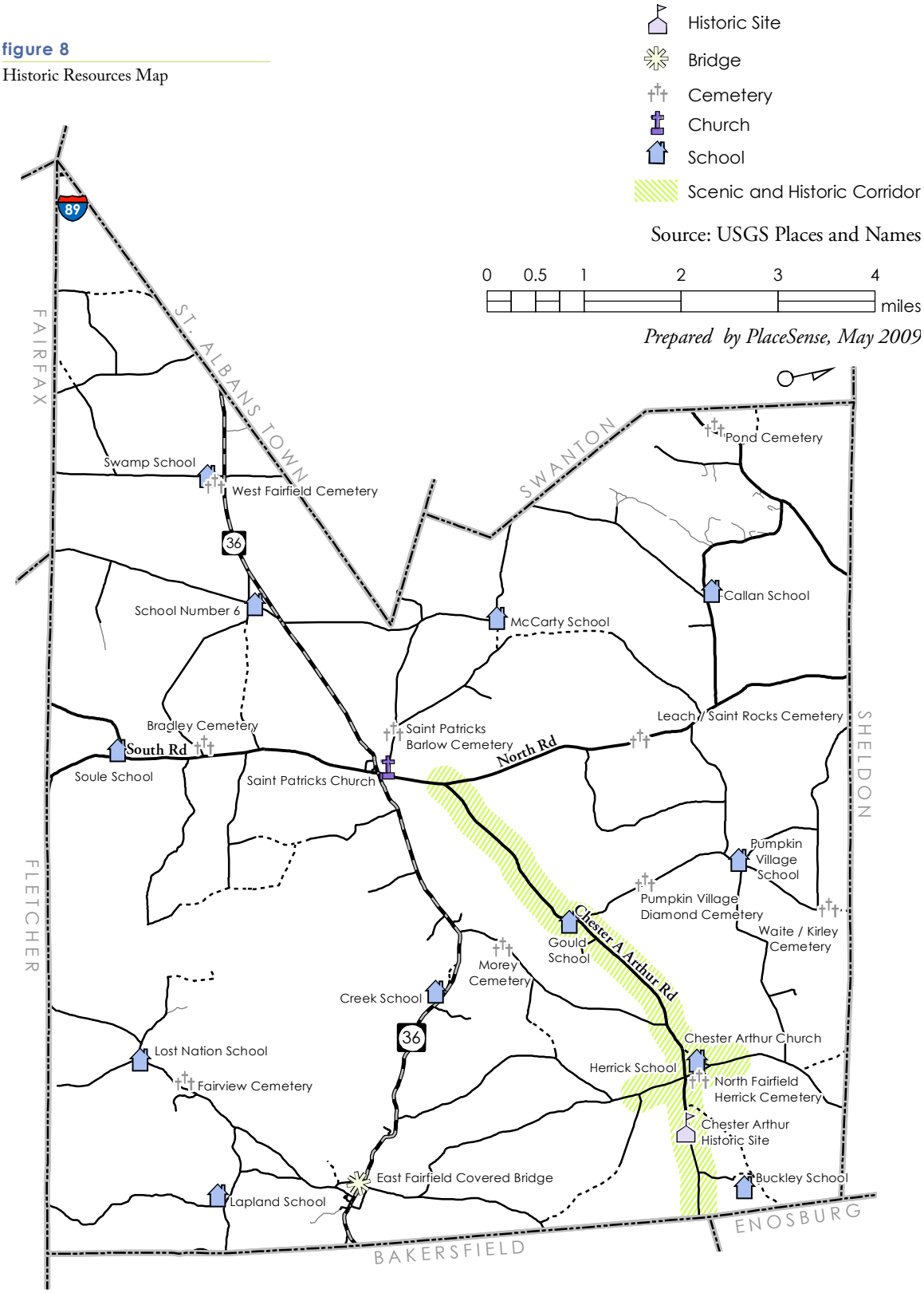
In similar fashion, the United States Department of the Interior National Park Service is the agency responsible for the National Register of Historic Places. Only the East Fairfield Covered Bridge, which is undergoing a $1.2 million renovation in 2009, is found on the National Registry. Many other buildings in town qualify but are not registered. Being listed results in the following for historic properties:

- Consideration in planning for federal projects.
- Consideration for federal tax provisions.
- Qualification for federal grants for historic preservation.

Listing on the National Registry does not restrict the use of the property or place any legal restrictions on the property. It only regulates the use of federal funds that may affect the property. The town encourages owners of qualifying properties to register with the National and/or State Registry. Any questions concerning state or federal listing as a historic site or structure should be forwarded to Vermont Division of Historic Preservation in Montpelier.

figure 8

Historic Resources Map



Historic Districts and Scenic Roads

The state recognizes the Fairfield Center Historic District as an outstanding example of an early 19th century town center. The features identified as important were the intact green, commercial buildings, tavern (since destroyed), residences, school, the Town house and fine Gothic Revival church. Only a few buildings do not contribute to the historic district. The Patton-Soule House, one of the finest Federal style houses in Vermont, sits at the north end of the district overlooking what was a very busy and thriving 19th and 20th century community center. Design control standards are now in place for any buildings in the village.

Chester A. Arthur Historic District and Scenic Road is an important part of the legacy of Fairfield. The state maintains a replica of the small house in which he was born in North Fairfield. Other features of this district include an old brick church and adjacent cemetery, now owned by the State Historic Society. Several homes in the area are architecturally appropriate to the era. A design control feature exists in this district, as it does along the scenic road.

Although not recognized on the state registry, the town has identified East Fairfield Village as being historically significant. As such, the design control features present in the Fairfield Village and Chester A. Arthur District apply here as well.

Cemeteries

Cemeteries offer a personal link to past residents of Fairfield. For some families in town today, these are the final resting places for parents, grandparents and great-grandparents back to the earliest settlers. There is perhaps no stronger connection to our common past than in the cemeteries that dot our countryside.

Figure 8 shows the location of Fairfield's cemeteries. A survey by D. B. Morry in 1973 (and updated in 1990 by Arthur Hyde) cataloged some basic information about each site.

References

Anyone interested in more information regarding Fairfield's colorful history has many places to turn. Unfortunately, a comprehensive work has yet to be compiled. The Fairfield Historic Society is hoping to get grants to have such a work assembled, but until then a trip to a library will have to suffice.

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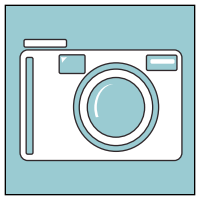


3. today

Population

Population Trends

Approximately 1,900 people currently live in Fairfield. The town's population has been increasing by 10 to 12 people each year on average over the last two decades. Growth rates in Fairfield were significantly higher during the 1970s and '80s as shown in Figure 10.

For the past 40 years, Fairfield's population has been around four percent of the total population of Franklin County. Franklin County's population increased at a slower rate than Vermont as a whole for much of the 20th century. Since 1980, however, the county's growth rate has outpaced that of the state.

figure 9

Town and County Population

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2007
Fairfield	1,225	1,285	1,493	1,680	1,800	1,894
Franklin County	29,474	31,281	34,788	39,980	45,417	47,934
% County	4.2%	4.1%	4.3%	4.2%	4.0%	4.0%

	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000-07
Fairfield	0.5%	1.5%	1.2%	0.7%	0.7%
Franklin Cty	0.6%	1.1%	1.4%	1.3%	0.8%
Vermont	1.3%	1.4%	1.0%	0.8%	0.3%

figure 10

Average Annual Growth Rates

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Population growth has not been shared equally among all Franklin County towns. The rate of growth in some municipalities has been markedly higher than the rate of the county, while population levels in the other communities have remained stable. Consistent with statewide trends, as Franklin County's population has grown, the percentage of county citizens residing in historic population centers, such as St. Albans City, has declined. In contrast, the percentage of county residents living in the immediate vicinity of those centers, such as St. Albans Town, has increased. Those towns situated in the southwestern part of the county, contiguous to rapidly developing Chittenden County and within the Interstate 89 corridor, have experienced the county's highest rate of population growth.

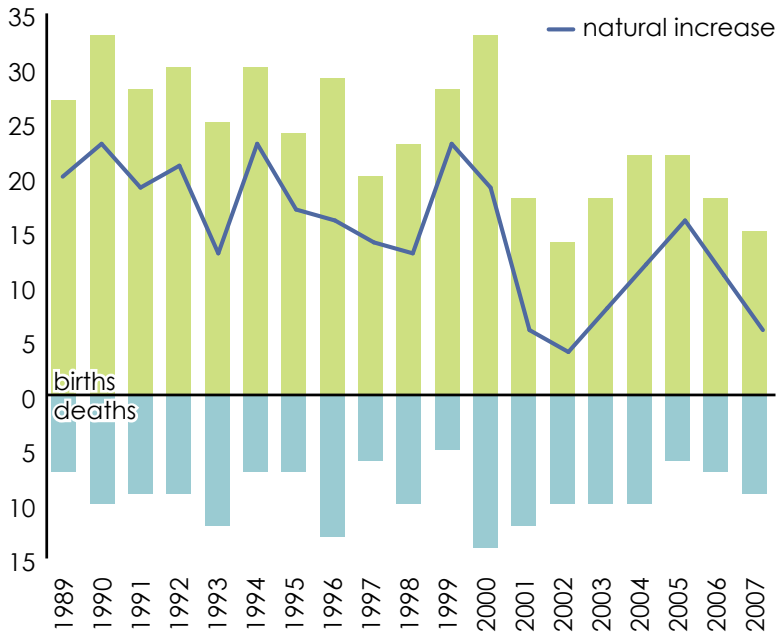


figure 11
Vital Statistics and Natural Increase
Source: VT Department of Health

Unlike those faster growing municipalities, Fairfield's growth is being driven by natural increase rather than by people moving into town. While the number of babies born each year is variable, Fairfield has been experiencing a trend of declining birth rates for nearly two decades. In recent years, there have been 20 births and 10 deaths on average each year.

Age Profile

The age distribution of Fairfield residents has been responding to national trends shaped by the baby-boom generation. While the town's population has consistently been younger than county and state averages, demographic changes like the end of the echo baby-boom are clearly reflected in the smaller cohorts of children being born in town in recent years. Also evident is a steady increase in the number of elderly residents as life expectancies continue to rise, a trend that will be magnified over the next several decades as the large baby-boom generation ages.

These demographic changes will affect the housing needs of Fairfield residents, the local school system, and the provision of human services. With an increasing percentage of the population age 55 or older, demand for smaller, accessible homes with reduced maintenance requirements located closer to basic services will likely grow throughout Vermont. There is currently a limited amount of housing in town designed to meet the needs of older residents. Over the next several decades, the number of frail elderly, many living alone, is expected to increase, which points to a need for housing, healthcare,

transportation and other support services that will allow residents to remain living in the community as they age.

The generation of children born to baby-boomers (the echo baby boom) reached peak numbers in the early 1990s. Since then, children have accounted for between six and seven percent of the town's total population. It is anticipated that this statistic will remain stable over the next several decades resulting in only modest increases in school enrollments as the town's total population grows. The record high school enrollments of the 1990s will likely not be surpassed or equaled for the foreseeable future unless there are significant changes in the regional economy that would attract large number of younger families from outside the area to move into town.

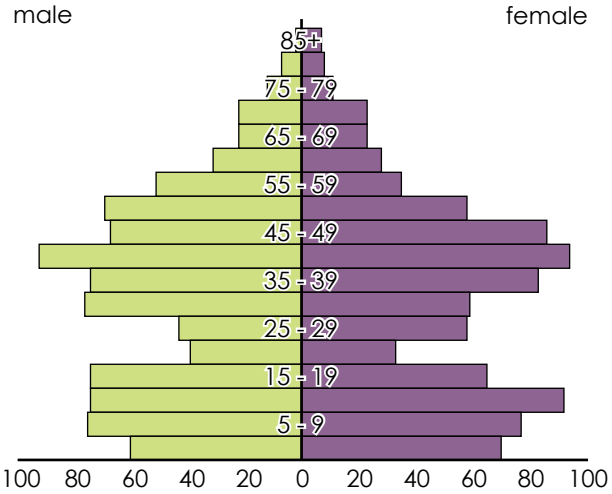


figure 12
Population Pyramid, 2000
Source: US Census Bureau

Households

For planning purposes, the number of households and their characteristics are perhaps more important than the total population. Households drive demand for housing, facilities and services. As households become smaller, the number of households – and therefore needed housing units – can increase without any growth in population.

As of 2008, there were approximately 700 households living in Fairfield. Over the past two decades, the number of households has grown twice as fast as the total population due to a declining household size. While the average household size in Fairfield remains higher than county and state averages, the number of people per household dropped to 2.9 people in 2000 and is almost certainly continuing on a downward trend.

While the number of households with children remained relatively stable during the 1990s, the number of single-person households and couples without children grew. This trend is anticipated to continue given the age distribution of Fairfield's population.

	Per Capita Income	Median Household Income	Median Family Income
1980	$12,939	$41,053	$43,269
1990	$16,449	$46,241	$48,554
2000	$20,953	$53,534	$58,768

figure 13

Annual Income (adjusted to 2006$)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Income Profile

The median income of Fairfield households has consistently been slightly higher than county or state averages. Given the town's higher average household size, per capita (person) income has been slightly lower. According to the 2000 Census, the median household income in Fairfield was around $44,000. According to the Vermont Department of Labor, the average wage paid by a Franklin County employer that year was approximately $28,000 – indicating that most households are supported by more than one wage earner.

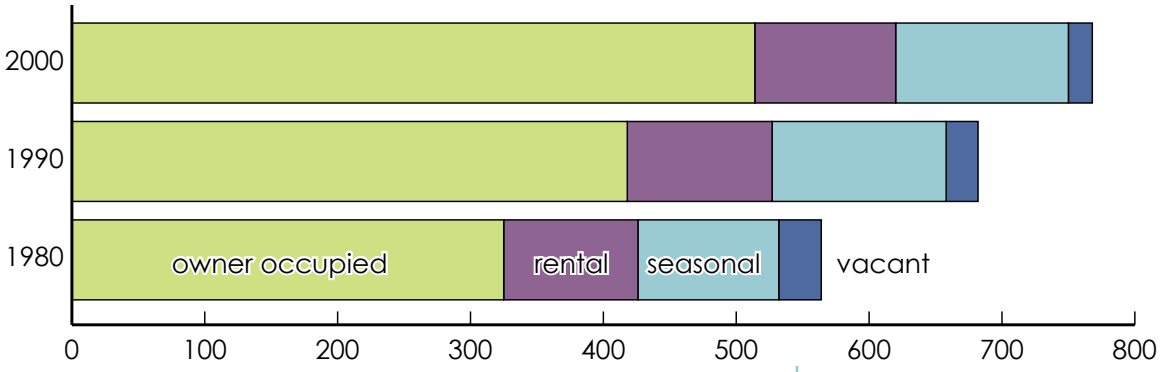
The age and income profile of households is a strong indication of their propensity to move and the type of housing they will be looking for. Of the households that moved into Fairfield during the 1990s, 60 percent came from somewhere else in Franklin County. So, an analysis of the current and projected mix of households in the county by age and income can be used to make broad assessments about housing needs. Younger households with adequate means are likely to transition from renting to home ownership, and will be looking for modestly priced starter homes. Established middle-aged households are less likely to move, while older households frequently downsize to smaller homes with fewer maintenance requirements.

Housing

Housing Trends

The 2000 Census counted 768 housing units in Fairfield, 620 of which were classified as year-round, occupied dwellings. During the 1960s, '70s and '80s, Fairfield added around 10 homes per year to its housing stock. The amount of housing in Fairfield was increasing at rates above county and state averages during those decades.

figure 14
Housing Units by Tenure
Source: US Census Bureau



In response to perceived growth pressure and the strong desire of town residents to remain a rural, agricultural town, Fairfield adopted a permit allocation system in 1988. For the past 20 years, Fairfield's growth management plan has capped the number of residential building permits that can be issued each year. The rate of housing development was slowed so that during the 1990s, an average of less than nine new residences were built each year. Even with the allocation in place, the rate of housing development in Fairfield was still higher than county or state averages for the decade.

The town's growth management program set an average annual growth rate for year-round residences at 1.4 percent, which would have resulted in 93 homes being built this decade (2000 to 2009). However, the cap does not include all dwelling units – agricultural and seasonal housing are exempt. Between 2000 and 2007, a total of 92 dwellings were permitted, which includes 10 units of agricultural housing, four camps and two rental units. Between 2000 and 2006, Franklin County's average annual growth rate in dwelling units was

only 1.2 percent. It can be assumed that the town's rate of housing development will again be slightly above the county average again this decade.

figure 15
Town and County Housing Units
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Fairfield	368	328	444	564	682	768
Franklin County	9,324	9,963	11,414	14,460	17,250	19,191
% County	3.9%	3.3%	3.9%	3.9%	4.0%	4.0%

	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
Fairfield	-1.1%	3.1%	2.4%	1.9%	1.2%
Franklin Cty	0.7%	1.4%	2.4%	1.8%	1.1%
Vermont	1.1%	1.9%	3.1%	2.0%	0.8%

figure 16
Average Annual Growth Rates
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The 2007 grand list included 680 residential properties including 148 listed as vacation homes (these figures do not include residences on farm properties) totaling more than 11,000 acres of land or 27 percent of land in town. The number of residential properties increased by 30 since 2004 and the amount of land in residential use increased by more than 1,100 acres. Some of this change may be due to corrections to how land had been categorized in the grand list. However, a review of recent subdivision activity shows that the majority of lots being created remain 10 acres or larger. So while the number of new homes being constructed each year has been reduced, the rate at which farmland is being subdivided and converted to residential lots remains a concern.

Characteristics

Similar to rural towns around Vermont, Fairfield's housing stock is comprised primarily of owner-occupied, single-family detached homes.

Farm Housing

According to the 2000 Census, there were 154 people living in the town's 51 farm dwellings. The number of farm dwellings remained constant during the 1990s, while the number of residents living on the

	# of Parcels		Acres		Average Value	
	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007
Residential 1	228	236	405	410	$121,857	$124,482
Residential 2	224	255	7,474	8,890	$182,941	$193,156
Mobile Home (landed)	40	37	395	340	$95,015	$94,935
Mobile Home (unlanded)	6	4	140	-	$51,700	$9,575
Vacation 1	125	123	165	163	$47,923	$51,624
Vacation 2	27	25	1,351	1,229	$111,533	$119,948
Commercial	19	16	338	247	$121,295	$124,856
Utility	4	4	4	4	$626,525	$631,800
Farm	96	102	22,350	22,348	$394,051	$373,287
Woodland	40	38	3,685	3,080	$74,520	$62,611
Open Land	116	110	4,023	3,696	$53,261	$48,404

figure 17
Fairfield Grand List Summary

town's farms decreased by 60 people. An analysis of the town's 2007 Grand List suggests that there were 102 dwellings on farm property.

Around 20 farm properties include more than one dwelling, which may account for some of the discrepancy between the Census figures and town records. Many of Fairfield's farms have traditionally provided on-site housing for employees. Farm worker housing has been exempt from the town's permit allocation system, raising questions about the equity of that provision among some non-farm residents. The town's land use regulations should provide flexibility to ensure that this common practice remains an option for the farming community. However, if farm worker housing is to continue being exempt from the permit allocation system, there needs to be a mechanism for requiring a permit if the dwelling is no longer serving its original purpose as an accessory use on an active farm.

Seasonal Housing

The town also has 130 to 150 seasonal homes, most located around Fairfield Pond. There have been a few conversions of camps to year-round homes in recent years. The town anticipates that more seasonal residences may be converted to year-round use as property owners retire to their "camps."

Mobile Homes

There are between 40 and 75 mobile homes in Fairfield, depending on how structures are classified. There are no mobile home parks in town and virtually all mobile homes are on their own lots. Mobile homes have traditionally been an affordable housing option in rural communities like Fairfield. An analysis of census and town grand list records suggests that the number of mobile homes has been on the decline in Fairfield in recent years. Given the cost of land in Fairfield, a mobile home on its own lot may not be affordable for some households as the average assessment for such a dwelling was around $95,000 in 2007 according to the Fairfield grand list.

Values and Affordability

Fairfield residents have identified a limited supply of affordable housing as an issue of concern. An analysis of housing affordability based on the state's definition does not substantiate that perception. However, the state bases those calculations on a regional median income figure that includes all of Chittenden and Franklin counties, which does not accurately reflect the lower household incomes in outlying rural towns like Fairfield.

Housing values shot up in Fairfield between 2002 and 2006 and many recent home sales have been significantly higher than the assessed value of the property. It appears that the current economic downturn has stopped the escalation in home values, but the associated problems with the credit markets seem to have significantly reduced rate of sales and construction. The implications of national economic trends on the town's housing market are not yet evident. Sale prices, household income and assessed values should continue to be monitored to determine the affordability of homes in Fairfield.

