

Smart Growth in Small Towns

Kate McCarthy, AICP
Mad River Valley Affordable Housing Talk Series
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*Algiers Village, Guilford, VT
Population 2,121*



About VNRC



With the support of over 4,000 members & activists, VNRC works across four program areas from the grassroots to the Legislature to promote policies and practices that:

- Support **vibrant communities, healthy downtowns and the working landscape**
- Keep Vermont's **water pure, public and plentiful**
- Protect Vermont's **natural areas and forests wild, working and whole**
- Promote a **clean, green and efficient energy future**

What we'll cover today

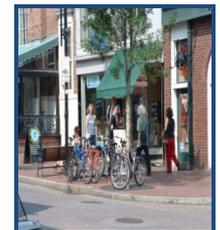
1. What “smart growth” is, and why it matters
2. Housing choice as a tool for adapting to change and strengthening community
3. Approaches and ideas for promoting housing development and smart growth

What is smart growth?



Development that revitalizes neighborhoods, protects farmland and open space, keeps housing affordable, and provides more transportation choices.

It leads to places that are **economically prosperous**, **socially equitable**, and **environmentally sustainable**.



Ten principles of smart growth

1. Mix of uses
2. Compact design
3. * Range of housing opportunities and choices*
4. Human scale, walkable neighborhoods
5. Distinct sense of place

