

St. Albans City Planning Commission Report on Proposed City Plan

Edition: May 15, 2017

The St. Albans City Planning Commission has drafted a proposed Municipal Development Plan (hereafter referred to as the City Plan or simply the Plan), as described in 24 V.S.A., Chapter 117, Subchapter 005.

A draft of the proposed Plan is available at the St. Albans City Clerk's Office, St. Albans City Hall, 100 North Main Street, or online at www.StAlbansVT.com/CityPlan. The webpage also includes the online appendices referenced in the proposed Plan.

This report has been drafted in accordance with 24 V.S.A. § 4384 (c), and its purpose is to explain the proposed City Plan's consistency with State planning goals and to describe the likely effects of any new land designations in the Plan.

Extent to which the proposed City Plan is consistent with the goals established in 24 V.S.A. § 4302

Each chapter of the City Plan begins with topical background text and data and ends with one or two planning goals. Each goal is supported with various objectives, policies, programs and activities that touch upon many aspects of the quality of life in our community.

Since November 2015 the Planning Commission has been developing the goals, objectives, policies, programs and actions in the City Plan, as compiled from various sources of input, including:

- the previous 2012 St. Albans City Municipal Plan,
- priorities adopted by the City Council,
- updates from City programs and initiatives, and
- community input received at public meetings and submitted in writing.

A version of the following table appears in Chapter 1 of the City Plan. It links each of the 24 V.S.A. § 4302 state planning goals with the City's goals, under which are found relevant objectives, policies, programs and actions.

State Planning Goals:	Met by City Planning Goals:	Comments
1. Establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework	1.1, 1.2, 10.1	The City Plan seeks to balance the use of resources with taxpayers' abilities to provide funds, as well as the ability of the City to find external sources of support. The Plan proposes to promote growth and development while maintaining the character, form and quality of life in St. Albans.
2. Encourage citizen participation	1.1	The Plan was discussed in public meetings, and special advertising was used to alert the community to the opportunity.
3. Consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development	7.2, 10.1	The Plan proposes to capitalize upon and continue the City's historically dense and efficient pattern of smart growth development.
4. Encourage and assist municipalities to work creatively together	9.1	Chapter 9 specifically discusses how the can collaboratively engage in regional planning and use its unique setting to benefit the region.
5. Maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside	2.1, 4.1, 8.1	The City of St. Albans embodies this goal, and the Plan proposes to continue the City's historically dense and efficient pattern of smart growth development.
6. Provide a strong and diverse economy	2.2, 4.1	The Plan proposes to maintain and grow the wide range of available options for employment, retail, services and more found within the City's Commercial Axis.
7. Broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities	5.2	The Plan proposes that the City engage as it is able with entities in the region to achieve this goal.
8. Provide for safe, convenient, economic and energy efficient transportation systems	6.2	The City's street and sidewalk network is inherently walkable and efficient, and the Plan proposes to maintain and improve this infrastructure.
9. Identify, protect, and preserve important natural and historic features	5.1, 7.1, 7.2	The Plan identifies the important and unique areas in the City with settings and features to preserve.
10. Maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, forests, and other land resources	5.1, 7.1, 7.2	The Plan identifies the aspects of urban life, especially trees and green areas, that connect one to nature and advocates for their protection and cultivation.
11. Make efficient use of energy, provide for the development of renewable energy resources, and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases	7.1, 7.2	The Plan identifies heating energy sources, vehicle miles traveled, energy burden, and other data and includes various proposals for increasing energy resilience and reducing greenhouse gases.
12. Maintain and enhance recreational opportunities	5.1	The Plan celebrates the City's recreational resources and proposes their preservation and improvement.
13. Encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries	2.2, 4.1	The Plan highlights the Farmers Market, the Aldis Hill forest, and other aspects of urban life that interconnect with this goal.