Economy

Agriculture

Fairfield, despite continued decline in the total number of farms, remains one of the most agricultural communities in the state. The town's farming community is ever changing and increasingly diverse. While there are few agricultural statistics available at the town level, data is available from the 1997, 2002 and 2007 federal Agricultural Censuses for the 05455 (Fairfield) and 05448 (East Fairfield) zip codes.

figure 18
Farmland in Fairfield

In 1990, the Vermont Department of Agriculture counted 74 dairy farms in Fairfield, which declined to 55 in 1998. As of January 2009, there were 37 dairy farms shipping milk in town. The 2007 Fairfield Grand List included 102 farm parcels and there was virtually no change in the acreage listed in that category between 2004 and 2007. The amount of land classified as woodland or open land did decline over that three-year period, however. In 2007, there were approximately 600 acres less of woodland and 330 acres less of open land listed than in 2004.

Over the past two decades, Fairfield's agricultural economy has experienced both consolidation and diversification. In order to remain profitable, the average Vermont dairy farm has become larger, which explains why the number of farms in Fairfield has declined at a faster rate than the amount of land being farmed.

The available statistics also point to the increasing number of small farms that are diversifying the town's agricultural economy, which for more than a century has been largely focused on milk production. Within Fairfield, farmers are raising beef cattle, horses, pigs and poultry in addition to milk cows. A range of crops is grown including corn, hay, soybeans and berries.

figure 19
Fairfield Farm

More than half of the town's farms produce maple syrup; so, stands of sugar maples are important agricultural resources in Fairfield. In addition to the challenges posed by acid rain, air pollution and climate change on the sugar maples, woodlots are facing pressure from development as evidenced by the declining amount of forestland listed in the town's Grand List.

Current Use Program

The Current Use Program offers landowners use value property taxation based on the productive value of land rather than based on the traditional "highest and best" use of the land. The program includes a tax penalty for removing enrolled lands as a disincentive to develop productive lands. Over the past 15 years, the amount of land enrolled in Fairfield has increased somewhat to a total of nearly 28,000 acres or 64 percent of the entire town. It should not be assumed that all that acreage is actually in productive use, however.

Transfer and Purchase of Development Rights

Farmers may want to consider selling or transferring their development rights – that is, selling the right to develop the land while maintaining all other existing rights – to land trusts or other parties buying such rights for agricultural lands preservation purposes. This provides extra income, and can ensure that the land is not developed even after the current farmer has passed on the land to the next generation, rented it out, or sold it. In responses to our survey, most farmers were familiar with Transfer and Purchase of Development Rights (TDR and PDR), with about half in favor of and half against using it as a land preservation tool.

The purchase of development rights has been perhaps the most effective form of protection of farmland to date. The Vermont Land Trust, which has targeted Fairfield farms as part of an agricultural "critical mass" area, has undertaken 25 projects in town, resulting in the

purchase of development rights on roughly 6,850 acres of farmland, at a cost of approximately $4 million.

Land Evaluation and Site Assessment

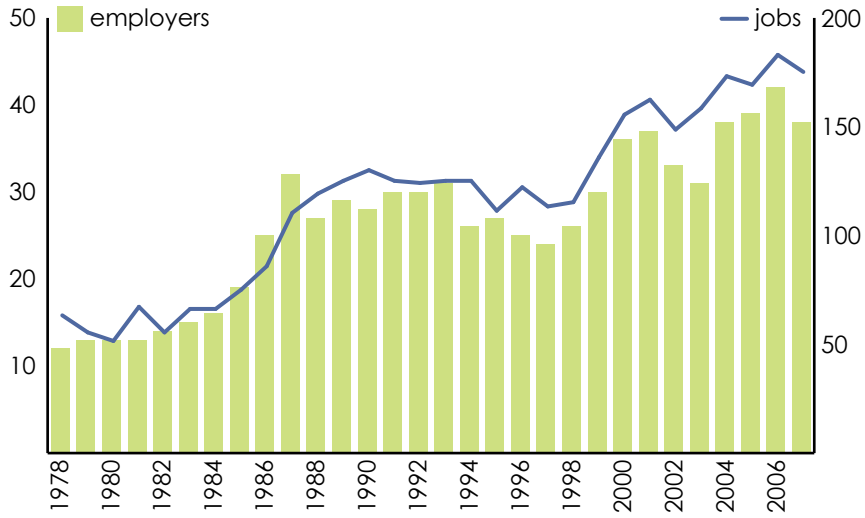
Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) is a method for identifying the best agricultural lands for preserving. It is a point-rating system based on the quality of the land and criteria decided upon by an individual town. It enables towns like Fairfield to decide which agricultural lands to preserve through means such as selling development rights to land trusts. Fairfield has developed a LESA, under the guidance of Michaela Stickney, and it is incorporated by reference into this plan.

The Vermont Land Trust has since conserved a significant amount of the land identified as the most productive in town. The LESA could be further integrated into the town's land use regulations to help guide development to marginal lands and establish appropriate densities.

Local Businesses

The Vermont Department of Labor provides information on economic activity occurring in town, based on the data it collects from businesses with employees covered by unemployment insurance. This data does not include the self-employed, businesses owners or partners and many agricultural workers, but it does include public employees such as those working for the town, school or post office. In recent years, around 40 business establishments have been counted in Fairfield, employing around 175 people altogether. The number of businesses has more than tripled over the past 30 years, with the most rapid growth occurring in the late 1980s. In

figure 20
Fairfield's Employers and Jobs
Source: VT Department of Labor



2007, the annual wages paid by Fairfield employers totaled more than $5.1 million resulting in an average wage per employee of $29,000.

The types of non-agricultural businesses in town are diverse and typical of rural communities including a number of construction contractors, automotive service and repair, specialty shops, professional services, lodging and artists. The town's largest employer is the public school system, which employs around 60 people.

Home Businesses

While there is little data available on home businesses currently operating in town, anecdotal evidence suggests that they are an important component of the town's economy. According to the 2000 Census, 144 households (23 percent) in Fairfield had self-employment income and 75 people reported working at home. In 1990, the Census separated the self-employment category into farm and non-farm. That year, there were 205 households (39 percent) with self-employment income, 93 of which had farm self-employment income. It is difficult to parse the recent Census data, but it is likely that the number of people working in non-farm home-based businesses has been increasing while the number of people working on the town's farms has been decreasing over the past two decades.

Education

Facilities

The Fairfield School District provides full educational services for children in grades K-8. Grades 9-12 attend regional high schools, primarily Bellows Free Academy in St. Albans. The Fairfield School was last expanded in 1988, when six classrooms and a new library were added. Current capacity is approximately 300 students. No expansion is anticipated during this five-year planning period.

However, the School Board has indicated a desire to explore options for constructing a gymnasium within the next 5-7 years. Such a facility would likely be available to town residents for recreation use and cultural events. Fairfield continues to provide transportation services (busing) for students. Because of the extensive road network and large area of town, the replacement of school buses is a reoccurring capital expense for the school. Other pending projects include the replacement of some kitchen equipment in the coming years. In addition, recreation fields are inadequate to serve current demand and the School Board is exploring alternatives for expansion. The roof will need to be replaced on one wing within the next five years.

Enrollment

Current enrollment (2007-08 school year) at the Fairfield School is approximately 260 students. Enrollment peaked at around 300 students during the 1996-97 school year and then declined to current levels. This reflects the passing of the so-called "echo baby boom" through the elementary school system. High school populations have also peaked and are beginning to decline as well. The town's birth rates suggest that enrollments will remain stable or perhaps decline during this five-year planning period unless there are significant changes to the regional economy that would attract young families with children to town.

Costs

The cost of providing public education has risen sharply over the past decade. There have been changes to state funding for education

figure 21

Fairfield Central School Enrollment

Source: VT Department of Education

	Students (K-8)
1994-95	292
1995-96	299
1996-97	305
1997-98	301
1998-99	283
1999-00	281
2000-01	
2001-02	264
2002-03	
2003-04	260
2004-05	264
2005-06	279
2006-07	262
2007-08	260

that have complicated the relationship between education costs and property tax bills, but the simple fact remains that each new home has the potential to add students to the school system and the taxes levied on that home alone will not cover the annual cost of educating even one child. As of 2007, Fairfield's school system was spending around $11,000 for each pupil enrolled. This figure was below the state average of more than $13,000, but does reflect an increase of nearly $1,000 since 2005. In 2007, the total school budget (including the costs of high school students) was $2.7 million, up from less than $2.5 million in 2005.

Childcare

As evidenced by the economic profile of Fairfield households, two wage earners support the majority of families. Many of these families are reliant on childcare providers, located both in Fairfield and nearby communities. According to the 2000 Census, 65 percent of children under age six in Fairfield lived in a two-parent household where both parents worked outside the home, while another eight percent lived in single-parent households where their primary caregiver was employed. Those percentages were slightly higher for school-age children, indicating a potential need for after-school and summer programs.

In 2008, there were five in-home childcare providers located in Fairfield. A preschool program is available during the school year based in Fairfield's Community Center. Many parents likely use childcare providers in the community in which they are employed and there are several day care centers and programs in St. Albans.

Vocational and Continuing Education

Fairfield school-age and adult residents have access to vocational and continuing education in nearby communities including the Northwest Technical Center in St. Albans, Cold Hollow Career Center in Enosburg Falls, Vermont Adult Learning in St. Albans, Vermont Community College in St. Albans, and numerous opportunities in the greater Burlington area.

Utilities and Services

Water

Two private water districts, one serving Fairfield Village and one serving East Fairfield, operate in town. Both are funded through user fees and have not traditionally sought assistance from the town. Both systems were upgraded in the early 1990s and are not facing immediate upgrade or expansion needs.

Fairfield Fire District #1 owns and operates East Fairfield's water supply system. The source of supply for this system is a gravel-packed well located at the Burton Gravel Pit land donated by Francis Howrigan in Fairfield. With a depth of 381 feet, the well is reported to have a safe yield of 275 gallons per minute. This chlorinated water supply is then distributed throughout the village area by four-inch and smaller plastic water mains.

Fairfield Village is serviced by a water supply completed in the fall of 1992. A 40,000 gallon covered storage reservoir is located adjacent to State Route 36. At an elevation of about 480 feet, this reservoir is connected to the system with a six-inch plastic main and helps to maintain the operating pressure at 40 to 45 pounds per square inch in the village.

Throughout the rest of the town, homes are served by individual water systems. According to the 1990 Census, less than 30 percent of dwellings in Fairfield not served by a public water system obtained potable water from a drilled well. These homes are supplied with water from dug wells (25%) and other sources such as springs or ponds. Data on water supply was not available from the 2000 Census and it is likely that percentage of drilled wells has increased over the past 20 years. Still, the number of residents dependent on shallow wells and springs remains high and these types of water supplies are more likely to fail during dry periods and are more susceptible to contamination.

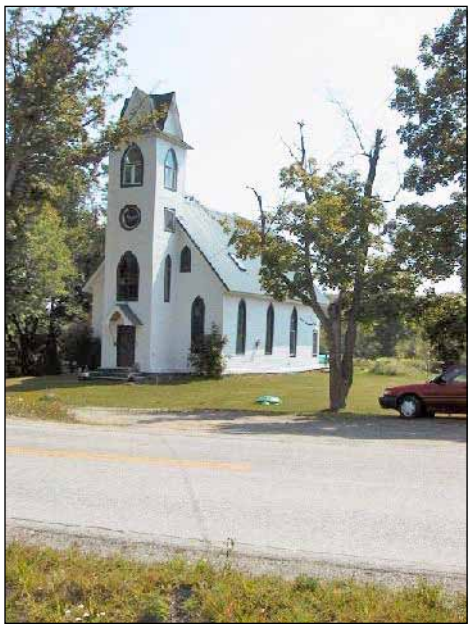
figure 22
Church

Wastewater

Wastewater is treated on-site by private systems. Changes to the state septic regulations in 2002 have closed the 10-acre exemption requiring all new lots, no matter their size, to obtain a state wastewater permit. The changes also included approval of alternative systems for use in Vermont, which will likely increase development potential on currently marginal soils over time. Therefore, the town can no longer rely on state septic regulations to maintain a low density settlement pattern in rural areas or to keep development off marginal lands.

There is a potential problem in the villages for the proper disposal of sewage. If future conditions ever mandate town actions to address wastewater treatment in the villages, consideration should be given to decentralized or other alternative treatment methods before a costly, conventional centralized sewage treatment plant is constructed. The town is actively pursuing grant funding to study wastewater options for its villages, both to reduce pollution potential and support growth in these designated centers.

figure 23
Church



Solid Waste

Fairfield is a member of the Northwest Regional Solid Waste District. Residents must make their own arrangements with private haulers for trash and recycling pickup.

Electric Infrastructure and Services

Both Central Vermont Public Service (CVPS) and Vermont Electric Co-Op (VEC) provide electricity in Fairfield. There is a transmission corridor that crosses into the southeastern corner of town, but no other regional infrastructure is located in Fairfield.

Communication Infrastructure and Services

Land line phone service is provided in Fairfield by Fairpoint Communications. There is limited DSL service available near the St. Albans line and on the eastern side of town. A cell phone antenna array was recently installed on a farm silo along Chester Arthur Road, improving cell service in many parts of town. There is also cell phone service from out-of-town towers. Some places in town still may have limited cell phone coverage. Cable television and high-speed internet service may be available in the eastern parts of town from North Country Cablevision. Elsewhere in town, satellite carriers can provide television and high-speed internet service.

Public Safety and Emergency Response

Fire Protection

Two volunteer fire departments – Fairfield and East Fairfield – provide fire protection service in the town. Both departments are funded through the town and private donations. No significant shortages of equipment or personnel have been identified at the present time.

Police Protection

Police protection, when needed, is provided by the Vermont State Police and the Franklin County Sheriff's Department. In the 2001 town meeting survey, police protection was singled out in many instances as unsatisfactory. Over the next five years, town officials may need to explore this issue further.

Health and Human Services

Doctors, dentists, and hospitals in nearby St. Albans provide medical treatment.

figure 24
Church

Consumption and Costs

Currently, Fairfield's residents and businesses are highly dependent on imported sources of energy. On average, Vermonters consume 74 percent of their non-transportation energy in the form of fossil fuels and another 17 percent in the form of electricity. Energy used for transportation is almost entirely fossil fuel based. Because these nonrenewable forms of energy are produced outside the region, most of the money spent on that energy is exported from the local economy.

Dependence upon energy resources is generally taken for granted. The costs and vulnerability of outside sources, especially fossil fuels, has increased drastically during the past decade. Yet, use of these outside sources of energy has continued to increase. Several studies have shown that for every dollar spent on outside energy resources 85 percent of that dollar leaves the community. Energy costs have become a major expense in government, business and personal budgets. Successfully reducing the impact of the costs and vulnerability of energy will benefit the town and its people.

Conservation and Local Generation

In Fairfield, as in communities around the country, there is increasing awareness of and concern about the sustainability of our energy consumption patterns. With a heating season that generally lasts seven months of the year and an average commute of 30 minutes, it is clear that energy consumption is a significant issue for the town's residents.

Substantial economic savings can be realized through energy conservation. Every dollar not spent on energy is available for local investment or saving, and to meet other basic needs. Reducing energy usage also reduces the adverse environmental impacts of energy production, transport, and use. Energy conservation can be facilitated through effective land use planning, building standards and design, and improved transportation efficiency.

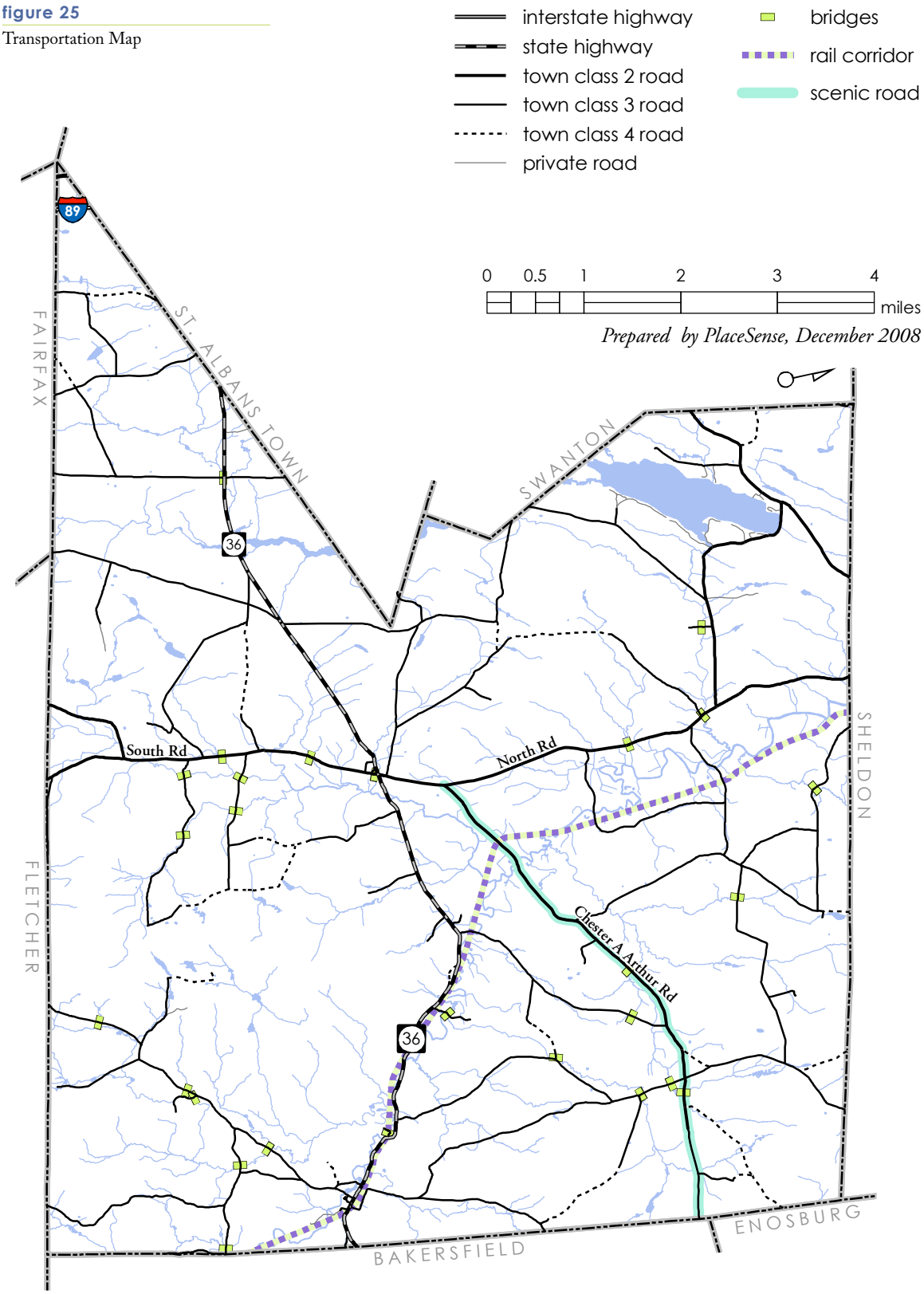
Development densities should be the highest within Fairfield's village centers and in those areas of town close to nearby employment centers and transportation corridors, with lower densities in outlying areas. By directing growth in this manner, costly and energy-inefficient scattered development can be avoided. Allowing residents to work from home also helps support energy efficiency by reducing commuter miles.

The siting, design, and construction of buildings strongly influences the amount of energy needed for heating and cooling, as well as the amount of electricity needed for lighting. Proper subdivision design, building orientation, construction, and landscaping provide opportunities for energy conservation measures such as less vehicular travel, passive solar space and domestic hot water heating, natural lighting, and photovoltaic electricity production. Additional energy savings can be realized by retrofitting existing buildings with insulation, more efficient doors and windows, weather stripping, compact fluorescent lights, and more efficient appliances.

Renewable energy resources offer long-term advantages over non-renewable sources. Solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, wood, wood gasification, farm methane and other renewable energy sources are expected to become more prominent in the town's future energy mix.

figure 25

Transportation Map



Transportation

As one of the most rural towns in Vermont, Fairfield deals with a smaller range of transportation issues than many other municipalities in the state. There is no public transportation system. The town's roads are not as heavily traveled by tourists as those in many other parts of Vermont. All transportation related features are identified on Figure 25.

Public Roads

The only state highway in Fairfield is Route 36, which travels east from the St. Albans line west to the Bakersfield line and passes through Fairfield Center and East Fairfield. Route 36 is state maintained and carries around 1,400 vehicles per day at the Bakersfield line and 2,800 vehicles per day at the St. Albans line. These traffic figures have been increasing gradually and they suggest that the highway is a primary route for many of the town's commuters and residents. A very short segment of Interstate 89 cuts across the easternmost corner of town, but the nearest interchange is approximately 2.5 miles east of the town line in neighboring St. Albans. Most of the remaining roads in Fairfield are town-maintained highways. Class 2 and 3 town roads receive state monies for their upkeep according to formulas based on class. Class 4 town roads receive no state funding for maintenance and are not maintained by the town during the winter months.

