



# TOWN OF SUNDERLAND, VT MUNICIPAL PLAN



ADOPTED BY THE SELECTBOARD  
[DATE]  
140 Mountain View Road, Sunderland, VT



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*A view from Sunderland Hill Rd.*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

## Introduction

The purpose of the Sunderland Town Plan is to provide a comprehensive framework to guide actions, programs, policies, and implementation measures. The plan is both a blueprint for the future and a dynamic document over time reflecting change and new conditions. The plan has been created in accordance

with Title 24 of the Vermont State Statutes.

Each section includes key descriptive information about the topic, planning considerations about the topic, as well as action items to implement identified planning considerations. Descriptive information should be used to



understand Sunderland. Planning considerations should be used to understand what issues with which the town must grapple. Action items should be used to implement the plan in the coming years and to set the policies to which the town is to be held accountable. A table of these action items may be found in Annex A.

## Location

Sunderland is located in the northern part of Bennington County in southwestern Vermont, an area historically called the “Northshire”. It is bordered by and closely linked to Manchester to the north and Arlington to the west. It has a seasonal road connection to Stratton to the east but no road connection to Glastenbury to the south. Like most towns in the region, Sunderland is shaped approximately as a square, 6 miles on a side. More than 80% of the town (21,884 acres) is owned by the federal government as part of the Green Mountain National Forest.

The balance of the town is situated in its north-west corner. It is bisected by the Batten Kill, historic Route 7A, and the Vermont Railroad tracks which follow along each side of the river. Route 7, a limited access federal aid highway

creates a loose boundary along the National Forest. This corner section of the town consumes all the valley and lowlands, between the Green Mountains and Mount Equinox and Red Mountain of the Taconic Mountains. Sunderland's situation is common in Vermont. The town benefits from extensive wilderness resources, however, its geography leaves an area with an extremely limited potential for future growth and development.

## History

The earliest known inhabitants in the area were Mahican Native Americans, who were part of an Algonquian-speaking culture of tribes. These communities lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle, meaning these early inhabitants resided in agricultural villages along the Batten Kill during the summer months and lived in forested areas during the winter months. Conflicts including the 17<sup>th</sup> century Beaver Wars drove the Mahican from the area and marked the beginning of European settlement. This colonial period was framed by a conflict between competing claims of New York and New Hampshire over ownership of what became Vermont. Sunderland was



chartered on July 29, 1761, and subsequently settled in 1766. A series of "proprietors' meetings" were held at various homes whereby the town was first organized and lots of certain sized parcels were distributed. Gen. Gideon Brownson became Sunderland's first Town Clerk, who would become the town's most prominent founding father.

Other prominent settlers included Ira and Ethan Allen. The exploits of Ethan Allen before and during the Revolution as a "Green Mountain Boy" leader and war

hero made him a colorful legend in American history, however the Allens were primarily land speculators, and were part-time residents of Sunderland at best. Their homestead was situated near the Batten Kill just north of today's intersection of historic Route 7a with the Hill Farm and Bentley Hill Roads, and the cemetery bearing Ira Allen's name contains the graves of Sunderland's early settlers. Another important person in Sunderland's colonial era history was Lucy Terry Prince. Lucy was the nation's



*The Ira Allen House*

*Photo Credit: Southwest Vermont Chamber of Commerce*



first black poet, the first woman to argue before Vermont’s Supreme Court, and the area’s first African-American landowner.

In the centuries since, Sunderland has remained a quiet community where farmers grew crops in the valleys, herded animals in the foothills, and harvested timber in the uplands. While never to the extent of Manchester and Arlington, there were some industrial operations which took advantage of waterpower provided by the Roaring Branch of the Batten Kill, including a chisel factory in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century which would give rise to the neighborhood of Chiselville. A more recent point of pride in Sunderland is the Randall Lineback cow, a rare heritage

breed historically exclusive to Sunderland which has a uniquely patterned coat and which is well adapted to small, forage-based farms as existed throughout the town’s history.

### Demographics

The table below provides the total population by town for Sunderland its neighbors from 1970 to 2020. Sunderland’s population grew significantly from 1970 to 1990, declined in 2000, and then increased substantially through 2020. In Bennington County, substantial population growth from 2010 to 2020 was confined to Northshire towns including Sunderland and its neighbors.

Population trends in Sunderland Area.						
Town	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Sunderland	601	768	872	850	956	1056
Arlington	1934	2184	2299	2397	2317	2457
Glastenbury	-	3	7	16	8	9
Manchester	2919	3261	3485	3560	3527	4484
Sandgate	127	234	278	353	405	387
Shaftsbury	2411	3001	3368	3767	3590	3598
Stratton	104	122	121	136	216	440
Winhall	281	327	482	702	769	1182
Bennington County	29282	33345	35845	36994	37125	37347
Vermont	444732	511456	562758	608827	625741	643077

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce 2021.



# Objectives of the Plan

## *Statement of Objectives, Policies, Programs*

1. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall manage pollution and flood hazard risks, including damage to natural resources and preservation of water resources, and despoilment of working lands.
2. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall maintain the rural and agricultural character of the town while providing for housing growth in accordance with regional targets.
3. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall provide areas for commercial and light industrial activity in designated areas, providing employment for residents and augmenting the tax base, including earth and timber resources.
4. Due to Sunderland's limited government capacity, Sunderland's Select Board shall not pursue creation of new public services and amenities specific to Sunderland, and shall instead contribute to regional amenities and services provided in adjacent towns where government capacity is greater.
5. The Select Board shall provide for an efficiently managed town with reasonable taxes.
6. The Select Board shall encourage recreational use of recreational resources including Green Mountain National Forest and the Batten Kill.
7. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall use land use planning to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and imported energy sources, reduce overall energy consumption through conservation and efficiency, and facilitate development of renewable energy resources locally.



# Land Use Plan and Map

## Future Land Use & Center Designation

Current and future land uses in Sunderland break down into four broad categories.

These are:

1. Village Center
2. Conservation areas and working lands
3. Infill and other rural areas
4. Enterprise and site-specific uses

lacked space for civic assets, in recent years Vermont has placed emphasis on encouraging development in compact areas surrounding civic and commercial assets. In 2024 the town was granted a village center designation for the area centered on the intersection of Vermont Route 7A and Hill Farm Road, based on a cluster of civic and hospitality buildings associated with the Allen family homestead.



*Sunderland Village Center District  
Inset of Map 1. See page 87 for full map*

In 2025-2026, in accordance with mapping guidance and new village center designation criteria stemming from Act 181, the village center boundaries were expanded to include commercial areas to the east of the existing center. This area includes commercial and office properties, as well as a handful of intermixed residences. A major justification for this expansion was to include the entrance to the Mount Equinox-Skyline drive, the most prominent tourist-serving business in Sunderland.

### Village Center

While Sunderland long had a “village center” located in the topographically-constrained area surrounding Borough Road which

Further expansion in the vicinity of the village center is limited by the floodplain of the Batten Kill, wetlands, and permanently conserved parcels (particularly to the east of the center), as well as the town boundary



*Randall Lineback Cattle*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

immediately to the north of the Village Center area. The historic center on Borough Road is reflected as a “hamlet” on the future land use map to recognize its historic importance but lack of future growth potential.

The town also includes one Designated Village Area centered in the neighborhood known as Chiselville. Chiselville lies immediately to the west of Sunderland’s historic Chiselville Covered Bridge, which is discussed in more detail in the Natural and

Historic Resources section of this plan. The neighborhood is intimately connected to the East Arlington Village Center, just to the west. Properties there are served by the Arlington Water Department, and this water supply access has allowed the neighborhood to be densely settled relative to other parts of the town. Future development is constrained by lack of public wastewater access, as well as the river corridor associated with the Roaring Branch tributary of the Batten Kill. There remains a



degree of development potential to the south and east of Chiselville, where an area of excellent wastewater disposal soils lies between the Roaring Branch and US Route 7.

## Conservation Areas and Working Lands Planning

Conservation areas are categorized as Rural Conservation on the future land use map (Map M1). These areas primarily consist of existing conserved lands including but not

limited to Green Mountain National Forest, wetlands over 5 acres, and privately owned lands accessed from Kelly Stand Road surrounded by conserved lands.

Ducks Unlimited manages a receiving area in Sunderland along the Batten Kill river as part of their In-Leiu of Fee program for Wetland restoration. Under this program developers and landowners within the Hudson River bound watersheds of VT have an opportunity to pay for work that will restore habitat in this area in exchange for



*Batten Kill access near the Village Center District*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*



the right to build on existing mapped wetlands. This program helps developers and landowners meet wetland mitigation requirements under federal and state law while protecting aquatic resources locally. Ducks Unlimited reports 140 acres in their ILF program plan for Sunderland, with mitigation credits having been sold to VTrans and a VELCO powerline projects.

Working lands are categorized as Rural Ag and Forestry on the future land use map (Map M1). These lands primarily consist of existing lands in Vermont's Use Value Appraisal (Current Use) program, whose eligibility criteria indicate a parcel is large enough for marketable agriculture or forestry operations. This map category also includes smaller parcels whose primary existing activity is farm or forestry operations.

Agricultural resources are central to Sunderland's identity and economy. Past community survey results demonstrate strong public support for the protection of agricultural soils and open farmland. The Town has an interest in maintaining farmland and promoting conservation easements.

Conservation easements remain a key tool for agricultural resource protection. Easements stay with the land and continue through ownership transfers, and typically

limit subdivision and development while allowing ongoing agricultural, forestry, recreation, and open space uses and keeping the land as part of the tax roles.

The Vermont Land Trust lists 180 Acres of land in the Town of Sunderland as under a Conservation Easement, with 30 acres owned directly by the Land Trust and the additional acreage spread across 28 plots currently serving both farming and residential uses. This land is chiefly located along the Batten Kill and includes large agricultural lots on Dunham Road and Ondawa Road.

Protection of generally accepted agricultural activities is mandated by Act 61, Vermont's Right To Farm law, but in order to allow for a resilient agricultural sector including the activities of agrotourism, local regulations should allow for an increased diversification of agricultural activities. These activities typically relate to accessory farm-based enterprises including value-added production, educational programming, tours, and retail. Special events (e.g., festivals, weddings, concerts) may provide economic opportunities but also pose potential conflicts related to noise, traffic, and rural character. Town regulations should clearly address the scale, frequency, and



*Farming on Sunderland Hill Rd.*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

operational standards for such activities to balance economic benefit with neighborhood and land use compatibility.

### *Resource Extraction*

A mid-century Vermont State Highway Construction Materials Survey identified several locations in Sunderland as having a mineral bed of sand and gravel appropriate for aggregate extraction. These locations have been ultimately deemed poor locations for mining due to steep hillsides, existing infrastructure, and existing

residences, but as the potential for future extraction exists the Town maintains an interest in minimizing potential aesthetic and environmental impacts from mining activities.

### *Infill and Rural-General Area Planning*

Under the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act, a rural municipality is defined as one with a population of 2,500 persons or fewer.



Sunderland's population remains well below this threshold, and the Town continues to be rural in both demographic and physical terms. Large areas of the community are characterized by working lands, steep topography, and significant forest blocks that influence development suitability.

The intent of Sunderland's land use regulations includes maintaining the Town's rural character and encouraging a historic pattern of compact development in appropriate locations.

This approach reflects the Town's physical constraints including steep terrain and limited usable land area, and encourages development where infrastructure and services already exist or can be expanded with minimal costs.

Infill development, or building on vacant, underused land within existing developed areas; allows for growth without creating substantial demands for new services. Existing developed areas of the town are categorized as Rural General on the future land use map (Map M1). Most development in these areas consists of housing. Outside the village center, these areas are the most preferred areas for future housing development, which may be accompanied by home-based businesses.

Key areas suitable for modest infill include, the Village Center District and the Chiselville area adjacent to East Arlington. Other areas suitable for modest infill include all area mapped as Rural General on the future land use map, including minor subdivision of large parcels among lands previously subdivided.

To accomplish this goal the Town will encourage infill development, clustered development, and the protection of natural resources and working lands. With these strategies Sunderland can accommodate a reasonable rate of growth while maintaining the broader landscape as largely rural, agricultural, and forested. Infill shall be encouraged through the use of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) and Planned Residential Development (PRD); and clustered development shall be encouraged through the use of Planned Residential Development.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are to be encouraged to increase housing within the existing settlement pattern. ADU's are smaller, independent dwelling units that are located on the same lot as an existing single-family home. Vermont state law requires municipalities to allow a homeowner to add one ADU as a permitted use wherever



housing is allowed supposing water, flooding, and wastewater standards are met. Current Town regulations for ADU exceed the State statute by allowing for additional square footage than required. The Town will seek to expand setback, coverage, and parking standards to further encourage this type of development.

Planned Residential Development (PRD) districts. PRD development can also act as a tool for cluster development, which allows landowners to realize development value while protecting contiguous blocks of open land for agriculture, forestry, or resource conservation. Current PRD development in Sunderland is limited to lots between 8 and 16 acres, the size of lots and uses allowable on PRD shall be considered.

### **Enterprise and Site-Specific Planning**

Sunderland contains three areas that require special consideration regarding future land use planning. These include the mixed-used, but industrial-focused, area centered on South Road, the site of the closed Sunderland Elementary School, and a former corporate headquarters located on Conservation Way (formerly Orvis) adjacent to the US-7 at Vermont Route 313E highway interchange.

### ***South Road Enterprise Area***

Sunderland maintains one area with a focus on industry which stretches north and south from the intersection of Vermont Route 313E and South Road. This area includes a primary facility of Green Mountain Power at which repairs and maintenance are performed, the manufacturing plant for Wilcox Ice Cream, as well as a number of small and local construction and property maintenance businesses. The area also contains the primary well site for the Arlington Water Department, which serves the Town of Arlington and parts of Sunderland, including some businesses and homes along South Road. The presence of a source protection area for this well site necessitates careful planning of development in the area, including limitations on onsite wastewater disposal. This area is mapped as Enterprise on the future land use map (Map M1)

### ***Elementary School***

The closed Sunderland Elementary School is an approximately 9-acre property located along Sunderland Hill Road on the western edge of the town. The property includes the school building, a playground, playing fields,



*The Conservation Way enterprise area*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

and parking, as well as an access road for properties to the west. The property constitutes an important adaptive reuse opportunity in the town, particularly due to the substantial existing onsite septic system. As the site is located between the Village Center, the Town Office, and Chiselville along the town's main local road, the site could be a viable location for future housing,

town-serving recreational facilities, and/or region-serving public services such as public safety, and healthcare.

### *Conservation Way*

The Conservation Way (formerly Orvis) site is an approximately 350-acre property located between US-7 and Kelly Stand Road, of which approximately 310 acres are permanently protected from development.



The remaining acreage includes a large former corporate headquarters building and associated parking and access road. This property has historically been the largest single contributor to property tax collections in the town, and ensuring the property remains in productive use is one of the most important planning priorities in the town.

As the property is distant from all area village centers, but the developable area is compact (not linear) and is situated alone adjacent to a major highway, planning for future use of the property sits uneasily within Vermont's planning framework. The future land use map reflects the area which is not permanently conserved as Rural General, while conserved areas are mapped Rural Conservation.

The property has a substantial amount of existing permitted wastewater capacity and

a large concentration of Class 1 ON SITE septic rating soils beyond that, as well as excellent regional transportation links north, south, and west and access to outdoor recreational amenities. Considerations for future uses of the property may include housing with some amount of commercial or live/work use. Alternately, an industrial-focused conversion or expansion could be considered, which focuses on the value of the property's highway proximity to limit truck traffic through nearby villages, but any industrial use must consider the adjacent source protection area for the Arlington Water Department's wellhead. Another alternative could be taking advantage of the highway access, natural amenities, and beautiful views from the property for use as a hotel and/or an assisted living or other elder care facility.



## *Land Use Policies*

1. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure development of land must be compatible with environmental characteristics and appropriate for the site and purpose.
2. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure development shall be focused in existing settled areas.
3. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that, in the absence of public services such as central sewage disposal and water supply, each building site shall not adversely affect adjacent property and water resources.
4. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall align minimum lot sizes with the underlying land use purpose including large lots where preservation is the priority and allow for flexibility where development is the priority to concentrate development.
5. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that new development shall not be designed so as to require addition of new public roads or other capital improvements.
6. Acknowledging the Batten Kill is a State designated Outstanding Resource Water(s) which is a visual and functional asset which must be allowed to remain in its natural state. Compatible recreation use is encouraged; development in the Batten Kill Corridor with structures, utility lines, or other impairment of scenic qualities is considered unnecessary and undesirable.
7. Utilization of mineral resources, such as sand, stone, and gravel deposits, shall not create adverse aesthetic impacts or hazardous slopes. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that screening, either natural or man-made, is required during the operation of the site, and reclamation when excavation is completed is required.
8. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that land development and subdivisions including construction of roads and utilities shall avoid fragmentation of agricultural working land areas.



9. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that land development and use that would impair or endanger watersheds and well head protection areas supplying public water supply systems is discouraged, and any such uses shall make provision for remedial action in event of potential contamination.
10. Land above 1,500' elevation shall be maintained in its natural state. Non-intensive recreation use shall be permitted with controls to avoid erosion or other damage to fragile soils and botanical and wildlife areas.
11. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall encourage primitive recreation activities, such as wilderness camping, are encouraged in areas with existing access, as well as non-intensive recreation.
12. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall not encourage construction of new campgrounds in areas mapped Rural Conservation on the Future Land Use map, but encourages continued use, including potential expansion of, existing campgrounds in these areas.
13. Utilization of forest lands for commercial enterprises such as logging and sugaring are appropriate activities, and encouraged with approved forest management plans.
14. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that compact development shall be encouraged in areas designated on the Future Land Use map. Outside these areas, it shall provide for lower density development.
15. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that residential development projects, especially major subdivisions, shall be evaluated for appropriate form based on land suitability and to retain special resources identified in the Town Plan and in consideration of water and soil-based wastewater resources.
16. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that new subdivisions shall be integrated with the town, which shall be understood to be defined as adjacent to existing developed lands, and, where possible, subdivisions shall include at least two road access points.



17. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall provide incentives for creative site planning and design such as cluster and planned residential development techniques in appropriate locations.
18. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that residential development should be limited and carefully planned on slopes greater than 15%. Where natural slopes exceed 20%, no residential development and associated improvements shall occur.
19. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that designated commercial and enterprise areas shall provide for commercial and industrial uses in keeping with the rural setting of this area without creating strip development patterns incompatible with state planning goals.
20. The Sunderland Highway Department shall review new right of way access permits to ensure development shall avoid excessive curb cuts and low density strip-type development, particularly in the village center.
21. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that commercial and industrial uses shall avoid off-site impacts to adjoining areas, such as smoke, air quality, noise, lighting, etc.
22. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall facilitate adaptive reuse of properties including the former Sunderland Elementary School and Conservation Way (formerly Orvis) site.
23. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall facilitate the use of ADU and PRD in the Village Center District, areas adjacent to East Arlington, and the Historic Borough Road Settlement area.
24. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall adapt the use of ADU and PRD for the purposes of maintaining the rural character of the Town.
25. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall recognize the potential use of soils. The development or subdivision of lands with high potential for agriculture, forestry, public water supply, wildlife habitat, or mineral and earth resource extraction shall not prevent the continued or potential use of the land for these activities.



26. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall preserve the working lands character of the Town by maintaining prime agricultural land free of development, as well as preserve and maintain the integrity of the forest and open space.
27. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall preserve the working lands character of the Town by maintaining prime agricultural land free of development, as well as preserve and maintain the integrity of the forest and open space.
28. The Planning Commission shall consider revision to the Land Use and Development Bylaws to reduce the minimum size for a PRD from 8 acres to 5 acres and remove the 16 acre cap to the PRD size, and expand definition of accessory uses for a PRD to include agricultural uses.
29. The Planning Commission shall consider revision to the Land Use and Development Bylaws to allow for conditional approval of ADU's that do not conform to existing setback, coverage, and parking standards.



## Flood Resilience

According to the Sunderland Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021), incorporated in this plan by reference, the natural hazard of greatest significance is flooding and fluvial erosion. Flooding generally refers to inundation flooding which is the rise of riverine or lake water levels. Fluvial erosion is the erosion of the stream channel that causes the stream to change its width and depth. Both of these hazards can cause damage to development located within the floodplain. Sunderland's location along the Batten Kill and its tributaries makes it susceptible to both flooding and fluvial erosion.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has developed flood hazard maps for Bennington County identifying properties that could be threatened by flooding. The National Flood Insurance Program provides insurance to those property owners within flood hazard zones to protect owners from financial loss as private insurers will not provide such coverage.

Sunderland joined the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) in 1985, and the current Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (DFIRMs) became effective December 2, 2015.

DFIRMs are developed by FEMA to provide communities with the information needed to manage flood risks. DFIRMs are based on information derived from Flood Insurance Studies (FIS) that detail the "existence and severity of flood hazards"<sup>1</sup>. Bennington County's FIS was finalized in 2011.

DFIRMs provide the Town with mapped information regarding the floodway and flood hazard areas. The floodway is mapped as the channel of a river or other watercourse and the adjacent land areas that must be reserved to discharge the base flood without cumulatively increasing the water surface elevation by more than the designated height, typically one foot. Flood hazard areas include Zones A, AE, B, and X. Zone A indicate areas that are subject to inundation by a one percent annual

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sunderlandvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Flood-Insurance-Study.pdf>



*The Roaring Branch along Kelly Stand Rd.*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

chance event. Also known as the 100-year flood zone as it is an area that could potentially flood once in a hundred years. A one in a hundred-year flood is considered the “base flood”. Zone AE are the same as Zone A areas however this zone has been mapped using detailed methods to create base flood elevations. Zones A and AE are shown on The River

corridor, Floodplains and Wetlands Map (Map M6). This information is then used to determine insurance premiums. Zone B and X (shaded) are those areas that have 0.2% (or 1 in 500 chance) annual chance flooding.

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources also developed maps of river corridors that include areas susceptible



to fluvial erosion hazards. River Corridors “include the width of the meander belt of the river and an additional 50-foot buffer that allows for a stable wooded bank when the river is at equilibrium.”<sup>2</sup>

The table below shows the number of structures by type from E911 data that are in the floodway, the SFHA, and the buildings in the river corridor that are outside of the SFHA.

Buildings in Floodways and River Corridors			
Building Type	Buildings in Floodway	Buildings in Special Flood Hazard Area	Building in River Corridors
Camp	0	0	5
Commercial	0	1	0
Mobile Home	0	1	0
Multi-Family Dwelling	0	2	0
Single Family Dwelling	0	7	42
Other Residential	0	1	1
Total	0	12	48

Per data from [Vermont Geodata Portal](#) utilizing E911 Building Footprint data.

According to data from FEMA 1, there have been 0 repetitive losses in Sunderland. There are 6 NFIP insurance policies in force: 4 are for single family dwellings and two are for other residential dwellings. One policy is located in Zone A and the others are in Zone X.

The NFIP requires towns that participate in the program to adopt bylaws that meet standards to protect infrastructure from flooding. Sunderland’s bylaws include a

River Corridor Overlay (RCO) District and an Inundation Hazard Overlay (IHO) District enacting no adverse impact regulations in the SFHA and the river corridor. The State of Vermont advocates for regulations that exceed NFIP requirements and follow *no adverse impact* floodplain management. **No Adverse Impact** is a principle that strives to ensure that “the actions of one property owner should not adversely impact the rights of other property owners.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/rivers/river-corridor-and-floodplain-protection/river-corridor-and-floodplain-maps>

<sup>3</sup> <https://floodtraining.vermont.gov/basic-concepts/what-you-need-know#sfha>



## *Flood Resilience Policies*

1. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall encourage open air uses (recreation, agriculture, etc.) versus structural uses, obstructions or fill in the floodplain.
2. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall restrict development and filling in of floodplains and wetlands along (the main) stream channels to protect their recharge and water storage benefits as they relate to flooding and to protect them as wildlife habitats.
3. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall maintain appropriate setbacks from streams and surface waters, as specified in the Land Use and Development Bylaws.
4. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall avoid development in river corridors and protect high risk fluvial erosion hazard areas and their ability to maintain natural flows during peak flooding events.
5. Sunderland's Select Board shall regularly adopt the most recent State of Vermont Town Road and Bridge Standards as they are developed.
6. The Planning Commission shall assure that any new development in either Special Flood Hazard Areas or the Fluvial Erosion Hazard Area, as shown on Map M6, is avoided. This would include the storage of any hazardous materials.
7. The Select Board should collaborate with other municipalities, the Bennington County Regional Commission, and the States of Vermont and New York in planning for the use and protection of regional water resources such as the Batten Kill. This could involve an intermunicipal agreement between these towns and communities in New York State for the long-term protection of the Batten Kill for both resources and to address flood hazards.
8. The Select Board and partner organizations shall support continued monitoring of the Batten Kill and work with other interested groups to implement actions that will ensure ecological integrity and quality of the river environment and of the aesthetic, recreational and cultural resources of the Batten Kill watershed.



9. The Select Board and Emergency Management Director shall maintain a current Local Emergency Management Plan that provides for emergency response and flood preparedness.
10. The Planning Commission and Emergency Management Director shall maintain an updated hazard mitigation plan that fulfills FEMA requirements and the Select Board and the Emergency Management Director shall annually review the effective Hazard Mitigation Plan for each action's status and for funding needs in the upcoming budget session.



## Natural Resources

Sunderland has many natural resources that shape the community. The soils, topography, and surface water all dictate much of the development within the town, generally sequestering it to the northwest corner along the Batten Kill and its tributaries. While development

historically has been along waterways, it is important to take into consideration the impacts of flooding and fluvial erosion as discussed in the Flood Resilience section previously. Per the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, Vermont's air quality is often considered



*Wilderness near Bacon Hollow Rd.*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*



to be excellent, but it is not only impacted by local emissions but also emissions from outside of the state, such as wildfires and electricity generating facilities.

## Land resources

Soils have a direct bearing on the suitability of land for development purposes, since adverse characteristics such as poor permeability, poor stability, and shallow depth to bedrock can create limitations for septic systems, roads, and building foundations. Soils information provides guidance for overall growth and density and, subject to site verification, individual site development potential.

The description of topography in Bennington County generally forms three categories: valley land -gently rolling and river bottom; rugged mountainous and forest land -steep slopes, higher elevations; and Intermediate areas having varying conditions. In Sunderland it is estimated that 87% (25,800 acres) is in the rugged mountainous category, and most of this land is in the National Forest. In contrast, valley land is only 11% (3,300 acres) of the total area, having the greatest development potential as well as a variety of important natural resources.

The interface between mountain and river bottom is the intermediate category with approximately 2% (500 acres) of the total. In addition to the obvious mountainous areas, there are a number of steep hillsides near roads and streams. They also provide an important visual resource for the community and region. Topography and, in particular, steep slopes impose a natural constraint and limitation for development. Topography is classified by gradient; a slope of 0-5% is usually suitable for development. Grades in excess of 20% usually have severe limitations for development. Approximately 30% of the land area of Sunderland has slopes in excess of 20%.

Most of the Town of Sunderland has been identified as Priority Interior Forest Blocks and Priority Connectivity Blocks in assessments conducted by Vermont Conservation Design. These contiguous forestlands are especially important and provide critical connections between biophysical regions. These areas are recognized by The Nature Conservancy for their biodiversity, climate resilience, and ecological connections that can support the movement and adaptation of species to climate change.



## Surface Water Resources

Nearly all of Sunderland drains to the Batten Kill and from there to the Hudson River, except for small portions in the east that drain to the Winhall and Deerfield Rivers and from there to the Connecticut River. Map M8 shows rivers and streams, riparian areas and wetlands. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department characterizes the Batten Kill as a “large coldwater stream” and it supports species such as trout that require cold water temperatures, high alkalinity and cold baseflow from groundwater. The Batten Kill was designated an outstanding resource water in 1991.

Nearly the entire length of the Batten Kill has been altered by bank armoring, culverts and bridges, encroachment into riparian buffers and by erosion. The most significant changes have resulted from straightening that likely occurred 80 years or more ago. Straightened sections create higher velocities and scouring of the streambed. Bridge and culvert constrictions can have similar effects. The resulting excessive energy and sediment movement destabilizes the banks removing cover needed by trout

and other organisms. Erosion rather than inundation has been the primary cause of property damage in previous storms such as Tropical Storm Irene and increased velocity exacerbates erosion. There is a clear need for areas where the Batten Kill can meander to dissipate energy and for floodwaters to be retained and allowed to drain.

The documented decline of the wild trout population has been attributed to these past river channel alterations and encroachments, the reduction in cover due to the loss of forested areas and the removal of in-stream woody debris that provides cover. Cover is critical for trout to avoid predation and stresses from flooding events or winter mortality. The Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife impose “catch and release only” rules for Brook and Brown Trout on the Batten Kill from the New York state line upstream to the to the Depot Street Bridge (Route 11/30) in Manchester. The local non-profit river group, the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, has partnered with Trout Unlimited, Burr and Burton Academy, the state and federal officials to restore in-stream and riparian habitat for the fishery. Though focused mostly on the Arlington stretches, over 100 trees



and shrubs have been planted along the Hill Farm Inn riparian zone and on numerous private properties in town. The goal is to restore the fishery to a level of productivity that will allow sustainable harvesting. Such a recovery could lead to the return of the seasonal influx of anglers that has been an important revenue source for local businesses.

Surface Waters and Riparian Areas represent both valley bottoms containing stream courses and buffers to protect those streams. The continued viability of species that depend on these streams and rivers is directly dependent on the quality of those areas as well as the contributing watersheds. Natural vegetation helps in stabilizing banks, moderating temperature fluctuation by providing shading, providing cover for aquatic species and filtering of sediments and pollutants from water draining from roads and other human uses. Many bird species, such as migrating warblers, mammal species, such as mink and otter, and reptiles, such as wood turtles which are considered a species of greatest conservation need (SGCN), use these riparian areas for habitat.

There are numerous wetlands in Sunderland, but the largest are along the Batten Kill, Beaver Meadow Brook, Branch Pond Brook and Lye Brook (Map M6). Wetland mapping is based on both the National Wetland Inventory and mapping by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Wetlands are aquatic systems that are transitional between uplands, lakes, ponds, and rivers. They are permanently or periodically flooded, dominated by hydrophytic vegetation that is adapted to those conditions and have soils with physical and chemical characteristics of low or no oxygen conditions created by saturation with water. They provide important ecosystem services including flood storage, groundwater discharge and recharge, nutrient absorption and nutrient recycling as well as habitat for numerous flora and fauna. The Kesick Swamp Wildlife Management Area is an 80-acre wetland habitat accessible from Sunderland Hill Rd. owned by the State of Vermont and managed by Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.

### *Scenic Resources*

Scenic Resources include forested hillsides, open lands, and historic landmarks. Sunderland's landscape is



*Viewshed including Ira Allen Cemetery*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

most often viewed from its public places, and the most visited public places in a community are its roads. As such, public roadways are extremely important to the region's overall scenic character.

Route 7A travels through Sunderland as part of the Shires Byway, one of ten federally designated scenic byways located in Vermont, and serves as an important visual gateway to Sunderland Village Center. Additional scenic roadways into the village center area include northbound traffic on Sunderland Hill Road, with it's a north facing view of Equinox Mountain, and Hill Farm Road which has notable West facing views that include Ira Allen Cemetery, Red Mountain and Pendock Hill. New construction that disrupts public sightlines; specifically visually prominent, waterways, hillsides, mountains, and

ridgelines should include provisions for siting and screening structures to protect these important scenic sites.

Skyline Drive is a privately owned scenic roadway which offers views for a small fee. The 5 mile long path travels to the peak of Mount Equinox. While the majority of Skyline Drive is located in Manchester, the welcome center and tollhouse for the private road are located on Route 7A in Sunderland.

Tree cutting within the town right of way, which primarily serves to improve roadway safety, can also serve to open viewsheds including "gateway" views; including views across open fields, prominent ridgelines or hillsides, historical buildings and districts and gateways to those districts.



## *Natural Resources Policies*

1. The type and intensity of development on a given site shall be compatible with soil conditions and construction shall follow conservation practices that are recommended by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service.
2. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall recognize the potential use of soils. The development or subdivision of lands with high potential for agriculture, forestry, public water supply, wildlife habitat, or mineral and earth resource extraction shall not prevent the continued or potential use of the land for these activities.
3. The Town and other partner organizations such as the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, the Bennington County Conservation District and others shall work together to maintain and enhance the ecological integrity of the Batten Kill and its tributaries.
4. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall protect water quality, riparian areas, wetlands, and scenic resources.
5. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall support the preservation of highest priority forest and connectivity blocks as depicted in Map M7.
6. Sunderland's Town Treasurer should support landowners enrollment in the Use Value Appraisal program ("Current Use").
7. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure development on hillsides, mountains, or ridgelines shall be situated or screened by vegetation, so as not to be prominently visual from off-site locations.
8. When considering roadside tree cutting within the right of way, Highway Department staff should consider whether it can be done in such a way as to open scenic viewsheds or improve "gateway" views particularly in and around the village center.



*The historic Chiselville Covered Bridge*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

## Historic Resources

Preservation of historically significant sites, buildings, and archaeologically sensitive areas is of particular interest to Sunderland residents. Initial surveys conducted by the Bennington County Regional Commission and the Vermont Historic Preservation Division in the 1970s and 1980s provide useful baseline information, but should not be considered comprehensive. Additional evaluation is

also underway by the U.S. Forest Service, which may offer technical assistance for assessing areas outside of the Green Mountain National Forest. Together, these efforts highlight the town's diverse cultural resources and underscore the importance of continued documentation, stewardship, and protection.