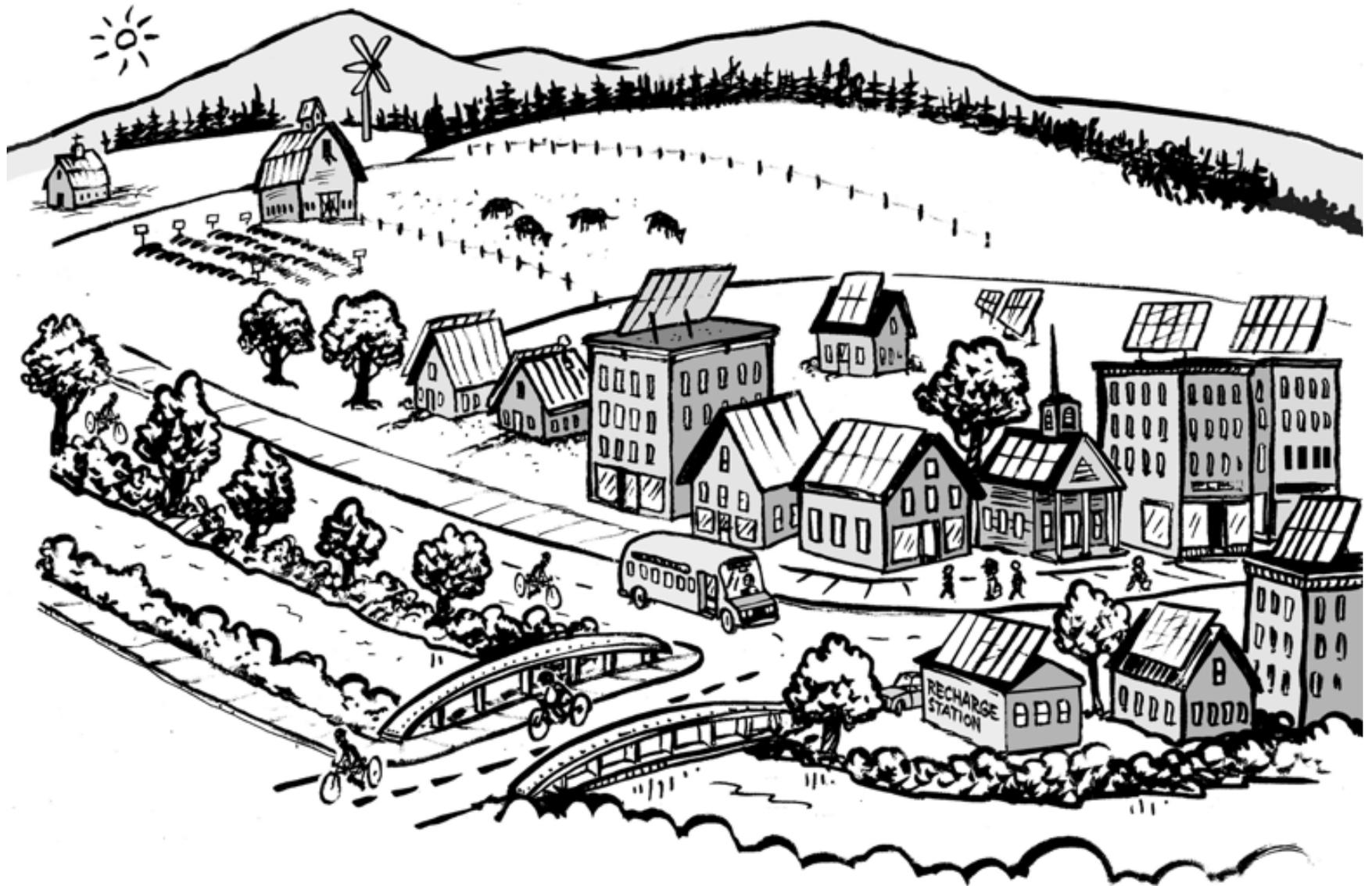


Ten principles of smart growth, con't.

6. Protect farm and forest land
7. Directs development to existing communities
8. Provide transportation choices
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, cost effective
10. Community engagement and stakeholder collaboration