The majority of the transportation issues in Fairfield have to do with the maintenance of the many public roads, and associated bridges and culverts, which dissect the town. Most town roads are gravel. Some townspeople have expressed that in summer there is a problem with the dust that is raised on these roads as cars go by. However, many people also indicated that paving roads would encourage higher speed driving and this was considered undesirable. It was noted that when certain roads had been paved, or upgraded in some other way,

figure 26

Fairfield Road Mileage

Source: VT Agency of Transportation

	Paved	Gravel	Total
Interstate Hwy	0.676	0.000	0.676
State Hwy	10.084	0.000	10.084
Town Class 2	19.810	1.516	21.326
Town Class 3	1.739	68.757	70.496
Town Class 4	0.000	13.113	13.113
Private Roads	0.000	3.360	3.360
Total	32.309	86.746	119.055

commuter traffic through Fairfield from other towns increased and that was also undesirable.

Fairfield has more miles of road for its size than any other Vermont town. This fact alone means that Fairfield has more road maintenance costs than most towns. However, because of its relatively low population and lack of industry and commercial properties, it certainly does not have the largest tax base. This means that a high proportion of the town's budget must be used for road maintenance. Downgrading some roads from class 3 to class 4 is one option for the town to reduce maintenance costs. However, this must be done with caution since evidence suggests that most roads are well traveled.

Fairfield already has protected one of its many picturesque roads, that leading to the Chester A. Arthur birthplace, by designating it as a State Scenic Road. With so many scenic vistas and other resources in town, Fairfield may wish to consider designating others.

Private Roads

Given the fiscal implications of increasing the total mileage of town-maintained roads, it is likely that any new roads constructed in Fairfield will be private. Private roads need to be constructed to basic standards in order to protect public safety and prevent damage to adjoining public infrastructure.

Rail

Historically, two railroad lines ran through Fairfield, but neither is currently used. The former Central Vermont Railway cuts across the northwest corner of town (for about 1/3 of a mile) from Swanton to Sheldon and was turned into the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail in the late 1990s. The St. Johnsbury/ Lamoille County Railroad runs parallel to the Black Creek for several miles through the villages of Fairfield and East Fairfield from Sheldon to Bakersfield. In 2002, the state decided to start converting the 96-mile rail line into a recreational trail, the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail. This project is ongoing. Both of these lines have been officially rail banked meaning they will remain trails until rail becomes feasible again.

Recreation

Fairfield has an active Recreation Committee that oversees the mostly volunteer maintenance of the town's recreation fields and that organizes year-round activities. The town typically funds capital costs associated with maintenance, such as the replacement of the East Fairfield Community Center septic system in 1998. Existing recreation facilities are heavily used and additional space, especially ball fields, has been identified as capital need in the near future.

Facilities

Fairfield's public recreation facilities include the following:

- **East Fairfield Town Common:** Located in East Fairfield, the town common includes a basketball court / ice rink and picnic tables.
- **Fairfield Center Town Common:** Includes a baseball field, soccer field and basketball court.
- **Fairfield Center Recreation Park:** Fairfield has a five-acre Recreation Park located on town property across from the Fairfield Center School. The park, which was developed in 1989, contains a gazebo, playground equipment and a recreation path. In 1994, a Playground Committee was formed to spearhead ongoing park maintenance and improvements. Over the years, the group has leveraged grant funding with town dollars and a lot of volunteer labor and materials in order to keep the park both safe and attractive. Currently, the committee is fund-raising to install a new play structure at the park, replacing the existing structure which is 19 years old. Other improvements recommended by the committee include reclaiming the park's recreation path, which is no longer accessible for those with disabilities due to being overgrown by vegetation.

Outdoor Recreation and Rural Character

Maintaining and developing Fairfield's natural beauty and resources for recreational purposes is an important aspect of the overall town

plan, because not only is such an endeavor compatible with the preservation of the rural character of the town, but also, recreational development in the form of vacation dwellings helps form a solid tax base for the town.

Keeping the area attractive for outdoor recreation entails more than merely maintenance of the present assets. Some assets are already deteriorating and becoming overcrowded. Fairfield Pond, for example, has nearly reached its limits as far as accommodating housing on its shores. The area requires immediate attention in order to prevent further development where the water quality and surrounding soils are already suffering.

figure 27
Fairfield Pond

In addition to cleaning up the deteriorating areas, the town's recreational plan must encourage the development of new recreational areas. Many good sites are located in the town and could be made suitable for recreation, wildlife areas and other uses. The most important aspect of planning new recreation areas is to ensure that sound environmental and ecological principles are employed.

The density of housing, whether it is seasonal or full-time, must be carefully controlled in areas surrounding water bodies to control pollution and accompanying health hazards; similarly the proximity of housing to the water's edge must be carefully guarded. In line with maintaining ecologically sound recreation areas with natural beauty as their outstanding quality, measures must be taken to ensure that commercial establishments and concession stands do not dominate 'natural' recreation areas. Such commercial development must be confined to specific areas where environmental beauty and quality will not be impaired.

Environment

Climate and Air Quality

Vermont's climate is best described as variable; temperatures range greatly throughout the year and can change considerably in a given day. There can be great differences in the weather during the same seasons in different years, and considerable diversity from place-to-place. Moderately warm summers, cold winters and ample rainfall are characteristic of the regional climate.

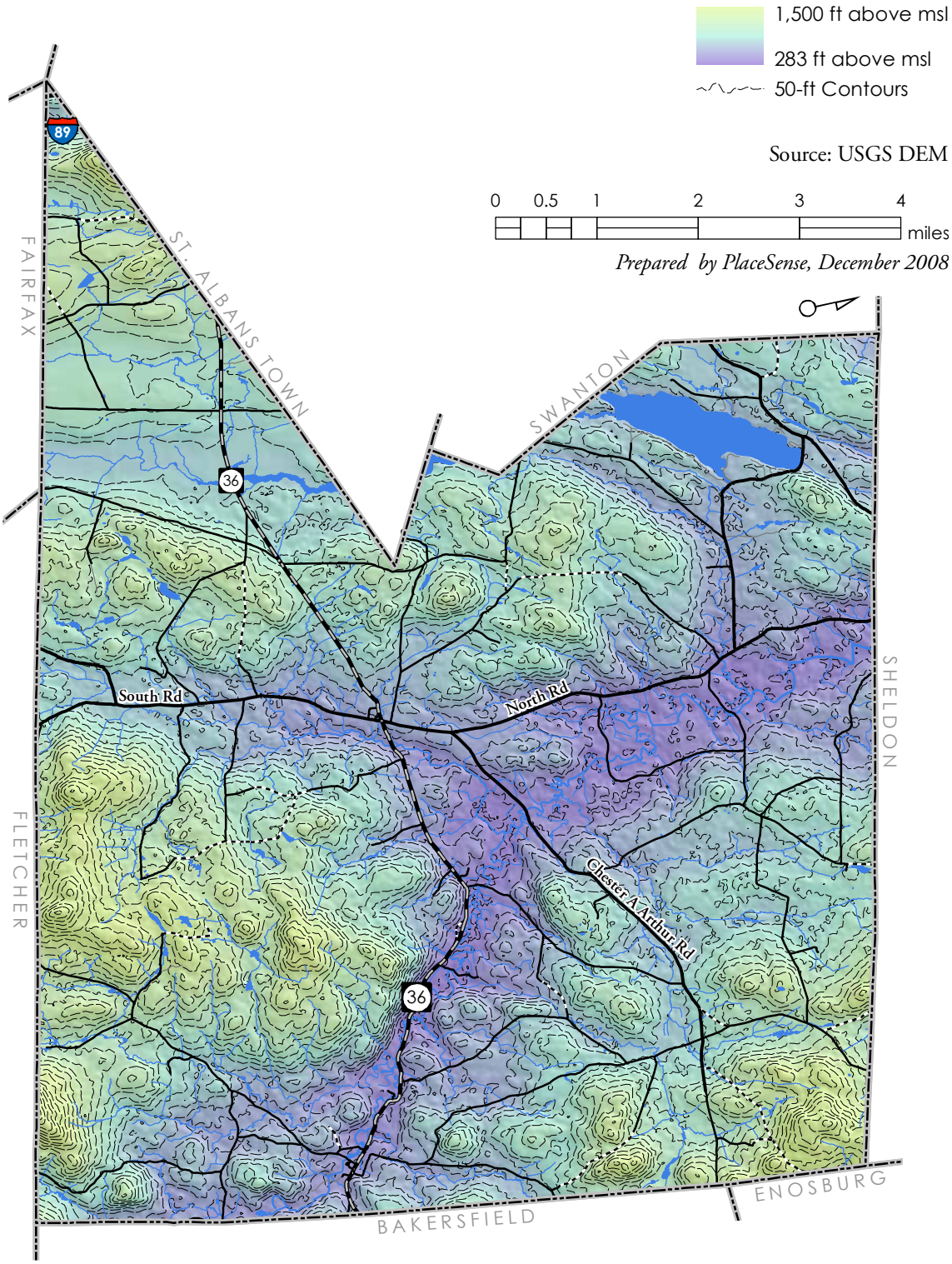
Average annual precipitation is around 35 inches, including the water equivalent of snowfall. Depth of snowfall ranges considerably from year-to-year, but averages around 60 inches over the season. The period of continuous snow coverage is typically from early December to early March, although up to 20 percent of winters may not have a period of continuous snow cover longer than one month. It appears although the effects of climate change are affecting Fairfield's typical weather patterns. Average temperatures seem to have risen over historic norms in recent years. While this has brought less severe winter weather, it has also resulted in prolonged periods of summer heat and storms of greater intensity.

Air quality is generally high throughout Vermont, especially in rural towns like Fairfield. Levels of air pollution throughout most of Vermont meet federal standards. Unlike more industrialized places, motor vehicles are the largest source of air pollution in Vermont; vehicles emit ozone, particulate matter and chemical compounds. Localized areas where traffic is congested or vehicles sit idling often have very low air quality. Weather patterns can also influence whether pollutants will disperse or remain concentrated close to the ground. Lower air quality has been linked to human health problems and can impact the natural environment as well.

While technology and emission controls have greatly reduced the amount of pollution vehicles produce, the number of vehicle miles driven in Vermont has doubled since 1972. The Federal Highway Administration estimated that the total number of vehicle miles driven in Vermont during 2004 was approximately 7.8 billion or

figure 28

Elevation Map



around 12,650 miles per person (in 1950, the average number of miles driven per person in Vermont was around 3,100). The 2000 Census reported that there were about 1,245 passenger vehicles in Fairfield or two vehicles per household.

Acid rain, which is caused by air pollution, is affecting environmental quality in Vermont. Acid rain causes acidification of lakes and streams and contributes to damage of trees, especially at high elevations. Acid rain is an additional stress, along with climate change, on the town's sugar maple stands. In addition, acid rain accelerates the decay of building materials such as stone and metal. Power plants, industrial manufacturing and motor vehicles are all sources of pollutants that are ingredients of acid rain. These pollutants become part of the air masses circulating in the upper atmosphere. Prevailing winds transport the polluting compounds, sometimes hundreds of miles, across state and national borders.

Geology, Terrain and Soils

Geology

Greywacke schist is a rock commonly found in Fairfield. It is complex metamorphosed sandstone. Gniesses, phyllites, schists, and greenstones are also present in Fairfield. The main difference between these rocks is their degree of metamorphism - some are finer grained than others are. These metamorphic rocks of Fairfield have also been folded, faulted, and jointed.

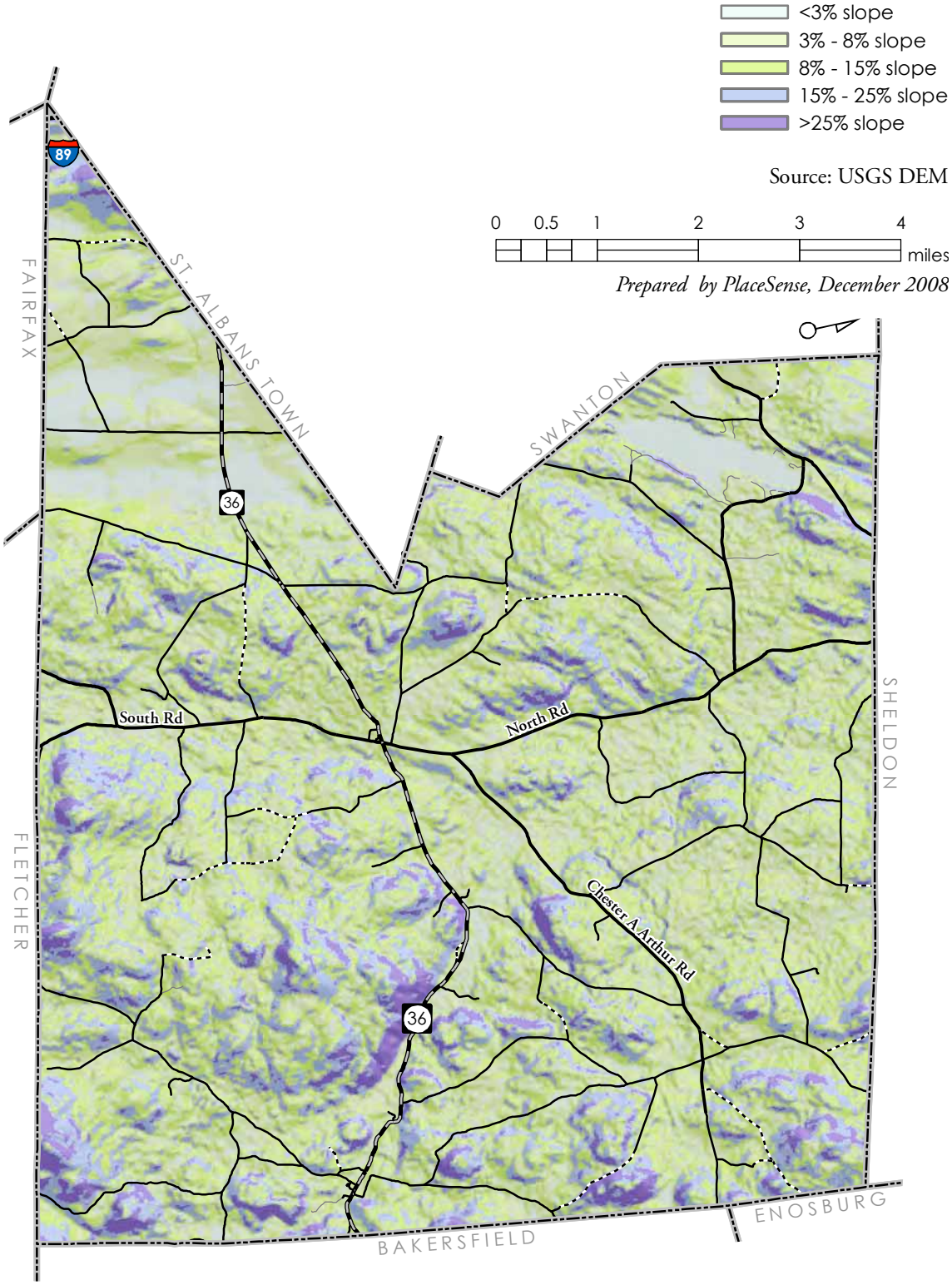
On the surface, a large part of Fairfield is covered by more recently deposited glacial till, the debris deposited directly by the melting ice of a retreating glacier. Till is unsorted, which means it is composed of particles of all sizes from clay to small boulders. Till covers Fairfield as a thin veneer less than ten feet thick (greater in stream valleys).

Slope

The locations of slope categories in Fairfield are listed and described in terms of their agricultural usefulness below, and are shown on the development limitations map.

figure 29

Slope Map



More than half of Fairfield has a slope that is favorable for agriculture. Slope suitability, however, is more meaningful as a reference for future land use decisions, especially when overlaid with other maps and information available in this town plan and other studies.

Slope Categories in Fairfield and Best Possible Uses

0–15% Slope (Flat). Good for agriculture, housing construction and engineering. This is the best land and makes up 31,328 acres or 66% of the land in Fairfield.

15–25% Slope (Gently Sloping). Good for agriculture with the use of machinery and more labor. 10,580 acres of Fairfield, or 22% of the land area, is in this category.

25%+ Slope (Steep). Thin soils, susceptible to erosion. This land is not agriculturally productive, is not safe for construction, and is best kept under natural vegetation and grass cover. Approximately 5,382 acres, or 12% of Fairfield, is in this category.

Slopes greater than 25 percent present considerable constraints to many types of development. These are characteristically covered by shallow soils often having fragipans that make development more difficult. The necessary cuts and slope stabilization for foundations, parking areas, road access and utilities are expensive and often, unless well designed, are unattractive.

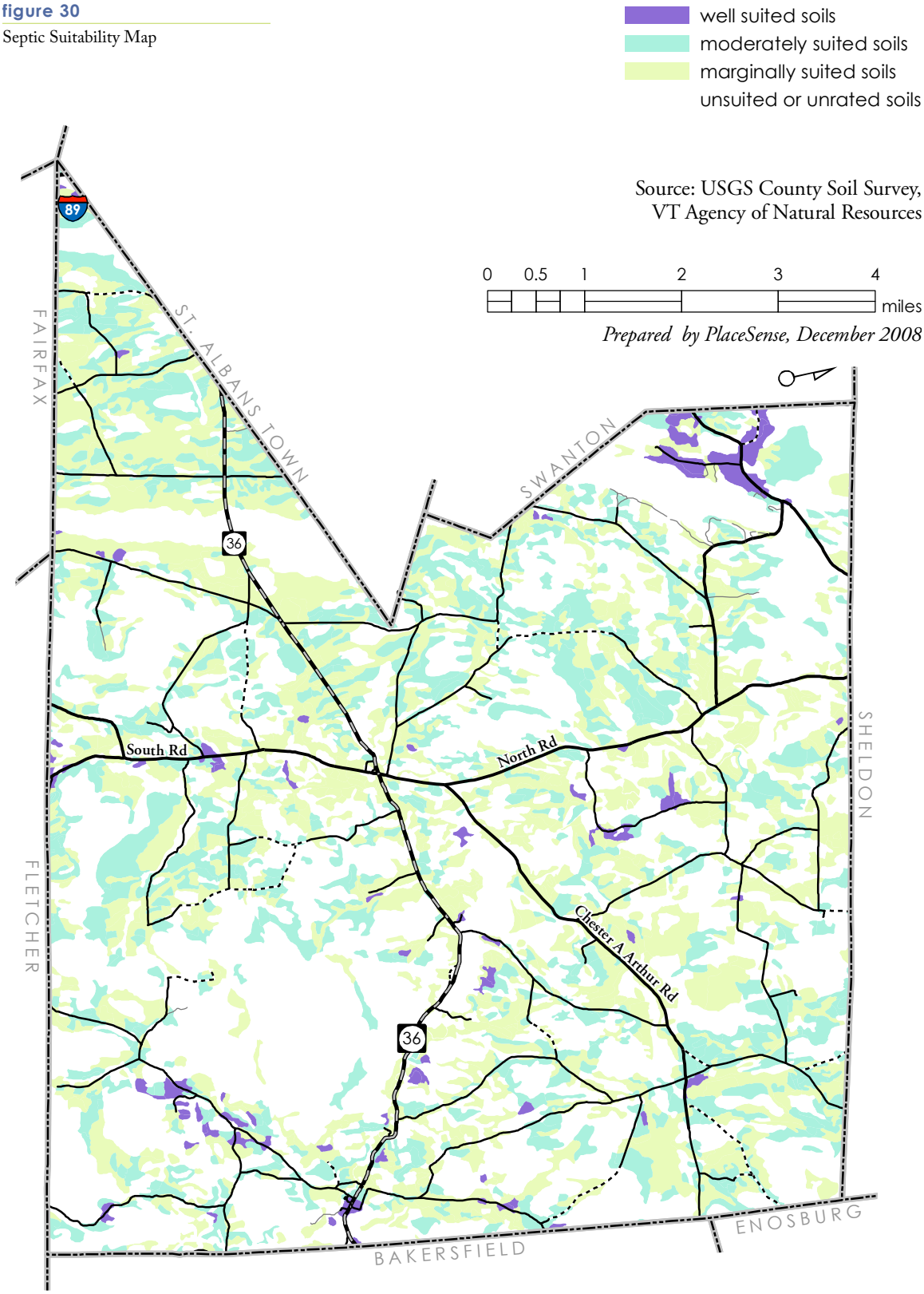
Development on steep slopes (over 15 percent) may also be at the expense of the municipality as the costs of road maintenance, runoff maintenance and sedimentation problems are much higher on steep slope areas. School bus and fire service may also be difficult, expensive or even impossible depending on weather conditions.

Considerable environmental problems may arise from development on steep slopes presenting hazards to those residing within the areas as well as those outside. Development on steep slopes may upset the natural slope repose angle and by removal of vegetation and the injection of effluent by on-site sewage disposal will increase runoff, erosion and the possibility of mass movement or slumping. Slippage of foundations is not uncommon in steep slope areas.

Septic tank disposal fields located on slopes greater than 15 percent may result in partially treated effluent surfacing and seeping onto the downslope surface causing health hazards and possible nutrient enrichment of surface water, not to mention aesthetic problems. Of the effluent that does remain under the shallow soil characteristics of

figure 30

Septic Suitability Map



steep slopes, much of it may flow laterally and result in groundwater contamination or the surfacing of effluent at outcrop or fragipan areas.