State Planning Goals:	Met by City Planning Goals:	Comments
14. Provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources	7.2, 8.1	The Plan advocates for the preservation and cultivation of the City's current urban natural resources and settings and proposes to maintain the City's compact, smart growth form of development, which benefits the landscape of the surrounding region.
15. Ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing	3.2	The Plan highlights the role of its neighborhoods and Downtown in providing housing, references the recent Housing Study and includes multiple proposals for ensuring affordable, safe housing for a broad range of residents.
16. Plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services	6.1, 6.2	The Plan contains multiple proposals toward this goal.
17. Ensure the availability of safe and affordable childcare	5.2	The Plan proposes that the City provide reduce barriers and provide the incentives that it can to achieve this goal.
18. Encourage flood resilient communities	7.1, 7.2	The Plan includes multiple proposals toward this goal and references the new Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Effect of proposed Land Designations

24 V.S.A. § 4384 (c) also requires comments on the effects of any new land designations proposed in the Plan. The City Plan proposes exploration of seven alterations to current land designations in the City's Land Development Regulations. For the most part, the proposals are to be reflective of current uses and character and do not suggest significant divergence from current land use districts or current uses.

A. North Main St. Residential/Office District

This proposed change is noted in the Proposed Land Use map and suggests changing the land use district of most of North Main St. to be more reflective of the current residential and office uses in the area. Currently this area is in the Business 2 District, which allows many more uses than what is found on the street at this time. This would also be a good opportunity to directly address prevention of strip development along this street.

- (1) The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.

This proposal is meant to better reflect current uses and thus would not lead to any predictable change from current traffic patterns.

- (2) The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on:
- (A) the municipal tax base; and
 - (B) the need for public facilities.

This proposal is meant to better reflect current uses and thus would not lead to any predictable changes to the current grand list values of the included properties or their need for public services.

- (3) The amount of vacant land which is:
- (A) already subject to the proposed new designation; and
 - (B) actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it does not suggest a new land use type for the City. It merely is meant to better reflect current uses in the area.

- (4) The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of:
- (A) appropriate alternative locations;
 - (B) alternative uses for the area under consideration; and
 - (C) the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it does not suggest a new alternative land use type for the City. It merely is meant to better reflect current uses in the area.

- (5) The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability, and existing development in the area.

This proposal does not suggest a new proposed use, in general, for the City. It suggests that an area of the City within the Business 2 District, yet that does not exhibit the broad range of uses allowed in that district, could be altered in designation to more closely reflect the current uses.

B. New Educational, Recreational, and/or Open Space Districts

This proposed change is noted in the Proposed Land Use map and suggests changing the land use district of the schools, parks, fields, cemeteries and other open spaces in the City that are located in the Low Density Residential District LDRD. Due to their current uses and configurations, they are often legal nonconforming in the LDRD. Furthermore, separate designations for these lots could allow for the future removal of use designations from the LDRD that are not used elsewhere and thus further preserve the residential nature of that district.

- (1) The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.

This proposal is meant to better reflect current uses and thus would not lead to any predictable change from current traffic patterns.

- (2) The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on:
 - (A) the municipal tax base; and
 - (B) the need for public facilities.

This proposal is meant to better reflect current uses and thus would not lead to any predictable changes to the current grand list values of the included properties or their need for public services.

- (3) The amount of vacant land which is:
 - (A) already subject to the proposed new designation; and
 - (B) actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it does not suggest a new land use type for the City. It merely is meant to better reflect current uses in the area.

- (4) The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of:
 - (A) appropriate alternative locations;
 - (B) alternative uses for the area under consideration; and
 - (C) the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it does not suggest a new alternative land use type for the City. It merely is meant to better reflect current uses in the area.

- (5) The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability, and existing development in the area.

This proposal does not suggest a new proposed use, in general, for the City. It suggests that certain existing lots in Low Density Residential District that exhibit uses and configurations not typically found in that district could be altered in designation to more closely reflect the current uses.

C. North Federal St. Mixed Use District

This proposed change is noted in the Proposed Land Use map along the northern portion of Federal St. and suggests changing and unifying the land use district of those parcels. Currently

that section of Federal St. is shared amongst the Business 1, Business 2, and Service-Industrial Districts, leaving all parcels in a difference land use zone than their across-the-street-neighbors. This is an area of the City that will hopefully be improved together as part of the Federal Street Multi-Modal Connector Project, and it would be more prudent for all parcels along this street to be unified within a land use district. This would also be a good opportunity to directly address prevention of strip development along this street.

- (1) The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.

This proposal does not diverge from current mixed uses already found within the Business 1, Business 2, and Service-Industrial Districts and thus would have not predictable change from the traffic patterns of the current land use designations.

- (2) The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on:
 - (A) the municipal tax base; and
 - (B) the need for public facilities.