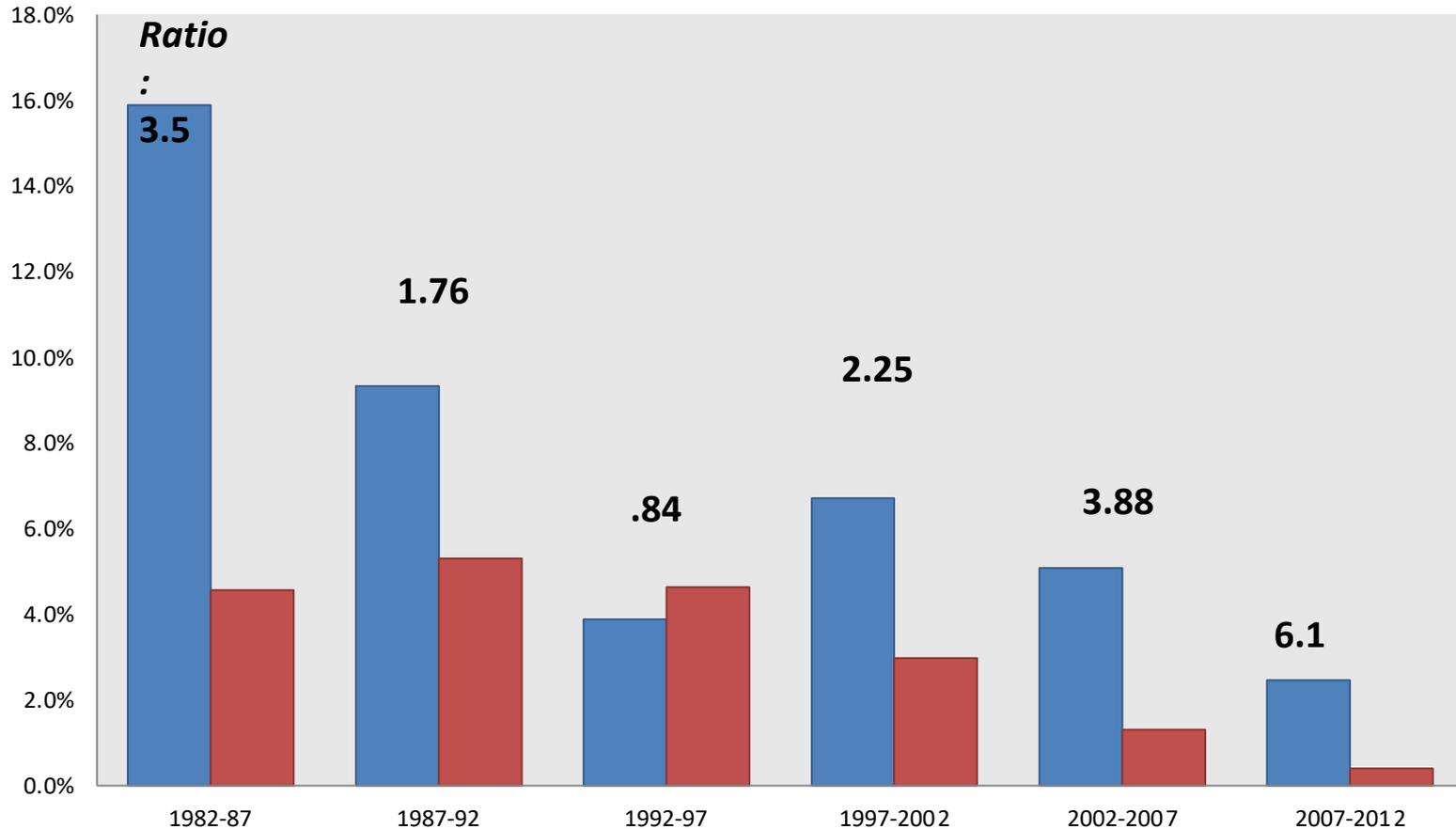


What are the benefits of smart growth?



Growth and the land base

Land development relative to population growth



■ Rate of land development

■ Rate of population growth

Smart growth can happen at a variety of scales



Smart growth can happen at a variety of scales



State planning goals support smart growth

Goal #1: To plan developments so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact villages and urban centers surrounded by rural countryside



Goal #6: To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.



Housing diversity as a way to adapt to change

- Demographics - household size/housing type mismatch:
 - 70% of households are 2 people or fewer