Furthermore, development on slopes greater than 15 percent should be avoided or at minimum carefully performed in order to avoid high environmental and social costs. Runoff and erosion should be carefully controlled during all phases of construction and wastes should be treated outside the steep slope area

Soils

In addition to slope, soil characteristics greatly influence the suitability of land for a given use. Since all development in Fairfield relies on on-site, soil-based systems to treat wastewater, the suitability of soils for septic systems is a key element in determining future land use patterns. As shown in Figure 30, there are few areas in town with soils well suited for on-site septic systems. Most of the town's soils are either moderately or marginally suited, and a significant amount are unsuited for wastewater treatment. While the soil survey provides information at the town level, a field assessment is necessary to accurately determine soil capacity on a particular piece of property. Figure 32 also identifies soils which are frequently flooded and therefore present a significant barrier to development.

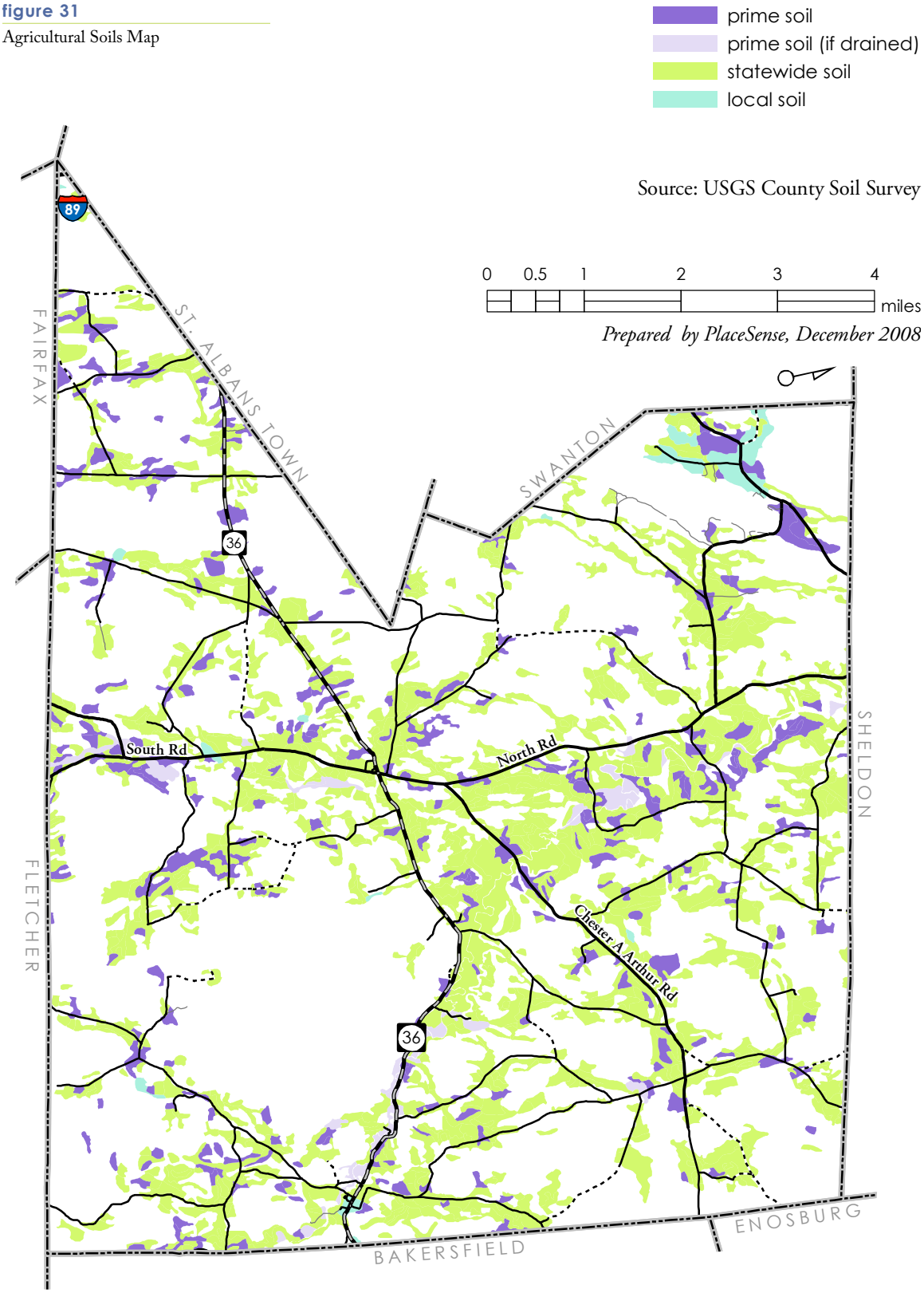
In addition to influencing development potential, soils are the foundation of the agricultural landscape. Both state and federal agencies have classified soils by their properties and have identified the most productive soils, as shown in Figure 31. Prime agricultural soils have natural fertility retention qualities, high organic matter content, favorable drainage, level to gently rolling slopes, sufficient depth and textural qualities as well as high available moisture content. These factors in combination make such soils intrinsically suitable for crop production. Quality of soil may be determined by USDA criteria or/and in accordance with local Fairfield tradition as to quality of agricultural land.

Earth Resources

There are a few earth resources of importance in Fairfield – sand and gravel deposits and mineral deposits. Sand and gravel are important

figure 31

Agricultural Soils Map



local resources for Fairfield and are needed for road repair and construction. Gravel deposits also are important areas for recharging groundwater supplies.

The state recognizes two mineral sites in Fairfield. Located just west of North Road between Sheldon and St. Rocks behind the Callan Farm is the Saint Rock Iron Mine. This small mine consists of six pits where good quality hematite has been extracted.

The second site is the Burnor #1 oil and gas exploration well (also known as the Columbia gas well). In the mid-1980s, Columbia Gas and Delta Drilling commenced work on an exploratory well on the north side of the Chester A. Arthur Road. In 1984, at a depth of nearly 7,000 feet, the consortium ceased drilling operations. The site is now registered as a dry hole. The possibility still exists for future exploratory wells in Fairfield. Wells drilled in St. Albans and near Mallets Bay in Colchester produced small amounts of natural gas mixed with a high percentage of methane. As can be currently seen in many places around the country, if gas prices remain high there may be incentives again to search for resources like natural gas.

Earth resource extraction and/or processing activities have a high potential for becoming a substantial public nuisance in the area where such activities are located. There is a potential for problems in any of the following areas:

- Noise, dust and air pollution, or radiation.
- Surface and groundwater pollution, siltation or radiation.
- Storage and disposal of waste materials, both solid and liquid.
- Increased storm water runoff, erosion and sedimentation.
- Despoilation of the landscape and limited utility for subsequent uses of the site.
- Decreased highway safety and increased municipal costs due to increased traffic and accelerated deterioration of highways and bridges attributable to transportation activities generated by the earth resources operations.

- Reduced property values because of primary or secondary impacts of the proposed earth resource operations.

All of these factors, single and together, may act to substantially depreciate land values in the immediate vicinity of such activities and the town in general.

While earth resource extraction comes with risks, many of these resources are needed by residents for road and building material, or for sale as a marketable resource. Of concern is that each of these resources is finite and once depleted cannot be replaced. Additionally, development near or over the resource may, in effect, make extraction impossible in the future. Therefore, any construction over an earth resource should account for the potential loss of that resource. The state has estimated that more than 30 percent of all sand and gravel deposits in Vermont are now inaccessible due to state regulations including water supply protection, critical wildlife habitat, conserved lands, and other factors. Current developments over deposits have further limited the availability of the resource.

The town, therefore, has two responsibilities. First, it needs to be vigilant in its regulation of earth resource extraction operations to prevent the creation of a nuisance. And second, the town needs to protect the resource to ensure its availability for future residents.

Water Resources

Black Creek

As the Black Creek meanders through the center of Fairfield, it is degraded by human and agricultural waste to the extent that large portions of it no longer support the most fundamental needs. A qualitative assessment of the creek was completed in April 1992 and its findings give evidence to these difficulties.

This assessment found that ten miles of Black Creek "from the confluence of the Missisquoi upstream to Route 36" does not support fishing and swimming uses. This portion of the river's ecosystem has been altered to the point that it is no longer viable and, in fact, is dangerous to human contact. Six categories were created to describe

the quality of the creek and it failed five – aesthetics, drinking quality, aquatic biota, contact recreation, and agricultural water supply. The only uses that it currently supports are non-industrial water supply and non-contact recreation.

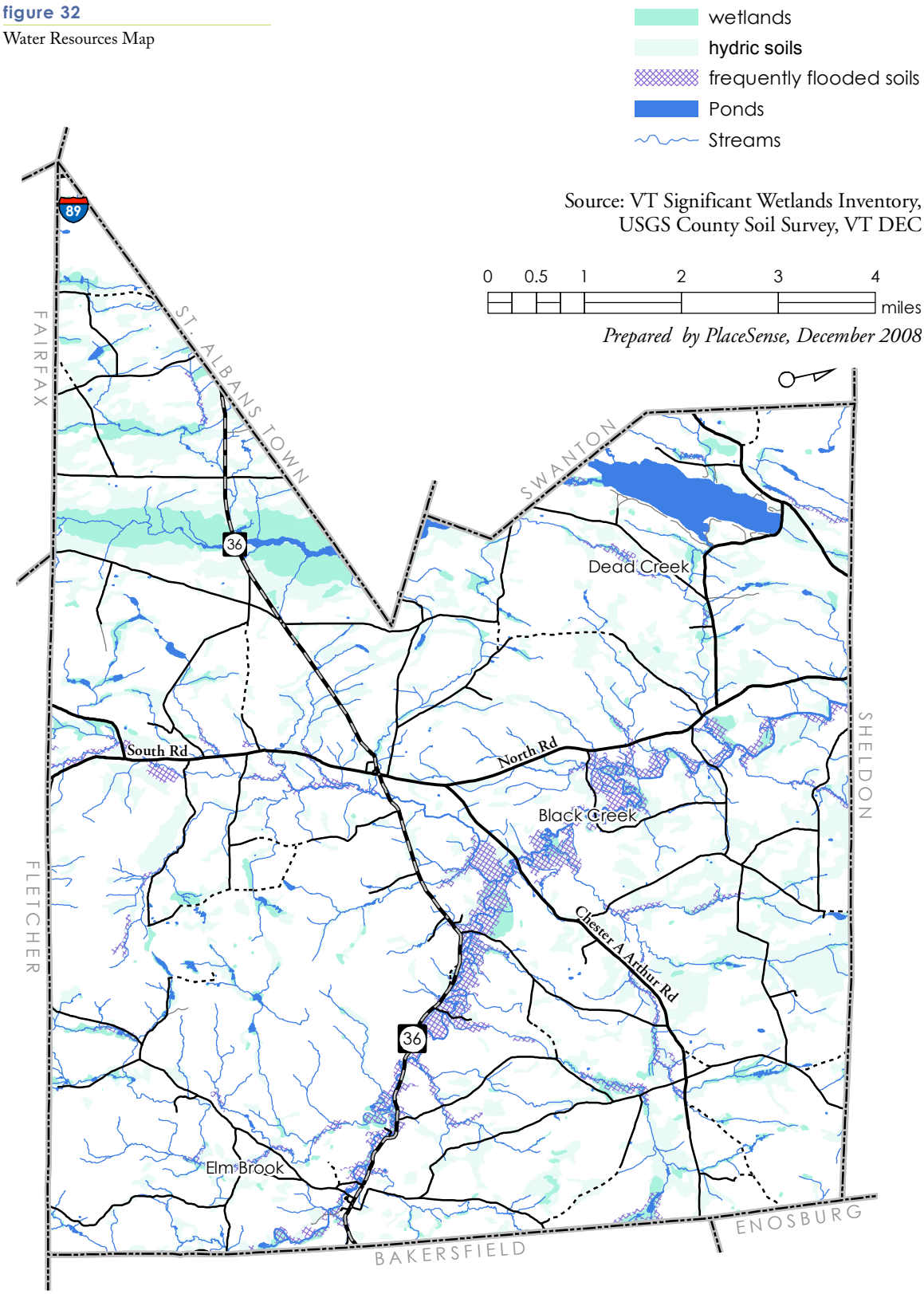
It was determined that the cause of this degraded state was high concentrations of nutrients and silt resulting almost exclusively from agricultural runoff. Although this was the most prevalent cause, it was also stipulated that vegetation removal along the shoreline was at least a moderate contributor to the creek's waning viability. The combination of these factors has increased siltation (suspended sedimentation and other particles), turbidity (muddiness), and thermal variability, and results in a proliferation of aquatic plants and algae that further decreases the available oxygen content within the stream. According to Dan Batchelder, the Consulting Forester for the region, fish populations have been severely disrupted because of these practices. These disturbing trends however can be altered and even reversed if more informed decisions are made by those whose actions affect the creek.

The most efficient method to control the runoff from agricultural sources is the creation of vegetated buffer strips to filter nutrients before they enter the creek. These strips would aid in the development and maintenance of viable ecosystems in a number of important ways. First, they would provide shading, which holds the water temperature constant or significantly cooler than in exposed areas of river. In addition, the lower water temperature would increase the oxygen-carrying capacity and consequently the ability of the creek to absorb and deal with organic contaminants. This would allow game fish populations such as trout, which require lower water temperatures and higher oxygen contents, to thrive. The buffer strips would also provide perches for insects and other animals which in turn become fodder for aquatic species.

The inclusion of a vegetated buffer strip would also provide a filter for incoming nutrient matter. As nutrients from farms and other sources enter the water system, the roots of the plants assimilate them and prevent them from entering the creek. Riparian (near or relating to the

figure 32

Water Resources Map



water) vegetation also decreases the speed of the runoff, which allows suspended particulate matter to be deposited on the banks rather than in the creek. Finally, these buffers stabilize the banks, deterring erosion and maintaining the character of the shoreline. In addition, buffer strips create aesthetically pleasing corridors, which add to the bucolic feel of the town.

Although the inclusion of buffer strips is important, they alone will not reverse the downward slide that the creek is experiencing. In addition, it is recommended that the landowners abutting the creek alter their land-use practices to minimize impact. This suggestion included the implementation of best management practices for farmers and landowners that have been outlined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Farmers can receive information and financial assistance from the local Natural Resources Conservation District Office. These practices entail such guidelines as adequate storage and spreading of manure, contour plowing and appropriate use of fertilizers and pesticides. In addition to enhancing the health of the creek many of these practices, such as contour plowing, are economically viable because they reduce topsoil loss.

More stringent quantitative standards for setbacks, which would require the inclusion of riparian vegetation are needed. With these more detailed provisions, there could also be incentives for farmers to employ best management practices and create buffer zones along the creek.

Fairfield Pond

Located in the northeast corner of the town, Fairfield Pond is a spot of incredible beauty and considerable activity. It is used by town residents for recreational activities such as fishing, boating, and sailing. Its shores are dotted with a number of seasonal camps that are for the most part unobtrusive and bolster the particular New England feel of the area. The pond also serves as water supply for the Town of Swanton, so it is essential that this water be protected for diverse uses.

Beginning in 1988, the water quality of the lake experienced a significant downturn with large-scale algal blooms occurring during

both the winter and summer months. Although the lake had been considered eutrophic by state agencies for a number of years, these blooms prompted enough public outcry to initiate a study by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation. The study was partially funded by that department, but was made possible through the generous monitoring efforts of the people of Fairfield and adjacent towns. Through the cooperation of these groups, a detailed study was compiled that outlined the current status of the pond and recommended a series of actions that were meant to reduce the deleterious effects of land-use in the surrounding area. The study was called the Fairfield Pond Diagnostic Study.

These results of the study concluded that the pond is severely eutrophic and has high levels of phosphorus concentrations, which caused the abnormal algal blooms. It was also determined that of the external sources of phosphorus, septic system failure was only a minor contributor. It was found that 80 percent of the phosphorus loading derived from tributary inflows into the lake. In particular, the northern and northwestern stream outlets are the most significant contributors of phosphorus. The loading in these streams was largely found to be the result of inappropriate land management practices on adjacent land.

This study also found that internal sources of phosphorus were the greatest contributor to poor lake quality. These phosphorous sources are trapped within the pond's bottom sediments and are the result of past use of pesticides and fertilizers. The phosphorus contained within these sediments is released primarily during the summer months into the already anoxic hypolimnion. When this happens species that require cold water and high oxygen levels struggle to find a suitable environment. This is especially significant for game species such as northern pike and trout, which require these conditions in order to maintain their populations.

The Fairfield study made recommendations both for future review and for the implementation of immediate actions. Its authors concluded that attention should be paid to the problem tributaries with a focus on controlling the loading at these sites. The Natural

Resource Conservation Service is a good resource for information about identifying and controlling sources of phosphorous loading.

This initial study was successful due to the spirit of cooperation that existed between the people of Fairfield and with those in the state agency. This type of cooperation should be fostered. The Lay Monitoring Program that was implemented was an important connection between residents and the state agency, and should serve as a model for future related efforts. In conjunction with phosphorus controls on external sources, it might also be necessary to implement internal phosphorous control measures to regulate the levels of phosphorous within the lake. Such measures might take a variety of forms and the final decision should be based on parameters that are agreed upon by members of the entire community.

An important objective for Fairfield would be to work creatively toward preserving the character of the lake while simultaneously improving its quality. The Fairfield Pond Recreation Association is an excellent vehicle through which to promote actions necessary to improve the health of the lake. The study recommended the creation of a survey that would catalog current land use practices and attempt to predict future patterns. This in turn could dictate a land management strategy to guide future decision-making. Active participation of pertinent organizations in the towns of Fairfield, Swanton and St. Albans would help to create a broad base of support for improving the quality of Fairfield Pond.

Groundwater

Groundwater is defined as all water that exists beneath the surface of the earth. The geology of the region is the most important factor in determining the flow of subsurface water.

The geologic conditions in Fairfield are less than conducive to significant aquifer formation. Areas of moderate groundwater potential are available within sand and gravel deposits in the sand valleys of Black Creek. Good ground water potential is present in the area directly west of Fairfield Pond. Recharge areas should be

protected from unrestricted dumping and other practices which might harm the potability of this important water supply.

The limited availability of ground water in Fairfield led to difficulties in locating a well site that would produce sufficient municipal water supply for Fairfield Center, however a good source was found and is expected to contain adequate supply for many years. Similar to the need for protecting recharge areas, it is important to protect the area surrounding a municipal supply well to ensure continued water quality. State regulations require that every municipal wellhead be managed under a Source Protection Plan. A Source Protection Area has been delineated around the new water supply wellhead, but further planning and regulations are needed to limit the potential for polluting the town's public water supplies.

Additional attention needs to be given to preventing contamination of groundwater supplies through contact with surface water pollutants. There are many points at which groundwater and surface water meet, creating the opportunity for contamination. For this reason good surface water quality should be maintained.

Human activity is a significant contributor to groundwater contamination. Therefore it is essential that people be informed of the types of practices that can cause contamination. This is particularly true in an area such as Fairfield, which does not have an abundance of ground water sources. Chronic dry-ups within individual systems, as well as within the East Fairfield public system, testify to this shortage. Potential sources of ground water contamination include septage, sewage, agriculture, landfills, junkyards, salt from runoff, and inadequate-depth or poorly percolating soils. These sources should be identified and ameliorated to the greatest extent possible.

Wetlands

Wetlands are those areas inundated by surface of ground water with a frequency sufficient to support vegetation or aquatic life that depend on saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Such areas include but are not limited to marshes, swamps, sloughs, potholes, ferns, river and lake overflows, mud flats,

bogs and ponds, but exclude areas that grow food or crops in connection with farming activities.

figure 33
Fairfield Swamp

Over 2,000 acres of wetlands are scattered across Fairfield, although Fairfield Swamp dominates in most people's minds. Fairfield Swamp is part of the St. Albans recreation/conservation district, and, as such, its only permitted uses are forestry, agriculture, and outdoor recreation. It is estimated that only 50 percent of Vermont's original wetlands still exist, and roughly 200 acres per year are disappearing in the state. No exact figures are available for Fairfield.