Several sites within Sunderland have been identified for their historical significance:

1. Chiselville Covered Bridge (1870): Located on Sunderland Road crossing the Roaring Branch, this bridge features large timber trusses and the highest pier supports in Bennington County. It remains an iconic structural and cultural landmark.
2. Sunderland Union Church (1880): A Queen Anne-style structure featuring a central bay tower and distinctive shingled spire. Together with the adjacent cemetery across Hill Farm Road, the church is the dominant historic structure in the Village Center District. Although in strong structural condition, the building's vacancy poses long-term preservation concerns. In 2025 The Vermont Department of Administration acknowledged ownership of the site. A 2025 Brownfield study found a leaking oil tank on the property, and discussions about restoration and property transfer have begun with a local nonprofit.
3. Hill Farm Complex (1790): Notable components include Pennock's Store, which operated as store in Sunderland from the 1850s through the 1960s. The structure retains its nineteenth-century appearance, including original interior shelving, counters, and a cast-iron stove, reflecting its long commercial role in town life.
4. Borough Road Settlement (1820s): Considered the town's earliest residential neighborhood, this area consists of small parcels and homes once clustered around a sawmill and shared a water source. The area has distinctive period architecture and offers a coherent record of early settlement patterns.
5. Hayden Homestead (1777) – A former tavern and stagecoach stop located along the original road between Kelly Stand and East Arlington. The main building was demolished in 2007, but a small threshing barn and associated outbuilding remain listed on the Vermont State Register of Historic Places.
6. Kelley Stand Road & Roaring Branch Scenic Corridor – One of Vermont's earliest roads, this historic corridor provides unique scenic, cultural, and recreational value as it follows the Roaring Branch into the National Forest. The area includes remnants of historic communities, camps, and local artistic heritage. Its largely unaltered natural character is widely cherished by residents for recreation and outdoor enjoyment.



Taken together, these resources illustrate Sunderland's distinctive historic landscape. Ongoing preservation should be balanced with the need for

development to ensure that these cultural assets remain intact for future generations.



*Sunderland Union Church*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

### *Historic Resources Policies*

1. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws should encourage protection of sites of historic/cultural merit from encroachment by incompatible uses and assure, to the best degree possible, that surrounding development enhances such historic features.
2. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws should encourage renovation and re-use or adaptive use of historic structures which might otherwise be lost due to deterioration through flexible performance standards that allow adaptation of existing structures to future needs.



## Transportation Plan and Map

Primary access to Sunderland is by US Route 7 and VT Route 7A. US Route 7 is a limited access federal highway with an interchange at VT Route 313E in Sunderland. VT Route 7A is the historic primary access to the town, crossing Sunderland's northwest corner. The roads are connected by VT Route 313E in Arlington.

Sunderland Hill Road is the primary road through the town, beginning at the Arlington border and heading north, passing through Chiselville and its eponymous covered bridge and corresponding low clearance, passing the former school, town office, town garage, and ending at the Manchester border just beyond the transfer station. The road is hilly with numerous sharp



*Freight using the Sunderland rail corridor*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*



corners, which naturally limits its utility as a through route for commercial vehicles.

Sunderland contains 11.369 miles of state highways, 15.17 miles of Class 2 town highways, and 13.95 miles of Class 3 town highways. The town road network may be divided into 4 components which do not simply correspond to these categories. The state and federal highways serve to move traffic to and through the town. Collector roads including Sunderland Hill Road, North Road, and South Road gather traffic from local roads and connect it to the broader road network. Increased noise and traffic burdens are felt by residences located on collector roads, especially near industrial areas. Local roads connect individual properties to collector roads and the broader road network. The locally-maintained Kelly Stand Road requires special mention, as it serves to provide access to Green Mountain National

Forest, but serves few properties in Sunderland.

No public transit connections currently exist in the Town. The Green Mountain Express operates one line on Route 7A that passes through Sunderland with the closest stops located in Arlington and Manchester.

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Map (Map M3) depicts one existing, one planned, and a number of potential bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects. These include the existing southbound bicycle lane on a portion of Sunderland Hill Road, and the existing routing of Western New England Greenway (US Bicycle Route 7). Conceptual projects include sidewalks in the village center, bicycle lanes and improvements along Sunderland Hill Road, and signage improvements to the VTXL long-distance gravel road bicycle route over Kelly Stand Road.



## *Transportation Policies*

1. Sunderland's policies and ordinances shall ensure new municipal and private roads, driveways, and drainage systems shall be designed, constructed, and maintained to meet the policies, goals, and objectives outlined in the town plan.
2. Sunderland's policies and ordinances shall ensure additions and improvements to the road network should be designed to mitigate impact on residential areas, and avoid fragmentation of wildlife habitat.
3. The Sunderland Select Board shall ensure major road improvements and investments shall support the existing road network, with minimal investment in road expansion serving remote and mountainous areas.
4. Sunderland's policies and ordinances shall ensure new municipal and private road construction shall be consistent with limitations imposed by topographic conditions and areas having special resource value.
5. Sunderland Driveway Access to Town Roads Policy shall ensure commercial and industrial developments shall provide for safe and efficient vehicular access. To the extent possible, adjacent commercial and industrial uses shall make use of common parking and access drives.
6. The Sunderland Select Board shall ensure Kelly Stand Road be maintained for its scenic value while providing safe recreational access.
7. Along roads where pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure are shown in the in Map M3, with particular focus on areas in the Village Center, the Select Board shall pursue construction of pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure.
8. On roads hosting long-distance bicycle routes as depicted in the map including the Western New England Greenway (US Bike Route 7), the Select Board and Highway Department shall support addition of signage indicating the presence of the route.



9. The Sunderland Select Board and Highway Department shall work with VTrans to implement a new roadway geometry and traffic calming measures to slow vehicular travel in the village center.
10. The Sunderland Select Board shall consider alterations to speed limits and roadway geometry to town roads to improve safety, with particular emphasis on roads that handle through traffic.



*Welcome sign installed in 2025*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*



# Utility and Facility Plan and Map

## Utilities and Public Services

### Electric Transmission

The primary electric transmission line for the Town runs east of most residential development, from the Chiselville area along the western border of the Green Mountain national forest, and into Manchester. There are no Electric Utility Substations located within town boundaries, and local electric service is funneled through transformers located near Ice Pond Rd and Legion Rd. in Arlington; and Wallace Rd. in Manchester. See Utilities Map (Map M5) for more details.

Over the next twenty years, summer and winter peak loads in Vermont are expected to grow mainly due to the electrification of transportation and heating, and proposals for expanded electrical infrastructure are expected to increase.

Utility poles in Vermont are primarily maintained by the electric utility companies, and part of joint use agreements with telephone, cable and broadband providers. The Town

maintains an interest in making sure that utility and electrical transmission lines and poles are placed in a way that have minimal impact on scenic viewsheds; and that the instillation of lower voltage residential poles are compatible with plans for the expansion of roadway, pedestrian, and bicycle infrastructure.

### Broadband

High quality broadband and cellular coverage is essential for Sunderland to grow. High-speed, reliable connections to the internet are necessary for business growth, entrepreneurship, and providing opportunities for remote work. Education is increasingly on-line and broadband is key to the success of students in the Town. The town

2024 data from the Vermont Community Broadband Board shows that the Town of Sunderland has near universal Broadband coverage with 3 camp properties at the end of Cobbs Rd. as the only underserved addresses in Town.



*Sunderland Town Hall being used for a regional land use training*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

## Cellular Coverage

According to data from a 2022 Mobile Wireless Signal Drive Test conducted by the Vermont Public Service Department the Town of Sunderland has spotty coverage for Mobile LTE Data downloads, and poor download speeds for from 1/2 of the major carriers in higher elevation areas; including little to no coverage from 2 carriers in areas on State Highway 7 starting south of the North Rd. overpass at mile marker 26 and going north through mile marker 29. Voice LTE Data results also showed that 1 of the major carriers had poor voice and data coverage for the majority of the

Town. No data was available for sections of North Rd. and Red Mountain Road.

Siting of new cellular facilities should prioritize existing structures such as radio towers, water towers, utility poles, silos, church steeples, public buildings, and public lands whenever feasible. However, because reliable cellular coverage is critical for both economic activity and public safety, aesthetic considerations must be carefully balanced with the need to improve service coverage.

## Shared Services

### Water

The Arlington Water Department's



primary water source lies along South Road in Sunderland. The only portions of Sunderland served by municipal water or sewer service are the Chiselville neighborhood (including homes west of the Chiselville Covered Bridge along Sunderland Hill Road) and a handful of properties along South Road. The system's source protection area extends east from this location.

### Fire and Public Safety

Sunderland contracts with the Town of Arlington for fire service provided by the Arlington Fire Department and EMS services are provided by the Arlington Rescue Squad. Public safety services are provided by the Vermont State Police, and the town hires the Bennington County Sheriff's department on a contractual basis.

### Solid Waste

Solid waste services in Sunderland are managed under a regional waste management partnership with the towns of Arlington, Dorset, Manchester, and Sandgate called the Integrated Solid Waste Applications Program (ISWAP). The Sunderland Transfer station is one of two State Certified solid waste facilities in

the ISWAP region. The transfer station is located on Sunderland Hill Rd. near the Manchester border; it is open to all residents of the 5 towns and is contracted to be open 5 days per week. The Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance (BCSWA) manages additional State Materials Management Plan compliance on behalf of the Town and administers the ISWAP program.

The Sunderland Transfer Station is located on private property and is collocated on a lot with an active industrial area and the former Sunderland Landfill. Under state law, the property owner of a former landfill must file annual site condition/engineering reports and renew site certification every five years.

### Library

Sunderland residents make use of libraries in Arlington and Manchester. The Martha Canfield Memorial Library is located in Arlington and open to Sunderland residents, the library provides books and other resources for the pursuit of enjoyment, knowledge, and enrichment. The Library provides educational support for students and adult learning opportunities. The



Manchester Community Library offers similar services, which also include rentable meeting rooms. Sunderland residents, particularly children who receive passes from school, make use of this library.

## Recreation

Sunderland Elementary School (SES): The recreational facilities located at the Sunderland Elementary School (SES) have been maintained by the school and traditionally been open to the public, SES has the only recreational facilities located inside town borders. These facilities include a baseball field, playground equipment, and a basketball area that was installed in 1978 and refurbished in 2017. Public access to these facilities may change in the future.

Arlington Recreation Park: The 27 acre park is located within the Town of Arlington near the Sunderland border and maintained by the Town of Arlington and the local Lions club. The Town of Sunderland contributes about 5% of the park budget and Sunderland residents have full access to the park. Park facilities include a playground, softball and baseball fields, tennis courts, a basketball court, a one-mile walking path,

a swimming pond, a soccer field, volleyball courts, a 9-hole golf course, an ice-skating rink, and picnic facilities including a pavilion. Financial support from the Town to the park is voted upon annually at Town Meeting Day.

Outdoor recreational activities available in the Town include fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and tubing on the Batten Kill River; snowmobiling, leaf peeping, hiking, and camping on the Kelley Stand and in the Green Mountain National Forest; biking and walking throughout the town. Community outreach showed demand for expanded recreational activities in the Town including desires for both passive recreation and expanded hiking opportunities.

## Town Buildings and Other Facilities

The Town of Sunderland maintains two publicly owned buildings, a town office and town garage. The town office was built in 2014, and is a modern office building that provides space for the Town Clerk including land records vault, a meeting room used by the Select Board and other town committees, and office space for other town staff including the Land Use Administrator and Listers.



Recent upgrades include remote meetings equipment and installation of heat pumps to supplement the building's propane heating system. The building fits the community's needs. As such, the Select Board should ensure regular maintenance is conducted to ensure it remains in working order for decades to come.

The Town Garage stands in contrast. The building is at or beyond its useful life and the town has not adequately planned for its replacement. It consists of a large metal arched structure which has experienced leaks, rusting structural

members, and inadequate insulation. The facility also includes a sand pile area, and outdoor storage for trucks and machinery. The facility does include a recently-built covered salt shed. Planning for the replacement of the garage is the most prominent facilities and utilities implementation action, as costs for new garage are high and will likely require substantial design work as well as assumption of long-term debt.

Details on planned energy efficiency upgrades to both buildings may be found in the Energy section.



*Salt shed at Town Garage*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*



## *Utility and Facility Policies*

1. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall regulate development in such a manner as to avoid contamination of source protection areas which lie within the town.
2. Sunderland's Select Board shall support access to federal, state, and regionally-supported recreational and civic resources including Green Mountain National Forest, the Batten Kill, and parks and libraries of adjacent towns.
3. Sunderland's Select Board shall not pursue the construction of additional town facilities where such facilities would require substantial amounts of ongoing taxpayer funding be diverted from core municipal services.
4. Sunderland's Select Board shall plan for the replacement of the town's highway garage with intent that the structure be replaced.
5. Sunderland's Select Board shall engage in capital planning that will ensure the Town Office, Highway Garage, and transportation infrastructure will be maintained and/or replaced.
6. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure impacts from the town's transfer station are adequately regulated.
7. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall support improvements to electrical infrastructure while managing floodplains, natural resources, and other demonstrable impacts on the town.
8. Sunderland's Select Board and Land Use and Development Bylaws should facilitate efforts to expand cellular voice and data service throughout the region. The siting of new telecommunications towers should be guided by the considerations outlined in this plan. Whenever possible, antennas should be placed on or within existing structures, including utility poles. "Stealth" tower designs are to be encouraged where they can integrate well into the surrounding landscape.
9. Sunderland's Select Board and representative to the ISWAP shall pursue improved strategies of recycling, reuse, and solid waste reduction in the town, including pursuit of a "swap shop" at the Sunderland Transfer Station.



*Sunderland Elementary School*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

## Educational and Childcare Facilities Plan

The Sunderland Elementary School operated from 1969 to 2026 with a capacity of 160 students. This school served residents of Sunderland in Kindergarten through grade 6 with students in grades 7 and 8 educated out of town on a tuition basis. The school also accepted and served several tuition students. Elementary enrollment (K-6) fluctuated between 53 and 61 students between 2021-2026, which represents a decline from 2020, when the enrollment was 84 students. The enrollment for its

last year of operation, 2025-2026 school year, was 50 students for grades K-6 with only 4 full time teachers as reported in a presentation made by the Superintendent of the BRSU in October 2025.

Students in grades K-5 previously served by SES will attend the Dorset School in Dorset, VT. Students in grades 6-8 will attend Manchester Elementary Middle School and those in grades 9 – 12 have school choice to an approved



private/independent school with many choosing to attend Burr and Burton Academy (BBA) in Manchester.

As of the writing of this plan, the status of the SES property and building is still undecided. The Town may purchase it from the T&G Regional School District. If purchased by the Town, the Town will need to maintain the building for at least five years. If sold prior to the end of those five years, the Town will be responsible for all capital improvements and renovations completed between when the T&G formed and the sale of the building to the Town.

### *Childcare*

Childcare centers and family childcare homes provide a significant service and contribute to the town and region's economy. Childcare enables parents to participate in the workforce and provides early education opportunities to children. Childcare centers vary in size and function and range from small home-

based facilities to larger state registered and licensed facilities.

As of early 2026, the only childcare facility located in Sunderland listed in Vermont's Department of Children and Families database is the school age program associated with the closing Sunderland Elementary School. Sunderland families rely on childcare centers in Manchester, Arlington, or other towns where a parent is employed to serve their needs. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws allow family childcare homes as required in state law, which remains a valuable option for families and aspiring childcare providers.

There are no registered childcare centers located in the Town of Sunderland. However, there may be small in-home daycares with up to 6 children which is currently an allowable use in Residential areas. The closest registered centers are in Manchester and Arlington.



## *Education and Childcare Policies*

1. The Select Board shall, in drafting the town budget, consult with the T&G Regional School District to coordinate school and town expenditures.
2. The Select Board shall consider waiving petition requirements for appropriations to childcare centers after the first successful petition and appropriation vote that do not request increases in funding, including by centers in adjacent towns
3. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall continue to support the operation of family childcare homes as required in state law, and revisions shall be considered to remove existing site plan review requirements.



# Energy Plan

## Energy Planning in Town and State

The Energy Chapter of the Town of Sunderland Municipal Plan is intended to provide the residents and local leadership of the town with information and strategies needed to plan for an energy future that maintains a vibrant community. This chapter will also guide the Town to lower energy costs, promote local renewable energy development, and better protect the environment.

Energy is a resource that must be considered in any comprehensive

planning process. The Town of Sunderland recognizes that as conventional fuel resources dwindle globally, the future resilience of its small community will require lowering dependence on imported, non-renewable fuels, tapping local energy sources for enhanced self-reliance, and improving efficiency. Sunderland has established energy goals and policies to support energy planning.

### *Sunderland Energy Goals and Policies:*

1. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall use land use planning to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and imported energy sources, reduce overall energy consumption through conservation and efficiency, and facilitate development of renewable energy resources locally.

The Town of Sunderland has led the way in energy planning. In 2019, The Sunderland Energy Committee was formed and in 2023 Sunderland became the first town in the region to become adopt Green Procurement procedures. This Memorandum of Understanding

involves the Energy Committee in town procurement policies in an effort to purchase energy-efficient items. Sunderland is also the first town to annually appropriate funding (\$500) to the [Window Dressers](#) program starting in 2025.

### *VT Energy Goals and Policies (VT CEP 2022)*



The Town of Sunderland’s goals are consistent with the State of Vermont’s energy goals and policies. The State established markers through [2022 Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan](#) (CEP) to help guide communities to a sustainable future. A central goal of the

plan is to **attain 90% renewable energy by 2050**. To achieve this goal, however, development of new renewable energy sources is insufficient on its own. In order to reach this target, energy conservation and efficiency efforts should work in tandem with renewable development.

Other goals outlined with the CEP include:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 and 80% by 2050 (10 V.S.A. § 578(a)).
- Relying on in-state renewable energy sources to supply 25% of energy use by 2025 (10 V.S.A. § 580).
- Improving the energy efficiency of 120,000 homes (approximately 35%) by 2030 (10 V.S.A. § 581).
- Meeting the Vermont Renewable Energy Standard through renewable generation and energy transformation (30 V.S.A. §§ 8004 & 8005).

A key aspect of improved efficiency will be a greater reliance on electricity. Since electricity can be generated from renewable resources, and electric-powered technologies such as heat pumps and electric vehicles are highly efficient, switching to electricity will help lower overall energy consumption even as lifestyles remain much the same as today. By 2050, nearly half of all energy will be supplied through electricity according to projections in the VT CEP.

The Town of Sunderland acknowledges the importance of integrating equity and justice into the energy planning policy process. The 2022 CEP indicates that on average energy spending as a percentage of income for individuals is approximately 10%; however, due to many considerations it could range from 6% to 20% and for some, it may be even higher. More information about energy costs and burden can be found later in this section.



The following questions helped guide the decision-making process while developing this plan:

1. Who is helped/who benefits from the policy or objective?
2. Who is harmed by the policy or objective?
3. Who is missing from the conversation on the policy or objective?

### *Act 174 and Enhanced Energy Planning*

In 2016, the Vermont Legislature approved Act 174. This act enhanced regional and municipal energy planning and provided a way for local communities to have more input on the siting of electric generation facilities. The Act established standards that, if met by a regional or municipal plan, assure that greater

weight (“substantial deference”) be given to those plans in Section 248 proceedings regarding the siting of electric generation facilities. The standards require that plans address specific requirements organized into three broad categories:

1. Analysis and Targets: assessment of current energy use and targets for future consumption.
2. Pathways: identification of implementation actions and strategies to achieve future targets.
3. Mapping: renewable energy resource maps and siting guidelines for renewable electric generation facilities.

This energy element is consistent with the Act 174 planning standards, statewide policies and goals outlined in the 2022 Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan (CEP). Attaining Vermont’s

energy goals requires action at the state, regional, and local levels. The Bennington Regional Plan was updated and adopted in 2024 by the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC)

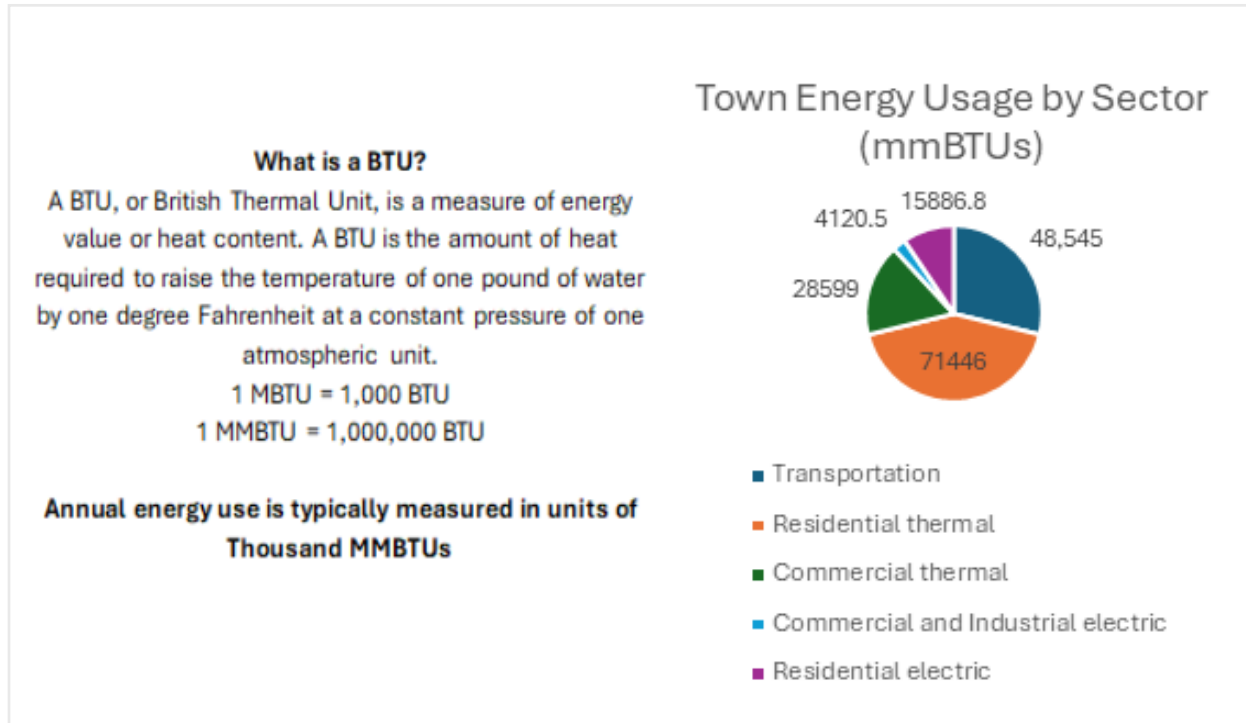


Figure 1. Data from Vermont Public Service Dept., Municipal Consumption Tool (2023 ACS 5-year estimates) and Efficiency Vermont (2023 data). Electricity used for heating, cooling, and transportation is included in the residential electric sector.

and this enhanced energy plan element also is consistent with the regional goals, and targets for efficiency, alternative energy use, and renewable energy development contained in that plan.

Much of the data presented in subsequent sections of this chapter comes from Low Emissions Analysis Platform (LEAP) model projections. The LEAP model is a tool used by the State of Vermont to analyze and project energy demand across multiple sectors at the state and regional levels for the years 2015-2050. The projections come from the Vermont Pathways Model, a specific

model within the LEAP model that was developed by the Vermont Department of Public Service and the Stockholm Environmental Institute. The LEAP projections for each sector include two scenarios: baseline energy demand and a “CAP Mitigation” energy demand. The baseline scenario, or business-as-usual scenario, was developed to estimate regional energy demand under normal policy and programmatic conditions. The Climate Action Plan (CAP) Mitigation scenario was developed to estimate energy demand needed to meet the state’s greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction



requirements. The CAP Mitigation scenario is consistently used throughout this plan. The regional LEAP projections were disaggregated by municipality

using each municipality's share of regional energy use. More information on the LEAP projections can be found in the Bennington Regional Plan.

## Current and Future Energy Use

As a rural town with 1,056 residents housed mostly in single family homes, Sunderland consumes a considerable amount of energy every year to meet its transportation, space heating and cooling, and electricity needs. According to LEAP model projections (see BCRC Regional Energy Plan 2024 for more details), Sunderland uses over 168,000 million BTUs (British Thermal Units) per year.

The chart below (Figure 2) illustrates one path the town can pursue to reduce energy use. With the year 2015 as a baseline, the town has identified energy

use targets by fuel/energy carrier for years 2025, 2035, and 2050. According to LEAP projections, Sunderland would phase out fossil fuels through electrification of the transportation and heating sectors, with biodiesel replacing some conventional diesel and oil fuels, and with widespread use of woody biomass for space heating. Over time, electricity will go from meeting less than 15% of total energy needs in 2015 to 70% of energy needs in 2050. More details on how specific technologies and strategies will achieve this energy reduction and fuel conversion are broken down by energy sector below.

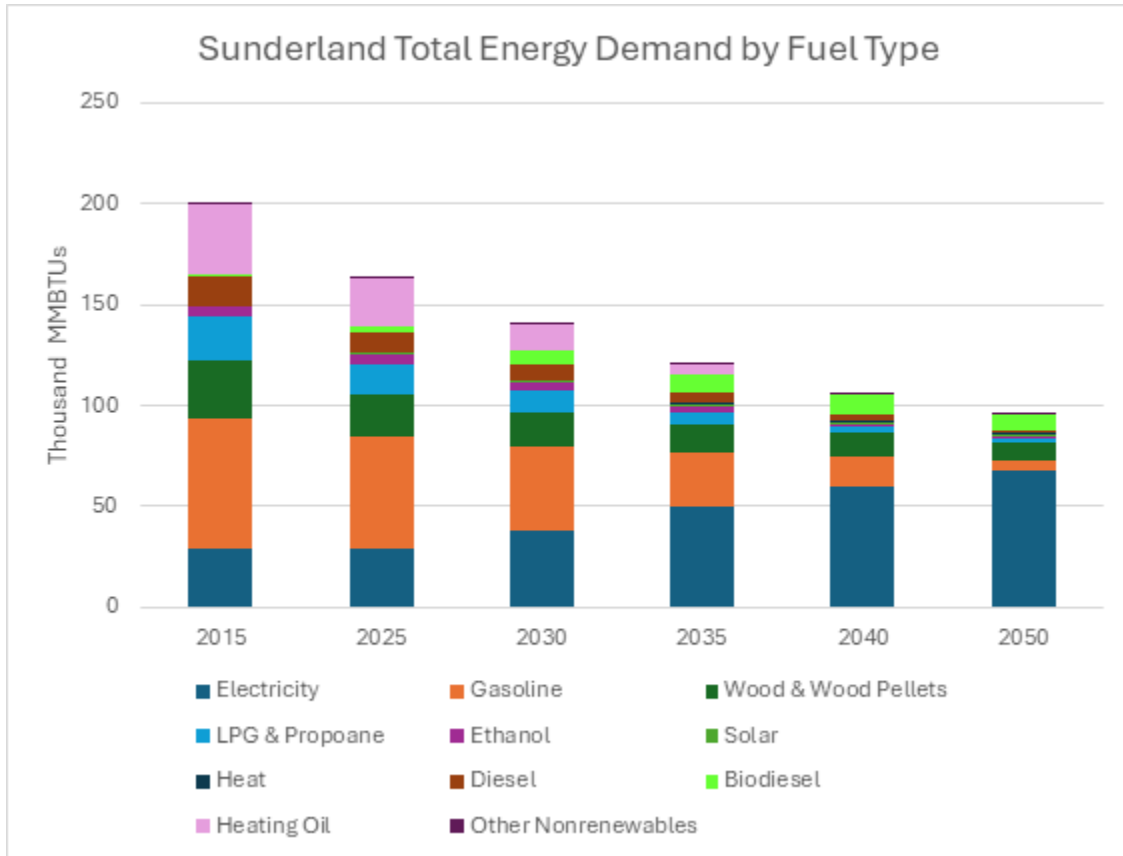


Figure 2. Sunderland Total Energy Use by Fuel Type, 2015—2050. Based on LEAP projections.

### Residential Energy Use

Energy use can be grouped into 3 major sectors: transportation, thermal (heating and cooling), and electricity. Sunderland’s residents consume large amounts of energy for transportation, to heat space and water, and to power lights and appliances with electricity. By

#### Transportation

In Sunderland, transportation consumes the second most energy behind residential thermal. Due to Sunderland’s rural location, people and goods

identifying technologies and practices capable of catalyzing the transformation of each energy sector, Sunderland aims to provide its residents and municipal officials with the tools necessary to realize the state’s energy goals.

constantly travel long distances to and from the community. The light duty vehicle (LDV) or passenger vehicles, which includes cars, pickup trucks, and



SUVs, has made this independent mobility and the freedom and access that come with it possible, yet most vehicles rely on vast amounts of non-renewable fuel inputs to function. According to 2024 ACS Survey 5-Year Estimates, Sunderland residents average 23-minute

commutes to work. 74% of residents commute alone with only 12% carpooling. Given the dependence most households have developed on fossil fuel vehicles, transportation represents one of the greatest challenges to reducing overall energy use.

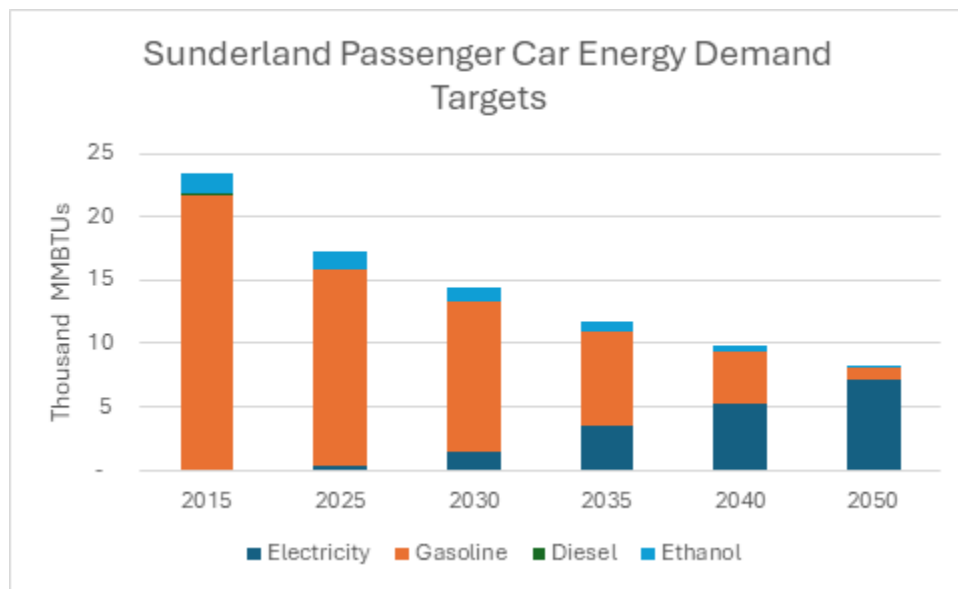


Figure 3. Sunderland Passenger Car Energy Demand Targets by Fuel, 2015—2050. Based on LEAP projections.

Electric vehicle (EV) technologies have advanced significantly in recent years, and these systems are projected to continue that trend in coming decades. By electrifying the passenger vehicle fleet, Sunderland residents have the opportunity to improve transportation efficiency and divert money currently spent on fossil fuels. Targets for

gradually reducing passenger vehicle energy consumption and converting to EV technologies are shown in the chart above.

Over the next three decades, total energy for transportation would fall gradually to just 35% of current levels by 2050.



The following EV passenger vehicle count targets should guide adoption rates in Sunderland: by 2025, 22 EVs, by 2030, 97 EVs; by 2035, 231 EVs; and by 2050, 546 EVs (targets generated through LEAP analysis). A combination of biodiesel and gasoline fuels will power the remaining portion of

passenger vehicles. The figure below shows the EV registrations for 2015 – 2024. There were 20 EV registrations in Sunderland in 2024, well on the way to meeting the 2025 target of 22 vehicles. As of the writing of this plan, 2025 registration numbers had not been released.

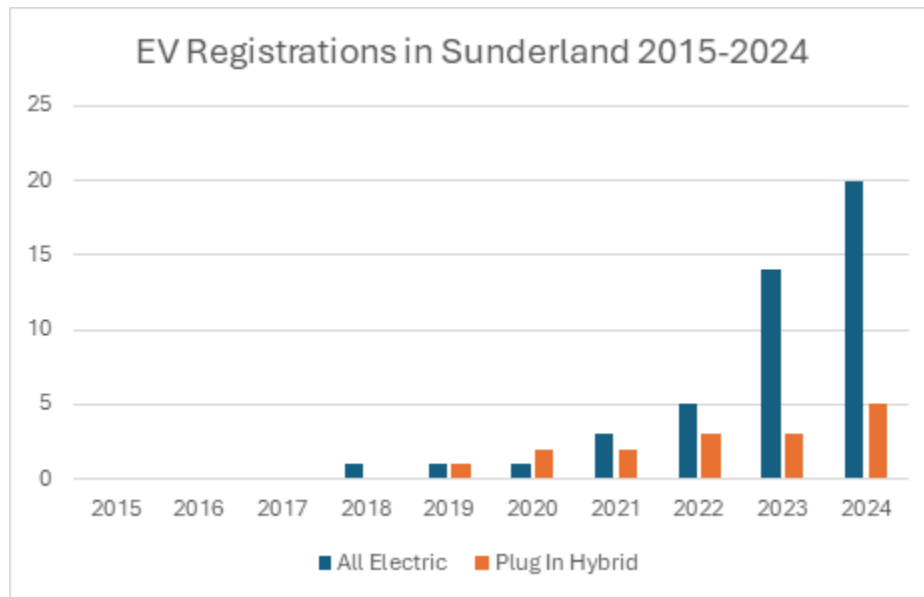


Figure 4. EV registrations in Sunderland 2015-2024. Efficiency Vermont, 2025.

While EVs will play a major role in reducing energy use while allowing Sunderland residents to continue to rely on some personal vehicle travel, efficiency gains from EVs alone will not account for all the energy reduction needed to meet future transportation energy targets. Conservation through behavior changes such as carpooling,

transit use, and increased reliance on walking and biking will be critical to reaching 2050 energy targets. Policies that encourage dense land use development and implementation of Complete Streets road design are necessary to shift the predominant transportation model from being vehicle-centric to multimodal and efficient-by-



design. The popularization of electric bicycles provides a pathway for improved bicycle mode-share in Sunderland by allowing more destinations (including those in Arlington and Manchester) to be accessible by bicycle. These vehicles are more energy intensive than unpowered

bicycles, but any offset car trips will decrease energy use on net. Sunderland has made a meaningful commitment to encouraging bike and pedestrian modes of transportation by building the Sunderland Hill Road bike lane and has expressed interest in future expansion.