 - 32% of homes are 2 bedrooms or less
- Covid-19
- Climate

Housing diversity (cost, housing type) creates a more robust system in the face of change.

It is a way to be welcoming and include people who may otherwise be left out.

Action:

Promote housing in villages – infill

Infill: the use of vacant land or property in a built-up area for further construction or development



Chester, VT. Photo by Braxton Freeman with modifications by Keys to the Valley

Action:

Promote housing in villages – infill

Infill concept - Warren



Source: Vermont Downtown Action Team Report, 2014

Action:

Promote housing in villages – mixed use



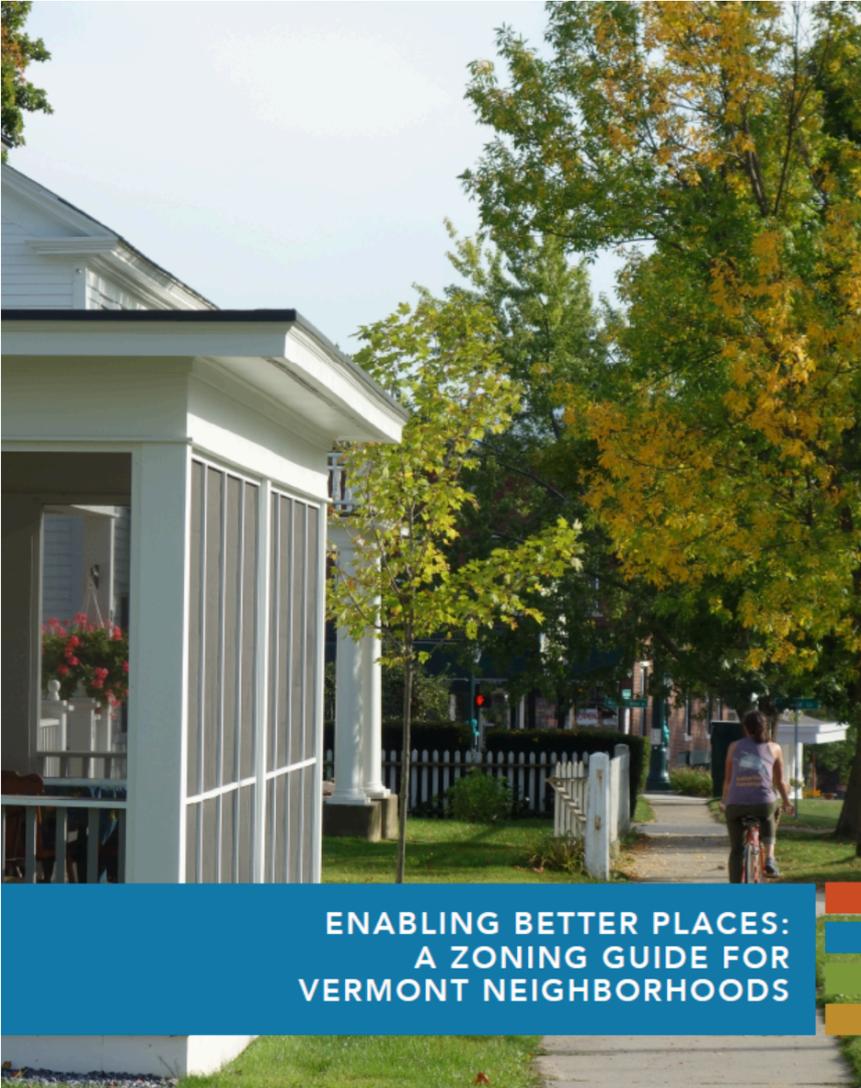
Action:

