



MEMORANDUM

To: Bolton Planning Commission
From: Lee Krohn, AICP, Senior Planner
Date: January 24, 2017
Re: Draft 2017 Bolton Town Plan

Per CCRPC's *Guidelines and Standards for Confirmation of Municipal Planning Processes and Approval of Municipal Plans*, CCRPC Staff and Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) have conducted an initial review of the Draft 2017 Bolton Town Plan in advance of your February, 2017 Planning Commission public hearing. The PAC will review this Plan again in a more final form, and make a recommendation to the full CCRPC Board at that time. The initial Staff and PAC review finds the Draft 2017 Town Plan to be generally consistent with the State planning goals, will include all required elements once in complete form, and is generally compatible with the *2013 Chittenden County ECOS Plan* and the plans of adjoining municipalities.

First let us say it is very clear that an enormous amount of research and work effort was put into this Plan. It is a comprehensive, encyclopedic compendium of information about the Town of Bolton! The PAC expressed numerous accolades about the draft Plan and very much liked the graphical layout of the plan; separating the more in depth data sections from the main text; and the conceptual approach of 'people, places, and prosperity' rather than numerous chapters based on the required elements. They felt that this was an interesting and readable plan that could be an example for other communities.

Further, we offer the following suggestions and recommendations for your consideration:

1. At the outset, the Plan begins to create a very interesting framework regarding the qualities that the community would like to "*maintain, evolve, or transform*". Consider whether this approach can be carried throughout the text, or at least brought back into focus at the end. Two possibilities for doing so are to reframe goals/objectives/policies within each section into actions that are placed into each of those categories; and/or to reframe the actions listed in the spreadsheet at the end into these categories.
2. A number of topics are described multiple times in multiple sections (such as energy use, housing, transportation, employment, and others). Given the structure of the Plan, this may work for you; but it may be worth considering whether each topic can be reorganized so it's covered comprehensively in one place. Similarly, some goals/objectives/actions are also stated several times in several different places. Again, this may work for you, or be deemed necessary; it's just something to consider.
3. Goals/objectives/actions don't always appear to follow logically from preceding text. For example, the housing section transitions rapidly from affordability to transportation costs; then a goal related to safety and affordability appears, followed by an action to quantify

abandoned buildings. In cases like this, it's not clear how the action relates to or helps to solve the issues described in that section.

Another example: the section on utilities appears to encourage these (water and wastewater in particular), but the first action is not to take over private utilities. This might work better if the issues are clarified, and the actions reversed in order, with a bit more explanation. I presume the intent is that shared utilities can help promote more effective and efficient use of Bolton's limited developable lands, yet the Town does not wish to take these over as public utilities in order to help keep taxes down, and allow those served by these utilities to pay the costs associated with them. If that is the case, it may be helpful to explain.

Similarly, in the telecommunications section – there appear to be goals both to restrict and to expand broadband or telecom services. Some further explanation might be helpful; and some clarity as to what is sought be achieved or avoided. For example, to discourage wireless services in broadbrush fashion could restrict opportunities that might otherwise be helpful. Wireless does not always have to mean tall towers upon the landscape; it could mean small, low power devices on existing utility poles that are more cost effective than the wired systems presently encouraged in the plan – and thus perhaps more likely to be installed in more remote areas not presently served well. So as in other areas described here, it may be helpful to goals to be achieved/problems to be avoided, rather than just having statements either promoting or discouraging certain types of development.

Energy is another section where concepts are not always clear. Biomass harvesting is strongly encouraged, in contrast to clearings for solar or wind power; but how does this approach relate to other strongly stated goals to protect steep slopes, contiguous forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and water quality? Similarly, can the encouragement for renewable energy (via density bonuses, as suggested) actually be achieved if the other stated requirements for setbacks and screening are applied?

Finances: discussion of a high tax rate suggests this is a problem, but then discussion that follows states that taxes are lower due to lower home values. If important to discuss, it might be more useful to frame this in context of actual tax burden related to household income. The tax rate by itself is more of a ratio than an actual measurement of impact. Further, if another objective is to support creation/growth of home businesses, then the action of creating an inventory is just a start...but what other actions might follow that could help to implement the objective?

Resilience: this section might benefit from some reorganization, so that it flows from big picture to specifics; and the information on flooding can be consolidated.

Historic Preservation: just a word of caution. Suggesting or requiring that the Secretary of the Interior's standards be applied to historic structures is certainly a worthy goal to help maintain historic integrity and authenticity. Yet, these are not always applicable to every particular situation, and are not always affordable to achieve. If these appear to be or end up as absolute requirements, the risk is that someone might do nothing, rather than perform maintenance/repair/upkeep that while not perfect, might be better than not doing it at all.

4. If the Town may wish to apply for Village Center designation for the West Bolton hamlet, then be sure to include sufficient description of how the proposed Village Center would support the plan's land use and other goals, and show the intended area and boundary on one of the maps. Please note also that while the suggestions in the Plan for this hamlet area make very good sense, this currently falls within the Rural Planning Area in the *ECOS Plan*, which may be a minor inconsistency. As the *ECOS Plan* is going to be amended by June 2018, we could consider amending the Planning Area map to be consistent with the West Bolton hamlet. Given the limited land area involved, and all of the other constraints to land development here and throughout the Town, increasing the potential density of development in this relatively small area is unlikely to lead to the sprawl-type development otherwise sought to be discouraged. CCRPC Staff will discuss this with the Long Range Planning Committee (the Committee responsible for updating the *ECOS Plan*) on February 9th to get their initial reaction.
5. Be careful with the use of adjectives or phrases that we may think we know what we mean, but which others can easily interpret in different ways. For example: "responsibly sited renewable energy", "healthy road budget", "sustainable tax rate", "responsible forest management". If we do use these, it might be helpful to define the goals or qualities we seek to achieve by these phrases, so that our meanings are clear. For example, a healthy road budget might be one that is sufficient to maintain equipment and public roads in good repair, replace or upgrade equipment and infrastructure on a planned cycle to minimize unnecessary downtime and repairs, and plan for major expenses through capital improvement planning and budgeting to avoid unexpected tax hikes.

Next Steps: CCRPC approval of municipal plans and confirmation of planning processes are actions by the full CCRPC Board, upon recommendation from the Planning Advisory Committee. Once in complete form, the plan may be submitted for formal review by the PAC, which will then provide a recommendation to the full CCRPC Board. For your information, the PAC will meet next on Wednesday, March 8. Staff planner Emily Nosse-Leirer, who has been working with you on this project, will certainly help to coordinate this process.

If you have any questions, or would like to discuss further any of these recommendations, please feel free to contact me at lkrohn@ccrpcvt.org, or my direct line, 802.861.0118.

Thank you.