*Thermal*

According to the 2023 American Community Survey, Sunderland’s homes are heated using gas (propane), electricity, fuel oil, coal, and wood. The

largest provider of heat is fuel oil, which provides 55% of the homes with heat, followed by gas (18%) and wood heat (13%).

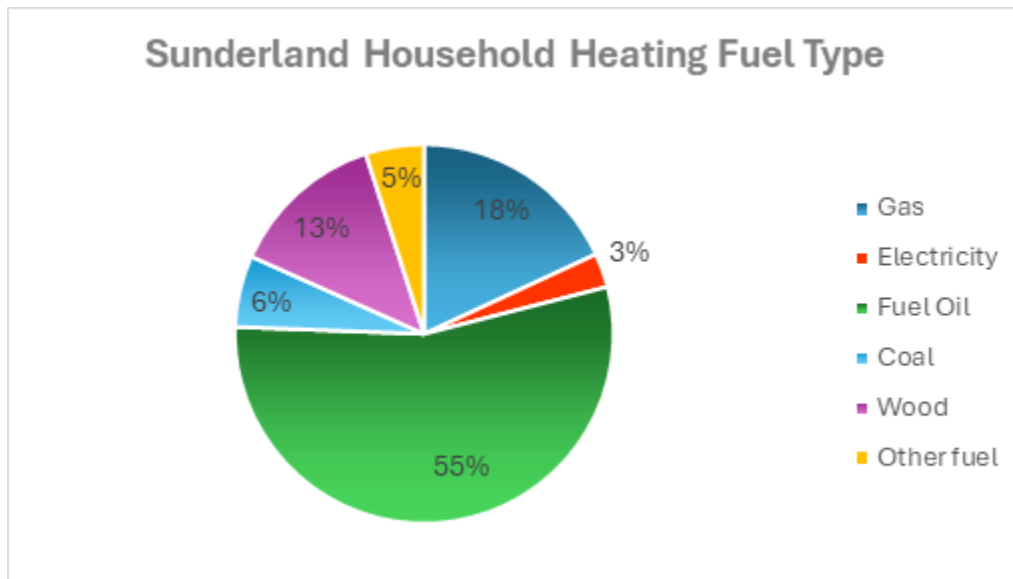


Figure 5. Sunderland Household Heating Fuel Type. Data from 2023 ACS 5-year estimates.

Leap targets (Figure 6 below) indicate a decrease in overall residential thermal energy demand by 43% by 2050 in order to meet state GHG emissions targets.

Cold-climate electric heat pumps are a highly efficient technology that will play a major role in lowering overall energy consumption in the town through



electrification. This technology is based on the mechanism that cools refrigerators by extracting cold air from ambient space and has improved significantly in recent years. In addition to being more energy efficient than other heating technologies, heat pumps can also cool one’s home during the warmer months. Heat pump water heaters efficiently heat water by using electricity to pull heat from the air. This offers a cleaner alternative to fossil fuel-based water heaters.

To meet 2050 goals, cold-climate electric heat pumps can be adopted in accordance with the following LEAP target counts: by 2025, 233 heat pumps installed; by 2030, 428 heat pumps; by 2035, 625 heat pumps; and by 2050, 922 heat pumps. Heat pump water heaters should be installed to meet LEAP target counts in the following increments; 509 by 2035, 690 by 2040, and 699 by 2050.

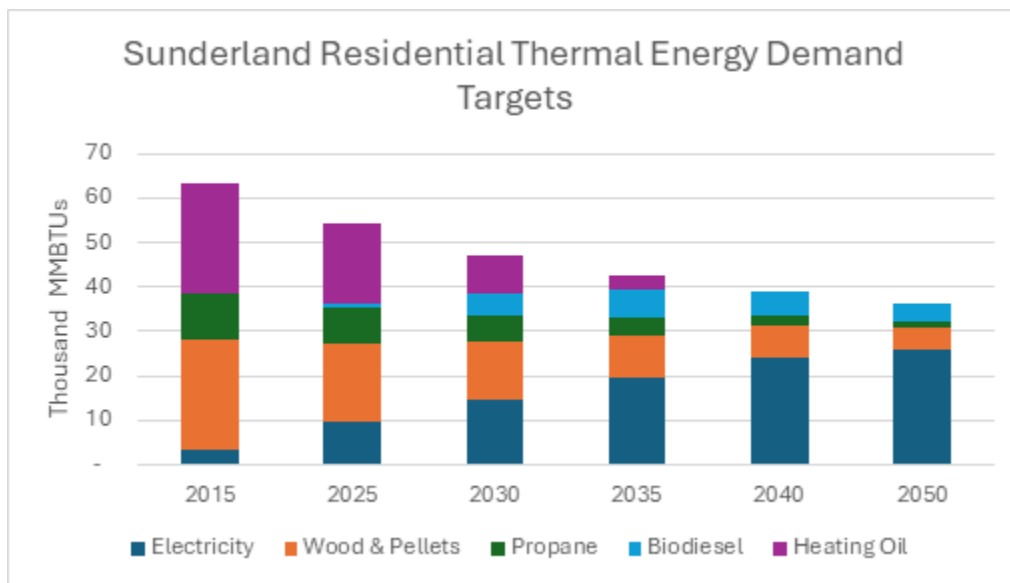


Figure 6. Sunderland Residential Thermal Energy Demand Targets. Based on LEAP projections.

Gradually switching thermal systems to more efficient electric options would do much to improve energy efficiency, but thermal conservation gains would rely on

extensive weatherization of existing homes and incorporation of building codes for new construction.



**The following household weatherization count targets can help guide efforts in Sunderland: 168 households by 2025, 298 households by 2030, 364 households by 2035; 439 households by 2040; and 589 by 2050 (targets generated through LEAP analysis).**

By better sealing and insulating homes, total energy use will decrease drastically since it requires less energy to heat and cool a weatherized home. Heat Squad is

### *Electricity*

As mentioned previously, electricity use will expand greatly in the future since it is a reliable way to make renewable energy sources available for use. Electricity is a conductor of energy, not a source, but electricity is often mentioned as if it were an energy source since widespread adoption of appliances, vehicles, and thermal technologies powered by electricity are critical to achieving Vermont's energy goals.

a program of Cornerstone Housing Partners (formerly NeighborWorks of Western Vermont) that offers technical assistance and financing options to make weatherization programs accessible. BROCC Community Action offers weatherization assistance to income-qualifying households. Efficiency Vermont data shows that at least 30 Sunderland households made thermal shell improvements in 2024, indicating that residents already value this approach to efficiency.

Current trends suggest that total electric use, after a brief dip in 2017 and 2019, has been steadily increasing in Sunderland homes as shown in the chart below. This increase may be caused by an increase in electrification within the heating and transportation sectors. However, as electric technologies continue to improve and are adopted, electric efficiency will increase, causing usage to decrease.

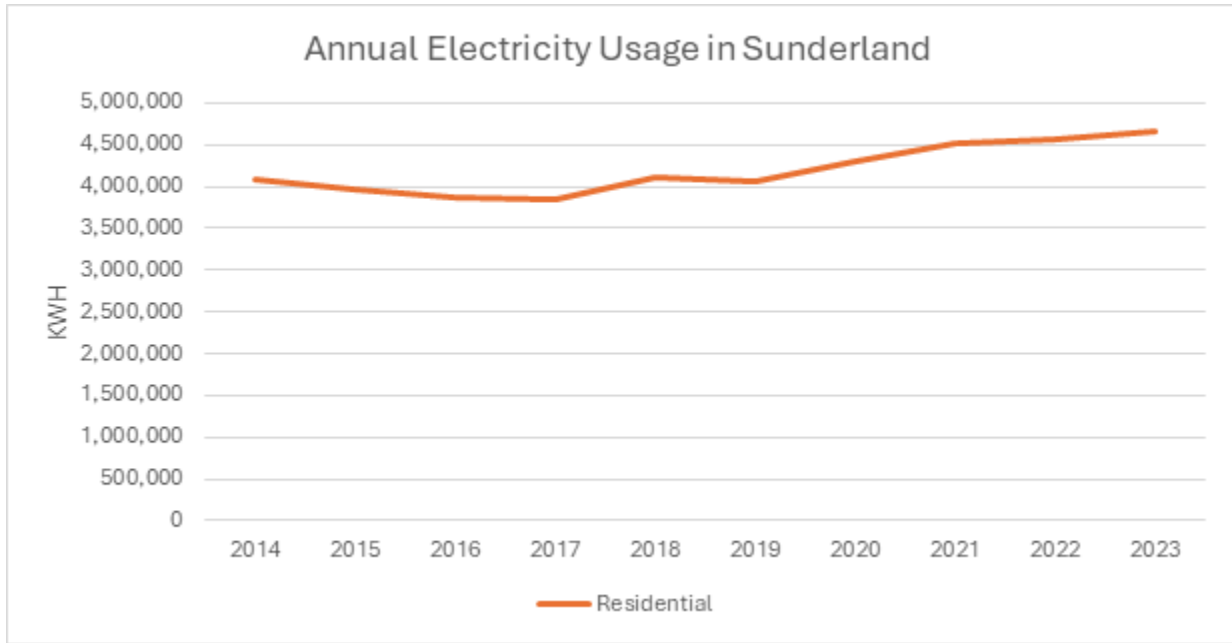


Figure 7. Annual Electricity Usage in Sunderland 2014-2023. Efficiency Vermont, 2025.

Figure 8 shows the electric energy savings that are possible to achieve through the implementation of efficiency measures, such as those offered by Efficiency VT and Green Mountain Power. For example, by 2050 residents

of the town could save approximately 1,065 MWh of electricity through efficiency programs, and businesses could save approximately 200 MWh of electricity (peak commercial electricity savings are projected to occur in 2035).

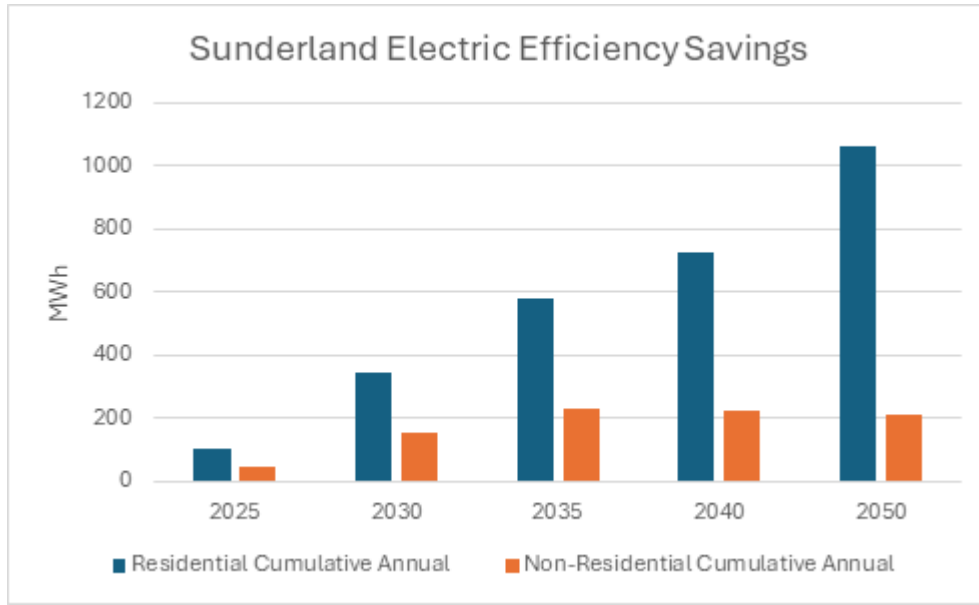


Figure 8. Sunderland Electric Efficiency Savings. Data provided by the Public Service Department and sourced from the 2022 Energy Efficiency Market Potential Study.

### Energy Burden

Energy burden is defined as the proportion of household income that is spent on energy costs. ([2023 Vermont Energy Burden Report | Efficiency Vermont](#)). Vermonters who are rural, low-income, non-white, and non-homeowners are disproportionately impacted by energy costs. Sunderland’s population meets one of the [Environmental Justice Focus Populations \(EJFP\)](#) with greater than >6% being people of color. According to the 2024 Bennington Regional Plan, Sunderland’s energy burden is 9.7%, slightly lower than Bennington region’s which is 10.6%. Nationally, an energy burden that is

higher than 6% is correlated to increased risk of respiratory diseases, stress and economic hardship, and difficulty in moving out of poverty.

According to a University of Vermont study, energy expenses disproportionately hurt Vermonters who are rural, lower-income, non-white, and non-homeowners. It is also important to note how energy spending often competes with other basic needs such as housing, healthcare, and food. According to [EAN’s 2024 Progress Report](#) “Vermont households with the lowest incomes – those earning less than 60% of area median income (AMI) – spend an



average of 19% of their income on heating fuel and electricity. Households at or above 100% AMI...typically spend 4% or less of their income on heating fuel and electricity costs.”

In Sunderland, approximately 23 households rent their homes (2023 ACS 5-year estimate). Renters are often subject to what is known as the split incentive, where landlords are responsible for the heating system and weatherization of the building, but the tenant is responsible for the utility bill. This may disincentivize the landlord to make efficiency improvements to the building that would lead to greater comfort and reduced heating costs for the tenant.

As Vermont continues the energy transition to meet its renewable energy goals and the requirements of the Global Warming Solutions Act, it is important to remember that the transition will not affect all Vermonters equally. Despite various state incentives, many clean

energy technologies are out of reach for Vermonters with low income or who rent their homes. The Town should encourage public engagement in decision making based around the energy sector in order to include those most impacted by these changes. The Town’s website can assist with providing energy information to residents and sharing programs that can assist residents in achieving weatherization and energy efficiency for their homes. These programs include Efficiency Vermont’s income-based assistance, BROCC Community Action services, and WindowDressers. Building up the Town’s website to reflect up-to-date information and statistics will be helpful to the Town when striving to achieve the goals set by the LEAP targets.

### Commercial and Industrial Energy Use

Sunderland is home to several manufacturing, utility, and service-based establishments. About 29

establishments are classified as commercial (VT Dept. of Labor, 2023).

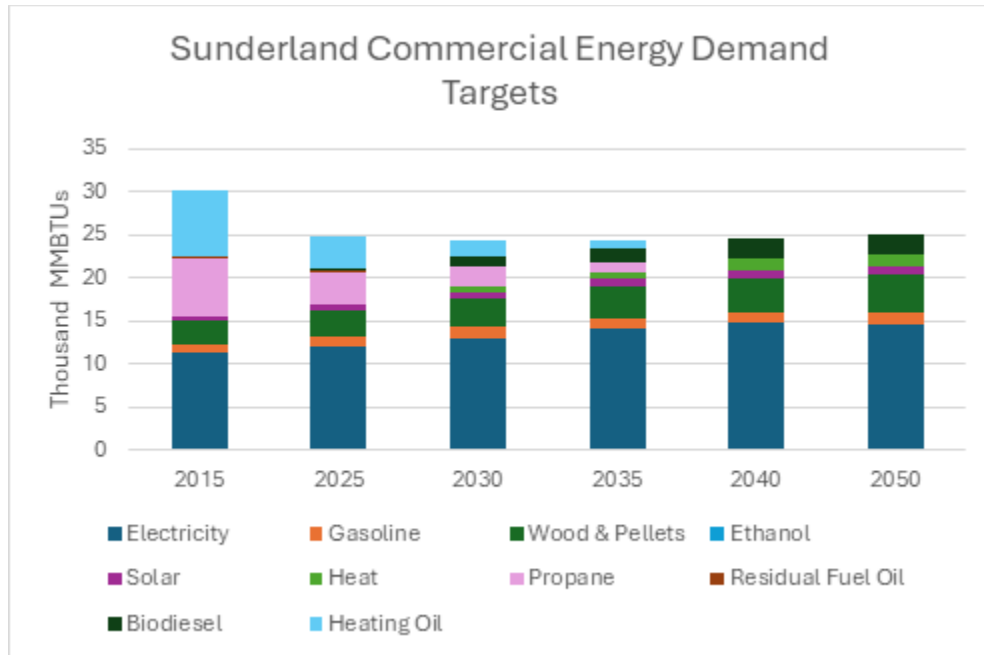


Figure 9. Sunderland Total Commercial Energy Use by Fuel, 2015—2050. Based on LEAP projections.

Overall energy use reduction at Sunderland’s businesses and industries is not projected to be as dramatic as for Sunderland homes. This flexibility is intended to prevent energy reduction goals from threatening local establishments’ viability over the next several decades. At the same time, policies and market forces still expect businesses to pursue energy reduction strategies appropriate to their ability.

To meet 2050 goals, **commercial heat pumps can be adopted in accordance with the following LEAP target counts: by 2025, 83 heat pumps installed; by 2030, 165 heat pumps; by 2035, 251 heat pumps; and by 2050, 321 heat**

**pumps.** These LEAP targets assume growth in the commercial sector, which may not occur as predicted.

Weatherization of buildings can also help lower overall energy use. **The LEAP targets indicate that 21% of businesses and industries should weatherize their buildings by 2025, 48% by 2035, and 100% by 2050.**

Heating oil use is projected to decrease almost entirely in the commercial sector by 2050, businesses will need to plan for electrification, woody biomass combustion systems, and biodiesel use to replace this fuel over time. Most businesses can reduce energy consumption through straightforward



conservation practices such as upgrading lightbulbs and appliances, powering down appliances and machinery when not in use (such as by using programmable timers), and adjusting thermal settings. Comprehensive energy audits are an

### Municipal Energy Use

Local government and schools are significant consumers of energy, and the costs associated with energy use by those entities have a direct bearing on taxes. Energy conservation and use of alternative energy systems in this sector have the potential to produce significant savings for the community and to set a visible example of responsible energy use. Fortunately, Sunderland's town offices are housed in a new building completed in 2014, so the offices are well-insulated and have up-to-date heating and electric systems that keep energy costs low. Baseboard propane and propane radiant heat systems in the floors warm the building in winter, and two heat pumps are installed to provide additional heat and air conditioning in the summer.

The town garage – in contrast to the offices – is notoriously energy inefficient

excellent first step to identify strategies that make the greatest impact on energy reduction and cost savings. Additionally, since many commercial and industrial operations involve sizeable building footprints, some sites may be well suited to accommodate rooftop solar arrays.

with minimal insulation in its aging metal construction. Though the town has made patch improvements to the garage over the years, a comprehensive building upgrade is needed and could deliver significant savings to the town over time.

In 2025, the Town of Sunderland was granted a \$206,000 Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP) grant. These funds will be used to weatherize and update the Town Office and Town Garage. Hot-air heat pump and programmable thermostats were installed in the Town Office and the foundation and doors were insulated and air-sealed. A solar array is planned for the roof and all lighting within the building will be upgraded to LED. The Town Garage project includes the replacement of the existing heat system with a heat pump, insulation and air sealing of the foundation, roof area and walls, and air



sealing of the doors. A 4kW solar system is also suggested for the roof.

The town offices and garage consume comparable amounts of electricity. Offices use high-efficiency indoor and outdoor light fixtures for which Efficiency Vermont issued rebates. Indoor lights are connected to timed motion sensors

and outdoor lights are scheduled to come on for the least number of hours possible each day. The garage houses several municipal vehicles and pieces of equipment, including a pick-up truck and two dump trucks that use diesel fuel. Over 85% of total municipal energy expenditures go to diesel fuel costs.

Municipal Energy Use by Year in Sunderland, VT.									
Energy Source	FY16/17 Total Cost	FY17/18 Total Cost	FY18/19 Total Cost	FY19/20 Total Cost	FY20/21 Total Cost	FY21/22 Total Cost	FY22/23 Total Cost	FY23/24 Total Cost	FY24/25 Total Cost
<b>Town Offices</b>									
Propane Heat	\$892	\$1,055	\$2,963	\$1,639	\$1,044	\$2,511	\$1,111	\$1,794	\$1,208
Electricity	\$1,049	\$1,050	\$1,053	\$1,104	\$1,130	\$1,146	\$1,350	\$1,472	\$1,714
<b>Town Garage</b>									
Propane Heat*	\$1,909	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,464	\$4,926	\$2,970	\$3,089	\$5,037
Electricity	\$1,291	\$1,106	\$1,085	\$1,108	\$1,308	\$1,374	\$1,424	\$1,581	\$1,700
Diesel Fuel	\$18,966	\$22,856	\$23,266	\$17,963	\$16,723	\$27,195	\$34,328	\$36,278	\$23,258
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$24,107</b>	<b>\$26,068</b>	<b>\$28,366</b>	<b>\$21,815</b>	<b>\$23,669</b>	<b>\$37,152</b>	<b>\$41,183</b>	<b>\$44,214</b>	<b>\$32,917</b>

\*Propane heat at the Town Garage was not recorded in the 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 Town Reports. It is unclear how these funds were accounted for in the budget at that time. The 2016/17 information was pulled from the previous Town Plan but that data was unable to be reconfirmed. The information for Propane Heat for the Town offices is also not reflected in the 2017 Town Report so I am not sure how it was recorded.

Sunderland Elementary School closed in the spring of 2026 and the future plans for the building are still unknown. Any previous energy use will decline to levels necessary only to maintain the building in stasis until a use is found for it. The closure of the school could lead to a

greater increase in passenger vehicle trips by parents driving elementary students to Dorset Elementary School. The future of the busing program is yet to be determined and the number of families who will utilize the buses for school transportation is unknown.

### Local Renewable Energy Generation and Potential

Nearly all energy consumed in Sunderland is currently imported in the form of gasoline, oil, propane, and

electricity. Some imported electricity is powered from renewable sources, primarily the electricity purchased from



hydroelectric generating facilities in Quebec and Labrador, Canada. Today limited energy production occurs in Sunderland in the form of numerous rooftop solar arrays (total installed capacity of 110 kW) and several residential solar hot water heaters. At least two local businesses have placed solar panels on the roofs of their commercial buildings: the Hill Farm Inn (12 kW) and Orvis Company headquarters building (75kW).

There are other areas in the municipality where specific scales of solar and wind development are appropriate. The following map analyses, which comply with Act 174 standards for renewable resource mapping (for more details, see the 2024 Bennington Regional Plan), are intended to provide information about renewable resource availability in the town. Maps were generated using GIS data layers developed by VCGI (the VT Center for Geographic Information).

Renewable resource layers were mapped, and then 'Known Constraints' (vernal pools; river corridors; floodways; state significant natural communities and rare, threatened, and endangered

species; national wilderness areas, and class 1 and 2 wetlands) were removed entirely from available resource areas.

Then 'Possible Constraints' (VT agriculturally important soils; special flood hazard areas; protected lands; deer wintering areas; conservation design highest priority forest blocks; and hydric soils) were overlapped with renewable resources to highlight where there are potential complications for developing generation facilities.

Remaining resource areas that do not overlap with any environmental constraints are considered 'Prime' resource areas, and resource areas that overlap with Possible Constraints are considered 'Secondary' resource areas.

When siting renewable energy facilities, prospective developers should perform public outreach and address reasonable community concerns that are raised. Also, renewable energy should be co-located with affordable housing that can help keep energy costs low for residents.



*Solar power generation at Hill Farm*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

### *Locally-Identified Constraints*

Act 174 authorizes municipalities to identify local resource areas where renewable energy development is inappropriate, and comparable development is already restricted. Two such areas exist in Sunderland, namely the Forest land use district and the Route 7 right-of-way. The Town Plan notes that development near the Route 7 interchange should be carefully guided so as to protect scenic and natural

resources, and that significant points of observation along Route 7 should be preserved. For the Forest land use district, the Town Plan states that permanent development such as roads and utilities is discouraged in order to protect forest resources and minimize costs for maintaining access to backlands.



### Solar

There are abundant solar resources throughout low-lying areas of the town, and much of this resource is unrestricted by state-identified environmental constraints. See local constraints, 'Prime' and 'Secondary' resource areas, and preferred solar sites in the Sunderland Solar Resources Map (M10).

The town has identified preferred sites for commercial-scale solar facilities in the Commercial/Industrial (CI) District, as shown on the Land Use Plan (Map M1). Solar electric generation facilities of 75 kW capacity and greater are encouraged in these areas. Solar facilities of 75 kW capacity and greater shall not be developed in other areas of town. Solar generation facilities of a capacity lower than 75 kW are permitted throughout the town, except in the local constraint areas of the Forest (F) land use district and VTRANS right-of-way. Preferred areas for solar facilities less than 75 kW include the following areas: roof-mounted systems; former brownfield sites; disturbed areas such as gravel or sand pits, sealed landfills, and former quarries; areas where topographical features or hedgerows naturally screen a site from

### Solar Scale Definitions & Examples

Residential-scale:  
capacity ≤ 15 kW



4.7 kW residential tracker

Commercial-scale:  
capacity ≤ 500 kW



150 kW farm installation

Utility-scale:  
capacity > 500 kW



1 MW screened by forest



common view; and areas adjacent to large-scale commercial or industrial buildings. The Town of Sunderland encourages solar development at residential and commercial scales in appropriate areas throughout town. Residential scale solar arrays, which primarily provide energy onsite and typically range from 1 to 15 kW, are suitable on rooftops and on ground-mounted trackers at homes and businesses. Commercial solar arrays, which primarily produce energy for sale to the electric grid, range from 75 kW up to several MWs' worth of capacity.

The Town of Sunderland should continue to encourage development of additional solar capacity in order to meet 2050 goals. The resource areas identified in the Sunderland Solar Resource Map (M10) should be referenced when installing solar. Resource areas in preferred sites alone total about 198 acres, which will support between 3 MW and 25 MW of solar installed capacity. Given that about 700 kW of the town's solar target is estimated to be met by roof-top solar (see Appendix A of the

Bennington Regional Plan, for methodology), the remaining 0.8 MW of new solar capacity will reasonably be met in the identified preferred and potential mapped resource areas, which total an additional 822 acres of solar resource.

Solar energy policies should consider the constantly evolving nature of energy technologies. As capacity and diversity of solar energy systems increase over time, the policies presented here should be reviewed to reflect relevant updates in the technology. For example, recently-introduced Tesla Solar Roof tiles on a Sunderland home may surpass the 75 kW capacity threshold delineated here, but could be found to be aesthetically and environmentally suitable in the town.

*Solar Screening*– Ground-mounted solar facilities shall comply with state minimum setbacks and all screening and landscaping requirements of the C/I district. The objective of screening policies is to mitigate the visual impacts of ground-mounted solar facilities on natural and historic vistas as viewed from public roads and neighboring residential properties.



**Wind Scale Definitions**

Utility-scale: Turbines with hub heights  $\geq 70$  meters, and capacity  $\geq 1$  MW.

Commercial-scale: Turbines with hub heights  $\leq 50$  meters, and capacity  $\leq 100$  kW

Residential-scale: Turbines with hub heights  $\leq 30$  meters, and capacity  $\leq 10$  kW

**Examples**



*All wind development must comply with the State’s turbine noise standards and environmental regulations. See Sunderland’s Wind Resource Map (M11) below to view areas where wind installations could be most effective.*

*Wind*

The Town of Sunderland currently has no wind generation facilities connected to the grid, which is likely due to the fact that areas with significant wind resource are in high altitude, high slope areas where development is generally not permitted. In Sunderland, these high-altitude, high-wind resource areas are conserved as part of the Green Mountain National Forest. Though wind energy development could be allowed in the national forest, it is considered less

favorable to develop than other comparable and unrestricted areas are available for development. The national forest land in Sunderland currently lacks electric transmission infrastructure to which a generator could be connected, making potential grid connection a very costly undertaking.

Due to these points of concern, the town has determined that small-scale (residential) power generation is most



appropriate in the municipality. Only wind energy generation facilities referred to as 'residential scale' with capacities up to 10 kW are permitted in the Rural Residential (RR), RCR, and CI districts. Mid-size, commercial-scale wind turbines are only appropriate in the Commercial/Industrial District. No wind energy generation infrastructure is permitted in the F District. The images to the right provide

an idea of the scale of residential and commercial-scale wind turbines.

Due to these restrictions, there are only two small areas that meet the local and regional constraints totaling 5.57 acres. The 2024 Regional goal for Sunderland is 0.4MW. In order to achieve this, they will need to identify at least 1.6 acres and possibly more.

### *Hydro*

There are no existing hydroelectric sites in Sunderland. Due to environmental regulations, it is highly unlikely that new dams or hydro sites will be developed in

Vermont. For the moment, Sunderland does not plan to develop hydroelectric generation facilities in the town.

### *Geothermal*

The soils in low-lying, developed areas of Sunderland have high resource potential for geothermal well heating systems.

This technology is highly encouraged in new residential and commercial construction.

### *Woody Biomass*

With more than 25,800 acres of forested land in the town, Sunderland has abundant woody biomass resource to be used for local heat generation – the most efficient use of biomass for energy. High-efficiency wood pellet and wood chip heat systems are a good choice for buildings of sufficient scale such as apartment buildings, schools, and other

institutions. Local installations of such systems include several sites in the Town of Bennington: wood chip heat systems at the middle and high schools and a wood pellet heat system at Applegate Apartments.

When it comes to using biomass for electricity generation, the town sees



combined heat and power biomass projects as preferable to enterprises dedicated solely to electricity generation. Biomass electricity facilities may be appropriate in Sunderland, though only projects operating at a capacity of 5 MW

or less shall be permitted in the town. Other plant-derived renewable fuels such as biodiesel can be produced from oil seed crops to support farm operations and to supply businesses in the area.

*Solar resources constraints, preferred sites, and resource areas*

**Local Constraints:** Solar resources have been removed from these areas where solar development and similar development is considered inappropriate and is not permitted.

**Preferred Sites:** Suitable for all scales of solar development, including commercial (75kW and greater in the Commercial/Industrial (CI) District). Preserved sites contain about 198 acres of solar resource area.

**Prime and Secondary Solar Resource Areas** – Solar resource areas outside of preferred sites are suitable for solar electric generation under 75 kW. Potential areas of residential-scale solar include over 820 acres of resource areas.

Wind resources constraints, preferred sites, and resource areas

**Local Constraints** – No wind energy generation infrastructure is permitted in the F District, where similar development is considered inappropriate and is not permitted.

**Regional Constraints** – The Bennington Regional Plan established a regional constraint of a 500-meter residential buffer for utility-scale wind development.

**Preferred Sites** – Sunderland has not identified any preferred sites for wind development in town.

**Wind Resource Areas** – Outside of local constraints, residential-scale wind facilities (hub heights ≤ 30 meters, and capacity ≤ 10 kW) are permitted. Outside of local constraint areas, commercial-scale facilities (hub heights ≤ 50 meters, and capacity ≤ 100 kW) are only permitted in the Commercial/Industrial District.



*Solar power generation at the South Road Enterprise Area*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

## Energy Conservation, Efficiency, and Renewable Energy Strategies

To achieve the energy goals advanced by the state of Vermont, Sunderland's residents and municipal officials must commit to concrete actions that reflect the transformations required for this undertaking. Achievement of 90% renewable energy by 2050 will depend on improving efficiency, conserving energy, and developing local renewable energy facilities at a steady, resolute pace over the next three decades.

The town has identified the following policies and actions as the most effective

pathways to realize the town's energy planning objectives. Many of the policies indicated here are discussed in more detail in relevant sections of the Sunderland Town Plan, particularly in the areas of transportation and land use. The town referenced both the Bennington Regional Plan (2024) and Act 174 guidance and standards documents published by the Vermont Department of Public Service to prepare these policies.



## Energy Policies

### *Municipal Leadership and Land Use Planning*

1. The Select Board should continue to maintain the municipal energy committee (established in 2019) to implement this plan and track progress on the policies and actions stated herein. This committee shall promote local residential and commercial efficiency and conservation improvements through coordination of information and technical assistance and advocate for appropriate renewable energy generation throughout the town.
2. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaw shall promote compact, historical development patterns. Though there is currently no single, dense village core in the town, there are areas where future development could be concentrated to establish walkable, multi-use hubs. To encourage development of these dense hubs of activity, EV charging stations could be installed in conjunction with development projects. Sunderland will continue participation in the state designation program to further compact development goals.
3. The Select Board should ensure all municipal infrastructure continues to be evaluated on a regular basis to identify opportunities for efficiency improvements and renewable energy generation and use. At the town offices, consider installing an EV charging station. When considering upgrades to the Town Garage, the Town shall consider the energy audit that was performed as part of the Municipal Energy Resilience Program. The town's capital budget program should consider weatherization improvements and upgrading existing thermal and transportation systems to high efficiency electric technologies.
4. The Land Use Administrator provide information to those engaging in new development in Sunderland adheres to the state mandated Residential Building Energy Standards.
5. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaw shall encourage site planning to take advantage of a site's solar resource potential, and to accommodate multiple transportation modes through the Site Plan and Subdivision Review processes.



6. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaw should consider natural ridgelines and profiles as an important natural asset of the town. Ridgelines and hill profiles are not necessarily higher elevations in the town, but could include the natural ridge profile and side slopes along Route 7, Kelly Stand, Batten Kill, etc. Commercial electric generation infrastructure shall be sited to not cause adverse aesthetic impacts to ridgelines and hill profiles, as viewed from the public right of way.

### *Conservation and Efficient Use of Energy*

7. The Sunderland municipal energy committee should continue to work with BCRC to coordinate presentations and local conversations that promote residential energy efficiency and conservation through the following programs: the "Energy Star" building performance rating system; educational programming and appliance upgrade rebates available through Efficiency Vermont; and weatherization assistance provided by the Bennington Rutland Opportunity Council (BROC) and NeighborWorks of Western Vermont (NWWVT). Providing information on programs that assist low-income residents and owners of rental units in pursuing weatherization and thermal systems upgrades should be prioritized.
8. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaw, supported by work of the energy committee shall promote energy efficiency and conservation at commercial and industrial sites in the following ways: by requiring all new commercial and industrial buildings meet the state mandated Commercial Building Energy Standards; by encouraging existing business to explore efficiency and conservation strategies outlined by Efficiency Vermont, which include promoting carpooling and alternative commuting modes among employees, completing energy audits, installing EV charging infrastructure, and upgrading thermal and transportation systems to higher efficiency and electric technologies when possible.