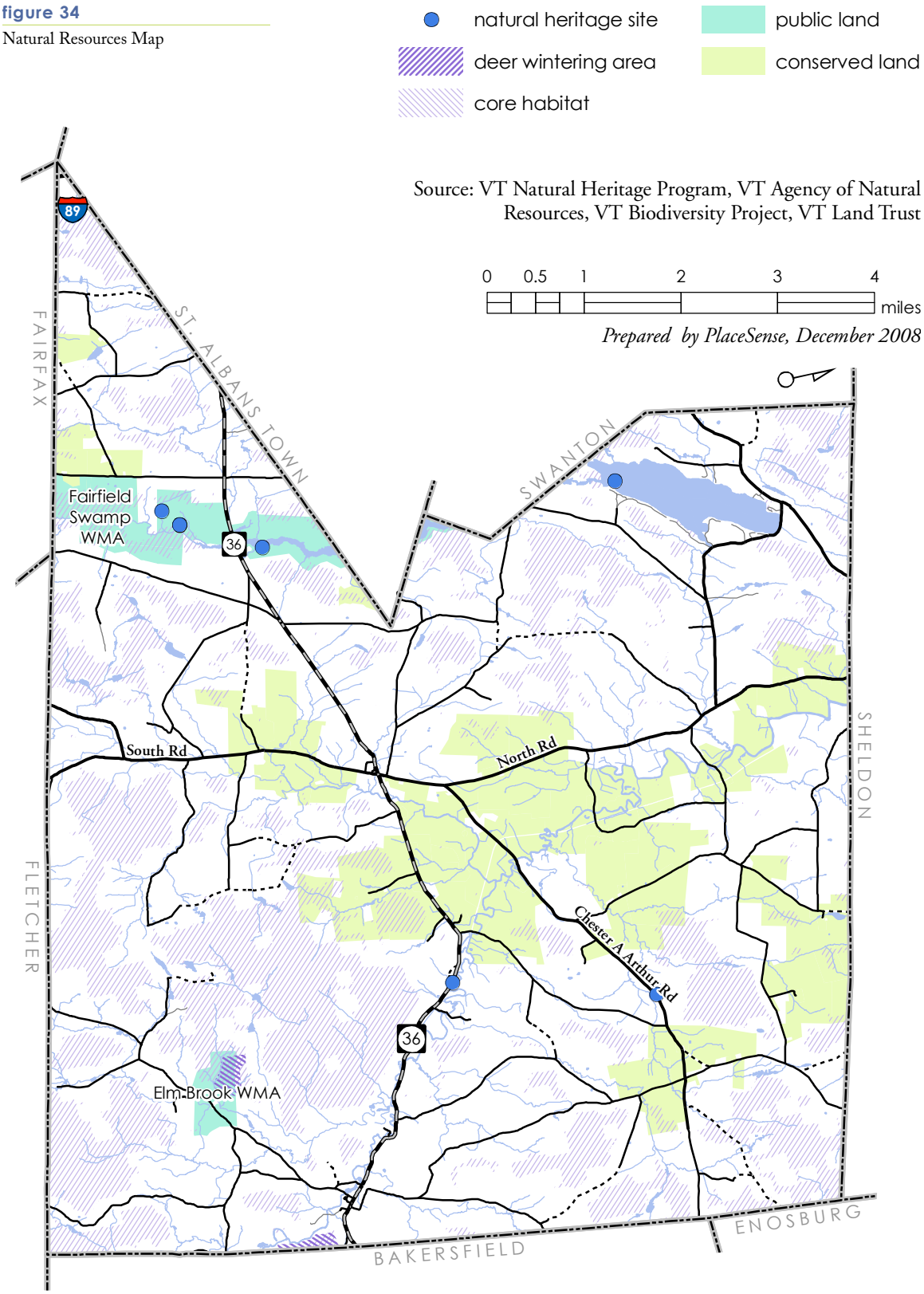
Fairfield swamp in the Dead Creek valley is one of the largest and most diverse natural areas in the county. Its 1,700 acres consist of 75 percent vegetative cover and 15 percent open water. There are a number of significant and rare plant species which have been identified in Fairfield Swamp including the only autumn-willow (*Salix serissima*) in Vermont. Other rare species that have been discovered in the swamp include the fringed white orchid (*Platanthera blephariglottis*) and one showy lady's slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*).

Fairfield Swamp has important potential as a good example of a hardwood-northern white cedar swamp which comprises a large part of the swamp's acreage. This type of ecosystem has often been degraded due to cedar harvest. Good management of this area as future "old growth" is likely as most of it is under state ownership. This area exhibits good examples of cattail marsh, shrub swamp and lowland bog, as well as a leatherleaf shrub bog and a black spruce bog.

All the typical components of hardwood-northern white cedar swamp forest are present in Fairfield Swamp except for a healthy population of white cedar. Red maple, yellow birch, black ash (*Fraxinus nigra*), winterberry (*Ilex verticilla*), red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*), and withe-rod (*Viburnum nudum*) are the forest's main components.

figure 34

Natural Resources Map



White cedar, also common in these areas, has suffered due to extensive logging and has never grown very large in size.

Species that are common to the habitat include the common cat-tail (*Typha latifolia*), bulrushes (*Scirpus spp.*), white water-lily (*Nymphaea odorata*), spatterdock (*Nuphar variegatum*), water-shield (*Brasenia schreberi*), speckled alder (*Alnus rugosa*), red maple, leatherleaf (*Chamaedaphne calyculata*), black spruce and bog laurel (*Kalmia polifolia*), and small cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*). Common herbs include pitcher plant (*Sarracenia purpurea*), cottongrass (*Eriophorum*), and uncommon rose-pink (*Calopogon tuberosus*).

Flood Plains

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has identified flood hazard areas in Fairfield in order to protect the public from loss of life and property. Special zoning regulations were adopted in accordance with federal requirements and Fairfield should continue to make amendments as needed to meet these standards. Designation of this district is also required for continued town eligibility in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Included are all areas subject to a one percent or greater chance of flooding in any given year (the 100-year flood plains) as shown on the latest Federal Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM), which are incorporated and adopted into the Fairfield Zoning Bylaws. Residents are encouraged to purchase flood insurance in order to protect themselves and their families in the event of a flood.

Land Cover and Habitat

Natural Communities

Fairfield is situated in the hemlock-white pine-northern hardwood sub-region. The dominant species of this forest type are eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), and yellow birch (*Betula leutia*). Of the softwoods, Fairfield is comprised predominately of eastern hemlock, eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*), black spruce (*Picea mariana*), northern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), and tamarack (*Larix laricina*). The most common hardwoods include

sugar maple, American beech, white ash, yellow birch and paper birch (*Betula paprifera*).

Our Changing Landscape

Prior to European settlement, Vermont forests consisted primarily of sugar maples, beech, yellow birch, paper birch, red spruce (*Picea rubens*) and balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*). Early on, Fairfield Swamp played an important role in the lives of the settlers. In 1789 the swamp was divided up into four-acre lots for "every proprietor." Each lot was primarily stripped of its cedar, which was used for fence posts. Today, white pine still exists there in some quantity.

Due to high demand for agricultural land, nearly 75 percent of Vermont's forests had been cut by the late 1800s. Over the last century Vermont forests have regenerated, resulting in the current forest cover.

The maple sugar business has been a catalyst for the protection of hardwood forests. Use of sugar maples for making maple syrup, an important agricultural product in Fairfield, has often motivated landowners to manage forest areas in a monoculture fashion.

In the early 1900s, logging was an important industry supporting a large part of the economy. Mostly virgin hemlocks, often as large as 4 feet in diameter, were cut and drawn to the railroad for shipment to the Swanton Lumber Mill. Other area industries which profited were the Carrol Page Tannery in Hyde Park which used the bark and the Swanton Lime Kiln which used the unsuitable logs for cordwood.

Wildlife and Fisheries

Wildlife is an important resource for any community. The presence of wildlife is an indication of a healthy, sustainable environment. A diverse and large wildlife population will be a good basis for recreation, in the form of hunting and trapping. Fairfield has an extraordinary range of habitats, characterized by many elevation differences, and thus hosting a diverse collection of wildlife and bird populations.

Wildlife is generally considered to be animals which are not domesticated. Wildlife is mobile and uses different areas for living,

eating and sleeping; because of their mobility wildlife is difficult to inventory. Fairfield is gifted with abundant wildlife and fish resources. The following are some of the wildlife species or groups of species found in Fairfield.

- **Deer**. There is a considerable variation in deer habitat across Vermont. Because of the generally mild winter climate of this area, deer do not concentrate in wintering yards to the extent they do in other zones. Conflicting land use practices also affect the range of the deer, especially intensive agriculture. The area has good potential for increased deer range as it becomes more wooded and through the creation of more buffers. The prime deer wintering area is hemlock.
- **Bear**. The greatest threats to the black bear in Vermont are buildings and roads; seclusion and forest areas are the requirements for successful bear habitat. A large population of bear is said to live in the southeastern corner of Fairfield, probably resulting from a spill over of individuals from Bakersfield. The beech stand in the northeast quadrant of Fairfield is a good bear habitat. Beech "mast" is one of the preferred foods for bear.
- **Upland Game**. Fairfield is an extraordinary habitat for birds like the upland plover, hawks, kestrel, pheasant, Hungarian partridge, ruffled grouse and woodcock.
- **Furbearers**. There are a variety of furbearers found in Fairfield: beaver, otter, martin, mink, raccoon, fisher, fox, skunk, and muskrat. In economic terms, the greatest income is from mink, fox, and muskrat.
- **Waterfowl**. There is a diversity of waterfowl found in Fairfield such as duck, mallard, wood duck, blue winged teal, golden eyes, and ring necked ducks. These species prefer shallow marshes with a good interspersion of aquatic vegetation species for cover and food. The major problem facing waterfowl is loss of habitat hence there is a need for care in draining and filling these areas, and for pollution prevention. There is need to retain the wetlands as prime habitat.

- **Warmwater Fish**. Among the native species are pickerel, northern pike, small mouth and large mouth bass, and yellow perch. There is need to preserve predator species of fish to control other populations, e.g. northern pike on perch. Water levels should be kept at a level which allows for adequate spawning. Pollution of the streams from agriculture has affected the perch and brown trout populations.
- **Coldwater Fish**. Local species are dominated by brook, brown and rainbow trout.

Problems related to wildlife:

- Lack of access for hunters from excessive posting,
- Lack of all stream side buffers, resulting in a fragmented habitat,
- Little money in the trapping business,
- Misfiring by hunters; firing of horses, dogs and the destruction of fences.

Hunting

Fairfield has only a fall hunting season; during this season gun, bow and arrow, and trap (beaver) hunting are permitted. The southeastern corner of Fairfield known as the Romar District should be preserved as a wildlife habitat especially seasonally for bear. Buffers should be left out along streams to provide for the free movement of wildlife.

Wildlife Management Areas

These are the areas owned and administered by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife; they include:

- **The Elm Brook Management Area:** This is situated on a knoll on the northeastern corner of Fairfield. This area provides a 53-acre deer wintering area (80% basal is hemlock). This is the home of woodcock, white tailed deer, ruffed grouse, sunshine hare, brook trout lark, flying squirrels, brown bat and the short tailed shrew. The game population in this area is small because of area size.

- **Fairfield Swamp:** This comprises 1,292 acres, spanning Swanton, St. Albans and Fairfield; the largest portion being in Swanton. Waterfowl are seen in the area, because of the 60 woodduck boxes. Studies have shown that 90 percent are used annually by woodducks and hooded mergansers. There is an element of pressure from hunting.

Significant Natural Areas

Creekside Rails, a stretch of unused Lamoille Valley Railroad track between Black Creek and Route 36, has become home to one of Vermont's rare and endangered species, the great St. John's wort (*Hypericum ascyron* or *Hypericum pyramidatum*). Great St. John's wort typically grows along rivers on gravel shores and bedrock ledges. The population that is found in Fairfield is one of Vermont's largest consisting of over 100 stems. The man-made gravel railroad bed forms an excellent habitat for this endangered plant. A serious threat to the population would be a possible conversion of the tracks to recreational uses.

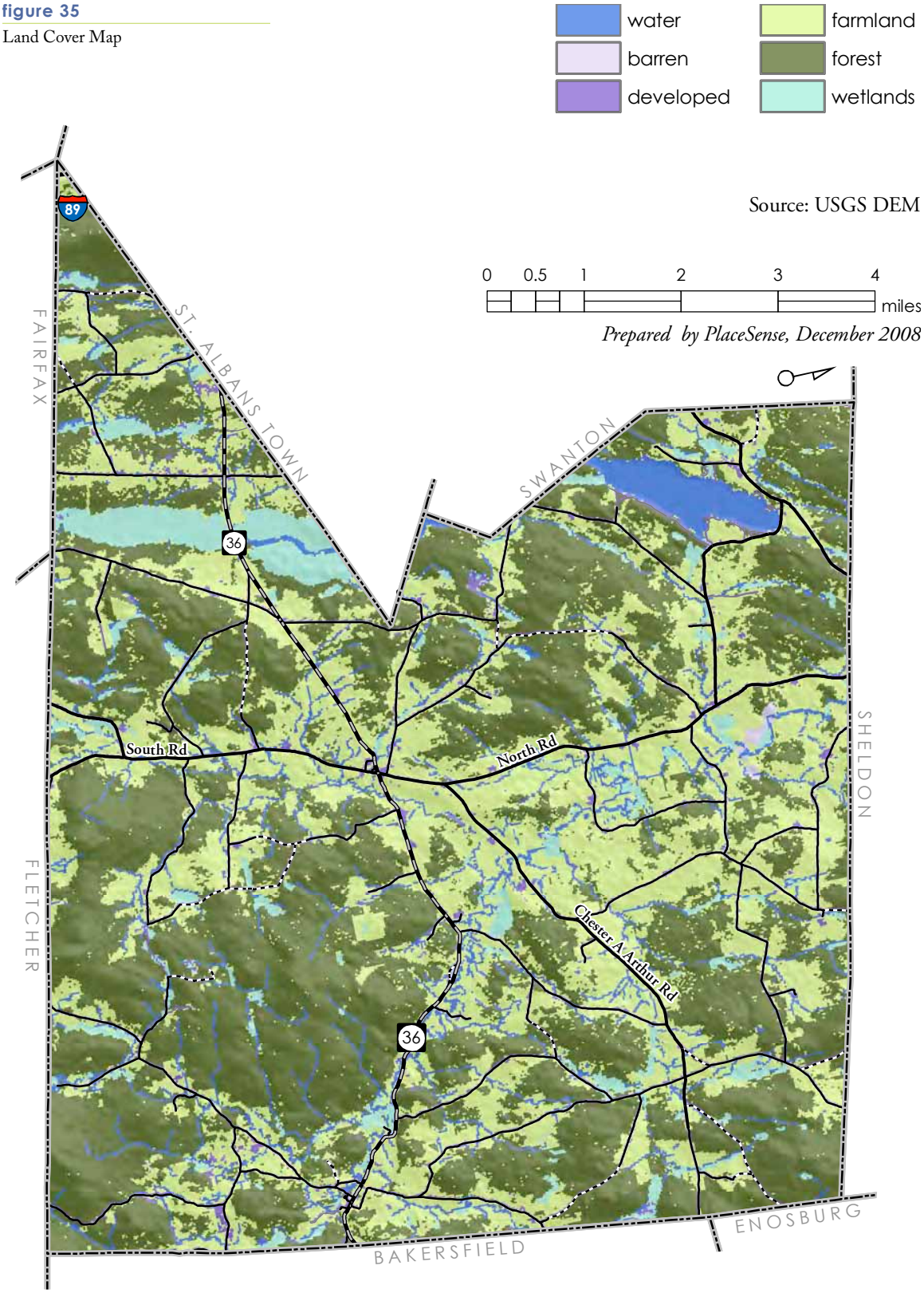
The Elmbook Wildlife Management Area is significant because it is state-owned and therefore protected from inappropriate development. Three forest stands have been identified in this area including a 53-acre high-quality hemlock stand, a 22-acre pole timber northern hardwood stand (composed of red (*Acer rubrum*) and sugar maple and yellow birch) and a 76-acre black ash-elm-red maple pole timber stand.

Scenic Resources

Fairfield is an incredibly beautiful rural town. Set against the backdrop of the Green Mountains, the town's hamlets, open fields, wooded hillsides and historic farmsteads all delight the eye. The town's geography and historic settlement patterns create a wonderful town resource, and the visual beauty is a valued asset of the town.

figure 35

Land Cover Map



Current Land Use

Current Development Patterns

A review of Fairfield's 2007 Grand List indicated that less than one-third of the town's land area is used primarily for residential, commercial, utility or public uses. More than 70 percent of the land in town is considered to be part of a farm, or to be wooded or open land.

As shown on Figure 37, there are concentrations of homes in East Fairfield and Fairfield Village, around Fairfield Pond (primarily seasonal camps) and in the vicinity of Route 36 near the St. Albans line. However, most of the town's year-round homes are dispersed at low densities along the town's many miles of rural roads.

Of properties classified as year-round residential in the 2007 Grand List, 232 lots were 10 acres or more in size accounting for more than 8,750 acres (22% of the town's land area). There were 259 year-round residential lots less than 10 acres in size, for a total of around 550 acres (1% of the town's land area). While it is likely that many large-lot residential properties include working lands or open space, the trend towards greater fragmentation of the town's land base is a concern. Encouraging residential development to occur on smaller lots would help maintain larger tracts of land suitable for productive use.

Without parcel maps, it is difficult to assess and analyze changes in land use and development geographically. However since the late 1990s, development in Fairfield has been mapped for the state's 911 system. This data offers some insight into where development has occurred in town during the past decade.

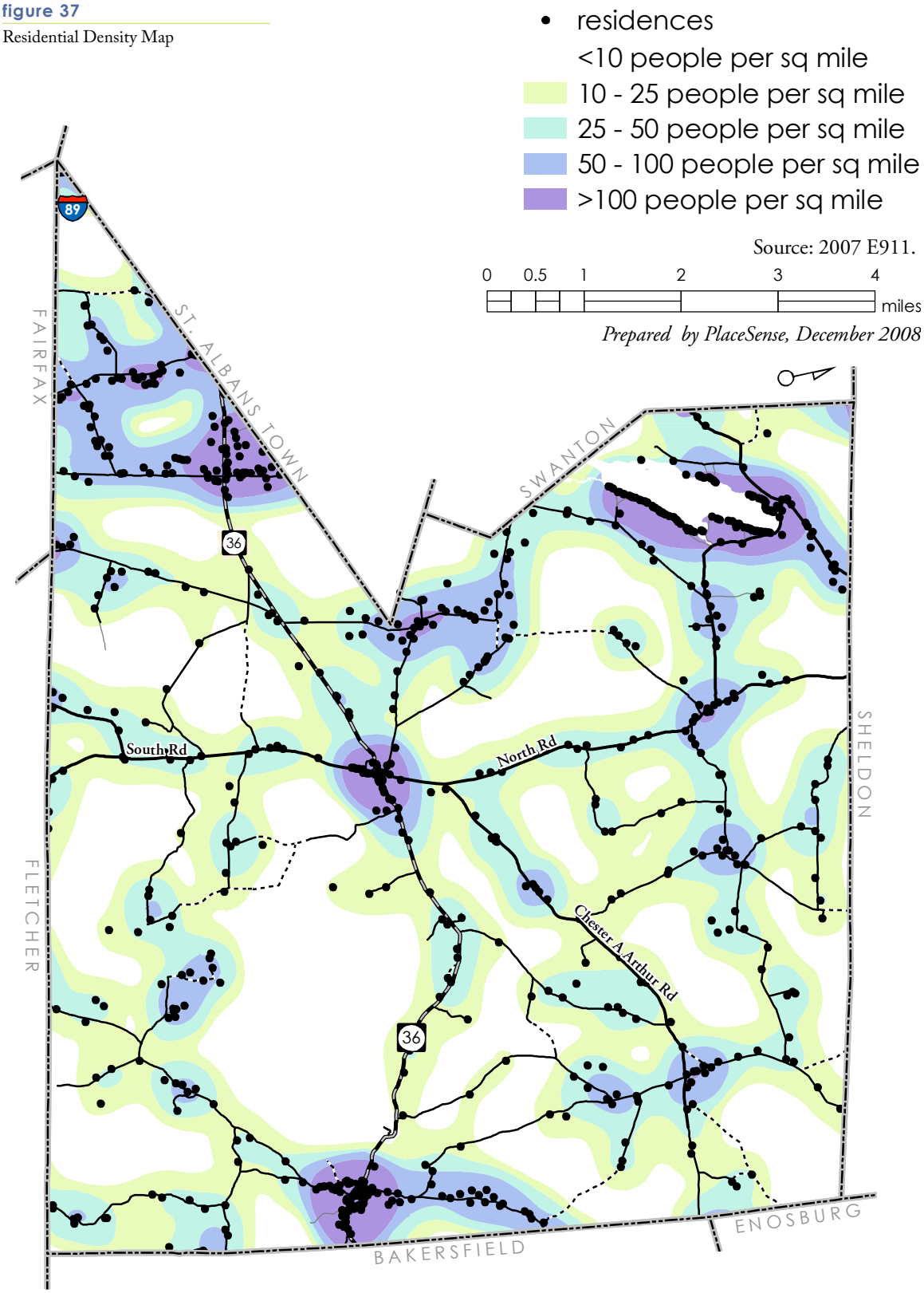
figure 36

2007 Grand List

	Parcels	Acres	Average Value
Residential 1	236	410	$124,482
Residential 2	255	8,890	$193,156
Mobile Home (w/land)	37	340	$94,935
Mobile Home (w/o land)	4	0	$9,575
Vacation 1	123	163	$51,624
Vacation 2	25	1,229	$119,948
Commercial	16	247	$124,856
Utility	4	4	$631,800
Farms	102	22,348	$373,287
Woodlands	38	3,080	$62,611
Open Land	110	3,696	$48,404
Public	15	n/a	$19,893
Total	965	40,407	

figure 37

Residential Density Map



New homes are not being constructed in and around the village centers, rather development is occurring at the outer edges of town, most notably near Fairfield's border with St. Albans and Swanton.