This proposal does not diverge from current mixed uses already found within the Business 1, Business 2, and Service-Industrial Districts and thus would not lead to any predictable changes to the current grand list values of the included properties or their need for public services.

- (3) The amount of vacant land which is:
 - (A) already subject to the proposed new designation; and
 - (B) actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it does not suggest a new land use type for the City. It merely is meant to better unify the designated uses in the area.

- (4) The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of:
 - (A) appropriate alternative locations;
 - (B) alternative uses for the area under consideration; and
 - (C) the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it does not suggest a new alternative land use type for the City. It merely is meant to better unify the designate uses in the area.

- (5) The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability, and existing development in the area.

This proposal does not suggest a new proposed use, in general, for the City and does not diverge from current mixed uses already found within the Business 1, Business 2, and Service-Industrial Districts.

D. New District that Allows for Multi-Family

This proposed change is noted in the Proposed Land Use map and suggests changing the land use district of 94 and 100 Lower Welden Street, which currently are located in the Low Density Residential District LDRD and yet are legally nonconforming; both of these lots have multiple principal structures and consist of more than 2 dwelling units. They are also larger than typical LDRD lots. They also provide affordable housing. The proposal would be to re-designate the two lots to allow for the current residential densities that they contain.

- (1) The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.

This proposal is meant to better reflect current uses and thus would not lead to any predictable change from current traffic patterns.

- (2) The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on:

- (A) the municipal tax base; and
- (B) the need for public facilities.

This proposal is meant to better reflect current uses and thus would not lead to any predictable changes to the current grand list values of the included properties or their need for public services.

- (3) The amount of vacant land which is:

- (A) already subject to the proposed new designation; and
- (B) actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it does not suggest a new land use type for the City. It merely is meant to better reflect current uses in the area.

- (4) The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of:

- (A) appropriate alternative locations;
- (B) alternative uses for the area under consideration; and
- (C) the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it does not suggest a new alternative land use type for the City. It merely is meant to better reflect current uses in the area.

- (5) The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability, and existing development in the area.

This proposal does not suggest a new proposed use for the City. It merely is meant to better reflect current uses in the area.

E. Transitional land use districts along the boundaries of existing districts that exhibit opposing degrees of density of use.

City Plan policy 8.1(B)6 proposes to explore transitional land use districts along the boundaries of existing districts that exhibit opposing degrees of density of use (high vs. low) and type of use (commercial/industrial vs. residential). Typically, the existing uses and characteristics in these border areas do not reflect either zone, but something more transitional between the two. This is why the lines between districts are blurred in the Proposed Land Use Map. One example of this policy would be the creation of High Density Residential Districts, or similar, in areas where the Business-1 and Low Density Residential District currently border each other.

- (1) The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.

This proposal is meant to better reflect current uses and thus would not lead to any predictable change from current traffic patterns.

- (2) The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on:
 - (A) the municipal tax base; and
 - (B) the need for public facilities.

This proposal is meant to better reflect current uses and thus would not lead to any predictable changes to the current grand list values of the included properties or their need for public services.

- (3) The amount of vacant land which is:
 - (A) already subject to the proposed new designation; and
 - (B) actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it does not suggest a new land use type for the City. It merely is meant to better reflect current uses in the area.

- (4) The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of:
 - (A) appropriate alternative locations;
 - (B) alternative uses for the area under consideration; and

(C) the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it does not suggest a new alternative land use type for the City. It merely is meant to better reflect current uses in the area.

(5) The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability, and existing development in the area.

This proposal does not suggest a new proposed use, in general, for the City. It merely is meant to better reflect current uses in the area.

F. Lake St. Design Review Expansion

This proposed change is noted in the Proposed Design Review District map and suggests extending a design review overlay along Lake St. properties from the current DR2 design review district to the City boundary. The primary purpose of this change would be to preserve a gateway aesthetic along a major through-way into the City, much like the Gateway Design Review Districts on North and South Main St.

(1) The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.

This proposal would establish an overlay review procedure to the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities.

(2) The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on:
(A) the municipal tax base; and
(B) the need for public facilities.

This proposal would establish an overlay review procedure to the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities. It would not lead to any predictable changes to the need for public services. As for the municipal tax base, the design review process may ensure a higher quality of exterior work on properties, which could have a positive neighborhood effect on grand list values. However, such an effect would likely be negligible compared to the other structural factors considered in the assessment process.

