

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE & VISION

our plan for a healthy future

Why should we plan for a healthy future? Health and well-being is the common theme that emerged as we developed and updated this plan. The health of our economy, environment, neighborhoods, and city government have direct and indirect effects on the physical and mental health of city residents. And conversely, the health of residents affects many other aspects of our city. Promoting physical, mental and social health in Barre City is an investment in our future economic prosperity and revitalization efforts.

Barre City faces many challenges in planning for the future. While these may be daunting, they are not insurmountable given the assets we have to draw upon. The City has land, buildings, infrastructure, transportation systems, and an available workforce. Our community has a tradition of entrepreneurship and a strong manufacturing heritage. The Main Street reconstruction project has already built on those assets, and is injecting a positive new energy into our city, along with the construction of City Place and the redevelopment of Enterprise Aly.

To overcome the challenges facing Barre, we need to build and strengthen the connections between our many community assets. In isolation, each element of our community may be wonderful, but our community will only be more than the sum of its parts if we make it possible for our places and amenities to strengthen one another.

In practice, that means making more “places” (spaces designed for people to be in and enjoy), and reducing the number and impact of “non-places” (spaces designed for people to pass through as a means to and end). It means drawing connections between nearby assets, by making them visible to one another and making the space between them inviting to exploration. It means prioritizing connections that encourage physical, mental, and social health.

If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you get people and places.

~Fred Kent

Barre City’s success depends on the support and participation of an engaged citizenry. At the core, these efforts are about investing in all of us so we can achieve our goals and improve our lives. For that reason, the over-arching purpose of this plan is to improve the health and well-being of those who live and work in Barre City.

Where are we headed? Our plan for a healthy future recognizes that Barre City needs:

- To attract and retain businesses that pay a living wage, provide health insurance benefits, and match existing levels of workforce education or provide job training.
- To attract and retain residents, particularly households with moderate to higher incomes.
- A transportation system that enables all residents to conveniently and safely travel around the community, accessing homes, jobs, schools, parks, shopping and services.
- A system of public utilities that is reliable and well maintained, that has affordable rates, and that is capable of supporting growth.
- Access to reliable, affordable and clean sources of energy.

- A quality school system that prepares students for higher education, employment and life-long learning.
- To provide the community services and amenities that foster an attractive quality of life without placing an excessive burden on taxpayers.
- Air that is safe to breathe, water that is safe to drink, land that is safe to use, and access to green spaces, parks and undeveloped areas where residents can recreate and enjoy nature.

What is the role of this city and this plan? City policies and actions can play a significant role in creating a healthy community that provides a high quality of life for all residents. Protecting public health, safety and welfare is at the core of many city policies and actions, yet previous plans did not directly address the topic.

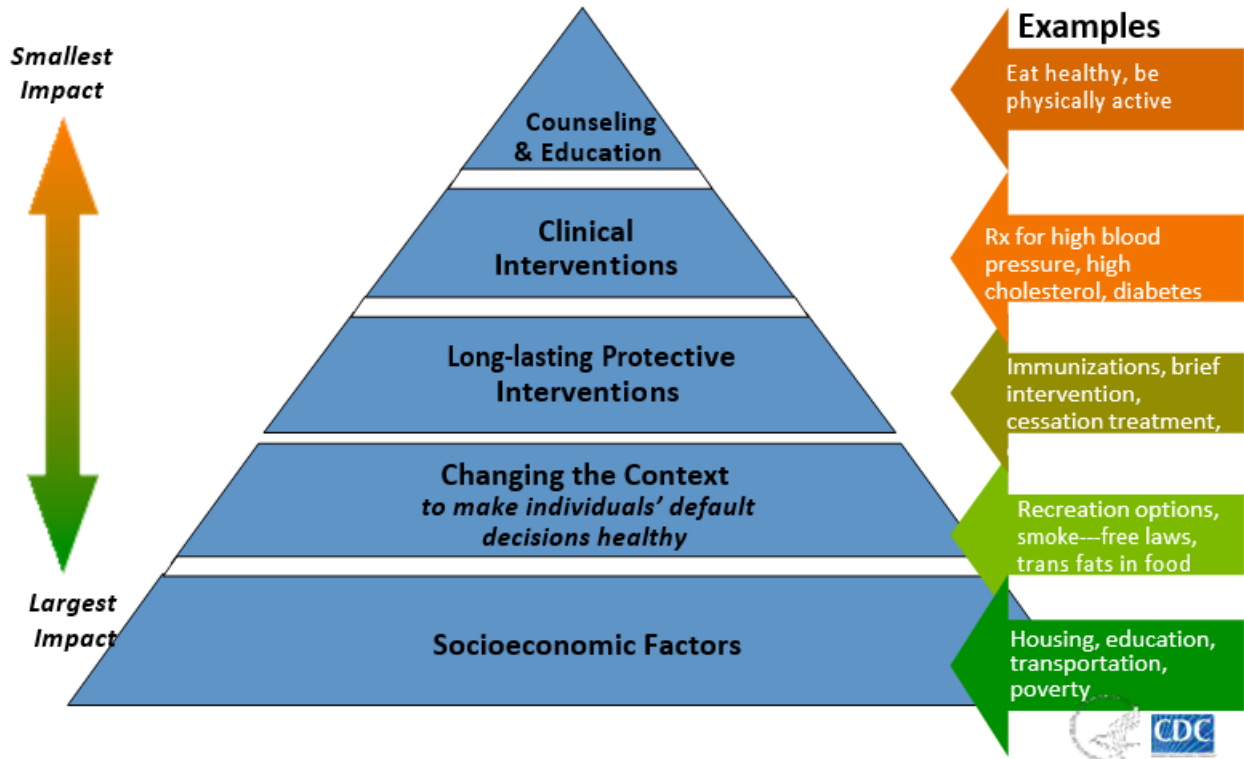
In this plan, we will continue to highlight connections between city policies and actions, and the health and well-being of residents. We have presented measurable benchmarks that can be used to evaluate how we are progressing towards our vision of a healthy future for Barre City.