## *Transportation*

9. The Select Board should consider pursuing installation of a EV charging station at the town offices. Informational presentations for Sunderland residents and business owners on the advantages of EV technologies as well as state and federal rebate opportunities may be coordinated with the assistance of Efficiency Vermont.
10. The Planning Commission should explore new transit routes, including the potential for a future bus stop along Route 7. Installation and maintenance of high quality and ADA accessible amenities at public transit stops such as shelters, benches, bike racks, posted signage and schedules, and park-and-rides should be pursued. Town officials shall be involved in any future proposals to develop passenger rail access along Route 7A.
11. The municipal energy committee, in partnership with BCRC and other groups, can share information with local businesses and institutions on promoting rideshare, vanpool, and car-sharing, on strategies to support seasonal bike commuting, and on using telecommuting to reduce energy expended for work travel. A school campaign to increase ridership of the school bus could create community savings especially as students will now be transported further distances for elementary school.
12. The Highway Department should assess existing roads for their ability to accommodate safe and convenient walking and biking as part of all work on Class 2 roadways. Areas for improvement should be prioritized and funding sought to align these areas with Complete Streets guidelines.



### *Renewable Energy Development*

13. The Select Board should support offsetting ongoing fossil fuel consumption by developing residential-scale renewable energy facilities on appropriate town-owned parcels. The Land Use Administrator should support interested residents in developing residential-scale renewable energy facilities on their properties. The town should consider trialing the use of blended biofuel in diesel-powered municipal trucks and equipment.

### *Local Food Production*

14. The municipal energy committee should help facilitate dialogue between local/regional food producers and local/regional institutions such as schools, hospitals, and meal delivery or provision programs to enhance the interconnectedness of the regional food system.



*Home in historic schoolhouse on Ondawa Rd.*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*

## Housing

As with population, the number of households and total homes has increased in recent years. Average household size continues to decrease, although much more slowly than the county as a whole. Notably, the

percentage of homes owned has increased, while the number of rental homes has decreased. The table below shows the change in households broken down by ownership type compared to the county as a whole.



Number of households in Sunderland and Bennington County and average household size.						
Year	Sunderland Number of Households			Bennington County Number of Households		
	Owner	Renter	Avg Size	Owner	Renter	Avg Size
1970	151	23	NA	6598	2624	NA
1980	221	42	NA	8375	3581	NA
1990	284	43	2.67	9511	4084	2.57
2000	292	58	2.43	10599	4247	2.44
2010	351	42	2.43	11017	4453	2.24
2023	420	23	2.31	14636	3562	1.79

Source: Vermont Housing Finance Agency 2025

The following table compares the number of homes in Sunderland to the number of vacant homes in Sunderland since 1970. This data captures, seasonal homes, those on the market, and those that have been vacant for maintenance or other purposes. Contrary to trends in some

regional towns, Sunderland’s seasonal population has not increased despite an increase in the total number of homes and total population, indicating the population increasingly consists of full-time residents.

Number of housing units by type in Sunderland, VT.						
Year	Occupied			Vacant		
	Total	Owner	Rental	Seasonal	Rental	Sale
1970	282	151	23	NA	NA	NA
1980	381	221	42	44	4	11
1990	458	284	43	111	5	7
2000	473	292	58	99	4	12
2010	525	351	42	104	7	12
2023	566	420	23	104	0	14

Source: Vermont Housing Finance Agency 2025

Combined with indicators in the Economic Development section including the substantial increase in the number of establishments Sunderland residents work for, it is likely that the increasing prevalence of remote work,

itself fueled by universal broadband access discussed in the Utilities section, has supported the recent increase in owner-occupied homes in Sunderland.



Recent changes in state housing law have required Regional Planning Commissions to establish housing construction targets, broken down by town. Below is the housing target for

Sunderland, which is similar to recent housing growth trends in the town and is expected to be attainable without meaningful change to town policy.

Housing Targets (2024)												
5-Year Annual Average Permits	6-Year Target	ADU	One Unit	Two Unit	3-5 Unit	5+ Unit	0-1 BR	2 BR	3 BR	4+ BR	Own	Rent
4.4	30	6	18	6	0	0	5	5	15	5	22	8

Source: Bennington County Regional Commission Regional Plan 2024

### Housing Policies

1. Sunderland’s Land Use and Development Bylaws shall provide for housing commensurate with needs as indicated in the housing target.
2. Sunderland’s Land Use and Development Bylaws shall encourage new housing be developed in existing built up areas, with particular concentration in the Village Center and Village Area, and secondarily in Rural General areas as indicated on the Future Land Use map.
3. Sunderland’s Land Use and Development Bylaws shall encourage new and rehabilitated housing be safe, sanitary, located close to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.



## Economic Development

Sunderland’s median household income is well above the regional average income, as it has been since 2009.

Trends in median household income for Sunderland, Bennington County and Vermont.

Year	Sunderland	Bennington County	Vermont
1979	\$14,955	\$14,719	\$14,790
1989	\$29,219	\$38,485	\$29,792
1999	\$40,500	\$39,926	\$40,856
2005-2009	\$60,962	\$45,265	\$51,284
2007-2011	\$61,985	\$48,083	\$53,422
2023	\$80,137	\$71,494	\$78,024

Vermont Housing Finance Agency 2025

Per the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, 81 percent of workers live and work in different towns. Sunderland has a small nonresidential base on the town’s 2025 Grand List, with only a few dozen

commercial, hospitality, government, office, and industrial properties. This somewhat overstates the prevalence of commercial sites, as some items are real property located with different owners

Number of employers and employees in Sunderland.

Year	Number of Establishments	Number of Employees	Number of Government Employees	Total employees (adjusted) *
1990	12	76	24	NA
2000	18	86	23	NA
2010	21	101	20	NA
2020	27	405	334	103
2024	43	541	332	259

\*Adjustment subtracts all additional education employees except those present in 2010 and 32 new Bennington Rutland Supervisory Union staff working in Sunderland 2020-2024

VT Department of Labor 2025



associated with individual sites. Recent years have seen a substantial contraction in the local employer base, including the closure of Sunderland Elementary School, relocation of jobs from the Conservation Way (formerly Orvis) office building, and closure of a handful of local small businesses.

While labor force data indicate a dramatic expansion in Sunderland's employee base since 2010, this is likely an artifact of changes in where teacher employment is accounted for in labor statistics. Almost all of this change comes from a more than 300 employee increase in local education jobs, which almost certainly is

a result of Bennington Rutland Supervisory Union (BRSU) jobs in other towns being attributed to the institution's office located in Sunderland.

Despite this, the number of total employers for whom Sunderland residents work has dramatically increased, alongside the total number of employees. This is a likely indication of an increase in remote work. The expansion of high-speed broadband internet to the town in recent years has made remote work from Sunderland, both for regional and national employers, much more viable



## *Economic Development Policies*

1. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall support a mix of economic activities and attract new businesses which take advantage of existing infrastructure and natural and recreational resources.
2. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall facilitate the use of local forest and agricultural lands for related commercial activities.
3. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall encourage uses and development patterns that will attract visitors including establishments offering entertainment and food in the Village Center.
4. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws and other town policies and ordinances shall encourage broadband and cellular communications be maintained to cover the town. Addition of small antenna sited atop existing utility poles in existing built-up areas including the village center is encouraged.
5. The Select Board and Highway Department shall promote walking paths and sidewalks, and bicycle trails and long distance bicycle routes, which would bring visitors and provide for healthy recreational opportunities for residents.
6. The Select Board shall promote the Green Mountain National Forest as a recreational attraction, particularly those forest lands within the town itself, and adequately fund fire and rescue services to ensure first responders are equipped to adequately respond to increased service demands.



## Compatibility Statement

The intention of this plan is to be consistent with state planning goals; consistent with the Plans of adjacent

### Statutory Requirements

This planning process was done in accordance with The Planning and Development Act 24 V.S.A. Section 4302(b)

Sunderland implemented this Planning process in the wake of two events; the announcement of the closing of the Sunderland Elementary School (see Education and Childcare Facilities Plan) and a community visioning process lead by the Vermont Council on Rural Development (See Sunderland Shines: Report and Action Plan in Annex C). These events activated citizen participation at an unprecedented rate for the Town with Over 100 participants involved in Sunderland Shines and 174 people participating in a Non-Binding Referendum related to school closure in Oct. of 2025. Information from these events and their identified constituencies helped inform this plan. Additional community outreach lead by the Planning Board included a series of public

municipalities and consistent with the Bennington County Regional Plan

hearings that engaged and collected data from municipal boards and commissions, town office staff, town highway staff, town contractors, business owners, and the general public. Citizen participation has been actively encouraged at all stages of the planning process; with hearings warned and promoted on social media.

Extensive research was done to establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework; and special efforts were made to consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development while considering policy recommendations. This plan also highlights how Sunderland works to share services with neighboring towns in the Utility and Facility Plan section. Coordination of development planning with relation to the Arlington Water Department's wellhead near South Road



remains an important point of inter-municipal coordination.

A recommended program for implementing the objectives of the plan

can be found as policies listed at the end of each section, and is collected in the Implementation Matrix in the Appendix.

### *Consistency with State Goals*

*1. To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.*

The Town Plan seeks maintain Sunderland's rural character by encouraging growth in its village area, and encouraging infill where possible; with an emphasis on preserving undeveloped agricultural and forest lands. Future investment in community facilities and services are to be directed to reinforce this development pattern.

*2. To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.*

The plan address economic concerns in sections related to Enterprise and Site-Specific Planning, Agricultural Resources, Educational and Childcare Facilities, and Cellular and Broadband Services. The importance of balancing environmental concerns with the need for development are addressed throughout the plan and notes the importance of including preservation of rare, natural, and scenic resources to the local tourism economy. The Economic Development section notes a lack of jobs located in Town and a largely commuter based population with a median household income above county and state averages.

*3. To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.*

The closure of the local elementary school, and the school's importance to the community are described in detail in the Town Plan. Other educational resources are mentioned in sections mentioning Broadband and Library access.



*4. To provide for safe, convenient, economic, and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicycles.*

The Transportation Plan includes a comprehensive discussion of the local and state road network, including the importance and challenges associated with maintaining the roads and bridges. Pedestrian and bicycle improvement projects are identified and the potential for a public transportation connection is discussed under Energy Policies.

*5. To identify, protect, and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape.*

The Natural Resources, and Historic Resources sections identify important local resources and discusses regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to their preservation. Additional concerns including the need to balance development with environmental concerns are addressed throughout the plan.

*6. To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, and land resources.*

The sections labeled Natural Resources, and Conservation Areas and Working Lands Planning consider the protection of air quality, surface and subsurface water resources, fish and wildlife habitat, and land conservation. Threats to local and regional environmental quality are identified and protective measures discussed. The Green Mountain National Forest is a protected resource that is and available for public use. It is mentioned throughout the plan as its extensive footprint that covers 80% of the town impacts many aspects of the Town character.

*7. To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.*

The Energy chapter contains an extensive discussion of the importance of energy and its impacts on community life. Policies and goals are outlined to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and imported energy sources, reduce overall energy consumption through conservation and efficiency, and facilitate development of renewable energy resources locally.



*8. To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.*

In the Recreation Section the plan discusses the precarity of existing recreational facilities in Town that are located on school property along with shared facilities with Arlington, and the potential expansion of outdoor recreational activities in the Green Mountain Forest and other areas in Town.

*9. To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.*

The Town Plan identifies the area's agricultural and forest resources as some of its most important assets. Plans to support both industries are largely covered in the Conservation Areas and Working Lands section.

*10. To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.*

A Resource Extraction section gives an overview of the potential for this industry in the area, and states the town interest in minimizing potential aesthetic and environmental impacts from mining activities.

*11. To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.*

Sections titled Infill and Rural-General Area Planning and Housing outlines regional housing construction targets and how the Town hopes to meet housing goals with tools including ADU, Infill and bylaw revisions. Affordability issues are addressed in the Energy section.

*12. To plan for, finance, and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.*

An inventory of community facilities and services is included in the Utilities and Facilities section. Specific policies related to budgeting and long term maintenance needs for the Town Office, Highway Garage are outlined in the same section, and upgrades to Town facilities are discussed in the Energy section.

*13. To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care.*



The need for high quality and accessible child care is addressed in the Educational and Childcare Facilities section.

*14. To encourage flood resilient communities.*

The Flood Resilience section provides an overview of prevention and mitigation efforts along with developing policies to strengthen Sunderland Emergency Management response capacity.

*15. To equitably distribute environmental benefits and burdens as described in 3 V.S.A. chapter 72.*

Due to Sunderland's small population, demographics show little variation in racial, cultural, and economic makeup across its neighborhoods. Environmental burdens related to traffic for residences located on collector roads are noted in the Transportation section.

*Relationship to Town and Regional Plans*

Sunderland's Town Plan primarily focusses on development and policy within municipal boundaries, however, it is important to recognize that the community's growth and change will also be impacted by development that takes place in the surrounding region.

Sunderland abuts 8 towns in the State of Vermont, Sandgate, Manchester Winhall, Arlington, Stratton, Shaftsbury, Glastenbury and Somerset. However, due to topography and the presence of the Green Mountain National Forest Sunderland's roadways only connect to three neighboring towns; Manchester to the North, Arlington to the West, and Stratton to the East. The connection to

Stratton is limited and seasonal Kelly Stand Road.

In general, each community's land use policies are similar to Sunderland's in that they encourage densely populated village centers surrounded by open countryside. There are no significant differences in land use patterns and therefore there are no conflicts with this Plan. All of the town plans of neighboring and cornering communities include Current Land Use identification and/or Future Land Use provisions designed to further town planning and inform Act 250 decisions.



The Utilities and Facilities section outlines regional partnerships and service sharing agreements that Sunderland has with its neighboring Towns. Of particular note is the need to coordinate land use policies with Arlington for protection of the Arlington Water Department's source protection area east of South Road in Sunderland. The towns also jointly fund fire and EMS services which serve both towns, among others.

Sunderland is also a member of the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) and has a working relationship with the BCRC that has assured that local and regional planning efforts are compatible. The Bennington County Regional Plan recognizes Sunderland as a rural community with an important village area and an abundance of natural resources. All items, including Future Land Use maps and housing targets are consistent with BCRC regional plan.



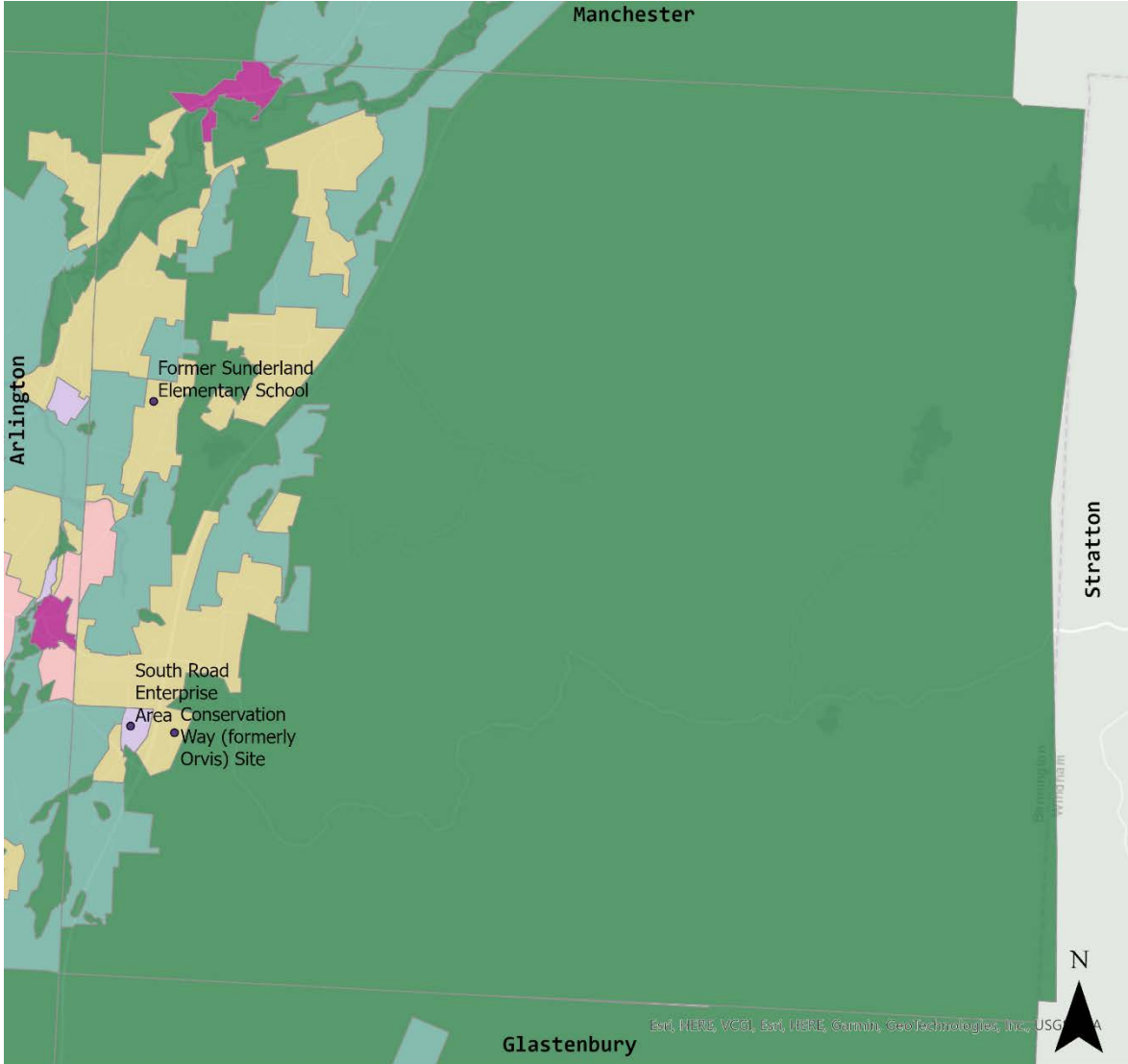
*Antique tractors displayed on Sunderland Hill Rd.*

*Photo Credit: BCRC*



# Maps

## M1



### Sunderland, Vermont Future Land Use Map

- |                         |                                |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Future Land Use Areas   | Rural General                  |
| Village Center          | Rural Ag and Forestry          |
| Village Areas           | Rural Conservation             |
| Transition/Infill Areas | Areas of Special Consideration |
| Enterprise              |                                |

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Prepared by Bennington County Regional Commission, March 2026

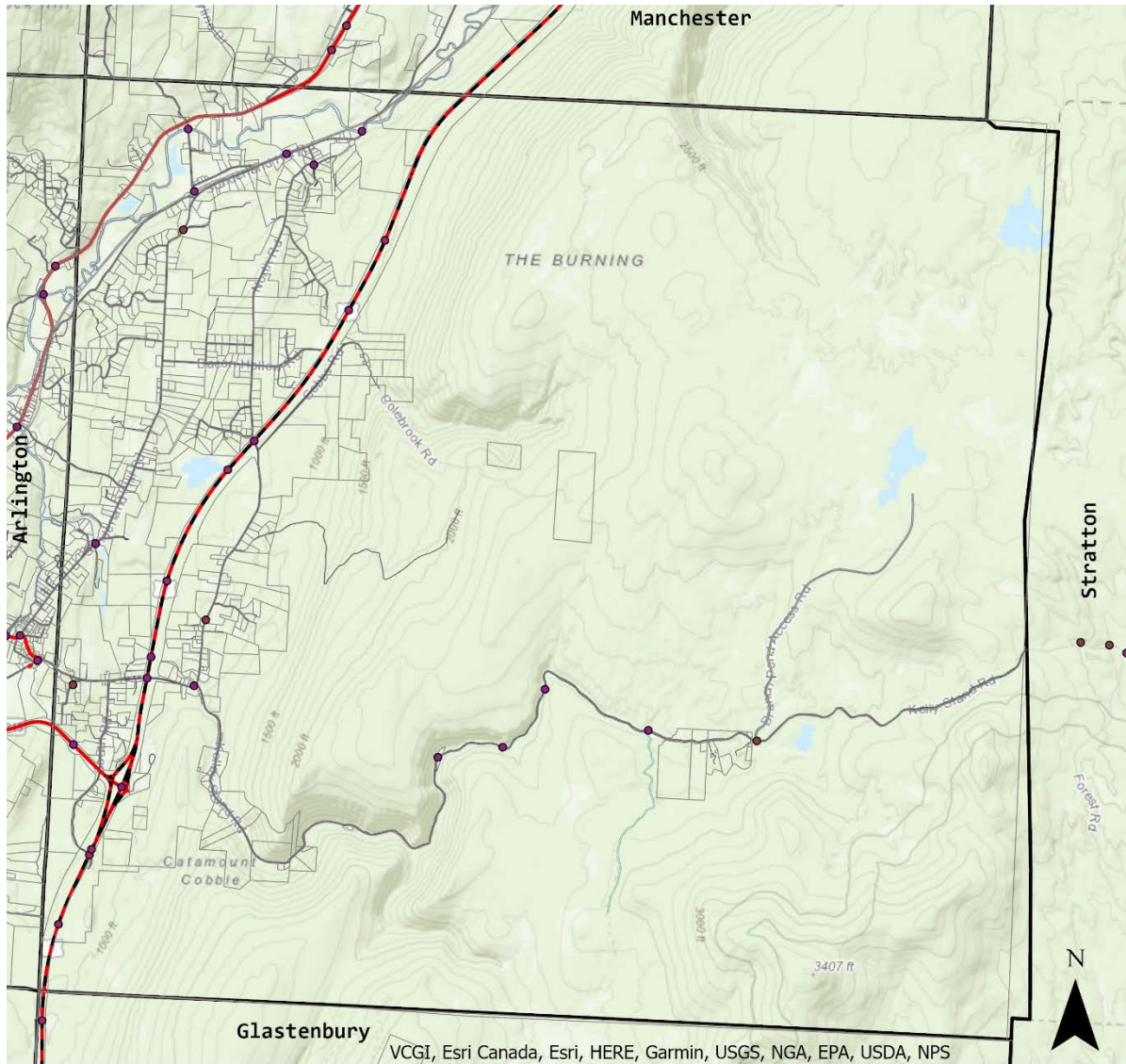
This map should be used for general reference and planning purposes only.

Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information





# M2



## Sunderland, Vermont Transportation Plan Map

- |               |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|
| Roads by Type | State Highway   |
| Town Road     | US Highway      |
| Private Road  | Bridges         |
| Class 4 Road  | Town Boundaries |
| Forest Road   |                 |



Prepared by Bennington County Regional Commission, March 2026

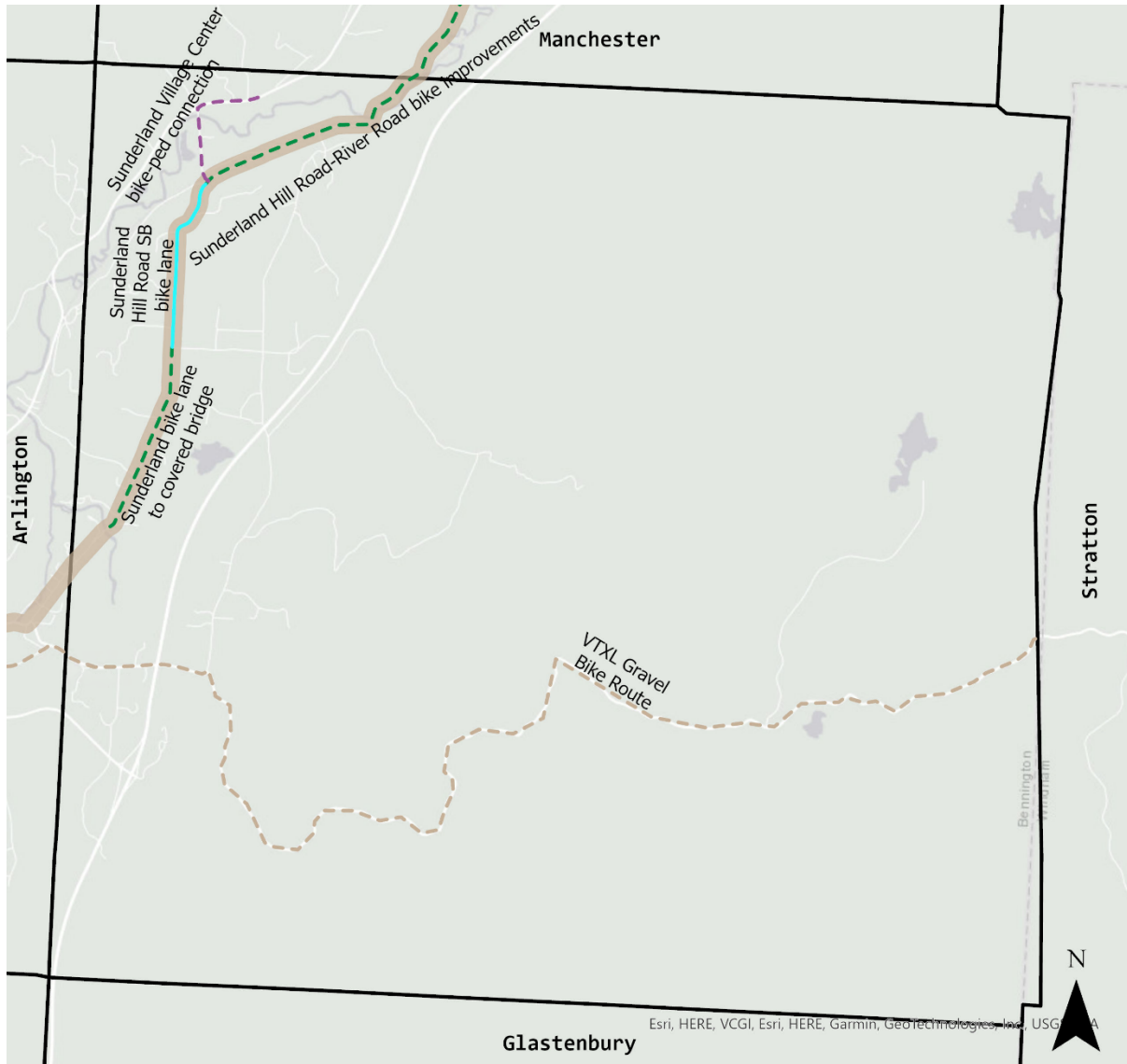
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Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information



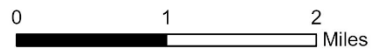


# M3



## Sunderland, Vermont Potential Pedestrian/Bicycle Projects

- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Existing Bike Lane           | <b>Bicycle and Pedestrian Projects</b> |
| Western New England Greenway | Conceptual Long Distance Bike Routing  |
| Town Boundaries              | Conceptual SUP                         |
|                              | Conceptual Sidewalk                    |



Prepared by Bennington County Regional Commission, March 2026

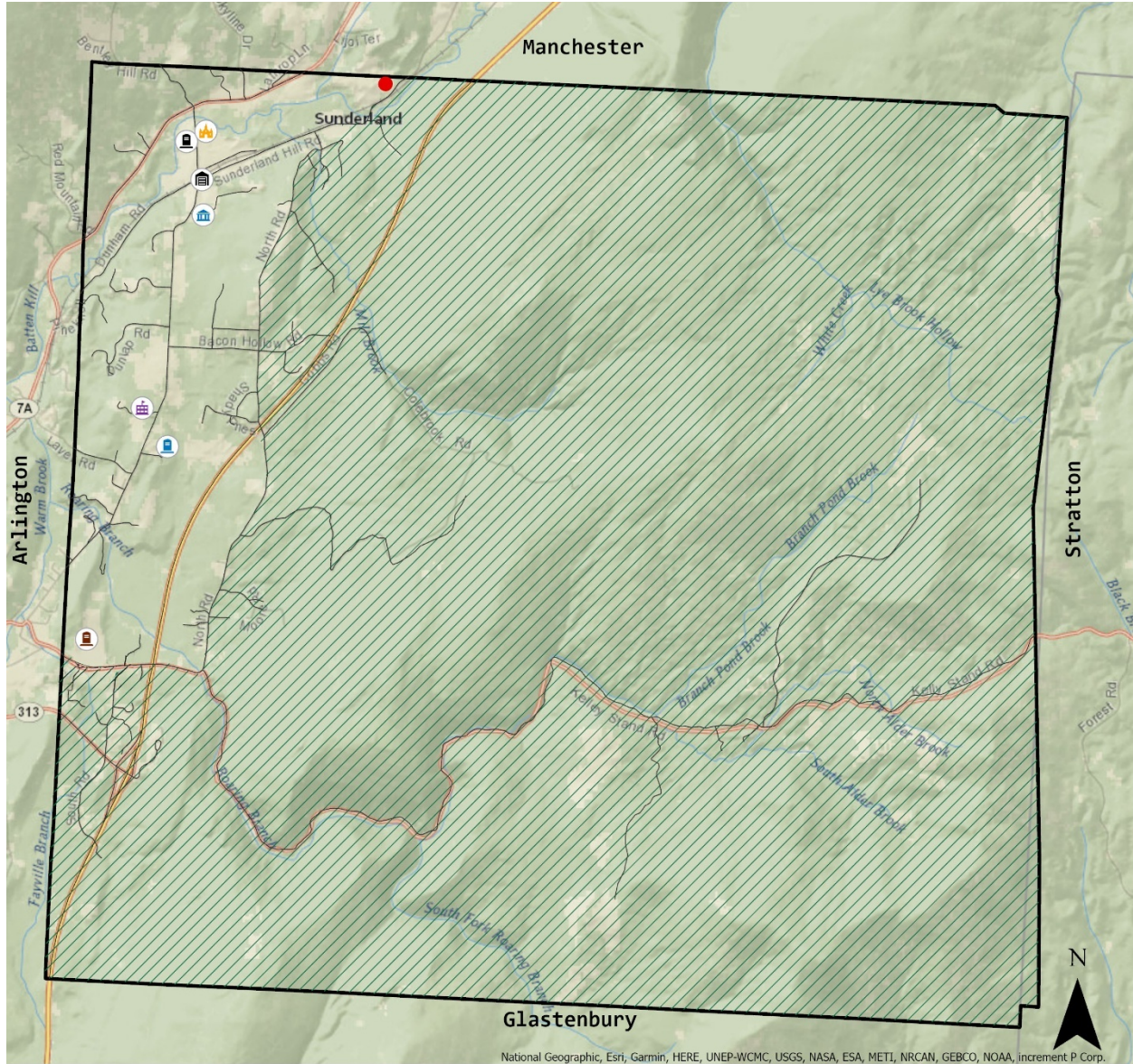
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Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information

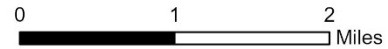




M4



### Sunderland, Vermont Facilities Map



Facilities

- Ira Allen Cemetery
- Lawrence Cemetery
- Mt. Pleasant Cemetery
- Sunderland Elementary School
- Sunderland Union Church

- Town Garage
- Town Office
- Transfer Station
- Sunderland Roads
- Public Lands
- Sunderland Border

Prepared by Bennington County Regional Commission, March 2026

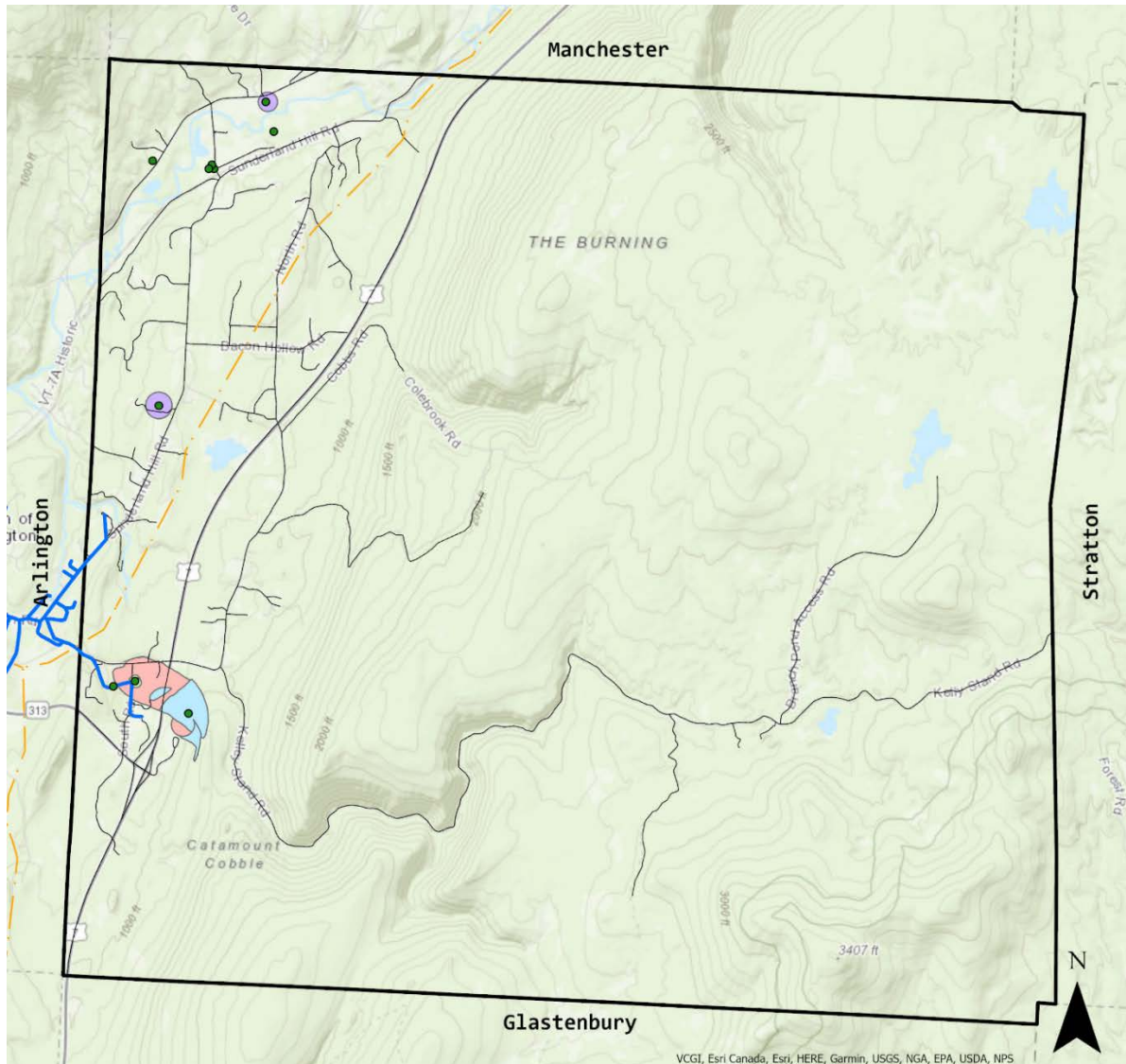
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Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information





M5



### Sunderland, Vermont Utilities Map

Groundwater Source Protection Areas  
Zone

- Z NTNC
- ZONE 1
- ZONE 2
- ZONE 3

- Public Water Sites
- Arlington Water Lines
- Electric Transmission Line
- Sunderland Roads
- Sunderland Border

0 1 2 Miles

Prepared by Bennington County Regional Commission, January 2026

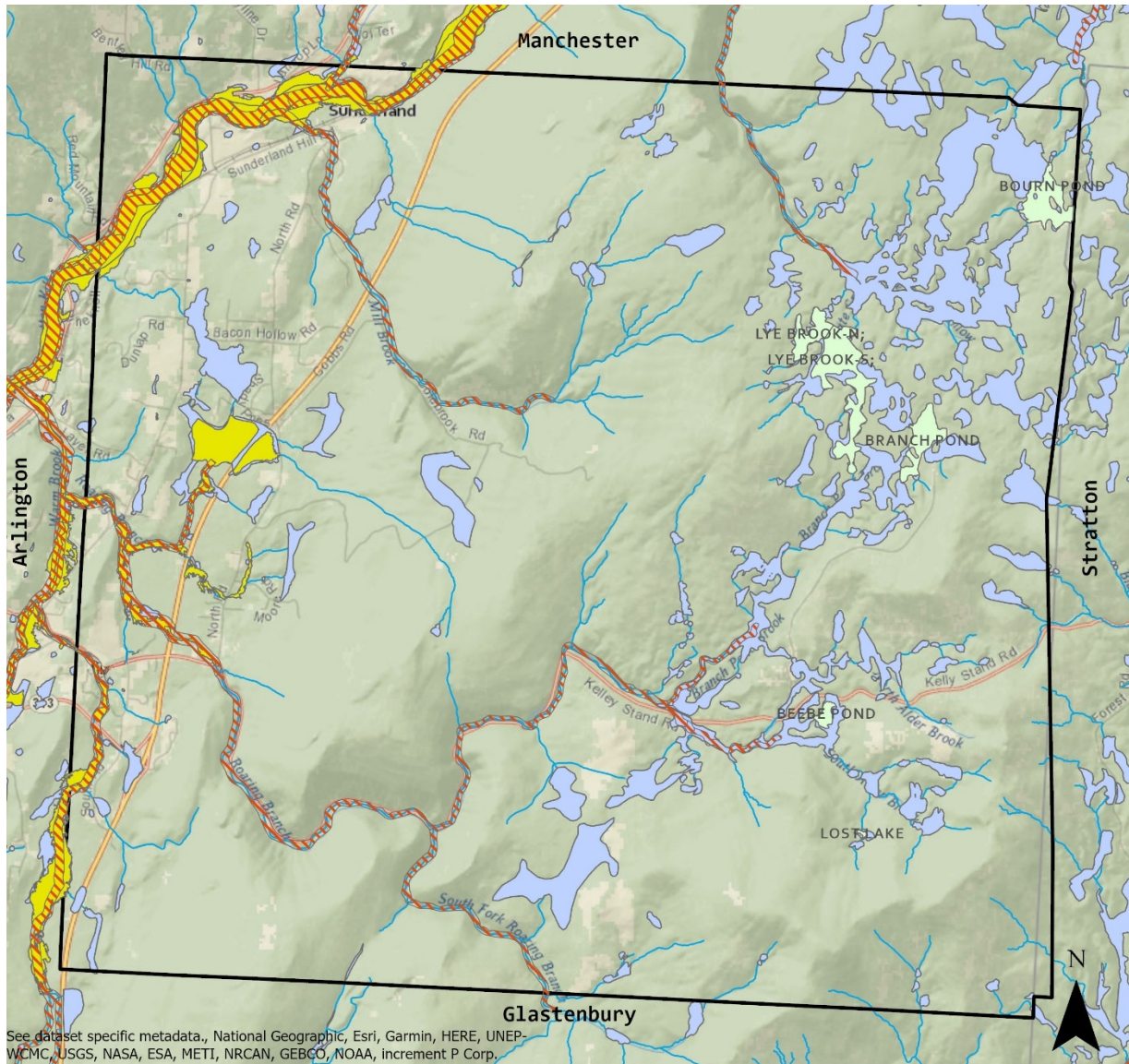
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Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information





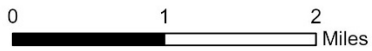
M6



See dataset specific metadata., National Geographic, Esri, Garmin, HERE, UNEP-WCMC, USGS, NASA, ESA, METI, NRCAN, GEBCO, NOAA, increment P Corp.