(3) The amount of vacant land which is:
(A) already subject to the proposed new designation; and
(B) actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it would establish an overlay review procedure to the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities. Furthermore, this change would be based solely on the context of the area being designated.

- (4) The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of:
 - (A) appropriate alternative locations;
 - (B) alternative uses for the area under consideration; and
 - (C) the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it would establish an overlay review procedure to the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities. Furthermore, this change would be based solely on the context of the area being designated.

- (5) The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability, and existing development in the area.

The area proposed for designation is specific to the properties along the street and state route that provide an entrance to the City for large amounts of incoming traffic.

G. Fairfield St. Design Review Expansion

This proposed change is noted in the Proposed Design Review District map and suggests extending a design review overlay along Fairfield St. properties from the current DR1 design review district to the City boundary. The primary purpose of this change would be to preserve a gateway aesthetic along a major through-way into the City, much like the Gateway Design Review Districts on North and South Main St.

- (1) The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.

This proposal would establish an overlay review procedure to the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities.

- (2) The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on:
 - (A) the municipal tax base; and
 - (B) the need for public facilities.

This proposal would establish an overlay review procedure to the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities. It would not lead to any predictable changes to the need for public services. As for the municipal tax base, the design review process may ensure a higher quality of exterior work on properties, which could have a positive neighborhood effect on grand list values.

However, such an effect would likely be negligible compared to the other structural factors considered in the assessment process.

- (3) The amount of vacant land which is:
- (A) already subject to the proposed new designation; and
 - (B) actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it would establish an overlay review procedure to the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities. Furthermore, this change would be based solely on the context of the area being designated.

- (4) The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of:
- (A) appropriate alternative locations;
 - (B) alternative uses for the area under consideration; and
 - (C) the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it would establish an overlay review procedure to the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities. Furthermore, this change would be based solely on the context of the area being designated.

- (5) The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability, and existing development in the area.

The area proposed for designation is specific to the properties along the street and state route that provide an entrance to the City for large amounts of incoming traffic.

H. Federal St. Design Review Alteration

This proposed change is noted in the Proposed Design Review District map and suggests one of two options:

- removing properties on Federal St. and Lower Newton St. from the DR3 design review district or
- adding design review overlay to properties on the western side of Federal St.

Currently there are properties on Lower Newton St. and Federal St. that are included in the DR3 design review district. However, these properties are not part of the North Main St. “gateway.” Furthermore, many of the properties in this area are located across Federal St. from properties that are not required to go through design review. Therefore, there is a regulatory procedural disparity between either side of the street. In general, it is unclear what design review would accomplish in this area unless the properties on the western side of Federal St. were brought into the design review overlay. So the Plan is suggesting that change either be made or that the other properties on Federal St. and Lower Newton St. be removed from the DR3 design review district.

- (1) The probable impact on the surrounding area, including the effect of any resulting increase in traffic, and the probable impact on the overall pattern of land use.

This proposal would revise design review procedures for the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities.

- (2) The long-term cost or benefit to the municipality, based upon consideration of the probable impact on:
 - (A) the municipal tax base; and
 - (B) the need for public facilities.

This proposal would revise design review procedures for the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities. The revision would not lead to any predictable changes to the need for public services. As for the municipal tax base, the design review process may ensure a higher quality of exterior work on properties, which could have a positive neighborhood effect on grand list values. However, such an effect would likely be negligible compared to the other structural factors considered in the assessment process.

- (3) The amount of vacant land which is:
 - (A) already subject to the proposed new designation; and
 - (B) actually available for that purpose, and the need for additional land for that purpose.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it would revise design review procedures for the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities. Furthermore, this change would be based solely on the context of the area being designated.

- (4) The suitability of the area in question for the proposed purpose, after consideration of:
 - (A) appropriate alternative locations;
 - (B) alternative uses for the area under consideration; and
 - (C) the probable impact of the proposed change on other areas similarly designated.

This analysis does not pertain to this proposal, since it would revise design review procedures for the properties in the area and would not revise allowed uses or densities. Furthermore, this change would be based solely on the context of the area being designated.

- (5) The appropriateness of the size and boundaries of the area proposed for change, with respect to the area required for the proposed use, land capability, and existing development in the area.

The area proposed for changes in designation is specific to the properties being referenced and their particular context. The status of other properties in the City is not relevant.

For more Information, please contact:

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