Why focus on health? Health is an ongoing concern at the individual, municipal and state level. The City has recognized this focus by adding programs in the Recreation Department such as Stick and Puck, and Open Gym. Renovations to the City's pool will have great benefits for allowing a more diverse group of people, especially with a zero-entry area that will benefit seniors and the physically challenged. There is the annual Granite City 5K run, updates to the smoking policy that show the added focus. Our population includes a much higher proportion of individuals and families living below the poverty line. Barre City also has many other residents who face health disparities, including those who are elderly, disabled, and recent immigrants. Barre has seen an increase in individuals experiencing addiction, homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system. All of these groups have a greater need for healthcare and related services. The challenges we face make our city an excellent barometer of the effectiveness of initiatives and programs aimed at improving health outcomes.

Vermont ranks as one of the healthiest states in the nation, but the average Barre City resident fares less well on common measures of health than the average Vermont resident. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Health Impact Pyramid (shown on the next page) clearly shows that "Socioeconomic Factors" and "Changing the Context" have the largest impact on population health. It is these very factors that are addressed in this plan. By working to create a community with safe and affordable housing, educational opportunities and excellence, pedestrian-friendly streets, and ample recreation opportunities, for example, we can have a profound impact on the health of city residents.

What are best ways to influence the 90% non-clinical determinants of health?

CDC Health Impact Pyramid



FRAMEWORK & PROCESS

the framework for our plan

This plan includes three elements:

- **Introduction** that: presents our vision of a healthy future for Barre City; establishes the framework within which the plan was developed, and describes our planning process; and provides a snapshot of the city.
- **Strategic Plan** that: summarizes the key points about our present condition; identifies the issues and challenges we face, as well as our strengths and opportunities; establishes goals and strategies; identifies specific actions to implement the goals and strategies; and sets benchmarks by which we can measure our progress towards achieving our vision of a healthy future for Barre City.
- **Community Profile**, which serves as the foundation for the plan and which: inventories and analyzes current conditions in Barre City; and projects future trends and needs. A variety of plans, studies, maps and data are interspersed throughout the community profile.

This plan is intended to be a guide for the achievement of short-term and long-term community goals through public investments, regulations and other implementation programs. Through this plan, Barre City residents and government seek to:

- Define our vision for the city's future.
- State our shared community values.
- Balance competing interests and demands.
- Address both current and long-term needs.
- Promote appropriate revitalization, growth and development.
- Reflect regional conditions and consider regional impacts.
- Be consistent with statewide goals and policies.
- Offer specific guidance while retaining enough flexibility to be useful when faced with unforeseen circumstances.

This plan also serves as a thorough research document of the community's present condition — our issues, challenges, strengths and opportunities. While updating this plan, we inventoried existing resources and conditions, and assessed likely future trends and needs in the city, region and state. Factors we considered included the:

- Capability of land to support revitalization, growth and development in the city.
- Availability of community facilities and services necessary to support revitalization, growth and development in the city.
- Need to improve undesirable conditions, revitalize neighborhoods, and improve our built environment.
- Interrelationship and compatibility of envisioned changes with existing conditions and development patterns.
- Potential effects of envisioned changes on other policies of the city and region.