### Sunderland, Vermont River Corridor, Floodplains, & Wetlands

- VT River Corridor
- FEMA 1% Flood Zone (Zone A & Zone AE)
- Wetlands
- Streams and Rivers
- Lake/Pond
- Sunderland Border



Prepared by Bennington County Regional Commission, January 2026

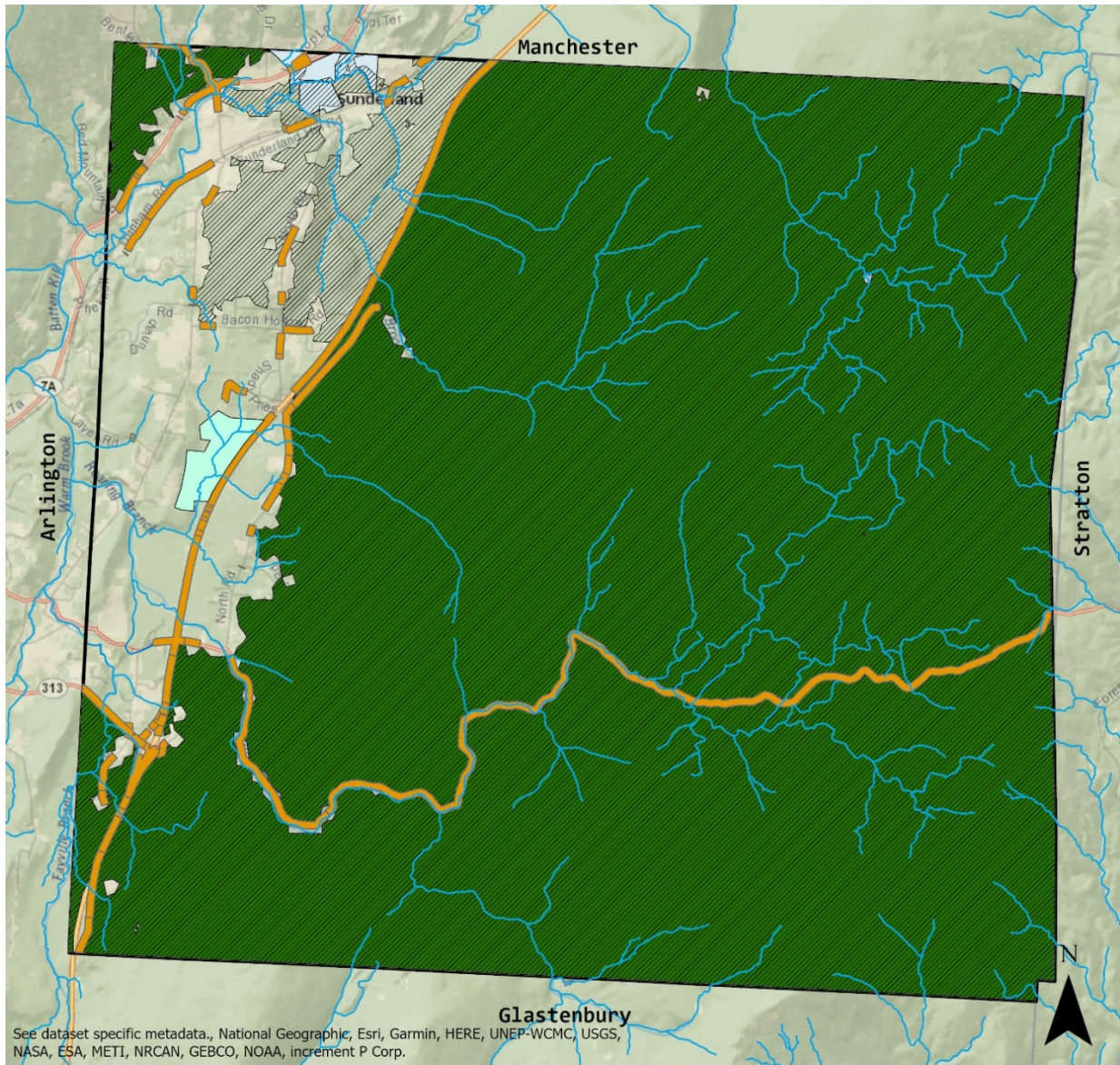
This map should be used for general reference and planning purposes only.

Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information





# M7



## Sunderland, Vermont Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors

- Highest Priority Connectivity Blocks
- High Priority Wildlife Crossings
- Highest Priority Interior Forest Blocks
- Streams and Rivers
- Sunderland Border
- Kesick Swamp Wildlife Management Area
- Ducks Unlimited Parcels

0 1 2 Miles

Prepared by Bennington County Regional Commission, January 2026

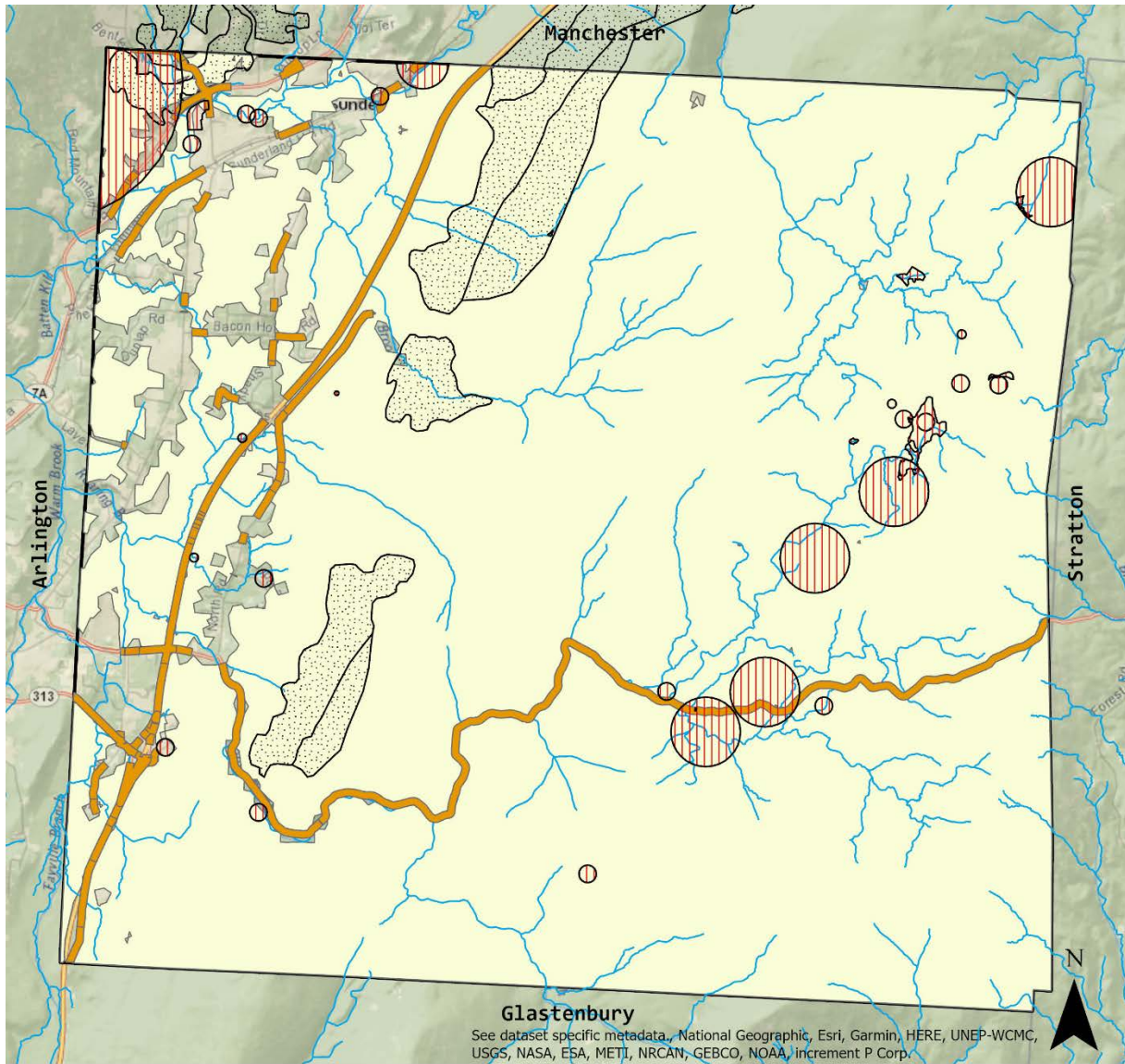
This map should be used for general reference and planning purposes only.







Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information





# M8



-  Rare, Threatened, & Endangered Species
-  High Priority Wildlife Crossings
-  Deer Wintering Areas
-  Habitat Blocks
-  Streams and Rivers
-  Sunderland Border



Prepared by Bennington County Regional Commission, January 2026

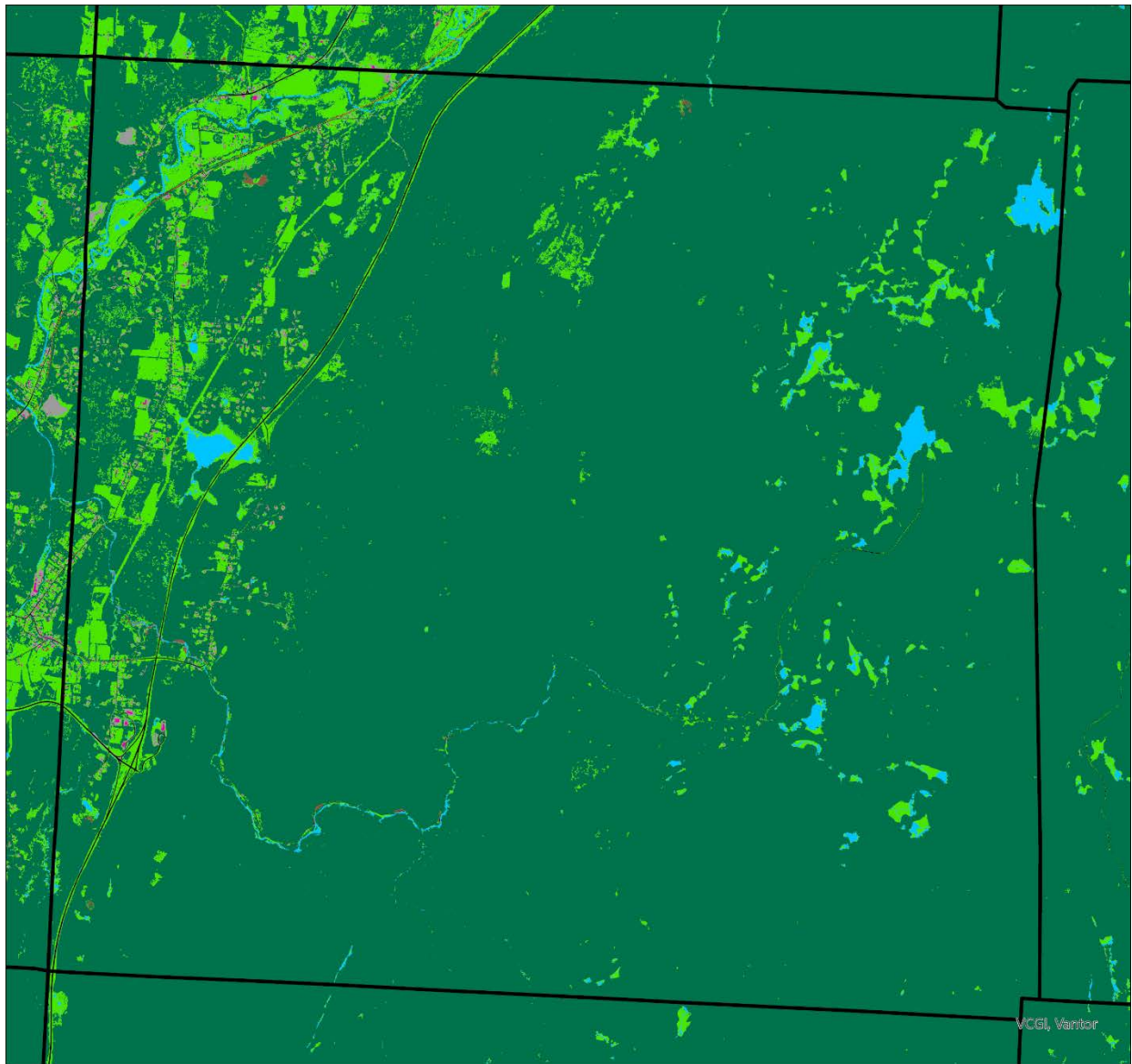
This map should be used for general reference and planning purposes only.

Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information





# M9



## Sunderland, Vermont Current Land Use Map

### Land Cover

- Bare Soil
- Buildings
- Grass/Shrubs
- Other Impervious

- Railroads
- Roads
- Tree Canopy
- Water
- Town Boundary



Prepared by Bennington County Regional Commission, March 2026

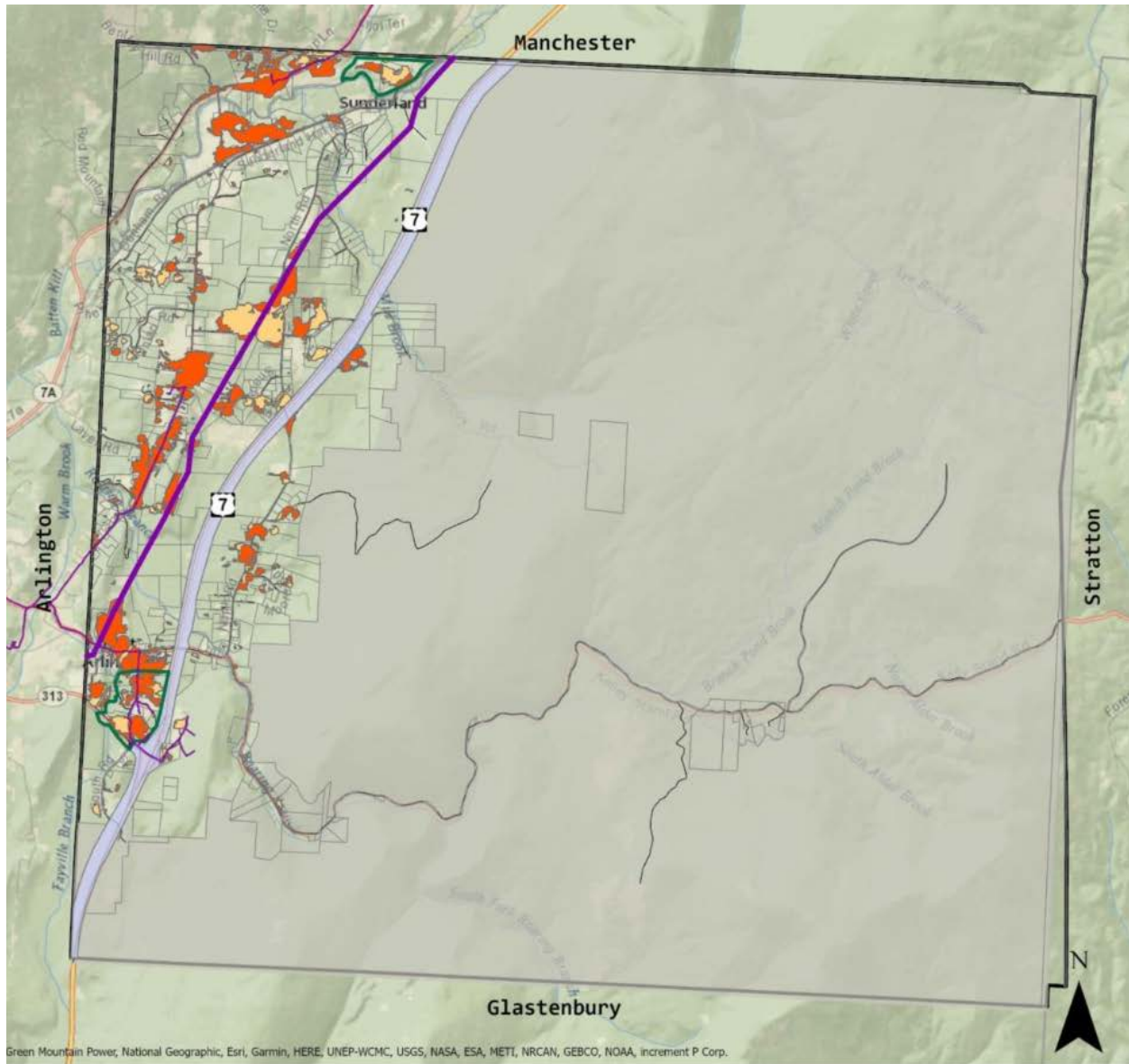
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Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information



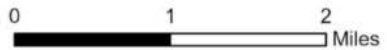


# M10



Green Mountain Power, National Geographic, Esri, Garmin, HERE, UNEP-WCMC, USGS, NASA, ESA, METI, NRCAN, GEBCO, NOAA, increment P Corp.

## Sunderland, Vermont Solar Resource Map



- 3-Phase Distribution Line
- Transmission Lines
- Preferred Solar Sites
- Sunderland Parcels
- Sunderland Roads
- Sunderland

- Local Constraints**
- Route 7 Right-of-way
  - Forest Land Use District

- Solar Resources**
- Prime Solar Resource - No Identified Environmental Constraints
  - Secondary Solar Resource - No Known Constraints, but at least one Possible Constraint

Prepared by Bennington County Regional Commission, March 2026

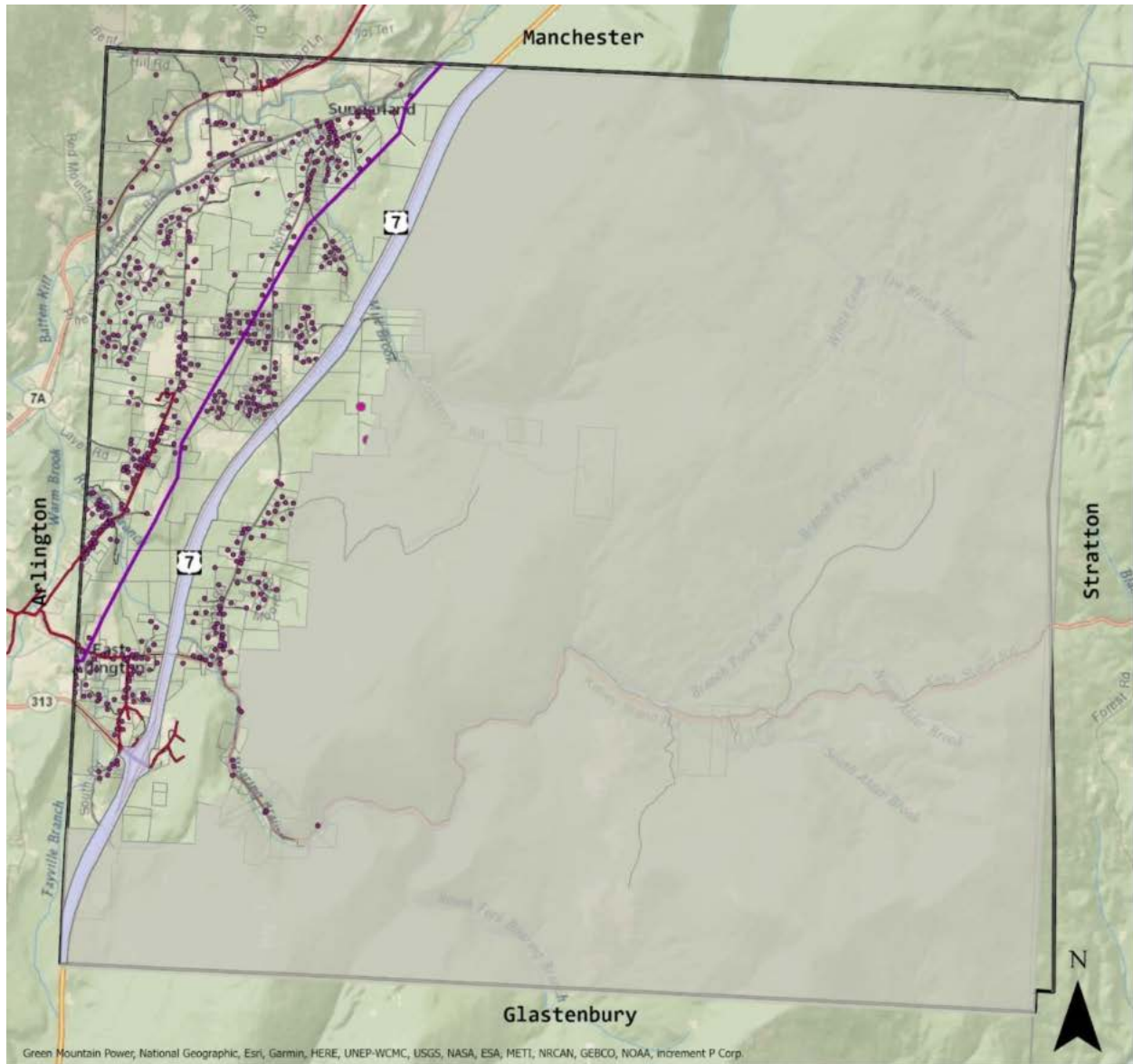
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Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information



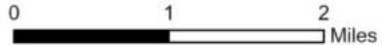


# M11



Green Mountain Power, National Geographic, Esri, Garmin, HERE, UNEP-WCMC, USGS, NASA, ESA, METI, NRCAN, GEBCO, NOAA, increment P Corp.

## Sunderland, Vermont Wind Resource Map



- Residential Structures
- Transmission Lines
- 3-Phase Distribution Line
- Sunderland Parcels
- Sunderland Roads
- Sunderland

### Local Constraints

- Route 7 Right-of-way
- Forest Land Use District

### Wind Resources

Secondary Wind - areas with high wind potential and no Known Constraints, but where at least one Possible Constraint exists.

Prepared by Bennington County Regional Commission, March 2026

This map should be used for general reference and planning purposes only.

Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information



Sunderland Town Plan Policy and Action Implementation Table.

Section	Policy or Action Number	<u>Policy or Action</u>	Responsibility	Primary objective it works to implement
Objectives	1	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall manage pollution and flood hazard risks, including damage to natural resources and preservation of water resources, and despoilment of working lands.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	
Objectives	2	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall maintain the rural character of the town while providing for housing growth in accordance with regional targets.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	
Objectives	3	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall provide areas for commercial and light industrial activity in designated areas, providing employment for residents and augmenting the tax base, including earth and timber resources.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	
Objectives	4	Due to Sunderland's limited government capacity, Sunderland's Select Board shall not pursue creation of new public services and amenities specific to Sunderland, and shall instead contribute to regional amenities and services provided in adjacent towns where government capacity is greater.	Select Board	
Objectives	5	The Select Board shall provide for an efficiently managed town with reasonable taxes.	Select Board	
Objectives	6	The Select Board shall encourage recreational use of recreational resources including Green Mountain National Forest and the Batten Kill.	Select Board	
Objectives	7	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall use land use planning to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and imported energy sources, reduce overall energy consumption through conservation and efficiency, and facilitate development of renewable energy resources locally.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	

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Section	Policy or Action Number	Policy or Action	Responsibility	Primary objective it works to implement
Land Use	1	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure development of land must be compatible with environmental characteristics and appropriate for the site and purpose.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2
Land Use	2	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure development shall be focused in existing settled areas.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2
Land Use	3	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that, in the absence of public services such as central sewage disposal and water supply, each building site shall not adversely affect adjacent property and water resources.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	1
Land Use	4	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall align minimum lot sizes with the underlying land use purpose including large lots where preservation is the priority and allow for flexibility where development is the priority to concentrate development.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2
Land Use	5	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that new development shall not be designed so as to require addition of new public roads or other capital improvements.	Planning Commission (permitting)	5
Land Use	6	Acknowledging the Batten Kill is a State designated Outstanding Resource Water(s) which is a visual and functional asset which must be allowed to remain in its natural state. Compatible recreation use is encouraged; development in the Batten Kill Corridor with structures, utility lines, or other impairment of scenic qualities is considered unnecessary and undesirable.	Planning Commission (permitting)	6
Land Use	7	Utilization of mineral resources, such as sand, stone, and gravel deposits, shall not create adverse aesthetic impacts or hazardous slopes. Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that screening, either natural or man-made, is required during the operation of the site, and reclamation when excavation is completed is required.	Planning Commission (permitting)	1
Land Use	8	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that land development and subdivisions including construction of roads and utilities shall avoid fragmentation of agricultural working land areas.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	3
Land Use	9	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that land development and use that would impair or endanger watersheds and well head protection areas supplying public water supply systems is discouraged, and any such uses shall make provision for remedial action in event of potential contamination.	Planning Commission (permitting)	1
Land Use	10	Land above 1,500' elevation shall be maintained in its natural state. Non-intensive recreation use shall be permitted with controls to avoid erosion or other damage to fragile soils and botanical and wildlife areas.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	1
Land Use	11	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall encourage primitive recreation activities, such as wilderness camping, are encouraged in areas with existing access, as well as non-intensive recreation.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	6
Land Use	12	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall not encourage construction of new campgrounds in areas mapped Rural Conservation on the Future Land Use map, but encourages continued use, including potential expansion of, existing campgrounds in these areas.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	6

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Section	Policy or Action Number	<u>Policy or Action</u>	Responsibility	Primary objective it works to implement
Land Use	13	Utilization of forest lands for commercial enterprises such as logging and sugaring are appropriate activities, and encouraged with approved forest management plans.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	3
Land Use	14	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that compact development shall be encouraged in areas designated on the Future Land Use map. Outside these areas, it shall provide for lower density development.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2
Land Use	15	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that residential development projects, especially major subdivisions, shall be evaluated for appropriate form based on land suitability and to retain special resources identified in the Town Plan and in consideration of water and soil-based wastewater resources.	Planning Commission (permitting)	1
Land Use	16	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that new subdivisions shall be integrated with the town, which shall be understood to be defined as adjacent to existing developed lands, and, where possible, subdivisions shall include at least two road access points.	Planning Commission (permitting)	2
Land Use	17	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall provide incentives for creative site planning and design such as cluster and planned residential development techniques in appropriate locations.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2
Land Use	18	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that residential development should be limited and carefully planned on slopes greater than 15%. Where natural slopes exceed 20%, no residential development and associated improvements shall occur.	Planning Commission (permitting)	1
Land Use	19	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that designated commercial and enterprise areas shall provide for commercial and industrial uses in keeping with the rural setting of this area without creating linear development patterns incompatible with state planning goals.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	3
Land Use	20	The Sunderland Highway Department shall review new right of way access permits to ensure development shall avoid excessive curb cuts and low density strip-type development, particularly in the village center.	Highway Department	5
Land Use	21	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that commercial and industrial uses shall avoid off-site impacts to adjoining areas, such as smoke, air quality, noise, lighting, etc.	Planning Commission (permitting)	1
Land Use	22	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall facilitate adaptive reuse of properties including the former Sunderland Elementary School and Conservation Way site.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2
Land Use	23	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall facilitate the use of ADU and PRD in the the Village Center District, areas adjacent to East Arlington, and the Historic Borough Road Settlement area.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2
Land Use	24	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall adapt the use of ADU and PRD for the purposes of maintaining the rural character of the Town.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2

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Section	Policy or Action Number	<u>Policy or Action</u>	Responsibility	Primary objective it works to implement
Land Use	25	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall recognize the potential use of soils. The development or subdivision of lands with high potential for agriculture, forestry, public water supply, wildlife habitat, or mineral and earth resource extraction shall not prevent the continued or potential use of the land for these activities.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	3
Land Use	26	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall preserve the working lands character of the Town by maintaining prime agricultural land free of development, as well as preserve and maintain the integrity of the forest and open space.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	3
Land Use	27	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure that utilization of mineral resources, such as sand, stone, and gravel deposits, shall not create adverse aesthetic impacts or hazardous slopes. Screening, either natural or manmade, is required during the operation of the site, and reclamation when excavation is completed is required.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	3
Land Use	28	The Planning Commission shall consider revision to the Land Use and Development Bylaws to reduce the minimum size for a PRD from 8 acres to 5 acres and remove the 16 acre cap to the PRD size, and expand definition of accessory uses for a PRD to include agricultural uses.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2
Land Use	29	The Planning Commission shall consider revision to the Land Use and Development Bylaws to allow for conditional approval of ADU's that do not conform to existing setback, coverage, and parking standards.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2

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Section	Policy or Action Number	Policy or Action	Responsibility	Primary objective it works to implement
Flood Resilience	1	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall encourage open air uses (recreation, agriculture, etc.) versus structural uses, obstructions or fill in the floodplain.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	6
Flood Resilience	2	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall restrict development and filling in of floodplains and wetlands along (the main) stream channels to protect their recharge and water storage benefits as they relate to flooding and to protect them as wildlife habitats.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	1
Flood Resilience	3	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall maintain appropriate setbacks from streams and surface waters, as specified in the Land Use and Development Bylaws.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	1
Flood Resilience	4	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall avoid development in river corridors and protect high risk fluvial erosion hazard areas and their ability to maintain natural flows during peak flooding events.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	1
Flood Resilience	5	Sunderland's Select Board shall regularly adopt the most recent State of Vermont Town Road and Bridge Standards as they are developed.	Select Board	5
Flood Resilience	6	The Planning Commission shall assure that any new development in either Special Flood Hazard Areas or the Fluvial Erosion Hazard Area, as shown on Map M6, is avoided. This would include the storage of any hazardous materials.	Planning Commission (permitting)	1
Flood Resilience	7	The Select Board should collaborate with other municipalities, the Bennington County Regional Commission, and the States of Vermont and New York in planning for the use and protection of regional water resources such as the Batten Kill. This could involve an intermunicipal agreement between these towns and communities in New York State for the long-term protection of the Batten Kill for both resources.	Select Board	1
Flood Resilience	8	The Select Board and partner organizations shall support continued monitoring of the Batten Kill and work with other interested groups to implement actions that will ensure ecological integrity and quality of the river environment and of the aesthetic, recreational and cultural resources of the Batten Kill watershed.	Select Board	1
Flood Resilience	9	The Select Board and Emergency Management Director shall maintain a current Local Emergency Management Plan that provides for emergency response and flood preparedness.	Select Board	1
Flood Resilience	10	The Planning Commission and Emergency Management Director shall maintain an updated hazard mitigation plan that fulfills FEMA requirements and the Select Board and the Emergency Management Director shall annually review the effective Hazard Mitigation Plan for each action's status and for funding needs in the upcoming budget session.	Planning Commission and Emergency Management Director (general planning)	1
Natural Resources	1	The type and intensity of development on a given site shall be compatible with soil conditions and construction shall follow conservation practices that are recommended by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service.	Planning Commission (permitting)	1
Natural Resources	2	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall recognize the potential use of soils. The development or subdivision of lands with high potential for agriculture, forestry, public water supply, wildlife habitat, or mineral and earth resource extraction shall not prevent the continued or potential use of the land for these activities.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	3

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Section	Policy or Action Number	<u>Policy or Action</u>	Responsibility	Primary objective it works to implement
Natural Resources	3	The Town and other partner organizations such as the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, the Bennington County Conservation District and others shall work together to maintain and enhance the ecological integrity of the Batten Kill and its tributaries.	Planning Commission (permitting)	1
Natural Resources	4	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall protect water quality, riparian areas, wetlands, and scenic resources.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	1
Natural Resources	5	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall support the preservation of highest priority forest and connectivity blocks as depicted in Map M7.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	1
Natural Resources	6	Sunderland's Town Treasurer should support landowners enrollment in the Use Value Appraisal program ("Current Use").	Treasurer	5
Historic Resources	1	Encourage protection of sites of historic/cultural merit from encroachment by incompatible uses and assure, to the best degree possible, that surrounding development enhances such historic features.	Planning Commission (permitting)	2
Historic Resources	2	Encourage renovation and re-use or adaptive use of historic structures which might otherwise be lost due to deterioration. Provide assistance to seek funds for maintaining such sites or structures.	Planning Commission (general planning)	2

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Sunderland Town Plan Policy and Action Implementation Table.