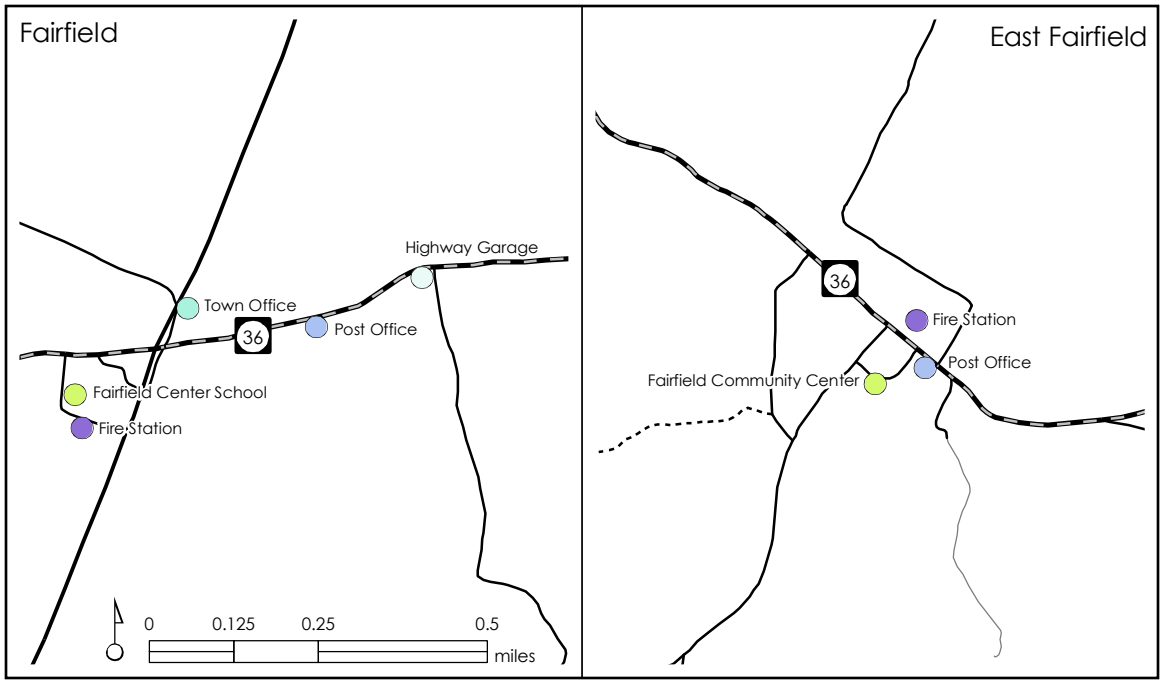
Land Ownership

Fairfield enjoys a high rate of resident ownership with around 65 percent of the town's land area owned by town residents. The owners of most of the remaining land live in neighboring communities. Less than four percent of land is owned by out-of-state entities. Even the town's seasonal camps are largely owned by families living in or relatively close to Fairfield.

Conservation

Approximately one-third of Fairfield's land area has been conserved through the Vermont Land Trust, limiting its future development potential, or is owned by the State of Vermont for conservation purposes. Most of the nearly 12,000 acres of conserved lands are located in the central part of town, creating a large swath of land that will remain in productive use. The state-owned lands are part of the Fairfield Swamp Wildlife Management Area. (See Figure 34).

figure 38
Public Facilities Map



Facilities

Town Office

In 1998, the town acquired property in Fairfield village which has allowed for the construction of a new town office with a larger vault, meeting space and office space for the clerk and other town officers.

Fairfield Community Center

East Fairfield Community Center on School Street houses a food shelf, a community center and a pre-school.

Town Library

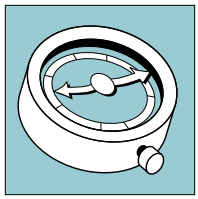
The town library is shared with the school, with part-time librarians being jointly funded. Current facilities, housed in the Elementary School, are adequate to meet current demand, although periodic equipment replacement and regular book purchases are anticipated.

figure 39
Fairfield Town Office

Officials and Staff

The administration of the town is the responsibility of a town clerk and treasurer and an assistant clerk working closely with the Selectboard. The clerk's office oversees the financial management of the town, maintains land records and associated documents, and provides management and administration for a variety of town projects.

A three member Board of Listers maintain the town's grand list with the assistance of the town clerk. With the passage of Act 60, the board was provided with computer equipment intended to help standardize property assessments in the state. The town does not presently maintain property parcel mapping, which would greatly assist both the listers as well as the town's five-member Planning Commission.



4. tomorrow

Growth Management

An essential element of Fairfield's growth management program is the recognition that the population growth and associated housing development will occur in Franklin County, and that the town should accommodate a reasonable share of that growth and development. Fairfield should be considered both in the context of Franklin County as a whole and relative to neighboring communities with similar land use and economic characteristics.

To determine what constitutes a reasonable growth rate, this plan has examined population and housing trends for the town, county and state. In preparing this plan, the town has reviewed the fiscal impacts of development and the costs of providing governmental services. The result is the identification of a reasonable growth rate of population and housing growth to serve as the basis of Fairfield's growth management plan.

Population Projections

Population projections are an important exercise to help ensure that growth management policies are responsive to future demands. The methodologies for projecting populations, however, are inexact and subject to a tremendous number of variables. This is compounded by the lack of regularly updated statewide projections and Fairfield's small population.

The MISER population projection is the only projection currently available for all Vermont municipalities. Prepared in 2003, it suggests that Fairfield's population will reach 2,039 people by 2020 – a rate of growth that is similar to what the town has experienced since 1990. The town's growth rate is projected to be slightly less than that of the county as a whole. For the purposes of this plan, the MISER

figure 40

Population Projections

Source: 2000 Census, 2010–20 MISER & 2025–30 PlaceSense

	2000	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Fairfield	1,800	1,924	1,980	2,039	2,098	2,151
Franklin County	45,417	49,583	51,701	54,065	56,059	58,089
% County	4.0%	3.9%	3.8%	3.8%	3.7%	3.7%

projection has been extended to 2030 to allow for a 20-year analysis. Population projections should be reviewed and updated as necessary to incorporate 2010 Census data, which will be available by the end of the five-year life of this plan.

The MISER projection does not provide any insight into the composition of Fairfield's future population. At the county level, however, the MISER projection does provide an age profile of the future population. That profile suggests that current trends will continue – reflecting the aging of the baby boom generation and declining birth rates. The composition of Fairfield's population is currently very similar to that of the county as a whole and there is no reason to believe that will change significantly in the next two decades.

With that assumption, the projected demographic profile for Franklin County can be applied to Fairfield's projected total population to assess the likely characteristics of the town's future residents. By 2020, Fairfield should anticipate that 17 percent of its population will be 65 years of age or older, compared to less than eight percent in that age group in 2000. The percentage of the population composed of school-age children is expected to decline to around 25 percent as compared to more than 30 percent in 2000.

Housing Demand

Forecasting future housing demand is a necessary element of a responsive growth management program. Housing projections are typically correlated to, and derived from, population projections. This requires making assumptions regarding the size and type of housing which will be required for a changing population, as well as the size and characteristics of current and future households.

Consistent with national trends, the number of people per household in Fairfield has been declining for more than 20 years. Given the current demographic profile of Fairfield residents, it is reasonable to assume that average household size will continue to decline. Trends suggest the town's average household size will fall below 2.5 people over the next 20 years.

	2000	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Fairfield	620	707	750	793	839	885
Franklin County	16,765	19,410	20,649	21,949	23,139	24,385
% County	3.7%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%

figure 41
Household Projections
Source: Derived from MISER projections

Applying the declining household size to Fairfield's projected population growth suggests that the town would continue to add around nine households per year over the next two decades. With that rate of household creation, Fairfield would continue to comprise around 3.6 percent of the county's total number of households. This projection of housing unit demand provides a baseline from which to consider the implications of the town's growth management program.

No projection, however, can be relied upon to predict the future with absolute certainty. Changes in the economy, energy costs, transportation infrastructure, et cetera can all drive demand in unanticipated directions. Additionally, given the town's small size, a single development on a large parcel could dramatically increase the rate of growth. That is why in 1988 Fairfield voters decided to implement a system to manage growth before the demand for residential development visible in nearby communities arrived at their doorstep.

Fiscal Implications of Residential Development

Studies in rural towns around the country have shown that on average each new home that gets built costs its community more to provide services than it pays in taxes.

A basic cost of community services study for Fairfield in 2007 showed that the town spent $1.23 for every $1 paid in property taxes to provide services to residential properties. Open land, however, only cost the town $0.35 for every $1 paid in taxes. This analysis did not include the costs of education, which are largely driven by the number of students (which equates to homes) in town. These figures are in line with cost of community services studies completed in other Vermont towns.

Fairfield's permit allocation system is designed to prevent residential growth from reaching a rate that would exceed the town's ability to provide facilities and services and that would increase the tax burden on current property owners.

Capital Budget and Program

Fairfield has prepared a detailed capital budget and program, which is incorporated by reference into this plan as most recently adopted. It shows that a large percentage of anticipated capital expenditures during the planning period are directly related to the town's extensive public road network. Additional residential development in outlying areas will increase annual road maintenance and school transportation costs, and increased traffic on roads that are now lightly traveled may necessitate major infrastructure improvements.

Conversion of Land for Residential Use

In addition to preventing growth at a rate that exceeds the town's ability to provide facilities and services, there is another equally important objective of the town's growth management plan – to limit the rate at which working farm and forest lands are being converted to residential lots.

While Fairfield has been successful at maintaining a reasonable rate of growth through its permit allocation system for the last two decades, there has still been a significant amount of land converted to residential use as most new homes have been built on lots of 10 acres or more in size. The town needs to consider whether the growth management program should be used to promote a less land consumptive development pattern over the next 20 years and to encourage development within growth centers in non-agricultural areas.

Public Support

Since its inception in 1988, there has been broad-based public support for the permit allocation system. For a number of years, residents voted at town meeting to establish a permit limit for the year. Voters were given three choices, one of which was "unlimited." A review of the

voting records shows that fully 80 percent of voters were in favor of the lowest number presented.

Comments made at the 2008 Planning Workshop were overwhelmingly in favor of maintaining the town's agricultural economy, promoting cluster development and limiting the rate of growth. When asked to envision and discuss future growth patterns, most workshop participants felt that even an average annual growth rate in housing units of one percent was too high and would prefer to maintain the status quo with little to no new home construction. Several attendees did speak to the need for housing that would meet the changing needs of current residents as they grow older, as well as affordable housing that would allow young people, especially those raised in the area, to choose to live in town as they enter the workforce.

Permit Allocation

Fairfield shall continue to limit its rate of growth to an average annual rate that matches that of Franklin County as a whole. Evidence indicates that the county's average annual growth rate, which was 1.4 percent, during the 1990s, has slowed. The best estimates available suggest that the county's average annual growth rate will be 1.2 percent over the next decade (2010 to 2019) and will continue to decline to a rate of 1.1 percent from 2020 to 2029. Therefore, Fairfield shall limit the number of permits issued for year-round dwelling units each year as detailed in Figure 42.

In establishing this growth rate, the town recognizes the need to

figure 42

Annual Residential Permit Allocation

	Growth Rate	Total Year-Round Units	New Year-Round units
2010	1.20%	718	8
2011	1.20%	726	8
2012	1.20%	734	8
2013	1.20%	742	8
2014	1.20%	750	8
2015	1.20%	759	9
2016	1.20%	768	9
2017	1.20%	777	9
2018	1.20%	786	9
2019	1.20%	795	9
2020	1.10%	803	8
2021	1.10%	811	8
2022	1.10%	819	8
2023	1.10%	828	9
2024	1.10%	837	9
2025	1.10%	846	9
2026	1.10%	855	9
2027	1.10%	864	9
2028	1.10%	873	9
2029	1.10%	882	9

periodically review the growth rate against current conditions and trends. Fairfield will implement its established maximum growth rate through its zoning bylaws as a permit phasing schedule linked to the town's capital improvement program.

It is important that Fairfield's growth management policies do not limit housing opportunities in a discriminatory manner. The town has considered the possible impact of permit phasing on housing costs. In order to further the goals of this plan related to housing affordability, senior housing, cluster development and maintaining a traditional settlement pattern, consideration should be given to exempting units from the permit cap if they meet specific criteria or otherwise allocating the units between designated growth centers and outlying rural lands.

goals

1. Establish a specific growth rate for consideration when making land use, capital facilities and farmland preservation decisions.

2. Administer a permit allocation system in a fair and non-discriminatory manner to ensure that Fairfield accommodates its fair share of regional population and housing growth, yet avoids a rapid rate of housing development and consequent conversion of farmland to non-productive uses.

policies

1. Maintain a fair share of Franklin County's projected population growth. To this end, the town should plan to accommodate a level of population and housing growth that will result in Fairfield accounting for 3.8 percent of the county's population and 3.6 percent of the county's households in 2020.

2. Ensure that any phasing schedule for permits includes a clearly defined, non-discriminatory, application and allocation process.

3. Administer the allocation formula, through implementation of the town's land use regulations, in a fair, non-discriminatory manner.

4. Continue to exempt accessory dwelling units and farm worker housing from the permit allocation system.

actions

1. Establish a growth rate not to exceed a 1.2 percent annual increase in year-round housing units from 2010 through 2019. The growth rate should serve as a permit allocation system based on existing housing units which would allow for 8 new units each year through 2014 and 7 new units each year from 2015 to 2019.

2. Review assumptions upon which the projected growth rate is based within five years (prior to the end of 2015). This will allow the town to evaluate recent growth trends regional population and housing distributions, housing affordability and current household size based on the best available demographic and housing data for the town and county.

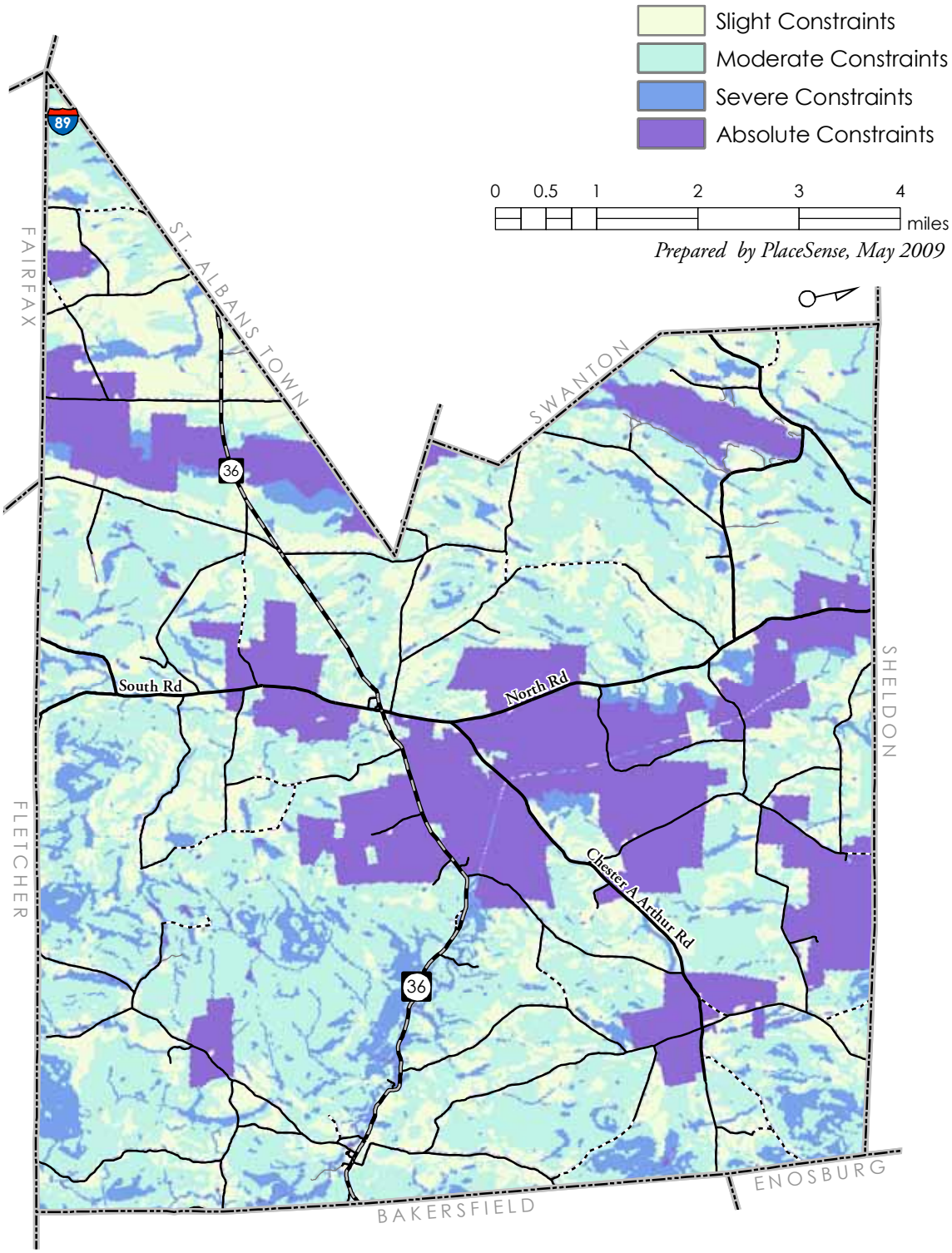
3. Consider zoning revisions that exempt elderly housing and affordable housing from any permit allocation system.

4. Explore opportunities to improve the effectiveness of the permit allocation system in slowing the rate at which working land is converted to residential property and guiding development to designated growth centers.

5. Prepare property parcel (tax) maps in Geographic Information System (GIS) format to better track property tax and land use trends and to assist with planning projects and the budget process.

figure 43

Development Suitability Map



Development Suitability

Certain areas within Fairfield are poorly suited for development. Such areas may present severe limitations because of environmental characteristics, location or potential social costs if misused. Once developed these areas may entail high maintenance costs, the burden of which may fall directly upon the municipality.

Slopes greater than 25 percent present considerable constraints to many types of development. The difficulties are compounded by the fact that these areas are also typically covered by shallow soils. Keeping vegetation cover on slopes is critical to maintaining stable soil on slopes. In order to protect the municipality from assuming the added expenses of road maintenance and fire and school bus service, developments on or adjacent to steep slopes should be reviewed carefully. In particular, septic tank disposal fields should not be permitted on slopes over 15 percent due to the increased risk of system failure.

Settlement should generally avoid shallow soil areas (as defined by NRCS) as the increased site development costs for excavations, foundations, basements and utilities may be prohibitive. Furthermore, it is difficult to bury utilities below the frost line, thus exposing them to possible frost damage. On-site sewage disposal is virtually impossible in shallow soil areas; a separation distance is required below the bottom of the sewage disposal trench and bedrock or impervious strata.

Many areas in Fairfield have unconfined groundwater at or near the ground's surface for part of the year and may be polluted easily by application of nutrients from septic tanks or other sources. Once contaminated, these waters may present health hazards locally and pollution of surface waters should the groundwater contribute to stream flow or wetlands.

Floodplains represent inherent hazards to human life, health, and property.

Public water supplies shall be carefully guarded from contamination. A watershed is the land area which contributes water for a particular supply. Should septic systems, landfills or faulty sewer lines be located too close to the supply, contamination may result.

Development Constraint Analysis

An analysis of the limitations presented by slope, soil, and wellhead protection shows that a great majority of Fairfield appears to have major constraints to development. In many areas of town, this is likely to be true. Figure 43, shows areas where the greatest number of obstacles are likely to be present. Special construction techniques or careful siting may be necessary. The more limitations that are present in one area, the more likely that certain types of development will not be possible. Conversely, Figure 43 should not be interpreted that, as a result of there being no limitations present, the land can be developed. Those areas will likely have fewer obstacles to development than other areas of town.

goal

1. Ensure that all development within the town is pursued with strict regard to the capability of the land to support it and to limit development in areas which are hazardous or otherwise unsuited for this purpose.

policies

1. Prohibit land development on slopes greater than 25 percent and maintain vegetative cover to the greatest extent feasible.

2. Permit land development on slopes greater than 15 percent only in instances where the development avoids or mitigates the high environmental and social costs.

3. Ensure that runoff and erosion is carefully controlled during all phases of construction and wastes should be treated off of the steep slope area.

4. Avoid development on shallow soils.

5. Prohibit permanent habitation in those areas of 0- to 1-foot depth to groundwater.

6. Prohibit any alteration that interferes with the natural flow of water to surface waters.

7. Prohibit all new development other than those uses essential to the operation of agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation and wildlife protection from flood and fluvial erosion hazard areas.

8. Prohibit development that will risk contamination of an existing or potential source of public water supply.

Important Resources

Source Water Protection Areas

The Town of Fairfield contains two delineated Source Protection Areas. The first area is located within both Fairfield and Fletcher and exists because of the wells which provide water for East Fairfield Fire Department #1 and the Village of East Fairfield. Sources of potential contamination include leach fields and agricultural activities but there is little to no potential for contamination of the well or reservoir due to topography. The second area covers a small area north of Castle Road west of Fairfield Center.