This plan follows the framework for municipal plans established in state law (24 V.S.A. Chapter 117). The strategic plan and community profile both incorporate the required elements (land use, energy, transportation, utilities and facilities, housing, economic development, rare natural and historic resources, educational facilities, and flood resiliency). Our strategic plan includes:

- Statement of objectives and policies.
- Recommended program for the implementation the stated objectives and policies.

This introduction addresses the compatibility of our plan with the plans of neighboring communities and the region, and describes our planning process. The plan is also consistent with Vermont's 14 planning goals.

our planning process

The citizens and government of Barre City have a long history of planning for the future of our city. For five decades, we have had an adopted municipal plan, which has been regularly revised and updated.

During the most recent planning process, the Planning Commission tabled at the weekly Farmer's Market in Currier Park, hosted a questionnaire on the City website, and posted regular updates on the City website, along with sharing information through traditional means and social media. The Planning Commission also reached out to existing committees, organizations, city staff and officials, and other stakeholders for direct input while updating this plan.

The Planning Commission is responsible for preparing the plan, distributing the plan, holding public hearings on the plan, and submitting it to the City Council for consideration. The City Council is required to hold at least two additional hearings before adoption.

Bringing plans to reality can be achieved by passing and enforcing ordinances (regulatory) and by providing services and making public improvements (non-regulatory). Zoning and subdivision regulations are two important mechanisms for implementing the vision for revitalization, growth and development set forth in the city plan. Barre City has had a zoning law in place for more than 60 years. Our land use regulations were rewritten in 2019 that combined the zoning and subdivision ordinances into a single Unified Development Ordinance.

Barre City has also has a long history of non-regulatory actions that support the vision for revitalization, growth and development set forth in the city plan. Most recently, the city has:

- Installed energy-efficient boilers in City Hall.
- Undertook various brownfield assessments and clean-up of polluted sites, such as Enterprise Aly and the Keith Avenue site that resulted in redeveloped parking lots.
- Received grant funds that helped the Harrington Avenue neighborhood with flood resiliency by removing a total of 5 houses and expanded the floodplain in that area.
- Removed 2 at-risk homes on Hilltop Avenue that were sliding due to the increased rains received over the years.

This plan recommends additional regulatory and non-regulatory actions to continue the substantial progress we have made in recent years towards revitalizing our city (see Section 2).

our plan in a regional context

While the primary purpose of this plan is to guide future revitalization, growth and development of Barre City, we recognize that our community is part of a larger region. Our decisions can affect our neighbors, and likewise their decisions can affect Barre City.

Any application for development that is required to obtain an Act 250 permit from the Natural Resources Board must demonstrate conformance with the City's Plan, which allows us to achieve our goals of this Plan. While only a few Act 250 permits are issued or amended each year within our borders, the Barre City Council and Barre City Planning Commission are statutory parties and may participate in the permit process to ensure larger developments complement our public utilities, economy, historic buildings, neighborhoods, transportation and community needs and conforms with the municipal plan's goals and policies.

Development of public utility facilities within the City of Barre are required to obtain a Certificate of Public Good from the Public Utility Commission, otherwise referred to as the Section 248 process. Unlike Act 250, these types of development are not subject to the local permit approval process. The Barre City municipal plan is given "due consideration" in this permitting process and like Act 250 the City Council and Planning Commission are granted interested party status in the permit proceedings. The City of Barre may, however, choose to seek a Determination of Energy Compliance for the Barre City Municipal Plan from the regional planning commission, providing the City with a stronger voice ("Substantial Deference") in state permitting process which is tasked with determining where energy projects should and should not be sited.

Notwithstanding other provisions of this plan, developments in neighboring municipalities subject to Act 250 review will not be found consistent with this plan to the extent that such developments would have an undue adverse impact upon municipal utilities, facilities, or services in the City of Barre or the quality of life of principally residential streets within the city, including but not limited to impacts from low density and trip-generating residential and non-residential streets instead of State routes. The City may request that such developments take appropriate measures to ensure that any increased volume of vehicular traffic on City streets does not adversely impact street maintenance, air quality, levels of noise, speeding, or property values.

As critical links to the Interstate Highway System, it is further in the interest of the City of Barre's economic well-being to maintain State Routes 62 and 63 as free-flowing limited access highways between the City limits and US Interstate Highway 89 by discouraging the addition of new intersections and encouraging necessary improvements to maintain the functionality of existing intersections. Developments in neighboring municipalities will not be found to be consistent with this plan to the extent that such developments would have an undue adverse impact on the functionality of Routes 62 and 63. The City may request that such development stake appropriate measures to ensure a high level of service to and from the City.

As part of updating this plan, the Barre City Planning Commission considered the Berlin Town Plan, the Barre Town Plan and the Central Vermont Regional Plan. No inconsistencies among these plans and our plan for Barre City appear to exist.