Section	Policy or Action Number	<u>Policy or Action</u>	Responsibility	Primary objective it works to implement
Transportation	1	Sunderland's policies and ordinances shall ensure new municipal and private roads, driveways, and drainage systems shall be designed, constructed, and maintained to meet the policies, goals, and objectives outlined in the town plan.	Select Board	5
Transportation	2	Sunderland's policies and ordinances shall ensure additions and improvements to the road network should be designed to mitigate impact on residential areas, and avoid fragmentation of wildlife habitat.	Select Board	5
Transportation	3	The Sunderland Select Board shall ensure major road improvements and investments shall support the existing road network, with minimal investment in road expansion serving remote and mountainous areas.	Select Board	5
Transportation	4	Sunderland's policies and ordinances shall ensure new municipal and private road construction shall be consistent with limitations imposed by topographic conditions and areas having special resource value.	Select Board	5
Transportation	5	Sunderland Driveway Access to Town Roads Policy shall ensure commercial and industrial developments shall provide for safe and efficient vehicular access. To the extent possible, adjacent commercial and industrial uses shall make use of common parking and access drives.	Select Board	5
Transportation	6	The Sunderland Select Board shall ensure Kelly Stand Road be maintained for its scenic value while providing safe recreational access.	Select Board	6
Transportation	7	Along roads where pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure are shown in the in Map M3, with particular focus on areas in the Village Center, the Select Board shall pursue construction of pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure.	Select Board	5
Transportation	8	On roads hosting long-distance bicycle routes as depicted in the map including the Western New England Greenway (US Bike Route 7), the Select Board and Highway Department shall support addition of signage indicating the presence of the route.	Select Board, Highway Department	6
Transportation	9	The Sunderland Select Board and Highway Department shall work with VTrans to implement a new roadway geometry and traffic calming measures to slow vehicular travel in the village center.	Highway Department	5
Transportation	10	The Sunderland Select Board shall consider alterations to speed limits and roadway geometry to town roads to improve safety, with particular emphasis on roads that handle through traffic.	Select Board	5

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Section	Policy or Action Number	Policy or Action	Responsibility	Primary objective it works to implement
Facility-Utility	1	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall regulate development in such a manner as to avoid contamination of source protection areas which lie within the town.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	1
Facility-Utility	2	Sunderland's Select Board shall support access to federal, state, and regionally-supported recreational and civic resources including Green Mountain National Forest, the Batten Kill, and parks and libraries of adjacent towns.	Select Board	4
Facility-Utility	3	Sunderland's Select Board shall not pursue the construction of additional town facilities where such facilities would require substantial amounts of ongoing taxpayer funding be diverted from core municipal services.	Select Board	4
Facility-Utility	4	Sunderland's Select Board shall plan for the replacement of the town's highway garage with intent that the structure be replaced within 16 years.	Select Board	5
Facility-Utility	5	Sunderland's Select Board shall engage capital planning to ensure the Town Office, Highway Garage, and transportation infrastructure will be maintained and/or replaced without foreseeable intergenerational transfer of tax burdens.	Select Board	5
Facility-Utility	6	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall ensure impacts from the town's transfer station are adequately regulated.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	1
Facility-Utility	7	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall support improvements to electrical infrastructure while managing floodplains, natural resources, and other demonstrable impacts on the town.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	1
Facility-Utility	8	Sunderland's Select Board and Land Use and Development Bylaws should facilitate efforts to aggressively expand cellular voice and data communication services to all parts of the region. Siting of new telecommunication towers should give primary consideration to concerns identified in this plan. As a first priority, antennas should be located in or attached to existing structures, including existing	Select Board, Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	5
Facility-Utility	9	Sunderland's Select Board and representative to the ISWAP shall pursue improved strategies of recycling, reuse, and solid waste reduction in the town, including pursuit of a "swap shop" at the Sunderland Transfer Station.	Select Board, ISWAP representative	1
Education and Childcare	1	The Select Board shall, in drafting the town budget, consult with the T&G Regional School District to coordinate school and town expenditures.	Select Board	5
Education and Childcare	2	The Select Board shall consider waiving petition requirements for appropriations to childcare centers after the first successful petition and appropriation vote that do not request increases in funding, including by centers in adjacent towns	Select Board	5
Education and Childcare	3	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall continue to support the operation of family childcare homes as required in state law, and revisions shall be considered to remove existing site plan review requirements.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	5

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Section	Policy or Action Number	Policy or Action	Responsibility	Primary objective it works to implement
Energy	1	The Select Board should continue to maintain the municipal energy committee (established in 2019) to implement this plan and track progress on the policies and actions stated herein. This committee shall promote local residential and commercial efficiency and conservation improvements through coordination of information and technical assistance and advocate for appropriate	Select Board	7
Energy	2	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaw shall promote compact, historical development patterns. Though there is currently no single, dense village core in the town, there are areas where future development could be concentrated to establish walkable, multi-use hubs. To encourage development of these dense hubs of activity, EV charging stations could be installed in conjunction with development	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	7
Energy	3	The Select Board should ensure all municipal infrastructure continues to be evaluated on a regular basis to identify opportunities for efficiency improvements and renewable energy generation and use. At the town offices, consider installing an EV charging station. When considering upgrades to the Town Garage, the Town shall consider the energy audit that was performed as part of the Municipal Energy	Select Board	7
Energy	4	The Land Use Administrator shall ensure new development in Sunderland adheres to the state mandated Residential Building Energy Standards.	Land Use Administrator	7
Energy	5	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaw shall encourage site planning to take advantage of a site's solar resource potential, and to accommodate multiple transportation modes through the Site Plan and Subdivision Review processes.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	7
Energy	6	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaw should consider natural ridgelines and profiles as an important natural asset of the town. Ridgelines and hill profiles are not necessarily higher elevations in the town, but could include the natural ridge profile and side slopes along Route 7, Kelly Stand, Batten Kill, etc. Commercial electric generation infrastructure shall be sited to not cause adverse aesthetic	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	7
Energy	7	The Sunderland municipal energy committee should continue to work with BCRRC to coordinate presentations and local conversations that promote residential energy efficiency and conservation through the following programs: the "Energy Star" building performance rating system; educational programming and appliance upgrade rebates available through Efficiency Vermont; and weatherization assistance	Energy Committee	7
Energy	8	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaw, supported by work of the energy committee shall promote energy efficiency and conservation at commercial and industrial sites in the following ways: by requiring all new commercial and industrial buildings meet the state mandated Commercial Building Energy Standards; by encouraging existing business to explore efficiency and	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	7
Energy	9	The Select Board should consider pursuing installation of a EV charging station at the town offices. Informational presentations for Sunderland residents and business owners on the advantages of EV technologies as well as state and federal rebate opportunities may be coordinated with the assistance of Efficiency Vermont.	Select Board	7
Energy	10	The Planning Commission should explore new transit routes, including the potential for a future bus stop along Route 7. Installation and maintenance of high quality and ADA accessible amenities at public transit stops such as shelters, benches, bike racks, posted signage and schedules, and park-and-rides should be pursued. Town officials shall be involved in any future proposals to develop passenger rail access along	Planning Commission (general planning)	7
Energy	11	The municipal energy committee, in partnership with BCRRC and other groups, can share information with local businesses and institutions on promoting rideshare, vanpool, and car-sharing, on strategies to support seasonal bike commuting, and on using telecommuting to reduce energy expended for work travel. A school campaign to increase ridership of the school bus could create community	Energy Committee	7
Energy	12	The Highway Department should assess existing roads for their ability to accommodate safe and convenient walking and biking as part of all work on Class 2 roadways. Areas for improvement should be prioritized and funding sought to align these areas with Complete Streets guidelines.	Highway Department	7

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Sunderland Town Plan Policy and Action Implementation Table.

Section	Policy or Action Number	<u>Policy or Action</u>	Responsibility	Primary objective it works to implement
Energy	13	The Select Board should support offsetting ongoing fossil fuel consumption by developing residential-scale renewable energy facilities on appropriate town-owned parcels. The Land Use Administrator should support interested residents in developing residential-scale renewable energy facilities on their properties. <del>The town should consider trialing the use of blended biofuel in diesel-powered municipal trucks.</del>	Select Board	7
Energy	14	The municipal energy committee should help facilitate dialogue between local/regional food producers and local/regional institutions such as schools, hospitals, and meal delivery or provision programs to enhance the interconnectedness of the regional food system.	Energy Committee	7

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Section	Policy or Action Number	<u>Policy or Action</u>	Responsibility	Primary objective it works to implement
Housing	1	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall provide for housing commensurate with needs as indicated in the housing target.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2
Housing	2	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall encourage new housing be developed in existing built up areas, with particular concentration in the Village Center and Village Area, and secondarily in Rural General areas as indicated on the Future Land Use map	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2
Housing	3	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall encourage new and rehabilitated housing be safe, sanitary, located close to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	2
Economic Development	1	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall support a mix of economic activities and attract new businesses which take advantage of existing infrastructure and natural and recreational resources.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	3
Economic Development	2	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall facilitate the use of local forest and agricultural lands for related commercial activities.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	3
Economic Development	3	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws shall encourage uses and development patterns that will attract visitors including establishments offering entertainment and food.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	3
Economic Development	4	Sunderland's Land Use and Development Bylaws and other town policies and ordinances shall encourage broadband and cellular communications be maintained to cover the town. Addition of small antenna sited atop existing utility poles in existing built-up areas including the village center is encouraged.	Planning Commission (in bylaw revision)	5
Economic Development	5	The Select Board and Highway Department shall promote walking paths and sidewalks, and bicycle trails and long distance bicycle routes, which would bring visitors and provide for healthy recreational opportunities for residents.	Select Board, Highway Department	6
Economic Development	6	The Select Board shall promote the Green Mountain National Forest as a recreational attraction, particularly those forest lands within the town itself, and adequately fund fire and rescue services to ensure first responders are equipped to adequately respond to increased service demands.	Select Board	6



## Summary of Town Outreach Feedback

### Town Stakeholders

- Highway Department
  - Highways generally in great shape and well-managed
  - Notable projects that have not been fully planned: retaining wall in Chiselville, North Road box culvert
  - Known flooding concerns: Dunham Road, railroad tracks near transfer station
  - PC requested a master list of future major projects from department
  - Noted need to plan for more sheltered storage for equipment/garage nearing end of useful life
  - Paving strategy is working, gravel roads struggle with budget constraint to maintain crown and elevation
- Energy Committee
  - Focused on MERP grant, notes garage energy efficiency
  - Appreciates Green Procurement Policy
  - Future planning for school property and community solar
- Town Attorney
  - Important to maintain an Act 174 compliant energy plan
  - Should consider enforcement mechanism and move as many ordinance matters into zoning bylaw as practical
  - Litigation volume low, result of few zoning permits
  - Should plan for future potential data center/commercial/industrial users carefully
- Fire Department
  - Development pattern generally conducive to efficient firefighting
  - Should encourage through roads rather than dead ends for efficient firefighting and bylaw should require dry hydrants in new subdivisions where practical
  - Should encourage buffer zones around buildings with limited vegetation
  - Should encourage/require Knox boxes on all buildings with fire alarms, potentially including short term rentals



- Transfer Station
  - Have enough capacity at existing facilities to serve region
  - Major workforce/housing issues, needed to start training their own CDLs
  - Few flooding concerns due to limited use of Sunderland Hill Road
  - Battery disposal safety is a broader educational issue
- Green Mountain National Forest
  - Value town efforts on the Kelly Stand
  - Plan substantial maintenance of existing trails/trail bridges up mountain
  - Will not be investing in new trails, existing trails meet demand
    - Mountain bike trails in Stratton just east of border scheduled
  - Could consider Appalachian Trail Community designation
  - Could support by hauling materials for trail groups or organizing volunteers
- Emergency Management Director
  - Important to balance flood concerns with housing/character concerns
  - Should encourage burying utilities, fire department water access, native species plantings
  - Should do hazardous tree survey and flag Emerald Ash Borer trees near power lines for Green Mountain Power
  - PC requested list of pinch points for flooding
- Invited but not present and did not provide feedback: Clerk/Treasurer, Listers, Cemetery Commissioners, Arlington Rescue Squad

#### Business Community

- Hill Farm Inn (and associated properties)
  - Traffic safety concerns at Hill Farm Road at 7A
  - Support church project
  - Housing related staffing concerns
  - Parking requirements/zoning could be more flexible
- Pete Haggerty Construction
  - Likes existing permitting process. Works well.
  - Should consider some design review
  - Junk enforcement: more needed
  - Could encourage joint/community septic
  - Echoed fire protection issues noted by EMD and FD



- Outdoor Rec Committee Representative
  - Initial hiking focus, later mountain biking
  - Still just getting started, discussing public vs private trails
- Wilcox Ice Cream
  - No current needs, wastewater managed, employees housed
  - Investing in modernization and mechanization
  - Encourage smaller lot minimums to retain young people
- Community space/food access committee
  - School discussion was most important point, timing is inconvenient for long-term planning
- Orvis
  - Noted general Vermont problems including housing
  - Employees value school choice and need more childcare slots
  - Internet/cell service investments important

Other members of the public

- Dixie Zens: Heard proposal for pavilion at the Town Hall with costs ranging from \$38k to \$150k depending on design with discussion of wetlands constraints
  - Speaks to need to better understand details and constraints on town properties
- One anonymous survey response summarized as “I don’t find the prospect of adding tax costs in order to reinforce an independent Sunderland identity”



### Sunderland Shines Engagement Summary Part 1

#### Summary of Top Community Concerns

This table summarizes the most frequently cited concerns from over 100 Sunderland community members collected by VCRD on June 18, 2025 and through the Sunderland Shines paper and online survey.

Rank	Concern / Theme	Frequency of Mentions	Key Details & Examples
1	Lack of Town Center / Gathering Space	Very Frequent	No central place for residents to meet; loss of school threatens remaining space; strong interest in pavilion, community garden, coffee shop, or new community center.
2	Communication & Community Engagement	Very Frequent	People feel uninformed about town meetings and decisions; need for a town newsletter, more use of Front Porch Forum and Facebook, and better event promotion; low meeting turnout.
3	Pedestrian & Road Safety	Very Frequent	Unsafe walking and biking on main roads; requests for sidewalks, bike lanes, clearer signage, and speed management; safety concerns for children and pedestrians.
4	Affordable Housing & Property Taxes	Frequent	High housing and land costs, lack of starter or affordable housing, increasing taxes, concerns about Airbnbs, and long-time residents struggling to stay.
5	Uncertain Future of Sunderland Elementary School	Frequent	Central to town identity and community life; strong worry about closure and its ripple effects on families and civic spirit; many ideas to repurpose building.
6	Limited Local Services & Businesses	Moderate	Few or no stores, cafes, or markets in town; reliance on neighboring towns; residents want a small commercial hub or general store.
7	Hunger & Social Disconnection	Moderate	Hidden hunger and lack of awareness about food insecurity; noted disconnect between income groups; desire for community food garden and stronger mutual support.
8	Historic Building Preservation (esp. Sunderland Church)	Moderate	Church described as 'crumbling' and in need of ownership resolution and funding; more general call to promote and preserve local history and heritage sites.



9	Youth & Family Activities	Occasional	Few structured activities for children and teens; lack of recreation and after-school options; interest in afterschool center, skatepark, or events like festivals.
10	Transportation & Access to Services	Occasional	No public transit; limited healthcare and child care access; distance from employment centers noted as barrier for young families.

### Summary of Top Youth Concerns

This table summarizes the most frequently mentioned themes, concerns, and ideas expressed by Sunderland’s 5th and 6th graders during the Youth Forum held on June 3, 2025.

Rank	Concern / Theme	Frequency of Mentions	Key Details & Examples
1	Desire for Gathering and Recreation Spaces	Very Frequent	Students want a community center, Friendship Park, local recreation park, dog park, and outdoor hangout areas. They want places to gather, play sports, host events, and have fun together in town.
2	Sidewalks and Road Safety	Very Frequent	Frequent concern about speeding, lack of sidewalks and crosswalks, and unsafe roads for walking or biking. Requests for sidewalks, ‘Beware animals’ and pedestrian safety signs.
3	Need for Local Services and Stores	Frequent	Students want a grocery or general store, smaller ‘Target-like’ shop, gas station, or ‘super center’ combining recreation and shopping. They wish things were closer and didn’t require driving to Manchester.
4	Community Identity and Visibility	Frequent	Students said Sunderland is a small town that ‘no one knows about’ and want more ‘Welcome to Sunderland’ signs and a unique park that stands out. They’re proud of their town’s nature and want it recognized.
5	Nature, Wildlife, and Environmental Concerns	Moderate	Students love forests, hiking, mountains, and wildlife, but worry about bears in trash, flooding, forest fire risk, and dead trees. Suggested solutions include dams, animal signage, and better flood control.

## Sunderland Shines Engagement Summary Part 2 Community Priorities for future action



These bullet points reflect potential actions that were brought up by the community by during the VCRD meeting on July 16, with over the 60 community members participating in the workshop. The Top two concerns were voted on by residents at the end of the forum and task forces have begun to meet to seek implementation strategies.

## Top Two Priorities:

### 1) Create and Improve Community Spaces and Increase Food Access

Community members are interested in creating a space in town that could be used for formal and informal gatherings and rented by community members for events. Types of spaces could include a pavilion, improvements at the town hall or Union Church, a community center or youth and senior center, and more. This group could also work to make fresh, local produce available by starting a community garden and supporting year-round local food programs.

### 2) Expand Outdoor Recreation Trails and Access

Community members could work to create new or expanded recreation trails in Sunderland. The group could explore possible new trail locations including the town hall property, near the covered bridge, or the National Forest. The group could also make a map of the existing trails and recreation locations in the community.

## Other priorities identified by the community:

- Increase local civic engagement/find ways to encourage more community members to volunteer in town government and other opportunities
- Collect and showcase Sunderland's history/ gather, celebrate, and publicize Sunderland's history
- Increase road safety for pedestrians and bikes
- Re-imagine the school/explore ideas for how the school building could be used in the future.
- Improve access to the Battenkill River
- Bring businesses to Sunderland
- Create spaces and events for youth and families
- Create/improve a bike paths in Sunderland
- Increase community events/opportunities to connect with neighbors.
- Advance housing solutions/rising costs of housing, especially for young families and seniors, and the increase in short term rentals.
- Improve community communications/ Town and community news and events
- Increase recreation amenities and programs/indoor and outdoor recreational amenities, especially for kids.
- Advance village development possibilities

# Sunderland Shines

## Report and Action Plan

September 2025



Produced by the Vermont Council on Rural Development

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# Vision for Sunderland's Future

*Compiled from vision statements shared during Community Visit meetings and supported by the majority of participants at the Resource Meeting and an online survey. The statements represent some of the broad hopes that the majority of responding residents have for the long term good of the Sunderland community.*

## Community members envision a future Sunderland:

- ❖ Where all are welcome and comfortable in the community.
- ❖ That attracts people to visit and live.
- ❖ Where neighbors get to know each other.
- ❖ That has a unique sense of identity and community pride.
- ❖ That is safe for families and kids.
- ❖ With a gathering place where the community comes together.
- ❖ With regular festivals, events, and gatherings in community spaces that all can enjoy, young and old.
- ❖ Where our outdoor recreation and other community spaces are accessible to all.
- ❖ Where residents come to community events and are engaged with what's happening in town.
- ❖ Where community members are civically engaged and serve on local boards.
- ❖ Where many people are engaged in preserving our Town's rich history and teaching our young people about it.
- ❖ Where local children have opportunities in Town for learning, recreation, and socializing throughout the year. Kids are cared for by the community.
- ❖ Where our roads are safe for walking and biking at any age.
- ❖ With woodlands and green spaces that are protected, including both private and public property.
- ❖ With a wide range of housing options, including options that are affordable to people who grew up in Sunderland.
- ❖ With local businesses like a restaurant or general store where residents and visitors can access local amenities.
- ❖ Where residents use their skills and passion to build up the community for the future.
- ❖ That is inclusive and equitable so that anyone can belong here and can benefit from all the things that are available in Sunderland.
- ❖ Where everyone is cared for and the community meets our needs.

# I. Introduction

Nestled among hundreds of acres of Green Mountain National Forest, Sunderland is a picturesque rural town with a rich local history and dedicated community members. The Sunderland Shines process illuminated the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm of community members, and the importance to residents of being together, getting to know each other, and spending time in the beautiful natural areas of town. While the community members who were involved in planning the outreach and forum topics for this process initially insisted that “nothing is happening in Sunderland,” it became clear through the process that the community cherishes opportunities to gather, and loves to show up for an event with dinner, music, and fun for all ages. The energy of the Sunderland Shines kick-off meeting, complete with a food truck and live music, exemplified this.

Visiting Team members who attended the meeting reflected on the immense opportunity available to Sunderland. The community’s placement along Route 7 and 7A, access to the Battenkill River, several buildings that could be community spaces, and a handful of diverse businesses were noted as key assets that could support the bright future that participants imagined for Sunderland.

A great example of this forward-looking attitude is the community’s approach to contemplating the future of the school building. While residents acknowledged the challenges and uncertainties of the closure, throughout the Visit the group was most interested in beginning to consider what the community would like to see in that building after the transition.

Visiting Team members also remarked on how achievable the action priorities chosen through this process are, given a number of existing assets to work with and build on. All of us were impressed by the number of people who joined the process and the energy and positivity they brought. Community members demonstrated that they are ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work for the future of their community.

\*\*\*\*\*

Many action ideas were identified throughout this process, and can be found in the “Opportunities” section of this report, along with notes taken at the initial forums.

After thorough deliberation, and multiple rounds of voting, Sunderland residents voted to form task forces around two priorities:

- **Create and improve community spaces and increase food access**
- **Expand outdoor recreation trails and access**

VCRD and its partners look forward to working with the Sunderland Task Forces as they advance these efforts. They are already hard at work — please support their efforts or join them by reaching out to their chairs (find details in the Action Plan section of this report).

The Vermont Council on Rural Development helps Vermont citizens build prosperous and resilient communities through democratic engagement, marshaling resources, and collective action. VCRD is prepared to support the efforts of Sunderland as it moves forward and to provide follow-up help to the Task Forces as called upon. VCRD will also serve as an advocate for Sunderland projects with appropriate agencies and organizations in Vermont. Please call on us, and on Visiting Resource Team members (listed with contact information in the back of this report), when we can be of help.

\*\*\*\*\*

There are many people to thank for making the Sunderland Shines Community Visit a success.

Thanks to the Sunderland Selectboard, who invited this process, and provided funds for the community dinner at the first meeting, the postage for the town-wide mailings, and drinks at all three of the meetings.

We also deeply appreciate the work and leadership of Planning Committee members who helped guide the process by identifying forum topics for discussion, developing the invitation process to start the effort, and helping with outreach at every stage. Thank you to Gordon Dossett, Avis Hayden, Jim Hayden, Scott Magrath, Andrew McKeever, Irene Nadler, Martin (Marty) Nadler, Tammie Reilly, Anthony Thompson, Ben Travis, Jenn Turner, and Dixie Zens.

Outreach is an essential component of a successful Community Visit, and many people helped make that happen. Thank you to Caroline Hartshorn for helping with the town-wide mailing, to Dixie Zens for helping with signage and banners in town, and to Andrew McKeever for distributing flyers. Thank you as well to the many other community leaders and organizations who worked together to spread the word about the event and make sure everyone in town was invited and encouraged to participate!

The Sunderland Elementary School was a key partner throughout this process. An enormous thank you to Principal Jenn Turner, administrator Katie Murphy and custodian Bill Amatruto for helping to coordinate the use of the school for all three of the meetings. We also appreciated the opportunity to meet with fifth grade students for a youth forum; their input and suggestions are included in the notes section of this report.

GNAT-TV was a strong partner throughout the process. Thank you to Tammie Reilly, and the entire team with helping with the production of the video announcement, and two subsequent videos. GNAT-TV is an incredible community resource, and we are so thankful for their support!

Andrew McKeever was a tireless champion for Sunderland throughout the process, and well before. His advocacy, and above and beyond efforts, including putting up posters throughout process, chair setup, and consultant. Sunderland is so lucky to have Andrew, and we are enormously grateful for his immense support.

Many thanks to Irene Nadler for coordinating childcare for the three meetings, and to Emma Daley and Chloe Gordon for providing childcare at the meetings.

Thank you to Anthony for coordinating the Hound Dogs food truck to prepare the dinner at the first meeting and to Dixie Zens for organizing the many volunteers to provide potluck dishes. Thank you to Sunderland's own Patrick Sargent for playing music during dinner at the first meeting.

We appreciate the help of the UVM Office of Engagement and UVM Center for Rural Studies for producing a briefing profile of data points about Sunderland for the VCRD Community Visit Team.

Thanks must also go to the funders of VCRD's Community Visit Program who made this process possible: the Northern Border Regional Commission, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, National Life Foundation, Vermont Community Foundation, Wisdom Connection, and VCRD supporters and donors. Front Porch Forum serves as an outreach sponsor for the Community Visit program.

VCRD calls in support from state, federal and non-profit leaders to participate in the Community Visit Program. We are proud of the partners we get to work with and our gratitude goes to the Visiting and Resource Team members that supported Sunderland's first and last meetings. The full list of leaders, agencies, and organizations that offered their expertise is in the back of this report.

Getting things done is all about leadership, so on behalf of all who have participated in the process so far and will continue to going forward, our deepest thanks go to those who've stepped up to serve as chairs and leaders of the Task Forces: Scott Magrath for Expand outdoor recreation trails and access and Casey Annunziata for overall communications. These leaders have already demonstrated their leadership in supporting the work of the community, and we are excited to see their efforts continue to grow.

Sunderland is well positioned to move these priorities forward. We are excited to support and celebrate the energy from these new initiatives, and look forward to seeing the good things to come in Sunderland.

## II. The Sunderland Shines Community Visit Process

VCRD's Community Visit program is a way for towns to engage and bring together their residents, set common goals and directions in a neutral and facilitated structure, and access resources that will help them take action on those goals. **Here is a snapshot of the 5-month process:**



### Planning Meeting: May 13, 2025

On May 13, 2025, 12 local community members met to plan for the launch of the Sunderland Community Visit process. This group came up with a name for the process – Sunderland Shines – and helped to plan the kick-off. They decided on forum topics and an invitation process. Thanks to Tammie and GNAT-TV, the group filmed an invitation video, and through calls, emails, flyers, banners, and lawn signs, this team worked hard to promote the kick-off.

The Committee included: Gordon Dossett, Avis Hayden, Jim Hayden, Scott Magrath, Andrew McKeever, Irene Nadler, Martin (Marty) Nadler, Tammie Reilly, Anthony Thompson, Ben Travis, Jenn Turner, and Dixie Zens.

### Step 1 ~ Kick-Off Forums and Community Dinner: June 18, 2025

Sunderland Shines kicked off with brainstorming forums held at the Sunderland Elementary School. Over 100 participants shared assets, challenges, and ideas for action in forum topics chosen by the planning committee and attended the free community dinner. Forum topics included: Community & Identity; Recreation; Schooling & Family Resources; and History & Progress. Nine visiting team members participated, learning more about Sunderland and providing reflections to the community.

Visiting Team members included: Ted Brady, *Executive Director*, VT League of Cities & Towns; John Castle, *Executive Director*, Vermont Rural Education Collaborative; Bill Colvin, *Executive Director*, Bennington Regional Commission, Julia Connell, *Community Development Specialist*, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Rebecca Ellis, *State Director*, Office of Senator Peter Welch, Peter Fairweather, *Principal*, Fairweather Consulting, Scott Grimm-Lyon, *Regional Planner*, Bennington Regional Commission, Amanda Gustin, *Director of Collections and Access*, Vermont Historical Society, and Trey Martin, *Director of Conservation and Rural Community Development*, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.

VCRD staff included: Lauren Brady, *Community Engagement and Policy Coordinator*; Alyssa Johnson, *Community Visit Program Director*; Dani Parkins, *Technical Assistance Associate*; and Nick Parker, *Community Programs Associate*.

## Step 2 ~ Community Meeting: July 16, 2025

After the kick-off, VCRD staff distilled the brainstormed ideas into 16 key areas of action. On July 16, over 60 community members joined at the Sunderland Elementary School to narrow the list of priorities for community action. After lively dialogue and a dot-voting exercise, two action ideas emerged as key priorities: 1) **Create and improve community spaces and increase food access** and 2) **Expand outdoor recreation trails and access**. Participants then signed up for task forces to move these priorities forward.

VCRD staff included: Lauren Brady, *Community Engagement and Policy Coordinator*; Alyssa Johnson, *Community Visit Program Director*; Dani Parkins, *Technical Assistance Associate*; Jessica Savage, *Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives*; and Denise Smith, *Executive Director*.

## Step 3 ~ Resource Meeting and Task Force Launch: August 13, 2025

On August 13, over 40 community members along with facilitators and resource team members came together to develop action plans, identify resources, and form task force groups that will work in the months ahead to implement the priorities. From here forward, all Sunderland Shines action is focused at the task force level.

Resource Team members included: Mark Anders, *Senior Transportation Planner*, Bennington County Regional Commission, Scott Grimm-Lyon, *Regional Planner & Solid Waste Program Manager*, Bennington County Regional Commission; Mariah Noth, *Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) Program Manager*, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Steven Pytlik, *Recreation Planner*, US Forest Service; Dara Zink, *Regional Planner & Emergency Management Program Manager*, Bennington County Regional Commission.

VCRD staff included: Alyssa Johnson, *Community Visit Program Director*; Jessica Savage, *Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives*; and Denise Smith, *Executive Director*.



### III. Sunderland Shines Priorities

Determined by Sunderland residents at the Sunderland Shines Community Meeting on July 16, 2025

*Through thoughtful conversation about the future of their community, Sunderland community members whittled down a list of 16 action ideas to these two priorities that offer opportunities to build on existing resources and strengthen the community. Residents then signed up for Task Forces to move them forward.*

#### **Sunderland residents selected these priorities for future action:**

##### **► Create and Improve Community Spaces and Increase Food Access**

Community members are interested in creating a space in town that could be used for formal and informal gatherings and rented by community members for events. Types of spaces could include a pavilion, improvements at the town hall or Union Church, a community center or youth and senior center, and more. A group could complete an inventory of community buildings in Sunderland, including those owned by the Town or others that could be open to the public. The inventory could assess and prioritize ways to improve these buildings to meet community needs, especially a space for people to gather. This group could also work to make fresh, local produce available by starting a community garden and supporting year-round local food programs. The garden could also be a place for neighbors to connect and for kids to learn about their food..

##### **► Expand Outdoor Recreation Trails and Access**

Community members could work to create new or expanded recreation trails in Sunderland. The group could explore possible new trail locations including the town hall property, near the covered bridge, or the National Forest. The group could also make a map of the existing trails and recreation locations in the community.



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## **Other Key Opportunities identified by the community:**

*Along with the chosen priorities, the key opportunities listed below reflect other potential ideas for action that Sunderland community members shared through community and student forums, and an online and print survey. Though these opportunities weren't chosen as priority projects through this process, community members may find the list useful as they look to expand on current projects or take on new ones.*

### **Increase local civic engagement**

A group could form to get more people engaged in community decision making and with local boards and commissions. The group could explore why residents haven't been participating, consult other towns and statewide partners for advice, and find ways to encourage more community members to volunteer in town government and other opportunities. The group could explore payment options or other incentives to increase volunteerism.