Promote housing in villages – mixed use



Action:

Promote housing in villages – zoning tweaks



The goal: make it easy to say “yes” to what you want to see more of.

- Permitted uses – Do the types of development you want require extra review, and is that necessary?
 - Ex: duplexes treated same as single family homes in Waitsfield
- Do setbacks make smaller lots difficult to develop, or incompatible with the existing development?
- What are the parking requirements?

Action:

Conservation subdivisions

A design process that makes conservation areas the first consideration

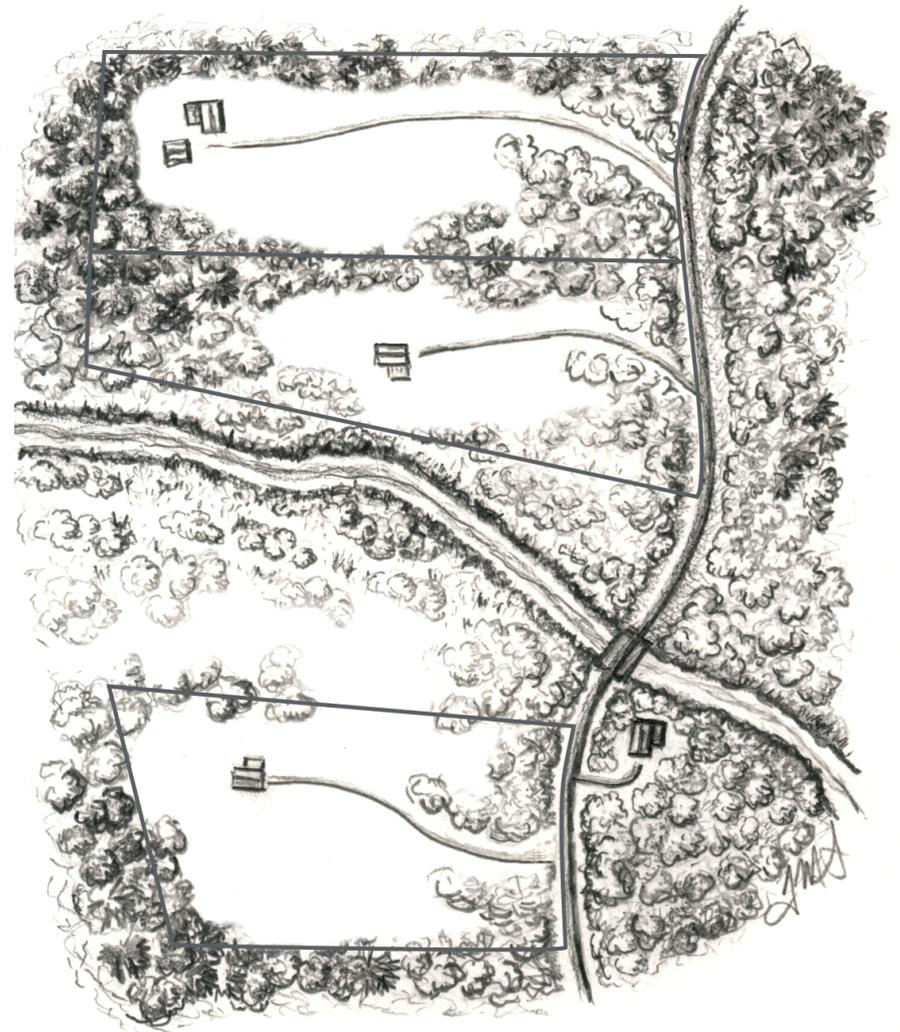
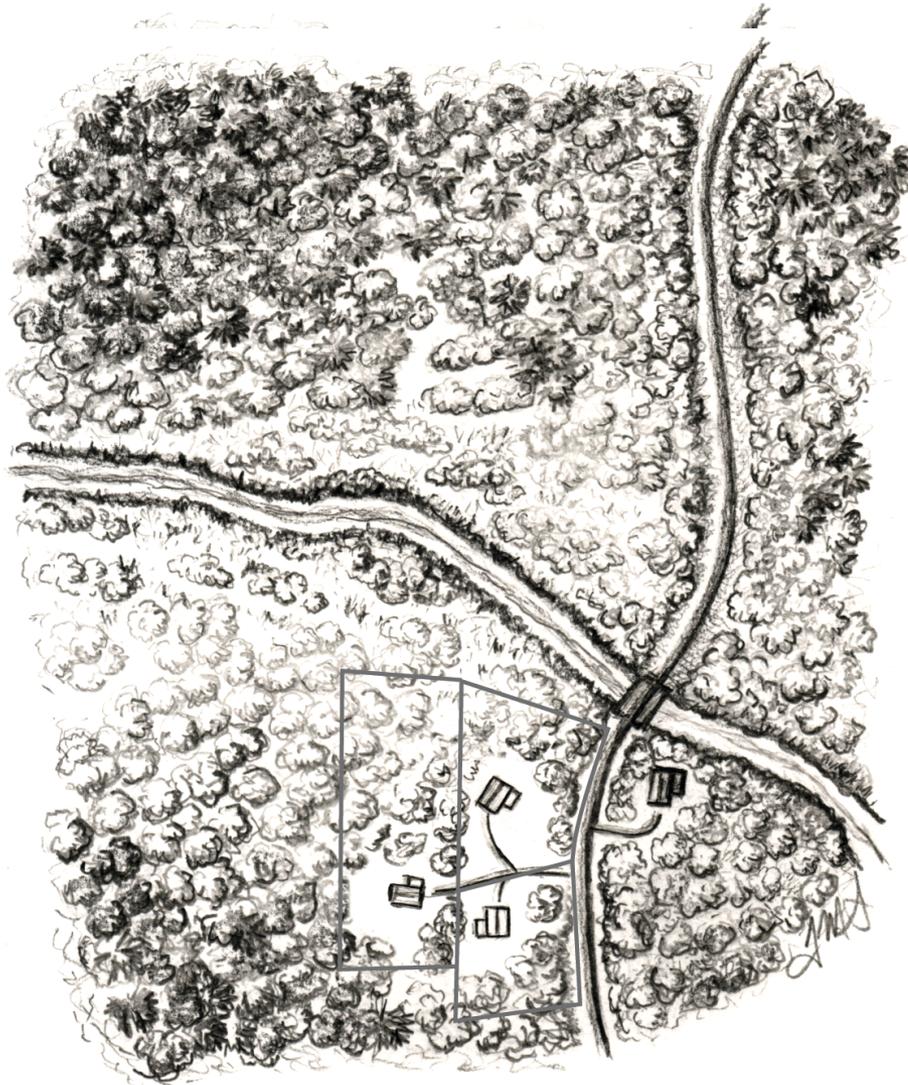
- Identifies key conservation areas
- Identify development areas
- Identify building sites
- Lay out roads, driveways, and utilities
- Identify lot boundaries

Emphasis on functionality of undeveloped spaces



Action:

Clustering and planned unit developments



Action:

Be a YIMBY – things you can do today

- Learn about housing – especially the details and nuances of the issue (you're here today!)
- Talk with your neighbors and friends
- Show up to say Yes In My Back Yard
- Support a housing trust fund



To summarize...

- Smart growth is an approach to development that has multiple benefits – transportation, affordability, protecting undeveloped areas.
- Diverse housing stock – both type and price – helps communities adapt to change, and supports a more diverse community
- Village development may take time, but provides housing choice and reinforces sense of place.
- For development that happens outside of villages, there are approaches to reduce its impacts.
- MRV towns have done good work over the years – keep your resolve on this tough issue!

Discussion

What are some steps that have been taken in your communities that make it easier to say “yes” to housing – especially smart growth housing? These can be small, medium, or large steps – they all count.