Berlin Town Plan. Berlin is west of Barre City. Route 302 and Route 62 connect the two municipalities, and the Stevens Branch of the Winooski River flows from Barre City into Berlin. The forested hillside south of Route 62 continues across the city line into Berlin.

The Berlin Town Plan was most recently revised and readopted in 2018. Both plans recognize the forested hillside south of Route 62 as a sensitive natural resource through planning areas the recommend low-density residential, conservation or recreation uses. Both plans share a similar concern about poorly-managed highway commercial businesses along the Route 302 corridor, and recommend actions to revise regulations to facilitate appropriately-scaled and -designed development. Both plans also speak to the critical need to maintain and restore the natural floodplain along the Stevens Branch near the municipal boundary. Berlin similarly looks to aggressively plan for economic growth, and seeks to be more pedestrian friendly, with walkable neighborhoods that bring together commerce and community.

Barre Town Plan. Barre Town surrounds most of the city, reflecting the fact the city was separated out from the town in 1895. Route 302 and Route 14 serve as major transportation routes between our two communities. In addition, numerous side streets and neighborhoods extend over municipal lines.

Our two communities have a long history of sharing resources including wastewater, water, stormwater utilities and school operations. Many residents have lived in both communities and many facilities, services and amenities located in Barre City are used by both town and city residents.

Most of the land in Barre Town that adjoins the city is zoned residential, with the transportation corridors of retail, commercial or industrial. Barre Town recently updated and adopted their Municipal Plan on June 23, 2020, and it recommends that most of the land along the city line continue in its present use as low density residential neighborhoods. Along the highway corridors this plan recommends a reduction in the density and intensity of use closer to the city line.

Central Vermont Regional Plan. Barre City is an active member of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, which includes 23 municipalities in Washington and Orange counties. CVRPC staff reviewed this plan before it was adopted and found it to be compatible with the regional plan and state planning requirements. A central theme of the 2016 Regional Plan is the “preservation and enhancement of the quality of life for all Central Vermont residents,” which aligns with our focus on a “healthy future for Barre City.”

OVERVIEW OF BARRE CITY

Barre City, formed and separated out from Barre Town in 1895, is a community of four square miles and 8,500 residents located in Central Vermont. Our city developed and became known as the “Granite Center of the World” in the late-19th century when the arrival of the railroad in 1875 spurred the rapid growth of the granite industry. Between 1880 and 1890, Barre’s population more than tripled as stoneworkers from around the world migrated here with their families. These skilled craftsmen extracted, cut, shaped, polished and sculpted our “Barre gray” granite into building materials, monuments and memorials that were exported around the country and world. The booming granite industry fueled the development of Barre City. As is the case with many American cities that relied on a single industry, our once vibrant community faced a challenging period of economic decline and stagnation when the granite industry began to contract in the mid-20th century.

Barre City is located at the junction of two valleys, carrying the Stevens and Jail Branches of the Winooski River. The Stevens Branch runs through our downtown, with the rail line and Route 302 sharing the relatively narrow valley. The valley floor is densely developed with residential neighborhoods extending up into the flat-topped, gently rolling hills surrounding downtown Barre City. To the north and west, where the terrain is steeper, the hillsides remain largely undeveloped and forested. The southwestern edge of the city has a more rural character, with farmland extending over the city line from a portion of Barre Town that remains largely agricultural.

Barre City is a 10-minute drive from both Exits 6 and 7 on Interstate 89, and is 15 minutes from Montpelier. U.S. Route 302, a major east-west route through New England brings travelers through downtown Barre City where the highway serves as our main street. These two access points in and out of the City allow for great flow of travelers to and from Barre. Vermont Rail runs through Barre City to Montpelier where it connects to New England Central Railroad. Many of our industrial properties abut the rail line and have the potential for rail service. The regional Knapp Airport is located four miles outside the city. There is public transit service linking Barre City to neighboring communities. The city’s wastewater treatment plant has 900,000 gallons per day of uncommitted capacity, and our water treatment facility has nearly 2 million gallons per day of excess capacity.

Barre City continues its revitalization efforts for future growth and development, and we are actively working to encourage private investment in our city. We completed a \$17.5 million reconstruction of North Main Street in 2011, that replaced the public infrastructure below and above ground in our downtown business district. This project was a complete face-lift for downtown Barre City and is the cornerstone of our revitalization plans. And it is working – only a few months after work was completed on North Main Street, construction of City Place which houses VTrans with a 15-year lease agreement, and rehabilitation of the Blanchard Block, that tenants include retail, medical and dental office, lawyers and accountants. Our successful pursuit of a TIF (tax increment financing) district in 2012 has made it possible for the city to fund other critical improvements downtown and keep our revitalization efforts moving forward.