### **Collect and showcase Sunderland's history**

A group could form to gather, celebrate, and publicize Sunderland's history. The group could collect and catalogue stories and history from longtime residents. The group could partner with GNAT-TV to record stories, host Sunderland history talks or storytelling nights, and explore creating a Sunderland Historical Society. The group could create interpretive signage for historic sites in town, as well as a map, brochure, and/or walking tour of historical sites in Sunderland. The group could explore partnerships with local businesses and organizations to help visitors learn about the area's history, and create events to celebrate parts of Sunderland's unique history, like the Randall cattle.

### **Increase road safety for pedestrians and bikes**

Residents expressed interest in improving the safety of bikers and walkers in Sunderland. A task force could work to add or improve bike lanes, sidewalks, and other solutions to make the town more walk and bike friendly. The group could add signage, improve visibility by cutting back plants, and run educational campaigns to raise awareness. The group could partner with existing groups in the community already focused on this work.

### **Re-imagine the school**

A group could form to explore ideas for how the school building could be used in the future. This group could work with the school district, Selectboard, and other partners to learn about the process and what comes next with the ownership and use of the school building. They could also reach out to other communities who have had school closures for their expertise and advise. The group could engage the community about what types of activities and programs would be a good fit for the community and for the building. Ideas include a makerspace, retail space, community center, community garden, continued use of the playground, and an afterschool program.

### **Improve access to the Battenkill River**

A group could form to help people access the Battenkill River more easily. The group could inventory public access points, consider ways to improve them, and explore the possible new sites. The group could also hold events to celebrate the river and offer educational opportunities, such as classes on how the watershed works or how to fish.

### **Bring businesses to Sunderland**

Residents of all ages said they want more local businesses in Sunderland. Specific ideas included a general store, coffee shop, other small retail stores, more healthcare providers, and places that sell food for the community. A group could form to understand what residents need and want, and work to bring those businesses to town. The group could research various strategies, including tax incentives, that could encourage businesses to locate in Sunderland.

### **Create spaces and events for youth and families**

Many Sunderland kids participate in afterschool and summer activities in other towns, and both parents and students expressed a need for a “third space” and youth programs in town. A group could form to expand opportunities for families and youth to connect outside of school. The group could offer activities and events for kids such as “Touch a Truck” day, fishing and biking clinics, or a trick-or-treat event. The group could work on making dedicated spaces for youth, such as a kids’ space within a larger community center, expanding youth recreation spaces, a shared youth and senior center, or a dedicated youth center.

### **Create a bike path in Sunderland**

A group could come together to plan and build a bike path in Sunderland. The group could work with the community and regional partners to develop a clear vision for the path and figure out how to connect to existing bike paths in Manchester and Dorset. The group could work with regional, state, and federal partners to identify and utilize funding sources.

### **Increase community events**

Residents expressed an interest in additional opportunities to connect with neighbors. A group could form to plan events for people of all ages in Sunderland. Ideas include creating an annual Sunderland Day, hosting a winter lights event, organizing game and cards nights, starting a Farmer’s Market, bringing back pub nights at Hill Farm, and holding more music events like concerts or open mic nights.

### **Advance housing solutions**

Residents expressed concern about limited options and rising costs of housing, especially for young families and seniors, and the increase in short term rentals. A group could form to assess current housing needs and expand strategies to increase affordable options such as fixing up local homes and buildings, adding accessory dwelling units, and more. The group could investigate how short-term rentals affect the community and explore ways to address any undesired impacts. The group could also identify solutions to help residents make home repairs and improvements.

### **Improve community communications**

A group could form to inventory how the community shares information about Town and community news and events and find ways to improve. The group could suggest improvements to websites, increase the use of Facebook pages, community websites, and Front Porch Forum, and/or launch a town newsletter.

### **Increase recreation amenities and programs**

Sunderland could expand recreation amenities and programming for residents. Community members expressed interest in additional indoor and outdoor recreational amenities, especially for kids. These might include a skate park or pump track, walking or hiking paths, and more. The group could also look into providing programming such as classes to teach kids to fish or ride bikes. This could include hiring a town recreation coordinator.

### **Advance village development possibilities**

Community members described several assets in town that may not be used to their full potential, including land and buildings owned by town, the former Orvis office building, and the designated village center along Route 7A. A group could form to learn about these areas and help the public understand the development possibilities. The group could do public outreach and engagement to find out what the community wants and then explore partnerships, funding or other strategies to support the types of development and business growth that the community is seeking.



## IV. Task Force Action Plans

Resource Meeting, August 13, 2025

*Sunderland Task Forces are comprised of community members and an appointed chairperson. On Resource Day committee members worked closely with a facilitator and a visiting resource team to develop step-by-step action plans and a list of human and financial resources to help achieve their goals. This final phase of the program marks the time when residents truly take ownership of the work and begin the exciting process of turning ideas into action.*

### ► Create and Improve Community Spaces and Increase Food Access

Community members are interested in creating a space in town that could be used for formal and informal gatherings and rented by community members for events. Types of spaces could include a pavilion, improvements at the town hall or Union Church, a community center or youth and senior center, and more. A group could complete an inventory of community buildings in Sunderland, including those owned by the Town or others that could be open to the public. The inventory could assess and prioritize ways to improve these buildings to meet community needs, especially a space for people to gather. This group could also work to make fresh, local produce available by starting a community garden and supporting year-round local food programs. The garden could also be a place for neighbors to connect and for kids to learn about their food.

Community Chair	<b>To Be Determined</b>
Facilitator	<b>Alyssa Johnson</b> , <i>Community Visit Program Director, VCRD</i>
Resource Team Members	<b>Scott Grimm-Lyon</b> , <i>Regional Planner/Solid Waste Program Manager, Bennington County Regional Commission</i> <b>Mariah Noth</b> , <i>Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) Program Manger, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board</i> <b>Dara Zink</b> , <i>Regional Planner/Emergency Management Program Manager, Bennington County Regional Commission</i>
Community Participants and Task Force Sign-ups	Casey Annunziata, Catherine Borman, Virginia (Ginny) Dexter, Jeff Dexter, Gordon Dossett, Kendra Ericson, Megan Gault, Toni Gray, Avis Hayden, Andy Holzman, Julie Hutchinson-Smith, Samuel (Sam) Liss, Andrew McKeever, Irene Nadler, Martin (Marty) Nadler, Margot Page, Kimberly Pinsanneault, Aleks Rutins, Nancy Schuller, Steven Schuller, Anthony Thompson, Suzanne (Suzy) Thompson, Phyllis Warren, Catherine White, Gary Zack, and Dixie Zens

#### Current status and overview of the issue today

- The Sunderland Elementary School will be open for the upcoming school year and then be closing.
- Per the original school merger agreement, the Town would have the option could buy the school building, land and assets for \$1.
- Town would have to hold for 5 years before they can sell (can they sell for a profit?), in case district needs to reopen because of increased student population.
- Previous evaluations were done of the school building and indicate a need for repairs.

- Aside from school building, other aspects of the property – 12+ acres, playground, parking - are included, although if the building remains vacant, it could be liability to use of those other parts.
- The Union Church building is an asset, and has constraints.
  - Can't move the church, very little property around the church, and no parking,
  - The Town attorney determining if they can find an heir of the people who owned it. If not, possibly the state will buy.
  - Northshire Community Land Trust interested in buying. \$118k estimate for construction work. Environmental analysis needed as well. The Land Trust wants to buy, preserve, use for rental for events as long as they can break even. Challenges include: no septic/water capacity and a leaking oil tank.
  - BCRC had a grant to work with an attorney, and based on their review thinks that the state is the owner. That information has been taken to the Secretary of Administration and a response expected from state soon. Once official then know what next steps are - if state will give to town or do something else with that.
  - Current study for future uses of the area based on the constraints.
- Energy committee working with a MERP grant of \$206,000.
  - Part spent to find out what they can do with the 10 acres by town hall; there may be challenges with that land like wetlands, etc. Dubois and King survey is happening in next month.
  - Other outcomes of the MERP grant include: heat pump for the meeting room, sealing up the garage, and a solar array that will take care of electricity needs for town hall and garage.
- The Town has \$250k funding that it received from ARPA and has moved to reserve fund, and will determine how to allocate based on community input.
- Possible new Pavilion construction project - where to put to support synergy and connection?
- Landowner next to the town office – home to Randall Cattle, a landrace rare breed. There are only 1000 in existence, and it is the state heritage breed of Vermont. Manage farm at Hildene. Collaborated in conservation of cattle. Working with Conservation District for silvopasture and infrastructure at personal farm and Hildene. Working on a historic marker for the Cattle.
- There is a historic marker commemorating Lucy Prince, earliest recorded African-American poet and who lived in Sunderland, on Hill Farm.

## Priority Action Steps

1. Inventory and update community communication channels including the town website, email lists, Front Porch Forum to keep momentum going and be able to share updates and seek input about the work of the group.
2. Inventory available spaces and sites that could be renovated or built on in Sunderland. Review findings from the study of the land at Town Hall and the clarity on next steps from the school after the Sept. 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting. Investigate examples of what other towns have done that agreed to buy school buildings after a closure. Consider public and private lands in Sunderland in this analysis.
3. Create a matrix of locations and rankings, including criteria such as:
  - Potential uses
  - Limitations, including soil testing
  - Improvement needs
  - Costs and potential funding sources
  - Logistical considerations: management structure needed, insurance implications, etc.
  - Time horizon
4. Work with the Parent Teacher group to hold a community event – could rent a tent, host at town hall or at the school.

## Other Potential Action Ideas

- Could locate the future pavilion at the School site.
- Brainstorm options for quick wins as part of this work – maybe the pavilion? Important to have a visible sign of doing something.
- Have quotes for the pavilion. Could contact people who would assemble (has a sawmill that can cut the lumber and reduce cost) great opportunity for community event “barn raising”, kids involvement. But, want to make sure they identify costs before getting too far down the road with ideas.
- Investigate funding sources - taxes, state/fed, grants and other fundraising.
- Community center considerations - bathrooms, parking, who is in charge of coordinating/cleaning.
- Brainstorm events - concerts, farmers market, community meal, etc.
- Review regulations for a community garden, for example allowed proximity to neighbors for composting. Brainstorm sites for gardens with water.
- Explore establishing food hub, would need due diligence of research on what it would take.
- Explore connecting with the Bennington County Food Hub - aggregation, freezing, value add and processing. Conservation district would assist, and potentially have it be an option for school.
- Determining whether to hire someone for directing pavilion space?
- Talk to landowners adjacent to church about whether they would sell a small parcel to accommodate developing the church into a community space.
- Investigate what next steps are for Orvis building – is housing an option? What are the limitations?
- Know what’s happening with the Union Church group and support them – connect for status update and requests.

## Visiting Resource Team Recommendations

*These recommendations for other potential actions and resources to consider were shared by Visiting Resource Team members representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, and encompass their experience, past success and consideration of the community’s unique assets and needs.*

## Action Recommendations

Creating an inventory list is a great place to start! Look at underutilized buildings, vacant spaces, available spaces, and potential parcels to construct.

Continued cultivation of community partners is essential.

Look at other communities/projects around the state that have been successful and something the community could replicate. See “Technical Assistance / Peer Connection Recommendations” section below.

Attend the Vermont Community Development Association (VCDa) Conference in Wilmington on September 24th which will be focused on "Repurposing Civic Buildings into Community Assets." A great to network, hear about successful projects, and get ideas on where to start! Learn more and register at

<https://www.vtcda.org/fallconference2025.html>.

Establish steering committee to study possible uses of school building should it cease educational operations.

Explore ways to leverage location and views of town office by adding amenities such as pavilion, cookers, playground, hiking trails.

Continue evaluation of possible acquisition and community use of Union Church.

Apply for a Municipal Planning Grant to conduct feasibility work and identify space and programming to turn the idea into reality: <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant>

## **Technical Assistance / Peer Connection Recommendations**

Connect with municipal officials in Johnson about how they use Legion Field - a community gathering space where they just moved the town library to.

Visit the Old School Community Center in Wilmington and meet with the Old School Enrichment Council to learn how this grassroots non-profit organization started. Learn more at <https://www.osccvt.com/> and contact Meg Streeter, Vice Chair at [megstreeter.realestate@gmail.com](mailto:megstreeter.realestate@gmail.com).

Connect with Food Connects in Brattleboro to see if there are supports for the type of community food focused activity Sunderland is considering. Learn more at <https://www.foodconnects.org/> and contact Lee Halpren, Executive Director, at [lee@foodconnects.org](mailto:lee@foodconnects.org).

Connect with Jon Ramsay, Executive Director, Center for an Agricultural Economy at [jon@caevt.org](mailto:jon@caevt.org) and 802-472-5362 ext 110.

Anything that involves an old building can turn to Preservation Trust of Vermont for Technical Assistance in knowing the building better, developing a strategy for rehabilitation, ADA and Code upgrades, explore funding opportunities, meet with other funders, etc. Contact Nicole Gratton, Field Services Community Support Specialist and Visiting Team Member, at [nicole@ptvermont.org](mailto:nicole@ptvermont.org).

Visit Hardwick and learn how the community rallied around turning Atkins Field into a community gathering space for all sorts of community gatherings.

Connect with the Manchester Village Land Trust, especially to learn more about their interest in the Union Church.

Bennington County Regional Commission could continue planning coordination for Union Church reuse. Contact Scott Grimm-Lyon at [sgrimmlyon@bcrcvt.org](mailto:sgrimmlyon@bcrcvt.org).

The Conservation District is an important resource. Contact Michael Fernandez, Executive Director, Bennington County Conservation District at [michael@bccdvt.org](mailto:michael@bccdvt.org).

Connect with local partners, including the Arlington Lions, to learn how they manage their pavilion, and the Arlington Commons, regarding the programming they already offer.

The Vermont League of Cities and Towns can be a resource for planning for ARPA funds, school purchase, insurance for events, and other examples of towns working with schools. Contact Ted Brady, Executive Director at [tbrady@vlct.org](mailto:tbrady@vlct.org).

UVM Extension Master Gardeners could support gardening efforts.

Vermont Community Garden Network could be a resource. Learn more at <https://vtgardens.org/>.

The Legal Food Hub at the Conservation Law Foundation may be able to provide legal support for food hub related initiatives. Learn more at <https://www.legalfoodhub.org/>.

Vermont Community Development Program maintains the Community Development Consultant list (on our website) which the community could contact folks for grant writing and technical assistance as needed. Consultants can sometimes be paid by certain grants. Contact Julia Connell at [Julia.Connell@vermont.gov](mailto:Julia.Connell@vermont.gov).

## Resources and Potential Funding Sources

The Regional Planning Commission/Regional Development Corp should also be involved! They have resources/technical expertise that can assist with this project. They can also support the use of brownfields funding. Contact Scott Grimm-Lyon, [sgrimmlyon@bcrcvt.org](mailto:sgrimmlyon@bcrcvt.org).

Vermont Community Foundation has a Spark Grant program that may be relevant to some of the action ideas identified. Learn more at <https://vermontcf.org/funds/spark/>.

VCRD's *Community Leadership in Action Guide* contains a chapter called "Develop a Community Center" with ideas and resources relevant to this topic: <https://www.vtrural.org/guide/>.

VCRD has a Climate Catalyst Innovation Fund are open until October 20, 2025 and provides grants off \$500-\$4,000 to support local Vermonters that are working toward reducing energy use, improving climate resiliency, and supporting communities working together in the face of a changing climate. Learn more and apply at <https://www.vtrural.org/climate-economy/climate-catalysts-innovation-fund/>

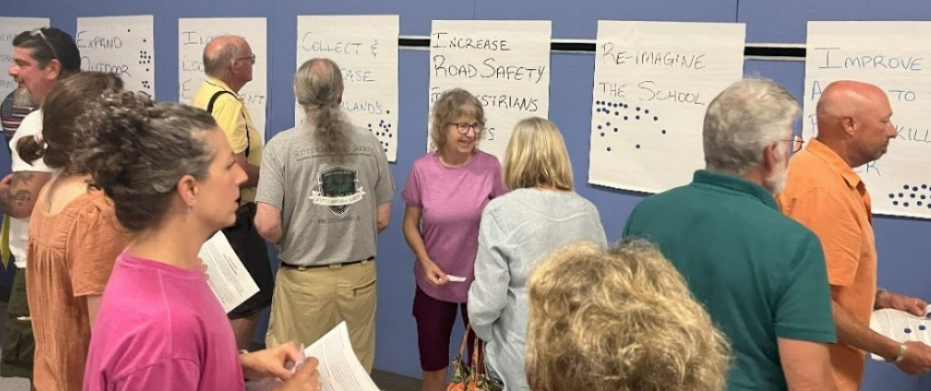
The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) has a Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) which can pay for grant writers once you've identified funding sources. Learn more at <https://vhcb.org/redi> and contact Resource Team member Mariah Noth at [mariah@vhcb.org](mailto:mariah@vhcb.org) or 802-828-1098.

Municipal Planning Grants and Vermont Community Development Program planning grants can help the community get started with identifying a space and/or identifying updates needed once a space has been identified. Learn more at <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant> and <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/vcdp>.

The State of Vermont Buildings and General Services Communities Grant program has regional economic development and Recreation Facilities Grants that may be relevant. Learn more at <https://bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants>.

USDA Rural Development Rural Business Development Grant: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/rural-business-development-grants-8#>. Contact Ken Yearman, [bpvtnh.inquiry@usda.gov](mailto:bpvtnh.inquiry@usda.gov) and (802) 828-6083.





## ► Expand Outdoor Recreation Trails and Access

Community members could work to create new or expanded recreation trails in Sunderland. The group could explore possible new trail locations including the town hall property, near the covered bridge, or the National Forest. The group could also make a map of the existing trails and recreation locations in the community.

Community Chair **Scott Magrath**

Facilitator **Jessica Savage**, *Director of Programs & Strategic Initiatives, VCRD*

Resource Team Members **Mark Anders**, *Senior Transportation Planner, Bennington County Regional Commission*

**Steven Pytlik**, *Recreation Planner, US Forest Service*

Community Participants and Task Force Sign-ups Beverly Anderson, Lawrence Anderson, Gabe Borman, Leah Davidson, Virginia (Ginny) Dexter, Kendra Ericson, Sam Galeota, Peter Garcia, Dina Garcia, Scott Grimm-Lyon, Avis Hayden, Jim Hayden, Erin Lyons, Scott Magrath, Steven Pytlik, Tammie Reilly, Aleks Rutins, Mia Smith, Anthony Thompson, Heather Toupin, Ben Travis, Michael Welther, Shane White, and Robert (Rob) Zeif

### Current status and overview of the issue today

- Much of the town of Sunderland lies within the Green Mountain National Forest; some of this is Wilderness Area designation.
- Attendees noted that there is a lot of local trail, forest road and gravel road recreational assets in the town, but many of these assets are unknown even to local residents.
- The town does not currently have any active recreation or trail groups or committees.

### Priority Action Steps

1. Inventory and map trails and outdoor assets. Assess what maintenance is needed, who owns the land, and who are the potential trail users. Includes reaching out to primary stakeholders (residents, landowners, kids, state & federal agencies, businesses, etc.).
2. Develop a mission statement for this group.
3. Prioritize projects and trails to create a working action plan.
4. Communicate with the broader community: reach out for help, survey what community wants, share progress.
5. Host a community volunteer trail maintenance day.

### Other Potential Action Ideas

- Increase trail maintenance of existing trails.
- Distribute trail maps (paper & digital on town website and AllTrails or other platforms).
- Make trails in the National Forest.
- Start a VT Mountain Bike Association chapter.
- Categorize trail use to make them safer – prioritize non-motorized trails.
- Budgeting with town, state and federal government for specific trails that they have an interest in.
- Find funding.

- Conduct a survey to find out what the community wants – what kinds of trails.
- Involve the elementary school students, and children in general.
- Invite representatives from the school to the committee.
- Ask school to invite parents and kids to the committee – it is an opportunity for community service.
- Start a Little Bella’s chapter (national girls mountain biking organization).
- Make accessible trails on the school property to get kids out in the woods.
- Identify trail stewards to take responsibility for specific trails.
- Explore utilizing the school after it closes as a trail resource center/hub with bikes and kayaks etc.
- Work with Burr and Burton to expand mountain bike trails.
- Identify river access points and make sure they are accessible.
- Create clear parking areas at river access points.
- Burr & Burton has service days that could be used for trail maintenance.
- Could get local businesses to sponsor sections of trails.
- Include the Long Trail School and Arlington High School in outreach.
- Reach out to Orvis or future owners about public access to trails that start at their headquarters campus.
- Explore economic opportunities and benefits of expanding outdoor recreation.
- Expand bike lane network.
- Improve trail marking and improve signage on existing trails.
- Organize walks so people can get to know the trails better.
- Need to message and figure out what mission is to communicate and build relationships with property owners.
- Promote trails that are ready for the public on All-Trails and other apps.

## Visiting Resource Team Recommendations

*These recommendations for other potential actions and resources to consider were shared by Visiting Resource Team members representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, and encompass their experience, past success and consideration of the community’s unique assets and needs.*

### Action Recommendations

Conduct a survey of community members early in your work: knowing what your neighbors want from a trail network makes your efforts much better and easier for them to support! You can find examples of trail surveys with your peers in other towns: see below for specific ideas or contact Sharon Plumb at the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council: [sharon@vermonttgc.org](mailto:sharon@vermonttgc.org).

Trail assessments, trail standards and trail building and maintenance practices are skills that can be learned and in some cases are best done by a professional. Consider what skills your group already has, and which ones you need. Identify skills that might require a professional to lead such as trail design and trail building. You can find best practices and examples as well as where to find trail professionals here: <https://vermonttgc.org/design-build-and-maintenance/> and here: <https://www.americantrails.org/resources> and here: <https://www.trailbuilders.org/>.

Consider reaching out to other communities who have done work around trail expansion and outdoor recreation: see below for specific ideas.

Purchase, rent or borrow trail traffic counters to gather insights on trail usage and preferences; create a schedule for data collection across all the trails participating in the Task Force. BCRC might have trail counters to lend or know where to find them for lending/renting. Contact your RPC at [manders@bcrcvt.org](mailto:manders@bcrcvt.org).

Post all publicly accessible trails on TrailFinder: <https://www.trailfinder.info/>. This site is made up of trail manager approved mapped trails and it's free to get your trails on it! Contact Claire Polfus to learn more at [claire.polfus@vermont.gov](mailto:claire.polfus@vermont.gov).

## Technical Assistance / Peer Connection Recommendations

Woodstock did a trail expansion project a few years ago. This group could also meet with other area trail groups (Hike Dorset: <https://dorsetvt.org/hike.html>, Bennington Area Trail System (BATS): <https://batsvt.org>) to gain knowledge on trail creation and maintenance; recent Community Visit towns to connect with include Lunenburg, Poultney and more. Contact VCRD for introductions: [alyssa@vtrural.org](mailto:alyssa@vtrural.org).

You can reach out to VT Parks & Recreation Association for ideas and maybe what other communities have done. Contact Jessica Brodie at [jessica@vrpa.org](mailto:jessica@vrpa.org).

Consider scheduling a meeting with Jackie Dagger at VT Parks & Recreation, VOREC Program Manager, to discuss how the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative might be able to help Sunderland. Contact Jackie Dagger, VOREC Director at [jackie.dagger@vermont.gov](mailto:jackie.dagger@vermont.gov).

It might be helpful to have regular conversation with the Green Mountain National Forest Supervisor to identify opportunities for collaboration. Contact John Sinclair, Forest Supervisor at [john.sinclair@usda.gov](mailto:john.sinclair@usda.gov) and 802-747-6704.

Contact Gary Holloway at the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development to hear examples of what other towns have done and to inquire about state funding resources including the Better Places program. Contact Gary at [gary.holloway@vermont.gov](mailto:gary.holloway@vermont.gov).

The Vermont Trails and Greenways Council (trail development and maintenance) and the Vermont Recreation and Parks Association (municipal recreation) can provide resources that may help. They co-host the Vermont Conference on Recreation and Trails Symposium together every fall. Contact Sharon Plumb at [sharon@vermonttgc.org](mailto:sharon@vermonttgc.org), and see <https://www.vrpa.org/Conference-Overview> for information about the annual conference.

Drew Pollak-Bruce at CRO Planning & Design is a consultant who also could be a resource around recreation trails. Contact Drew at 303-859-2370 or [drew@CROplanning.com](mailto:drew@CROplanning.com).

The local Chamber of Commerce may be a partner for community development projects. See <https://www.bennington.com/>.

Jessica Savage, VCRD's Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives, worked for the Vermont Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation for many years and would be a great resource for strategizing and planning next steps. Contact her at [jessica@vtrural.org](mailto:jessica@vtrural.org) and 802-227-2790.

Contact the Green Mountain Club's area chapter: <https://www.benningtongmc.org/>

Connect with the Velomont folks. Learn more at <https://vermonthuts.org/the-velomont/> and contact Angus McCusker at [angus@velomonttrail.org](mailto:angus@velomonttrail.org).

Connect with the Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA) chapter for the area. Contact Jon Mowry, President, Northshire Area Trail System (NATS) at [natsvmba@gmail.com](mailto:natsvmba@gmail.com).

## Resources and Potential Funding Sources

A Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) Planning Grant can assist with planning for rec trail expansion. Learn more at <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/vcdp> and contact Julia at [julia.connell@vermont.gov](mailto:julia.connell@vermont.gov) and 802-828-5215

Better Connections Program <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/projects-programs/better-connections>.

The Recreational Trails Program provides annual funding to Vermont communities for the development and restoration of public recreational trails. Applications require a 20% match. Learn more at <https://fpr.vermont.gov/recreational-trails-program>.

The Recreational Trails Program provides annual funding to Vermont communities for the development and restoration of public recreational trails. Applications require a 20% match. Learn more at <https://fpr.vermont.gov/recreational-trails-program>.

Recreation Economy for Rural Communities: [epa.gov/smartgrowth/recreation-economy-rural-communities](https://epa.gov/smartgrowth/recreation-economy-rural-communities).

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) has a Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) which can pay for grant writers once you've identified funding sources. Learn more at <https://vhcb.org/redi> and contact Resource Team member Mariah Noth at [mariah@vhcb.org](mailto:mariah@vhcb.org) or 802-828-1098.

The Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Program offers grants with no match requirements for projects that create measurable success supporting and growing their local economies through leveraging outdoor recreation. Learn more at <https://fpr.vermont.gov/recreation/recreation-grants/vorec-community-grant-program>.

Vermont Community Foundation has a Spark Grant program that may be relevant to some of the action ideas identified. Learn more at <https://vermontcf.org/funds/spark/>.

The Department of Health offers Healthy Community Design resources that may be relevant. Learn more at <https://www.healthvermont.gov/wellness/physical-activity-nutrition/community>.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund supports the development of public outdoor recreation opportunities across Vermont, with a focus on creating parks and open spaces, enhancing recreation areas and facilities, and protecting wilderness areas and forests. Learn more at <https://fpr.vermont.gov/land-and-water-conservation-fund>. Applications require a 50% match.

The State of Vermont has a Recreational Facilities Grant, which requires matching funds for shovel-ready projects. Learn more at <https://bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants>.

The Vermont Natural Resources Council has small grants that can help with community engagement. Find information here: <https://vnrc.org/small-grants-for-smart-growth/>.

The Nature Conservancy in Vermont has a Vermont Biodiversity Fund which can purchase and conserve land: <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/vermont/stories-in-vermont/vermont-biodiversity-fund/>

The Vermont River Conservancy supports river access projects: <https://vermontriverconservancy.org/>

VCRD and BCRC will write letters of support for grant applications. Contact Alyssa Johnson at [alyssa@vtrural.org](mailto:alyssa@vtrural.org) and Bill Colvin at [bcolvin@bcrcvt.org](mailto:bcolvin@bcrcvt.org).

VCRD's *Community Leadership in Action Guide* contains a chapter called "Advance Outdoor Recreation and Trails" with ideas and resources relevant to this topic: <https://www.vtrural.org/guide/>.

# V. Sunderland Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held with over 100 Sunderland community members and the VCRD Visiting Team on June 18, 2025, through a paper and online survey, and a youth forum.

*Although the prioritization work of the Community Visit Program requires a town to decide what is most important as it moves forward with Task Forces, nothing is lost in the process from the long list of concerns and ideas expressed in early community focus sessions. Many interesting and diverse thoughts are represented here, and are presented as a reminder of issues explored, and a possible foundation for future projects.*

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## Community and Identity

Visiting Team: Dani Parkins (FACILITATOR), Lauren Brady (SCRIBE), Bill Colvin, John Castle, Peter Fairweather, Rebecca Ellis, Amanda Gustin

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### What are the Assets in this Area?

- Great Forests and open spaces, that's most of our grand list, it's vast acreage and we take pride in it and seek to protect it.
- Covered bridge, the union church, the historic cemeteries, and the school are the 4 things that identify Sunderland.
- Many nearby assets in the surrounding towns and a close relationship with those towns.
- Hiking cycling, forest, four season activities, shopping, grade schools, great services, libraries, arts, rec parks.
- Great neighbors who come out, with potential for a lot more.
- Bike lane, WHERE?
- More families in town these days.
- Battenkill River, somewhat hidden but a great kayak or canoe ride down it.
- Tributaries, and the watershed as a fresh water source supporting ecosystems and recreation, and education, swimmers, fishers.
- Kelly stand Road is a great place for recreation, can get to Grout Pond, the AT, and Stratton. Brings a lot of people from all over hiking fishing etc. It's part of the Green Mountain National Forest.
- Easy access to the highway "Super Seven" and 7A as well, asset for tourists, commuters, and others.
- Home to historical figures like Lucy Prince, Ira and Ethan Allen.
- The school is an asset, major connection to others in the community especially for newer community members.
- Marc Johnson and the road crew - they keep the roads clear and in good shape all year round! We know they're on top of it! They do such a good job, they keep the roads beautiful even in the winter mix.
- There are a lot of dirt roads in town which are so well maintained here.
- Healthy proximity to Bennington Hospital and Manchester clinics.
- Families. It's nice to have a mix of ages and demographics.
- Lack of congestion - road traffic, very easy to get around.
- The view from town hall is spectacular, and it's a new building in good shape!
- You can see the stars in the sky here.
- Facebook group for the town "Sunderland Vermont."
- There's also a Sunderland Front Porch Forum - used a lot in town.
- GNAT is an underutilized resource, that is your community resource.

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### What are the Challenges?

- No town center and no meeting place, so there's no common gathering place that attracts people to come together, so people stay dispersed and don't have a sense of a center.
- Have talked about having a pavilion or a walking trail, something that people could gather.
- The lack of a town center means we aren't bumping into our neighbors to talk about what's going on and share information with each other.
- Lack of interest in Town Meetings, the elected and appointed officials would like more engagement and involvement from the community.
- Communication throughout town, and getting info about the municipal meetings is a big challenge.
- With a lack of gathering places, the school building is the only place that the community can gather. The school closing in the next few years will be a big loss of an asset to town.
- Historical Church is crumbling, trying to revive it, we're putting in a good effort, but it's such a big project that it's been difficult.
- Distance from the state center and those employment opportunities, and industry in general. That's a barrier to rural development and just young people being able to live and work here.
- The under current in our community is hunger. People don't realize how much exists. The yellow Barn Gardens grow for the Food shelves and the federated church, and on the Veggie Van Go Board. Have identified a large pocket of hunger that isn't talked about. The Arlington food bank is only open twice a month. There's not enough time or room in town to serve everyone in town who needs food.
- Especially with the school possibly closing, and lack of industry, there's a lack of a draw for young people in the

- community. Not having a young vibrant population puts a strain on the community.
- Planning for pedestrian safety, walking or cycling on the roads. More people on the roads these days, especially during rush hour all year round. Scary to walk on Hill Farm Rd and others, just myself or with my three dogs. Our State Road is also dangerous for pedestrians, and have previously talked with BCRC, but so far no luck.
  - No access to public transportation.
  - A runner has been chased many times by the dogs on the roads in town. This feels like a big danger both to the people and the dogs.
  - Safety while walking down the road, across the tracks and 7A, and back. There's no way to do with the speed that people go.
  - Lack of connection between socioeconomic populations in town, that might be related to some of those challenges like dogs loose and hunger in town.

- Small population and high property taxes and a lack of affordable housing.
- There are folks living in town who are multiple generations living here and it's hard for them to stay as taxes go up. Land in this part of state is very expensive, more so than where I grew up in Addison County. Building is very expensive and there's no housing stock.
- Taxes have recently exploded and I want to see that controlled. Want to see the Town watch the budget as well as the school watch the budget.
- Affordable Housing - there are either really wealthy people here or really poor people.
- Nobody has rules for Airbnbs and a lot of people are buying investment properties and not moving here.