The state recommends, where economically feasible, the purchase of all lands within a source water protection area. Where not economically feasible, the town should adopt regulations prohibiting activities which pose a significant risk of contaminating a well such as storage of hazardous materials, salt sheds, landfills, junkyards, cemeteries, telecommunications facilities, and electrical substations. Agricultural activities are permitted uses although BMPs are recommended.

goal

1. Regulate densities and uses within Source Water Protection Areas in order to prevent the potential contamination of public water supplies.

policies

1. Coordinate with the Town of Fletcher on compatible zoning around the adjoining source water protection area.

2. Purchase in fee simple or the development rights of parcels within the source water protection areas in order to ensure the protection of the water sources where feasible.

action

1. Update the source water protection overlay district in the zoning ordinance, which emphasizes large lot zoning, source prohibitions, design standards, and/or operating standards to regulate land uses that present a risk to the water supply.

Flood and Fluvial Erosion Hazard Areas

The Black Creek floodplain and other flood or fluvial erosion prone areas should be protected. While no building would be permitted in this area, agricultural and other uses which will maintain a satisfactory ground cover would be permitted

The Town of Fairfield has designated a Flood Hazard Area overlay district in its land use regulations in order to prevent increases in flooding caused by development in flood hazard areas, to minimize future public and private losses due to floods, and to promote the public health, safety and general welfare. Designation of this district is also required for the town's continued eligibility in the National Flood Insurance Program.

Included are all areas subject to one percent or greater change of flooding in any given year (i.e.: the 100-year flood plains) as shown on the latest Federal Insurance Administration maps. These are incorporated by reference. Detailed maps of the Flood Hazard District, and the Federal Insurance Administration Maps are available at the Town Office. Detailed ordinances dealing with the Flood Hazard District can be found in the Town Zoning Ordinance.

goal

1. Protect the health safety and welfare of residents and visitors of Fairfield by prohibiting development in areas defined by the Federal Insurance Administration Maps as being a special flood hazard area.

policies

1. Continue to enforce the regulations presented in the Flood Hazard District of the Town of Fairfield Zoning Ordinance.

2. Make any necessary amendments to the Flood Hazard District regulations to ensure residents continue to be eligible for the National Flood Insurance Program.

Rural Character

Rural character is created by complex development patterns, which have evolved over two centuries of agricultural- and forestry-based land uses. Rural landscapes include areas of relatively clustered development separated by large areas of productive farmland, forests, wetlands, rivers and hills. Buildings of different sizes are located on lots of variable areas at various distances from the roads based on the character of the land and its intended use.

There is an inherent conflict in zoning rural land because it is difficult to write regulations that would result in the diverse development pattern typical of the desired rural landscapes. Traditional zoning standardizes land use patterns resulting in a regularized pattern of new development that often does not fit into rural surroundings. Conventional zoning provides two basic options for rural areas, require large or small lots. Large lots maintain low densities, but consume more land than necessary and promote sprawl. Small lots can result in development that is too dense resulting in loss of rural character and creation of a suburban landscape.

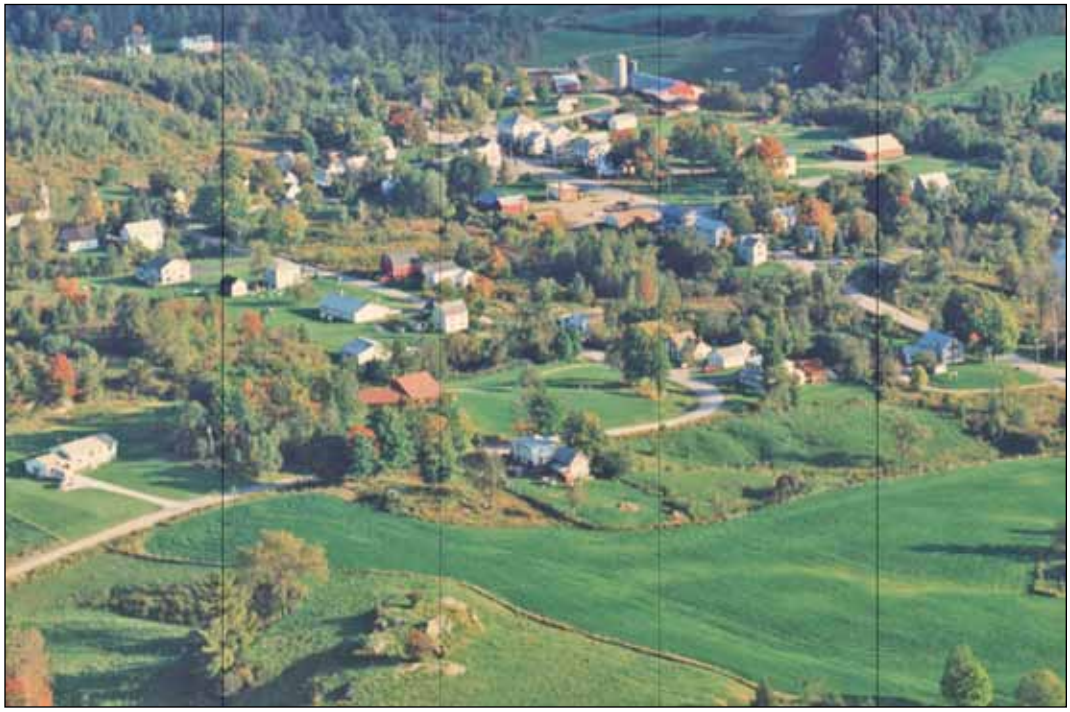
In order to preserve rural character while accommodating reasonable amounts of growth, Fairfield should promote use of cluster development on the lands outside the Village Planning Area. Clustering groups the allowed development together on smaller lots with a significant amount of the original parcel set aside as open space or productive land. In those areas identified as environmentally sensitive, use of conservation subdivision principles should be encouraged. Conservation subdivisions are a more environmentally-friendly form of clustering that protects important natural resources such as prime agricultural soils, wetlands, steep slopes, wildlife habitat, scenic views or forestlands.

Village Character

Fairfield wants to guide development to its two existing villages in a manner that maintains their character as small, traditional New England village centers. Traditional New England village centers can be described as places with:

- A mix of uses in close proximity to each other bringing people together for a variety of activities – including town affairs, work, living, recreation, business, shopping, and

figure 44
Aerial View of East Fairfield



entertainment – attracting and benefiting people of all ages and income levels.

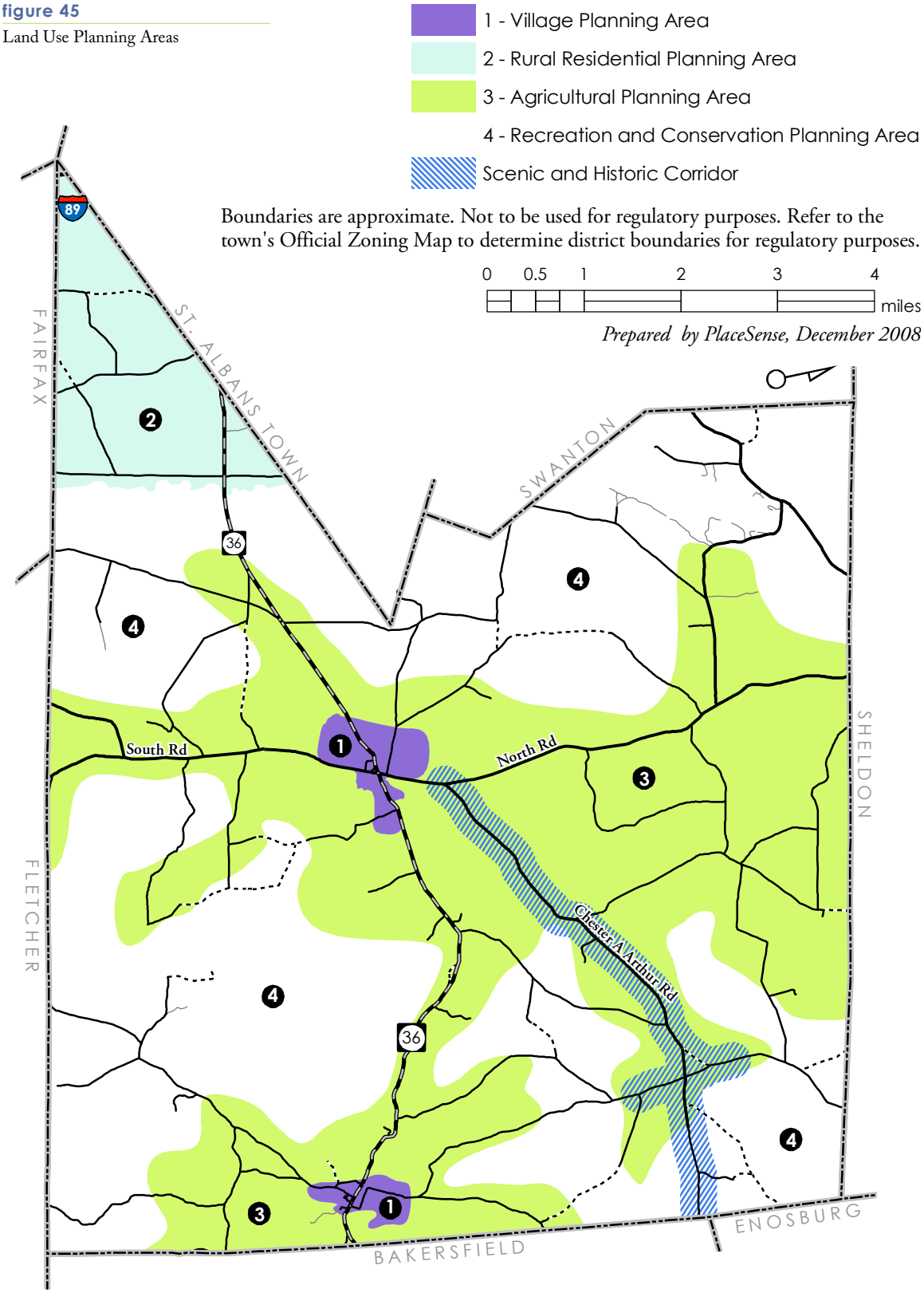
- A physical layout with higher densities in comparison to outlying areas and a distinct, defined geographical edge that establishes an identity or a sense of place.
- A pedestrian-friendly environment in which most uses are within a five- or ten-minute walk (1,500 to 3,000 feet) of each other and a transportation system that is designed first for pedestrians and secondarily for vehicles.
- A strong public presence, such as greens or parks, municipal buildings, post office, school or other public spaces or buildings.
- An atmosphere that is friendly and inviting.
- A presence of special features, such as historic buildings, landmarks, and views.

New development within the Village Planning Areas should be compatible with the physical design of the traditional village centers. Lot sizes, building heights and massing, setbacks, frontages, etc. should match and continue historic patterns. The physical design of traditional New England villages is characterized by:

- Multi-story buildings that maximize the use of vertical space while maintaining a human scale at street level.
- Buildings located close to the street built at the street line or with very shallow setbacks.
- Principal buildings closer to the street than associated accessory buildings (such as garages).
- Narrow, interconnected, tree-lined streets.
- Short and/or irregularly shaped blocks.
- Buildings whose main entrance is oriented to the street.
- Limited amounts of land devoted to parking, especially as visible from the street.
- On-street parking.
- Diversity in the size of buildings and lots.

figure 45

Land Use Planning Areas



Future Land Use

The overall policy concerning future land use shall be to maintain the rural character, aesthetic and scenic resources of the town and provide sufficient space in appropriate locations for forest and agriculture, residential, recreational, commercial, and industrial development and for public and semi-public facilities in light of their respective environmental needs and of their mutual interrelationships. Land use in the Town of Fairfield, for present and future purposes, has been defined in the following planning areas as shown in Figure 45.

Village Planning Area

The Village Planning Area includes the historic limits of the town's two villages, East Fairfield and Fairfield, as shown as Figure 45. These areas are largely developed and are characterized by high-density residential, civic, and business uses. For that reason, the geographic boundaries of this area incorporate a limited amount of adjacent undeveloped and underdeveloped lands, which have the possibility of being served by public infrastructure, to accommodate future growth and development.

The purpose of this area is to support the role of Fairfield's villages as the focus of social and economic activities in the town and to provide opportunities for residential, commercial and other compatible development that serves the needs of the town.

Future development in this planning area should occur in a manner that maintains the traditional, social and physical character of the villages including their historic and scenic resources, and which will not exceed the capability of the lands, waters, services, and the facilities to absorb such densities. Any new development within this area should respect traditional densities, setbacks, building scale and massing, and architectural integrity. Civic uses (municipal office, post offices, schools, etc.) currently located in this area should not be relocated to outlying areas.

There exists the possibility that a small-scale rurally-based industry might wish to locate in either of the two villages. Such industry should

be compatible with the rural, agricultural nature of Fairfield and located in close proximity with these two village districts. All industry employing more than two people wishing to locate in the villages of East Fairfield and for Fairfield Center requires Fairfield Planning Commission/Zoning Board approval before location in the village.

Commercial activities and other activities providing the residents of Fairfield with needed skills and services are encouraged. These activities, however, must never be allowed to become a public nuisance, and the Planning Commission is authorized to prevent any such activities should they become objectionable as determined by them after a duly warned public hearing. Any commercial or industrial development proposed for Fairfield must be in keeping with the rural character of the town. It is desirable for this type of development to locate in a single, central location rather than lining the edges of the main thoroughfares. The purpose of commercial development should be to serve the needs of Fairfield's residents and to provide additional employment opportunities within the town; such development should not saturate the area with merchandising outlets which do not fulfill these needs or are lucrative only for non-residents. Any industrial development should be of small scale so as not to create traffic congestion, pollution or other inappropriate aspects.

goals

1. Encourage village growth centers for residential and commercial development.
2. Provide safe drinking water and sewage disposal.
3. Encourage the development and expansion of appropriate and compatible industries.
4. Provide for the orderly development of appropriate commercial services.
5. Provide safe sidewalks on both sides of the streets in all residential areas.

policies

1. Protect the vitality and importance of the villages of Fairfield as community and regional assets.

2. Plan to extend village water supplies and construct village sewage systems.

3. Promote a diversified and stable economy by encouraging compatible industrial development and assuring the successful operation of existing industries and home occupations.

4. Encourage appropriate industries in suitable locations which will utilize the skills of the local labor force.

5. Encourage in suitable locations necessary commercial development relative to the local needs for retail, business and personal services.

6. Promote the clustering of related and compatible commercial uses and to discourage strip commercial development along highways.

7. Encourage provision and building of sidewalks.

8. Develop a plan to complete sidewalks.

Rural Residential Planning Area

This area includes land along Swamp Road west to the St. Albans town line. This part of town has seen significant residential development in recent decades. Due to the convenient access to the interstate and the regional center of St. Albans, this area of town is recognized as more suitable for rural residential development than the town's agricultural, recreation and conservation areas.

Use of PUDs are encouraged within this area, including developments that provide mixed-income housing and/or alternatives to detached single-family homes. The concept behind PUDs is to encourage cluster development rather than suburban sprawl. A PUD would

include either single-family, multi-family or mixed types of uses as allowed in the zoning district. The advantage of PUDs is that they conserve open space and save on costs to both the developer and the town. The importance of cluster development provisions in small towns should not be understated. Planned unit development allows the centralization of services and the efficient use of land, which are important factors in preserving the small-town character of Fairfield while absorbing the growth that seems inevitable.

Agricultural Planning Area

In agriculture lies the economic, social, historic, aesthetic and scenic character of the town and the fundamental strength and stability of the local and regional economy. Agricultural land represents a vulnerable and irreplaceable resource which must not be wasted; once it is developed it will likely be lost forever.

The Agricultural Planning Area includes lands in town where agriculture is the predominant activity. This district's most important activity must be supported by all other land uses. No activity should be allowed which is detrimental to this dominant use.

The Agricultural Planning Area consists of land suitable for various uses, but outside planned municipal facilities or situated in drainage basins where such facilities would be excessive in cost and difficult to maintain. Depending upon the character of the particular location, land in these areas is suitable for agricultural and forestry uses, some forms of recreation, full-time or seasonal residences, including mobile homes and trailers, in accordance with the town's zoning regulations.

Though residential development is an appropriate use for these areas, and very likely will take place, measures should be taken to ensure that minimum lot sizes are large enough to accommodate a septic system. The reasons for such a requirement are:

- That there are presently no municipal water and sewer facilities planned for these areas to compensate for the effects that housing in close proximity have on health and environment; and

- That houses on reasonably sized lots tend to be in keeping with the maintenance of rural character in rural areas; Fairfield's residents feel this is important. Therefore, development methods to preserve the rural character and protect the agricultural resources of these areas are encouraged.

While lots for residential development need to be large enough to accommodate water and septic systems, the parcels should be kept as small as necessary so as to minimize the loss of agricultural lands. The town supports the use of Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) and other clustering mechanisms to conserve agricultural lands.

Home based business on a small scale (less than two employees) can be allowed without Planning Commission approval. However, any non-farm business in this district with two or more employees must have Planning Commission/Zoning Board approval to be established.

goals

1. Protect and encourage the continuation of agriculture.
2. Maintain open meadowland.
3. Maintain large parcels under simple ownership for agriculture.

policies

1. Implement all positive incentives and other available means to keep prime agricultural lands in productivity.
2. Encourage the development of business and cooperatives as a means to stimulate the agricultural economy.
3. Control the siting of non-agricultural development and structures to limit impacts on important resources and loss of agricultural lands.

4. Encourage innovative densities, clustering of houses, protection of development rights, purchase of development rights, tax incentives etc.

Recreation and Conservation Planning Area

This planning area includes the lands around Fairfield Pond, Fairfield Swamp, the town's wildlife management areas and steep uplands. Generally, the lands in this area are poorly suited for future community growth and development.

Around Fairfield Pond development must be carefully controlled to protect water quality, recreation uses and scenic beauty. Fairfield Pond is a resource used by people for seasonal homes, fishing, swimming, and boating while the adjoining lands are used for agricultural purposes and permanent homes. No activity should be allowed in this district which degrades the pond's quality and its state classification.

Seasonal homes will be permitted in the area around the pond, as they contribute to the town's tax base; however, the enlargement of these seasonal homes or the conversion of a part-time dwelling to a full-time dwelling must conform to stringent controls in order to preserve the fragile environment of these areas. Specific controls on the siting of buildings are included in the town's land use regulations. Public recreation facilities are encouraged to be developed around the pond for the fulfillment of the recreation needs of Fairfield residents. Most commercial development should be discouraged in these areas, as it may have a tendency to destroy the atmosphere of the natural surroundings. Limited commercial development could be permitted upon the review of the Planning Commission, providing the proposed development is in keeping with the natural environment.

The southeast corner of Fairfield is characterized by a series of upland ridges and is presently the least settled part of town. The soils here tend to be most severely restrictive for all types of human developments, but do contain areas appropriate wildlife habitat, with its accompanying use by people for hiking, nature study, snow-shoeing, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, and hunting.

Other portions of the Recreation and Conservation Planning Area are characterized by their remote location, extreme topography and/or severe soil limitations for buildings, roads and sewage disposal. This area also includes many of the town's important natural and scenic resources, which are used and valued by residents for forestry, ground and surface water recharge, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation. Due to these natural resources, limitations to development, and the cost of providing public services to these areas, only limited, low-density and compatible land development will be permitted.

goals

1. Protect and improve water quality and recreational values of the area for residents and visitors of Fairfield.

2. Protect the scenic and important natural resource value of such lands for forestry, ground and surface water recharge, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation.

3. Ensure that any development that occurs does not have a negative impact on Fairfield Swamp including the wildlife, vegetation, and water quality.

Historic and Scenic Corridor

The Chester A. Arthur Historic and Scenic Corridor is an important part of the legacy of Fairfield. The state maintains a replica of the small house in which President Arthur was born in North Fairfield. Other features of this district include an old brick church and adjacent cemetery, now owned by the State Historic Society. Several homes in the area are architecturally appropriate to the era.

Chester A. Arthur Road is recognized along its entire length, from the intersection of North Road and Route 36 as a scenic road extending 1000 feet on either side. This scenic road is registered as such with the state. Appropriate means, such as landscaping and screening with trees and shrubs must be taken to maintain the pleasant appearance of this route which is traveled by many tourist visitors to our town. Efforts should be made to encourage appropriate building styles

within or visible from the corridor. Fairfield has established a design control district to protect this important resource from incompatible development.

goals

1. Encourage the preservation of Fairfield's heritage within the Historic and Scenic Corridor.

2. Encourage designation and protection of scenic vistas and scenic landscapes along the Chester A. Arthur Road.

policies

1. Maintain the scenic nature of the Chester A. Arthur Road through the control of building and development so as to foster a scenic landscape.

2. Make possible through design control and other mechanisms the preservation of individual buildings and districts of historical value.

3. Require tree/shrub planting and location of berms or equivalents to preserve scenic roads and vistas.

4. Support designation and protection of historic buildings including barns.

action

1. Designate scenic vistas and develop public parking areas alongside scenic roads so that the vistas are clearly designated.