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### **Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?**

- Hiking trail or something like that as a central focus for gathering in town.
- Some sort of community food garden to grow fresh organic vegetable for/with the community. Build the garden and they will come. Find land that would be suitable, need startup volunteers and a water source, and then people who will take care of it. It's a huge undertaking but would be such an asset.
- HOW TO IMPROVE Young Population???
- Putting up more road signs and cutting back vegetation to increase pedestrian safety.
- Take the land next to town hall and put a community garden there.
- The land and the building of the school could be sold and be a commercial property or be a gathering center, or divide it up. There's 12 acres of land as well of the building.
- The Orvis space is also a building where we could have mixed use.
- The village center could be moved uphill and closed to the Manchester boarder.
- Could have a mixed use neighborhood in the village center or near one of the big buildings.
- Look into the ownership of school building if it's closed, who would it go to?
- Town website section about road safety and pockets of hunger.
- Advertise the communications that exist like the Facebook page.
- Do a town-wide evaluation of the buildings that could be good assets for some of the Town's needs.
- Use the communication resources in town, the front porch forum could use more information and conversation.
- Would like a community newsletter to get emailed and sent to everyone in town.
- Build a pavilion on the Town Office Land with a little parking area and that would give us access to that field, could be a town garden bordering the wetland. Dixie's got a plan for this and there's a group working on this. It would provide a gathering place, could do family celebrations there, it's got a beautiful view.
- Hiking trails around the town center.
- Feasibility study on pedestrian safety working with the Planning Commission. What delivers the most benefit? Include the state highway and advocate to the state about how to make Route 7 a safer place to recreate.
- Improve community communication.
- The bike lane should be extended, to the school.
- Want to see a pavilion, would be great to see some amount of sports field or other things to draw people together.
- Maybe some speed management - those signs that tell you what speed you're going, the speed bumps.
- Consider ways that we can bring young people and families into town.
- Investigate how to bring affordable housing into town.
- Would love to have a coffee shop in town.
- Would love to have an event to bring people in, what about a Pumpkin Chunkin event (Pumpkin catapulting event) and have a whole festival about it. It could be a fundraiser to bring in cash. That event needs a lot of land, cause pumpkins can really fly!
- Develop some local rules about short-term rentals. What's the right limit for this community? There are cons to losing year-round community members, but it is a way that local folks also make it affordable to live here, and we should get creative about how we address it.
- Affordable housing that is actually affordable.
- Work to get more people to show up to selectboard and planning commission meetings to share more of the community feelings and interests on all of the issues.
- We could host events and if we publicize them well then we can attract people from all over and it will make those of us who live here proud and will give us fun reasons to gather and get to know each other and give us a sense of identity and community.
- Build community so that neighbors can meet each other and get to know each other. A festival, a potluck on a regular basis, can be cheap and low-key, maybe a community block party.
- Could do some work on our community identity and brand, evaluate how we fit amongst all the surrounding towns, why

this town rather than the other surrounding towns? Many moved here for school choice, but we could do new things and get picked up in the news and draw people to visit, they might even move here. Make this a desirable place to live.

- Think about what is the right type of development for our Town Plan.

- Find ways to encourage small businesses and entrepreneurs, now it's not hard but we could do more to encourage that.
- Rupert Village Trust has been working to rehab their building and put in a coffee shop there, we could learn from them
- Set up a calendar of cultural events to see what assets we can build on and draw people.

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## Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Helpful to Bennington County Region Commission (BCRC) as we engage with Sunderland to revise its Town Plan. Few themes were communication amongst residents (newsletter, social media, calendar), events kept coming up, vitality meaning commerce and community activity, concern and opportunity around what happens with the School building, lots of concern around road safety, could learn from the town of Bennington on the Town-owned roads, BCRC is certainly a resource there. Pride and Opportunity around the natural environment. One thing I didn't hear about was broadband and cellular access, how is that in town and is that an asset to entrepreneurs and families? Or a challenge to all.
- Seems that there is still ambiguity about the direction of the school building. Understand your articles of agreement, certainly some of that is in play with the new education legislation. Encourage more community engagement with the school board and more proactive thinking about how you might want to use it as a community space, start those

conversations as soon as possible. Wilmington is an excellent model of that.

- There were many assets and ideas that you identified. You talked about baby steps, and for this to happen it just requires a vision and persistence. This community can succeed with persistence. Impressed with the number of people who came out tonight, so you have a lot of great people. You also have a lot of great ideas. While there are many ideas, there are those 6 or so broad themes. Any of those are possible it just depends on what you want to do. A pleasure to listen to your love for the community, I heard a lot of linkage between assets and challenges. There's space for community gathering and a garden and that could address some of those challenges around connection and recreation and events. Perhaps building spaces for connection to happen is a theme of this discussion. You've already started the path of connecting with your community and building a path for you.

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## Recreation

Visiting Team: Alyssa Johnson (FACILITATOR), Scott Grimm-Lyon (SCRIBE), Ted Brady, Julia Connell, Julia Keeton, Trey Martin

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### What are the Assets in this Area?

- Applied for a grant in 2013 and built a 1 ¼ mile of bike path on Sunderland Hill Rd (completed in 2018).
- Safe Streets Committee.
- Kelly Stand Rd. connects to the National Forest (no bicycle/foot access).
- Great for Fly Fishing.
- Winter Season – Mixed use trails great for X country skiing
- Campgrounds off of Kelly Stand Rd
- Battenkill River – Canoeing and Kayaking
- As a small community the information is available and easy to access.
- Natural beauty is wonderful.
- Clean up day has a fantastic turnout.
- Many people also clean up through the rest of year – a lot of pride.
- Community pride.
- Trout Unlimited SW VT Chapter River Cleanups.
- Mt. Equinox Toll Road.
- There used to be a Marathon – not happening any more.
- American Legion (Arlington) and VFW (Manchester).
- Woodford Snow Dogs maintain multi-use trails in national forest.
- Arlington Commons and Arlington Rec Center/Pickleball courts.
- Access to the park in Arlington for sports and recreation, golf etc.
- Playground at the Elementary School.

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### What are the Challenges?

- Programs for kids are few and far between, we have to travel out of area.
- We're small and we have to tag onto that towns to access opportunities/we do not have a say in their management
- No organized sports for children (leagues Mt. Equinox Toll Road.
- Because we are small, we only got a 50/50 grant for bike lane an did not qualify for 80/20 grant
- Was not able to build bike lane as wide as Safe Streets committee desired.
- No longer have Scouts in Town (troops are in ARL and MAN)
- Lack of volunteerism
- Hills make cycling to destinations difficult nowhere to bike in town.
- Kids rush to get license because they need to go other places to do things.
- No real spots to hang out, no parks w/ benches.
- No Town Center or Gazebo to hold events.
- No coffee shops or markets.
- Used to have races up Mt. Equinox Mountain (bike and car).

- No Church that holds services.
- Playground at the Elementary School future is uncertain with school potentially closing.

- Fishing trails maintained by Hill Farm Rd.

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## **Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?**

- Skatepark or pump track.
- Pump track is doable (closed circuit course with hills)
- Dorset Mountain Bike & Foot trails are a good nearby model.
- Elementary building could be a community asset after closing.
- We need to be a more bike friendly town.
- Should connect bike paths to Arlington and Manchester.
- Battenkill River Access could clear out space and promote use of it.
- Undeveloped Village Center District is an opportunity area.
- Kids fishing derby like the Duck derby in Arlington.
- They used to put tubes in water in town – closed after Irene; privately owned.
- Connection to Orvis as a potential sponsor for community events.
- Colebrook Rd. /Colby Cobbs camp Rd. hiking trail is beautiful Public Access, but a private road.
- Tree preservation in national forest area.
- Appalachian Trail – better trail system could be taken advantage of.
- A published map of local trails could be useful – it would help invite people.
- Marking trails would make them more welcoming – current trails don't look much like a trail.
- Trails are hidden treasures (unclear).
- If town had central gathering place – (w/parking).
- Annual Sunderland Day – some kind of Community event to celebrate Sunderland Social community atmosphere, multigenerational gathering.
- Pavilion to rent out for birthday or anniversary parties.
- Should have a Town Recreation coordinator.
- Recruit a rich benefactor.
- Music event (Arlington attracts from across state)
- Even a few events a few times a year could be simple and maybe generate revenue.
- Indoor playground and/or trampoline park with a coffee shop to bring babies so it can be used year round.
- Indoor pool (not one in region).
- Hill Farm Inn might be able to coordinate with Town to host events.
- Thursday at Hill Farm Inn used to be Pub night for locals with an open mic.
- Historic Church on Hill farm Rd. could be a venue for music
- Church reimagining acquires nearby lots for parking - Some activities used to be at church/fundraiser put bathrooms in church needs parking, river access gazebo and connection to bike lane.
- Local volunteers to teach kids how to fish.
- Offer some kind of incentive to help people step up maybe a tax break for businesses or something else.
- The Area where Sunderland Church is, also has the best access area for fishing in Town (Also the Village Center District).
- Sunderland should do a survey to figure out what land it owns, and then determine which of it could be useful.
- Bring a Farmers Market to Sunderland look at available spaces (school).
- Consider what the town could potentially do with the school space – land can accommodate a lot of the suggestions.
- Splash pad at school playground.
- Indoor vibes for winter activities at School building.
- Housing that might be different than what is already available when redevelop School area.
- Area adjacent to Town Hall could serve potential uses (may be a wetland).
- Significant recreational activity opportunities can improve property values (bike infrastructure in particular).
- Hold events to teach kids about bikes fixing etc.
- Find a way to turn the school closing from a negative into a positive.
- Indoor/outdoor recreational space will need volunteers, but can start small.
- Sunderland could connect to trail networks in Manchester and Dorset.
- Community gardens to bring people together.
- Another Town does an annual plant sale to benefit town Citizens buy perennials and funds go back to the community. Other flowers are used to decorate town properties.
- Build more trails in the national forest and connect them to the Orvis Property off Rte. 7.
- Continue some kind of music and art program in the school space.
- Open Jam space music for the arts/ with music lessons for kids/a space to wait on instruments.
- Who is going to be the point person to make these ideas happen? How do we foster people to take these ideas to the next level?
- We need winter activities, weather for skiing is getting worse, we need to plan for snowless related winter activities too.
- Identify sledding hill in Sunderland for the kids kiosk w/hot chocolate.
- Winter lights on some kind of a public walking trail (with no snow required).
- Indoor space where kids can move and be wild rock climbing wall laser tag.
- Turn school into some kind of recreation hub for year-round activities have trails connect here.
- Organizing a 5K or 10K race could raise money and display recreation opportunities for the town.
- Some kind of parade or activity where kids can be the center of it.
- Events for kids like touch a truck/classic cars, events should offer snacks, coffee etc.
- Connect with the forest service to develop trails/trail friendly administrator at the moment.

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## Reflections of the Visiting Team

- The Town feels like a piece of unmolded clay – not inhibited by past infrastructure.
- River and Forest special combination and opportunities for outdoor recreation.
- The degree of selectboard involvement in this process is unique and an asset.
- Something emerges out of these.
- In a unique spot where Sunderland is growing; that means something special is going on.
- Age demographics are younger than other towns in VT which offers an opportunity.
- For an Outdoor recreation Town, this is the most kid-focused and public focused I've seen, great foundation to build on
- When you plan around families, the dynamism explodes.
- Do you have business and hub destinations you want to grow? What is the carrying capacity for this as a tourist destination?
- Randolph could be a good model for working with first service to improve trails.
- Focus on year-round recreation and winter recreation that will be good even in a changing climate.
- The elementary school property is untapped potential.
- Seems like there is a lot to do here that could be broadcasted to the rest of the state.
- The variety of age groups participating is special here.
- The family focus for activities is unique.
- Sunderland is not well known but the suggestions are giving me a reason to come back.
- Tap into resources and training, there are opportunities for the Town to have assistance, and we can utilize the people in this room.

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## Schooling and Family Resources

Visiting Team: Lauren Brady (FACILITATOR), Julia Keeton (SCRIBE), Ted Brady, John Castle, Julia Connell, Trey Martin

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### What are the Assets in this Area?

- For a small town, organized town structure, zoning board, town board, elated people that help the town to coalesce ideas and move it forward.
- School is fantastic, move when didn't think they would have kids, and love the school.
- Great community at the school.
- Best test scores, teachers doing good job.
- School is welcoming, small school, small community, small size is good.
- Family resources: beautiful place to raise a kid, fireflies, birdsong.
- Kids can be free, she comes from Berlin, big town, but here so much opportunity to go outside, be themselves.
- New to Vermont, comparing long island grandchildren to those in Vermont, she's in awe of what kids up here do. Freedom growing up. Critically think about the world around them. Great problem solving skills. Kids elsewhere don't have the outside world we do.
- Learn self play in this environment. On long island, if not in organized activity, on their screen, can't play by themselves.
- Wonderful school, town has supported connection to the school.
- Town pays stipend to support local childcare, thankful when that passes on town meeting day.
  - Supports financially Northshire daycare.
- Leverage resources that are outside of Sunderland like preschool, kids at BBA still have availability to go elsewhere, other options.
- Kids are exposed to lifelong skills and recreational opportunities, arts programs etc.
- Town has developed in a way that supports families. Enough zoning for it to be nice, but still freedom to live how we want to live.
- Government struck a good balance to benefit families.
- Connections made at school are phenomenal, as soon as kids went to school, he's made so many more friends in the community.
- Intrinsic to rural living, don't have a ton of resources but because community is so tight knit and school is so welcoming – have created strong relationships and support each other.
- Town at town meeting vote to support variety of organizations that help families like Northshire day care. They have created opportunities to access resources in other towns, credit to the community that vision is such that if you can't have it in town, provide it in close proximity.
- Arlington Rescue and Fire reach out annually to connect with students on fire safety, consider Sunderland part of the area they cover.
- Battenkill Valley health care center and Stratton foundation great organization that looks out for Sunderland.
- Students don't have their own sports league, but go north to be part of Manchester rec and go south to participate at Arlington, more options on where you want to go for your leagues. You have choices.
- During Covid, experience with her kids, very different from friends in Brooklyn because they had space to roam, going on hikes, building a bunny trap. So many wonderful things to create in this free space.

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### What are the Challenges?

- Beautiful church and a lot of people in town, but not a lot of people come to church – would love to see more people.
- From the sentiment of the room, continuance of the school seems like consensus. But is it worth it to pursue that if the

- ship has sailed and it is not likely to happen? Do we want to put energy into it?
- Last board meeting that occurred (school board), superintendent proposed, lots of energy and work went into the proposal, school administrators, considering their own communities and ideas. We all came to a consensus with the proposal put forward to the board. Find proposal in agenda packet online.
  - Board did not accept proposal as it was, did not move forward the proposal as outlined:
    - Move process of closing Sunderland elementary forward for 2026-2027 school year and beyond. But steps we have to take first, can't close it without going through process
    - Moving forward a regional middle school to be created in the future. It is a process that must be followed.
  - Worried about students transition from school of 50 to school of 480. Understands class sizes will be the same, but school still bigger overall.
  - Losing small town, small community, everyone knows everyone else community.
  - Plan tentatively developed to where kids would go, regional school.
    - Dorset stay as is, consume courier. Madams (not sure spelling on this) would consume us. Not what administrators feel is best path forward.
  - Lose core stone of community, only gathering place here. Working with VCRD and with new village center designation to come up with new gathering place, replace what we're losing.
  - School currently the "community space" and there is the town hall as well, losing not just education but community side of it is a concern.
  - Challenge that there aren't other places to gather as a community.
  - Current challenge is that a small rural school is lack of resources and lack of people available to fill resources available, such as therapist, school nurse, librarian etc.
  - In a public school environment, hard to teach to the individual, more effort to teach to the individual. Challenge that exists everywhere.
  - As move to bigger number of students in the classrooms, problem seems to grow.
  - Being isolated and not having downtown or business, got to go to Arlington or Manchester to access anything.
  - No quick shop to run to.
  - Can also be an opportunity to not have downtown business, special to have to this tiny little town and have these resources just down the road. Best of both worlds?
  - Remote distance to get healthcare is difficult, difficult to get into a pediatrician, had pay off five people to get in, on waiting lists. If moved to Sunderland today would be 3 years before kids could get dental and teeth checked.
  - Urgent care not vital option if not great insurance.
  - Not much veterinary care as well.
  - Waited a year for first physical appointment to see physician.
  - For families hard to watch bear cubs run through backyard and know that six year old wants to go outside and play. Have to be careful of these wildlife dangers.
  - Close family connections, but would not let daughter bike to a friend's house. Bike path only on steep hill which 6 year old can't access. Not safe elsewhere for kids to bike.
  - Lack of industry, not ton of people seeking out this place to build careers.
  - Shortage of healthcare, son needed a specialist. How do we access that?
  - Financial advisers, few accountants, everyone is retiring, few young people moving into those positions. Retiring generations of businesses.
  - Housing is challenging, trying to get other families to live here but no houses to buy. People are renting and want to leave that space, but no options.
  - Concerned about costs.

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### **Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?**

- If going to have bus kids, could Sunderland have a center for kids being bused back. Have a core of people to work with kids after school. Areas of interest or expertise, cool add on. Don't want people moving Sunderland to see that kids are bused to Manchester and decide to just live there instead. If we had this cool after school learning center where kids learn after school, may be something cool that attracts people. Someone used to teach math works with kids.
- Look at kids as they grow up, opportunities at BBA, sports, music, but kids like to hang out with one another and there is nothing for them to do. Special place for kids might broaden scope and include seniors, young adults. Old town hall in Windhall, one mom who made that happen. All kinds of activities in that building.
- Halloween trick or treat.
- Adults playing cards.
- Open up sense of community more, everyone here is together and talking and we miss that.
- Bike path would be great to connect to one that goes from Dorset to Manchester.
- What to do with space if no longer a school here.
- Climbing wall and gym for kids.
- Card room.
- Jam room.
- Art room.
- Community center: not school but something important for youth.
- Pool tables and ping pong.
- Afterschool spot.
- Events for seniors during the daytime.
- Dentist office and veterinarian and coffee shop that also sells tacos.
- Lots of people who love it here, grew up here and left because of not much opportunity. However we can inspire people to do the thing they want to do here is good. She had to start her own business to remain in Sunderland. Community classes to offer for kids and adults to inspire them.
- Personal finance class.
- Dental van that comes and visits schools throughout the district for kids that qualify.

- Community garden and teams based here after the school closes. Farmers market.
- Ask for FAQ on what would happen if school closes, build relationships with school board to get information.
- Convene neighboring communities to see what can do together, lean on each other.
- Develop committee of partners, selectboard, town members, school board (mixed response from the room).
- People are feeling burnt out though.
- Don't know what we're fighting against.
- Wait and see what the state does if it's going to expand districts, may have access to other schools. Don't know yet. Wait for action from the state before form committee.
- Talk to Rochester and other communities that have done this before, understand what worked.
- People in the room feel like this could be valuable but not right now.
- Housing at low cost in this area, little different from rest of the town.
- town houses or condos, coupled with area for kids to play.
- Farmers market into this area.
- General store.
- Use of land around the town building, sports field, soccer field. Having something here would be awesome.
- Community booklet of resources.
- Hiking trail map.
- Speed limit signs around town to slow down traffic.
- Parenting classes at elementary school, he found that helpful when he had a young kid. Building community, helping kids.
- Believes already a local dads support group.
- Local volunteer rotating master class, whether that's gardening or whatever someone is skilled at.
- Map out resources with other schools, is another community planning to repurpose their elementary school as a community center.
- Get a group to meet with people in Rochester (did he say Roxbury?), their school just closed, learn how that went, what opportunities are there. Learn from that experience.
- Don't put everything on your selectboard. Recognize that this is a financial burden and the selectboard knows that. Look outside government structures to make something like this works. Don't make selectboard raise taxes.
- Talk to other communities that have gone through this, what did their school board do. Understand the timeline, roles and responsibilities for the school board in any transition, what will happen to the building. Roxbury, still operating childcare in their old school through 2026, had to figure out how to make it a community asset. Have the community do research to what could happen for this building, don't put it all on the selectboard.

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### Reflections of the Community Visiting Team

- All incredibly passionate about this, important to develop this space. Very easy to get burnt and be overwhelmed by all the opportunities you have here. Participate where you can and when you can. Other communities going through similar paths, there are unknowns, but figuring that out will make you a stronger community.
- Most important thing a community does is raise the kids in that community. When that's the only thing you identify as Sunderland, that's hard and complicated. How you keep this sense with or without this school? Communities have fought school closure and those that didn't, found a way to repurpose that school.
- Community is like our help. It takes work. When you don't have a school, it takes more work. Have to be intentional about how you form those connections, be intentional about how you build community. Will have to be intentional about fostering community. Maybe there are elements of the school that can retain. Maybe town will run harvest dinners as an example instead of the school
- Inspired by hearing ideas on how to use space. Thinking about private organizations, don't have to have public childcare to have childcare for example. Think about revenues to stack together. This is happening all over Vermont, people are scared about it. Hurt in people's hearts. Impressed by how positive this was. At an age where it's so easy to be angry at each other, noticing that here community is positive and mindset of "we're going to do this and get this done."
- Partnership, school district and board have a responsibility to help you navigate through this. They have resources and capacity to help you through this. Develop FAQ. They have office staff. Develop a community committee that can look at all these options. Don't assume that selectboard wants to take ownership. It is an asset and a liability. Could be costs associated with the building.
- Engage the school district, provide FAQ, community forums. Can't over engage community. Build on that momentum.

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## History & Progress

Visiting Team: Alyssa Johnson (FACILITATOR), Scott Grimm-Lyon (SCRIBE), Rebecca Ellis, Peter Fairweather, Amanda Gustin

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### What are the Assets in this Area?

- Sunderland Thank You for visiting signs at the borders and the
- Chiselsville Historic Bridge signs.
- Historic Markers.
- New sign going up for Lucy Prince a famous African American Female Poet in Sunderland.
- Sunderland Church is one of our greatest assets.
- Recognition of Important Historic Figures, Allen Brothers.
- Mills and Surrounding areas.
- Are there historic artifacts, Chisels etc.
- Slides of residents of the Town couple married 75 years, The Thompsons, The beagles – They are open to those who want them.

- Stanley Steamer in Barn.
- Russell collection in Arlington Library – Ledger book of Sunderland Store the collection is interested in paper Items and Photographs and other ephemera (church bulletins, etc.)
- Old general Store (Now a residence) where old Texaco sign is.
- 85% of the Town is National Forest – Hotel and Other historic sites inside.
- Daniel Webster spoke on the Kelly Stand.
- Kelly Stand – several mills with stone walls are remaining and a 200 year old sawdust pile.
- Access to historic experts in Manchester and surrounding towns is excellent.
- A lot of collective knowledge in the area.
- In the Glastenbury wilderness, wagon wheels, sawblades, large chunks of iron in the McEntire area, border near of Town near south fork of roaring branch, wood stoves.
- A lecturer at Benn museum spoke about history of Kelly Stand Rd/has done the research.
- In Mt. Pleasant Cemetery is Veteran of Battle of Bennington (Samuel Pierce?).
- Ira Allen Inn, historic house.
- The historic Cemeteries are an asset.
- Chisleville Bridge.

### **What are the Challenges?**

- Church needs a ton of work but it is a beautiful asset.
- There's a committee that's working on it right now. Biggest challenge is Ownership of Church, see if state can take it over.
- Lack of community pride and communication.
- Private collections of things should be in the Town Hall, and there's not enough.
- Indifference about our community identity with historic assets displayed we could inspire pride.
- We don't have adequate avenues for promotion of our town and identity.
- Same Zip Code as neighboring communities.
- I'm a neighbor to the church – what has the feasibility of the building based on lot size etc.
- Challenges are fundraising, to meet significant challenges. Church needs plumbing heating septic and parking.
- How do you preserve hard to maintain things like the Church and the Chisleville Bridge?
- If no one jumps in to do anything the Church will sit for another for 200 years.
- Lack of a visceral sense of why this is a community. If we as a community become more of a community, it will be easier to get money and volunteer hours because people will chip in because they are part of the community.
- Housing challenges, housing is expensive and It's hard to find anything, the people need housing for the future of the community.
- Jeremiah Evarts – activist for Native American rights is from Sunderland some of his work inspired Civil Rights.

### **Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?**

- An email list where people can share their historic resources.
- There are lots of ways because of the history for us to promote Sunderland.
- Legacy gifts be made to the Town.
- Landgrove Meeting house is an example of an unheated historic asset and possible model for the Church
- Digitize early Town records -It would be great if they were accessible to the public. Documents signed by the Allens.
- There is already a number of people traveling to the Chisleville Bridge.
- Map and historical site poster board signage at Chisleville bridge.
- Brochures of area located at historic sites, walking map/tour maps.
- Digital archive, or website for locals to put their information and put it together on line.
- Add the next two signs in the town garage Welcome to Sunderland signs, where they need to go.
- We want to start small and get some low hanging fruit, more things like the signs is appealing, build on the small successes.
- We have the old school houses that have been turned into residential homes, they should be put on a map with information about what one room school houses were.
- Highlight the Randall Cow (Heritage cattle breed from the region).
- Make simple signs and markers at Town roads that people can see historic sites – keep it simple and not too long or hard to understand.
- Use Town Hall to exhibit our town treasures on a rotating basis.
- Signage like the sidewalk markers in downtown Bennington, with photos across the street so you can see a photo of what it used to look like from the spot you are standing.
- Tap into Hill farm and other places in Town with guests to promote the historical sites in Sunderland.
- Make sure Sunderland sights are on historic trails, African American Trail etc. Where applicable.
- Community Storytelling Events – possible partnership with GNAT.
- Older residents of the community, record what it was like
- Hayden Family on this side of the Chisleville bridge for oral history.
- 25 years ago there was an Revolutionary camp and battle reenactments, tis could happen again.
- Use older residents as an asset to identify buildings and things in historic photographs and add to oral history project.
- Finds a way to map the people in cemeteries, have names of people in Cemeteries associated with a Town map to show where they lived and where they are buried.
- The town is full of stories like Comstock showing up barefoot at Battle of Bennington, figure out ways to integrate these stories into the signage idea.

- Get a local historian (Bill and/or Avis) to do a Sunderland Series of Talks, it helps build a sense of community.
- Branding and Promotion – Travel groups, can we connect with them and tell them what makes Sunderland special - Sunderland, we're not just a Bridge.
- People volunteering can get frustrated from a lack of help.
- Create a Sunderland Historical Society.
- Dr. Russell's collection (located in Sandgate) doesn't serve as a historical society, but has a series of resource that could start one.
- People who are seeing our historic sights will need services in town, water, bathrooms, coffee, food trucks, etc.
- Pave the last mile of East Road and Flynn Hollow Road.
- Town village, the only commercial strip in Town.
- The Town should create zoning areas on Rte. 7a that will be more like a village and not allow things like storage areas.
- Get engaged in the zoning process, so the Planning Commission can serve residents.
- Redevelop the old Basketville into a bistro or café use.
- We could petition and get funds too.

### Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- A Historical Society would be a good umbrella for a lot of the ideas here and provide an institutional structure to help move these things along, lecture series, newsletters, markers, etc.
- The strategic and approach of doing the building off of the small wins.
- Building the visceral feel and response, community development is like building a joint work of art, maintain focus on why we love this place to keep momentum.
- There is tremendous history here in Sunderland, both physical assets and ephemeral things like stories, access to that knowledge and the ability to share it, identify audiences and the way to convey the information, we can't use Sunderland to connect with each other, those who have come before us and also those who are just arrived. History as a tool for those connections.

## Additional Action Ideas

Here are the ideas residents contributed through a paper and online form

- Make the municipal depot and sheds at the corners of Sunderland Hill Road and Hill Farm Road nice. They are in desperate need of a facelift.
- Repurpose a section of Sunderland Elementary for a Makerspace in the case that the school closes.
- Arlington area childcare in here to support Sunderland is very important to us and anything summer program or afterschool wise we can help with I would love to partner if there is room at the table for me.
- I'd like to see sidewalks, bike paths, or trails so that the people (including children) of Sunderland can get out and move. The roads are narrow and without shoulders.
- Depending on what happens with the school, there is a great playground at the present school and if that facility is no longer used as a school, it could be turned into a common-use building.
- I am very concerned that Sunderland's history is not well known and what we do have cannot be preserved for lack of a space to do so.
- Finish MERP work on town garage.
- Improve bike and walkability.
- The old church on Hill Farm Road is a great asset and it seems important to obtain the ownership of that building (contact living heirs) and then funding for operational use.
- It will be interesting to see what becomes of the old Orvis HQ building -- and see if there is a way to develop eateries etc. at the south end of town.
- Finish work on Sunderland Church.
- Better recreation access to The Battenkill.
- Install remaining "Welcome to Sunderland" signs on Rt. 7A.
- Start a town newsletter.
- Home energy audits (at a reduced/free cost).
- Energy efficiency demonstrations, DIY projects, info seminars (at Town Hall or the school).
- Community solar projects like many towns are doing to provide solar power to residents who can't afford their own or whose homes aren't conducive to solar panels.
- Become a Button Up Vermont town <https://buttonupvermont.org/>.
- A mailing (snail mail or email) to all residents about the many Efficiency Vermont projects, resources and incentives.

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# Youth Forum

These are notes from a forum with 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade Sunderland students conducted by VCRD staff at the Sunderland Elementary School on June 3, 2025.

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## What are the Assets in Sunderland?

- Friends live close by, walk to their houses, hang out and go somewhere.
  - Know where everybody lives and can hang out easily.
  - Close knit community, people are nice and thoughtful.
  - Can always find something to do in the woods.
  - Everyone really supportive, like school.
  - Quiet and wilderness.
  - Forests and greenery, hiking, big backyard.
  - Refreshing river - swimming and fishing.
  - Hunting, wildlife, birds.
  - Walking on the road with cousin.
  - Beautiful mountains!
  - State forest protected and public.
  - Neighbors OK with kids playing on property.
  - Daycares in Manchester.
  - Take a book leave a book.
- 

## What are the challenges?

- Camps and classes in Manchester - hard to keep in touch.
  - Unpredictable weather.
  - Small town no one knows about.
  - Speeding on small roads, not expecting.
  - Get lost on private roads.
  - Lots of friends live in other towns, hard to visit.
  - Have to be careful in the woods, dead trees.
  - Conventions and mall all an hour drive!
  - Planes fly low and a lot!
  - Wildlife population - deer damage.
  - Things are too far, have to drive, far to walk or bike and NO sidewalks.
  - Visitors don't know hunting areas.
  - Not a lot of shops, grocery store.
  - When rains, lake, swamps flood roads and farms.
  - Lots of bears getting into trash.
  - Camp fire risks forest fire.
- 

## What are your ideas for the future?

- Community Center.
- Sidewalks on more roads, more safe and crosswalks.
- 'Beware animals' signs - bear signs.
- Welcome to Sunderland (add this).
- Local Rec. park for sports and other camps.
- More doctors (eye doctors).
- Address flooding (maybe dam or other ideas).
- Live music - research options and invite musicians
- Cheaper places to eat.
- Super center - groceries, recreation, stage, have it all in one area so don't have to go to 5 different places and so we can play while family shops.
- Sunderland daycare.
- Take a book leave a book, library and bookstore.
- Make park different from other town parks so it stands out.
- Store like Target but smaller.
- Little bit of everything.
- Maybe a community store.
- Share extra garden produce or have a community garden.
- Outside area to hang out.
- Closer, cheaper, middle of town.
- Friendship Park (stage, gardens, wildlife).
- Jobs for kids at store or volunteer.
- Community food drop off/share.
- Community parks, dog park, pet friendly areas.
- Gas station (with store?).
- Sidewalks.
- Signs near house and roads where people and pets are.



## VI. Sunderland Community Visit Participants

Beverly Anderson  
Lawrence Anderson  
Adam Annunziata  
Casey Annunziata  
Todd B  
Merrill Bent  
Frazier Blair  
Catherine Borman  
Gabe Borman  
Andrea Brophy  
Bill Budde  
Gabrielle Carpenter  
Jeni Chui  
Simm Chui  
Rachael Clementa  
Gavin Cornell  
Meg Cornell  
Marilyn Coutoure  
Danielle Crosier  
BJ Dahl  
Lea Davidson  
John Dawson  
Jeff Dexter  
Virginia (Ginny) Dexter  
Michael di Monda  
Gordon Dossett  
Rep. David Durfee  
Linda Dykeman  
Tom Dykeman  
Kendra Ericson  
Chris Filipkowski

Sam Galeota  
Dina Garcia  
Peter Garcia  
Megan Gault  
Nick Gault  
Wayne Godfrey  
Irene Goyette  
Mark Goyette  
George Gray  
Toni Gray  
Alyson Gryzb  
Laura Hammler  
Caroline Hartshorn  
Avis Hayden  
Jim Hayden  
Kevin Hewes  
Andy Holzman  
Dan Houghton  
Ginelle Hunter  
Julie Hutchinson-Smith  
Christy Johnson  
Kathy Johnston  
Marc Johnston  
Daryl Kenny  
Leslie Kielson  
Dave Kiernan  
Kim Knapp  
Jackie Kutzer  
Kelly Langlais  
Todd Lawrence  
Liz Liecd

Samuel (Sam) Liss  
Marie Litowinsky  
Liz Lizca  
Erin Lyons  
Scott Magrath  
Brenda Massaro  
James McCarthy  
Andrew McKeever  
Linda McKeever  
Liz Miller  
David Monk  
Katie Murphy  
Irene Nadler  
Martin (Marty) Nadler  
Karin Nicholson  
Margot Page  
Perk Perkins  
Kimberly Pinsanneault  
Dan Reilly  
Tammie Reilly  
Sherry Risley  
Leslie Roberts  
Aleks Rutins  
Eric Salat  
Patty Sargent  
Rick Sargent  
Nancy Schuller  
Steven Schuller  
Adrienne Signor  
Mia Smith  
Heather Snow

Ed Surhan  
Anthony Thompson  
Suzanne (Suzy)  
Thompson  
Rick Timmerman  
Heather Toupin  
Ben Travis  
Jenn Turner  
Lily Van Haverbeke  
Peter Van Haverbeke  
Melanie Virgilio  
Lynn Wachtel  
S Eric Wachtel  
Brenna Warren  
Phyllis Warren  
Harriet Welther  
Michael Welther  
Catherine White  
Shane White  
Jonathan Wolff  
Colleen York  
Scott York  
Gary Zack  
Kathy Zack  
Loree Zeif  
Robert (Rob) Zeif  
Dixie Zens  
and many more...



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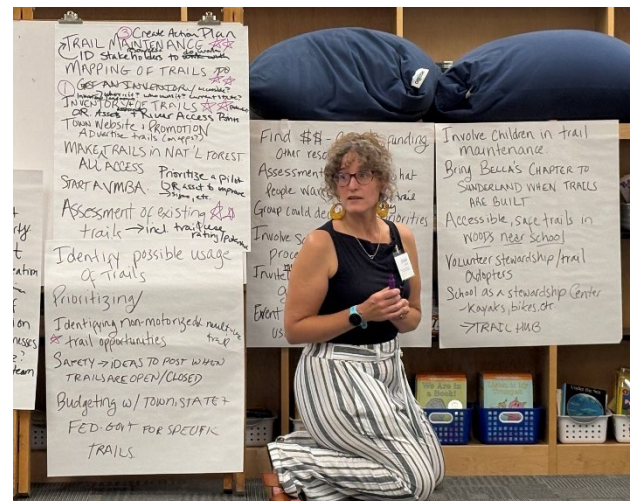




Photo: Andrew McKeever



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