Statement of Policy

Fairfield will gradually change as its population increases during the next five years. This process of change will require important decisions be made with respect to land use, the provision of community services and facilities, increased school enrollments, a more heavily traveled road network, recreational opportunities and the availability of energy resources. Recognizing and preparing for these changes has led us to the formulation of the following policies that will help guide town decisions.

Archeological and Historic Resources

In light of the fragile and irreplaceable nature of archeological resources, development in archeologically sensitive areas should proceed with caution. Our prehistoric and historic archeological sites constitute an essential link to our recent and distant past. These sites are often the only source of information for the longest part of human history in Vermont.

The Town of Fairfield has a long and varied past which has been responsible for the values and traditions held today. The town should ensure that the history behind the town is available for residents new and old to enjoy. Over the years, pieces of that past have been captured in Fairfield Vermont Reminiscences and in the history portions of this town plan. But gaps in the historic record exist – most notably the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Therefore, we support the Fairfield Historical Society and their efforts to compile and preserve the history of Fairfield.

Fairfield has many structures which have historical significance. In order to preserve the architectural and cultural character of the community as well as the contribution these buildings make to the overall attractiveness of the town, consideration should be given to the protection of those structures of historical and architectural interest. Similarly, the historic pattern of village centers surrounded by agricultural countryside is supported and encouraged.

goals

1. Preserve Fairfield's heritage for current and future generations.
2. Preserve Fairfield's fragile archeological record.
3. Record and preserve the history of Fairfield.
4. Make possible the preservation of buildings and districts of historical value.
5. Maintain Fairfield's historical settlement pattern of compact villages surrounded by agricultural countryside.

policies

1. Consider the potential impact of any project occurring in archeologically sensitive areas during the early stages of development. This will offer the best opportunity to mitigate potential impacts.
2. Support efforts to protect and preserve items and artifacts of historic significance to Fairfield.
3. Support designation and protection of historic buildings including barns.
4. Support any applications for grants to compile a town history.
5. Support the ongoing efforts to operate the town's historical society, including the acquisition and display of items of historical significance.
6. Promote the use of historic buildings for public purposes where feasible.

actions

1. Revise the town's land use regulations to include review of projects in archeologically sensitive areas.

2. Update the design control districts established in the zoning bylaws as needed to ensure the continued protection of historic resources and continue to ensure that any development in the design control districts complies with the guidelines.

Housing

All of Fairfield's residents and visitors are entitled to safe and affordable housing. How future housing developments occur (the location, type and size of the development) is critical to perpetuating the rural and agricultural character of Fairfield. Further, housing development necessarily increases demand on services and may potentially adversely affect environmentally sensitive areas or have negative impacts on agricultural lands.

goal

1. Promote safe and healthful housing for all segments of the population.

policies

1. Ensure the provision of adequate housing of a variety of types for all income, age, minority, and transient groups in an environment which is safe, visually attractive and satisfies the day-to-day living and recreational requirements of the residents.

2. Determine residential densities on the basis of topography, proximity to highways, village centers, employment centers and the requirements for the cost-effective and efficient provision of public services.

3. Encourage low densities where low levels of services are to be provided and higher densities only where they can be properly served.

4. Continue to not differentiate between mobile homes and other single family homes.

actions

1. Include exemptions for accessory dwelling units intended per statute to provide affordable housing, from the town's permit allocation system.

2. Consider other exemptions to the permit allocation system for farm workers housing, elderly housing, or other types of perpetually affordable housing.

3. Address conversion of seasonal dwelling to year round occupancy in any permit allocation system.

Education

Major changes have been made to the state education funding system over the past decade, but rising school costs continue to drive property tax bills upward. In reviewing development proposals, the town must carefully consider population figures and number of children, as part of its review of additional homes.

Future development in Fairfield shall not exceed the capacity of the town to provide educational services. The permit allocation system is one method of matching the ability to provide services for the growing number of children, and staying within the existing tax structure. Every small tax increase represents a large threat to the existing farm infrastructure which serves to maintain Fairfield's rural character.

goal

1. Provide educational services to meet the needs of Fairfield's children.

policy

1. Support efforts to broaden access to educational and vocational training.

Town Fiscal Condition

With the continuation of the town's conservative fiscal policies, Fairfield can expect to maintain a relatively stable tax rate well into the future.

goal

1. Maintain a stable tax rate and avoid significant fluctuations in annual capital expenditures.

policies

1. Give preference to capital projects involving the maintenance and upgrade of existing facilities necessary to provide current levels of service over capital projects designed to provide new or expanded services, unless such projects are clearly tied to the goals and policies set for in this town plan.

2. Continue to carry out the growth management recommendations set forth in this town plan, including the implementation of the permit allocation system, to provide predictability to the budget process while avoiding unanticipated demands for new or expanded services or facilities.

actions

1. Maintain the town's capital program which includes an inventory of capital facilities, establishes minimum levels of service (as appropriate), and serves as the basis for a five-year capital budget to be revised and adopted on an annual basis. To maintain the Selectboard's and School Board's responsibility for overseeing the town and school budgets respectively, separate but coordinated capital budgets for the town and school district should be developed and adopted by the appropriate board.

2. Establish dedicated equipment reserve funds and avoid using those funds for purposes other than the acquisition of capital equipment. A separate short-term cash flow, or contingency, reserve fund can be established should the town deem it necessary.

3. Prepare property parcel (tax) maps in Geographic Information System (GIS) format to better track

property tax and land use trends, and to assist with planning projects and the budget process.

Town Services

The primary service provided by Fairfield is the maintenance of an extensive road network. Other services are provided in order to maintain a suitable rural life style to its citizens and visitors including fire protection and public water (within village areas).

goal

1. Ensure adequate public facilities and services to maintain a suitable rural lifestyle for residents and visitors.

Telecommunications Facilities

The siting of communications towers and facilities is a growing issue across the state as groups debate the benefits of wireless service versus the aesthetic and safety considerations. The 1996 Telecommunications Act prohibited municipalities from banning towers within their town. Each town therefore must identify areas in which towers will be allowed. Towns may also regulate the appearance and other considerations with regards to towers and facilities. As the telecommunications industry is rapidly transforming, the issue of towers may resolve itself over the next few years with advances in satellite phones and facilities which are not required to be fixed upon towers. Until that day comes, Fairfield should find a suitable location for towers and pass bylaws to guide their development.

Towers and facilities need to be treated separately. Facilities are the antennas, dishes, and other items used to send and receive the signals. They are generally fixed on towers but recently creative companies have hidden them in bell towers, on top of water towers, on telephone poles, and other structures. The most important consideration regarding facilities is the health and safety issues relating to some of these systems (e.g. microwave dishes). Where a risk exists, they should be sited away from populated areas and sensitive habitats. Due to

the risk of contaminating public water supplies in the event of a fire, facilities should not be located in wellhead protection areas.

Towers on the other hand are generally criticized for their appearance. Typically located atop hills and many times adorned with blinking lights, they stand in stark contrast to the undeveloped, forested surroundings. When pressed communications companies have found creative ways to disguise towers as trees and keep them low enough to prevent the need for safety lights.

Fairfield should establish tower guidelines which first attempt to locate receivers on other structures existing in the area such as silos and steeples. If that were not possible, low towers (appropriately camouflaged) in the agricultural or upland district would be permitted. Co-locating (having more than one facility on a tower) should be mandatory whenever possible in order to minimize the number of towers. The town should require that a tower be removed if it is unused for a certain period of time. Finally, towers only present a risk if they fall. The owner of a tower should also own the entire fall-zone and no other residence or public building should be permitted in that zone. Towers would be inappropriate in the village districts, Chester A. Arthur District, swamp or lake districts.

Across Fairfield, telecommunications facilities need to be constructed carefully to ensure they do not become a blight on the landscape. Zoning bylaws should be adopted regulating the siting and appearance of such structures to prevent them from becoming a nuisance.

action

1. Develop bylaws in order to regulate the siting and appearance of telecommunications towers in accordance with state and federal law and the policies of this plan.

Energy

Energy costs have become a major expense in government, business and personal budgets. Successfully reducing the impact of the costs and vulnerability of energy will benefit the town and its people.

goals

1. Reduce the use of and dependence on expensive and non-renewable energy sources.

2. Promote efficiency and conservation of local and outside energy sources.

policies

1. Promote educational opportunities that further energy awareness for school students, local officials and townspeople.

2. Reduce energy costs as a proportion of municipal expenditures through implementation of a costing policy, management of town forest and other resources, and instituting cost-effective energy conservation/ renewable energy measures for town property (buildings, vehicles, etc.).

3. Adopt appropriate land use policies including encouraging appropriate site design and building construction for relevant public and private structures; including transportation costs as a planning and development factor; encouraging and providing access for renewable energy systems, and promoting optimum management of woodlots, agricultural lands, and similar resources.

Transportation

As one of the most rural towns in Vermont, Fairfield deals with a smaller range of transportation issues than many other cities or towns in the state: there is no public transportation system; its roads are not as heavily traveled by tourists as many other parts of Vermont; and most roads are unpaved. The majority of the transportation issues in Fairfield have to do with the maintenance of the many roads that dissect the town. Agricultural, natural, lake and recreation areas all require care in location of roads and access.

goals

1. Provide a safe and economical transportation network.

policies

1. Provide no services to Class IV town roads levels which currently exist.

2. Prohibit the placement of year round dwellings on land which does not have the required frontage on a Class III Highway or better.

3. Prohibit the conversion of seasonal dwellings and camps not having adequate road frontage to year-round dwellings.

4. Require a minimum of 50-foot right-of-way or deeded easement for access for the purpose of land development.

5. Review access in light of the town plan, zoning bylaw, subdivision regulations, road policy, and safety issues.

6. Allow reasonable requests for simple access to property. However, access for the purpose of land development shall be in accordance with town regulations and policies.

7. Allow Class IV roads to be maintained by landowners, with Selectboard approval, only to the degree necessary to provide simple access to property.

8. Require permission for all new road cuts from the Selectboard according to the town's Road Policy, as well as approval from the Planning Commission as required by the town's land use regulations.

9. Require all private rights-of-way to be constructed to standards set forth in the Road Policy.

10. Refuse to accept any private rights-of-way into the town highway system.

11. Require all expenses to be borne by the applicant in the process of laying out and constructing proposed roads, constructing drives, or installing culverts, etc. These expenses also include, but are not limited to, public warnings and legal fees for review of surveys and deeds.

actions

1. Continue to participate in the regional Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) to facilitate transportation plans and policies that are in the best interest of the region and Town of Fairfield.

2. Consider the development of a Road Surface Management System (RSMS) in conjunction with the Vermont Local Roads Program and the Northwest Regional Planning Commission.

Recreation

Maintaining and developing Fairfield's natural beauty and resources for recreational purposes is an important aspect of the overall town plan, because not only is such an endeavor compatible with the preservation of the rural character of the town, but also, recreational development in the form of vacation dwellings helps form a solid tax base for the town.

goal

1. Maintain and enhance recreational and scenic resources

policies

1. Provide in convenient and suitable locations, recreational areas and facilities for the use and enjoyment of the residents and assure the provisions by the developer of adequate and suitable recreational areas within existing and proposed

subdivisions realizing that recreation is a necessary, beneficial and essential activity in the lifestyles of the residents, especially the young.

2. Maintain, improve and expand town-owned recreation areas in order to provide recreational opportunities for future generations. The encroachment of incompatible uses should be carefully monitored and avoided in order to preserve the integrity of these areas, as well as areas that are not yet owned by the town but have been identified as prime recreational resources.

3. Provide open space system for the preservation, protection and enhancement of major physical and environmental features such as mountains, waterways and bodies of water, wildlife and other natural resources.

4. Conserve prime recreational resources from incompatible land uses and to protect the scenic qualities including agricultural, forest and riparian lands from unnecessary despoilation.

Earth Resources

A number of resources located underground in the Town of Fairfield have commercial value, either at the present time or for the future. While there may be an obligation on the part of the town to allow these resources to be reasonably developed for the good of the general public, such extraction or processing activities must not be allowed to impose an adverse impact upon town residents. It is intended that the public interest be protected by regulations assuring that both the present and future effects of such extraction or processing operations are not adverse to the public health, safety, comfort or convenience or damaging to the value of surrounding properties.

1. Permit new earth resource extraction or processing operation only after a full examination of the proposed operation has shown that there will be no detrimental impact on the town.

2. Ensure that excavation operations are subject to public supervision.

3. Require any earth extraction or processing proposal to include a plan, acceptable by the Planning Commission, for the rehabilitation of the site at the conclusion of extraction or processing activities. Appropriate guarantees may be required to ensure the rehabilitation at the operator's expense.

4. Require any party proposing earth extraction activities to bear the burden of proof in showing that there will be no detrimental impact.

5. Require that development being proposed near or over important earth resources accounts for the potential loss of that resource.

Streams, Headwaters and Shorelines

Stream headwaters (located in the upper reaches of a watershed) are usually cool, and have a high oxygen and low nutrient content. For this reason upland streams tend to be highly productive per unit area and are extremely sensitive to sedimentation and pollution discharge.

Many of these streams are ephemeral, only flowing after heavy precipitation when surface runoff and rising water tables intersect the stream channel. All of these factors make pristine stream headwaters extremely sensitive to disturbances resulting from forestry and urbanization.

Shoreland conservation practices contribute to the prevention and control of water pollution, protection of spawning grounds for fish and aquatic life, preservation of shore cover and natural beauty, and the multiple use of waters.

policy

1. Ensure that development within the shoreline areas of lakes, streams and rivers is compatible with the natural beauty of the area, protects existing vegetation, is set back sufficiently to prevent erosion along stream banks or pollution from subsurface sewage disposal systems, and where possible retains visual and physical access to the water bodies.

Agricultural Soils and Meadow Lands

These lands represent truly unique, irreplaceable resources due to their unique physical qualities, the importance of fertile soils to a stable economy, and the state, national, and international need for increased food production.

Meadowlands may or may not be classified as prime agricultural soils, but traditional meadowland in Fairfield regardless of soil type is vitally important open green space to be protected.

policy

1. Prohibit development within agricultural areas on the prime or very good agricultural soils where alternative locations exist.

2. Avoid siting buildings in meadows wherever possible.

3. Control the siting of any type of development, including agricultural development or building, for least impact on the area.

Forest Resources

Wood and wood products are becoming increasingly valuable commodities yet future forest productivity is often neglected in harvest practices.

policy

1. Protect and enhance forest productivity by encouragement of sound management practices.

Wetlands

Wetlands are of crucial importance to the surface water regime. These areas store large quantities of water during periods of high runoff and gradually release water during low flow periods. Therefore, the wetland regulates stream discharge both during low flow and peak flow. Loss of this storage capacity will not only adversely affect stream behavior but will also increase floods and reduce stream flow during crucial low flow periods.

Wetlands are also important for the maintenance of water quality. The biological activity of a wetland area enables the absorption and assimilation of nutrients and thus purifies to some extent the water which is discharged.

policy

1. Prohibit land development resulting in the loss of wetland storage capacity or additions to the marsh areas of any substances which are likely to increase the concentration of materials beyond the assimilative capacities.

Natural Areas

Natural areas have educational, scenic, recreational or scientific value to the present and future populations. They include areas that constitute unique ecological or natural science value and are suitable areas for education and research, or areas which are unique within a community and possesses scenic or recreational values.

goal

1. Development in proximity to natural areas should take place in such a way as to preserve their value for education, science, research, aesthetics, and recreation.

Scenic Resources

Chester A. Arthur Road is recognized as a scenic road along its entire length and is registered as such with the state. Appropriate means,

such as landscaping and screening with trees and shrubs must be taken to maintain the pleasant appearance of this route which is traveled by many visitors to our town. Efforts should be made to encourage appropriate building styles.

goal

1. Maintain the scenic nature of Fairfield's roads including the protection of scenic vistas and scenic landscapes and, in particular, those associated with the Chester A. Arthur Road.

policies

1. Encourage development in a manner that fosters a scenic landscape through scenic road designation and control of building and development in the Chester A. Arthur Historic District and Scenic Road.

2. Require tree/shrub planting and location of berms or equivalents to preserve scenic roads and vistas.

action

1. Identify scenic vistas and develop public parking areas alongside scenic roads so that the vistas are clearly designated.

Development Rights

The desire to maintain the present status quo is starting to conflict with the financial pressures of our modern world. The implementation of strict zoning may not be possible and other solutions must be developed to accomplish our planning goals. The main objection to slow growth planning is loss of property rights which in reality translates to money interest. One way of dealing with this is purchase of development rights.

goal

1. Continue efforts and programs to preserve productive farmland in the Town of Fairfield.

policies

1. Encourage local landowners to participate in the Vermont Current Use program.

2. Promote the sale, barter, exchange, control and use of development rights to control growth, development and foster the continuation of agricultural activity.

3. Support the efforts of the Vermont Land Trust to conserve farmland in the town.

4. Continue to allocate local funds to the Town Conservation Fund, as recommended by the Planning Commission, to purchase development rights to preserve farmland. Such funds should be used to leverage larger sums from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Fund and other public and/or private funding source.

5. Examine every land transaction and subdivision for the possible acquisition of development rights.

actions

1. To set up a local conservation commission or community land trust within the next 5 years.

2. Develop and annually maintain an inventory of farms, farm parcels, and total acreage in farm production. Such an inventory would be used in conjunction with the Fairfield Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system to identify significant agricultural lands.

3. Locate and identify landowners that wish to sell or trade development rights. To assist these individuals in locating willing buyers. To set up or join programs that foster the use of development rights. To educate the citizens about these programs. To assist landowners in maximizing their position.

Priority Actions

A mere statement of the town's past, its present situation and desired direction will not ensure that this direction is followed; action must be taken to implement the plan and work toward the objectives developed therein.

The local boards and commissions charged with the implementation of this plan must adhere to its basic tenets of the plan. Similarly, the District Environmental Commission and other state agencies will use the plan as part of Act 250 and elsewhere as provided in state law.

The chief component of implementation will be the administration and enforcement of the town's land use regulations. This includes the continuation of the permit allocation system in place since 1988 Second, but nonetheless urgent, is the need to keep the town's capital budget and program current through annual updates.

Throughout the implementation of the plan, periodic reviews and future consideration of other implementation devices, increased public involvement in the town planning process will be essential.

The following is a list of specific actions that should be initiated to ensure the continuation of the process for which this plan is a beginning:

1. Make any necessary amendments to the town plan as new Census data is released and review the accuracy of predictions made using old information. In particular, reevaluate the conclusions of the growth management plan in light of the most recent data.

2. Develop and maintain a current inventory of home occupations and businesses to determine trends as they develop in the town.

3. Prepare property parcel (tax) maps in Geographic Information System (GIS) format to better track

property tax and land use trends and to assist with planning projects and the budget process.

4. Investigate the possibility of scenic byway designation for the Chester A. Arthur Road.

5. Pursue funding to begin investigating the potential for small-scale municipal or community wastewater treatment infrastructure for the town's villages and designated growth centers.

Regional Connections

Compatibility with Neighboring Communities

As a rural town, Fairfield is much more likely to be affected by outside development pressure than to generate growth or impacts that will affect its neighbors. As part of developing this plan, Fairfield has examined the plans of adjoining towns and has found its goals and policies to be compatible with those of its neighbors. In particular, Fairfield compared its plans for future land use and development along its town line with those of its neighbors and found no conflicts.

Bakersfield

Bakersfield has designated the entire length of its boundary with Fairfield as part of its Rural District. Both Fairfield and Bakersfield have designated the area along Route 36 between their villages (East Fairfield and Bakersfield village) as rural in order to limit the potential for strip development along the highway and to maintain the two centers as distinct.

Enosburgh

Enosburgh has designated the lands along its shared border with Fairfield as part of its Rural Residential District. Enosburgh calls for low-density, cluster development so that large contiguous open space is protected for farming and pockets of housing will occur in less productive areas.

Fairfax

Fairfax's Agricultural/Forest/Rural Residential planning area abuts the town line with Fairfield. Their plans calls for agriculture and forestry to remain the dominant land use and for the maintenance of rural open countryside and forestland.

Fletcher

Fletcher has placed the land along its town line with Fairfield into its Agricultural/Rural Residential District or Conservation District, which is consistent with land uses envisioned on Fairfield's side of the border.

St. Albans

The Town of St. Albans has placed much of its land along the Fairfield town line in its Rural District while the remaining land, largely around Fairfield Swamp, is in the Conservation District.

Sheldon

Sheldon describes all of the land along its shared border with Fairfield as rural. There is an area of rural land between Sheldon village and the town line.

Swanton

Around Fairfield Swamp, Swanton has land in a Recreation/ Conservation District. The remaining land along the town's shared border with Fairfield is part of the Agricultural Residential District.

Compatibility with the Regional Plan

Fairfield recognizes that it is part of a larger region and has considered the compatibility of its planning goals with that of the region. Fairfield's land use planning areas are similar to the proposed land use plan adopted by the Regional Planning Commission. The Regional Plan identifies Fairfield's village centers and supports the continuation of historic village and hamlet centers through village center planning and designation efforts that preserve their traditional character. The Regional Plan also designates Fairfield's agricultural lands as an important resource, and further states that the best farmland in the region should be given the highest level of support for continued agricultural use.