

The Montpelier Master Plan: Envisioning a Sustainable City

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Master Plan?

Master Plans typically consist of maps, policy statements, goals and objectives addressing a number of issues relating to growth, housing, economic development, transportation, environment, parks, recreation, community character and historic preservation and conservation.



The Master Plan contains the goals and policies for board members, citizens, businesses, and organizations to consider in making proposals for new development or programs in the city. Zoning codes, zoning maps, and other ordinances are written and adopted to implement the master plan and the land use maps. Other implementation strategies are also identified in the master plan.

Why does the City need a Master Plan? Won't it just collect dust on the shelf?

State law requires cities and towns in Vermont to adopt and update town plans every five years if they want to be eligible for government grants and to have standing in local and regional Act 250 proceedings. Beyond the requirements, though, having a plan gives the City Council, all the different city departments and commissions, and the building owners, residents, and businesses in Montpelier a policy framework that guides decision-making and financial planning. For example, a local non-profit concerned with water quality may reference the Master Plan in a grant proposal, showing that water quality is a high priority for the City of Montpelier.

What makes it a *sustainable* Master Plan, and why is that important?

First, what do we mean by *sustainable*? In our work, we define sustainability as “the ability to meet our needs today without denying future generations the ability to meet their needs.”

In the process of developing a *sustainable* city Master Plan, we have taken a lot of time to consider how our needs as a community are met today and can continue to be met in the future.



The new plan goes beyond a typical Master Plan (which focuses primarily on land use and economic development) to address human needs in 5 broad categories: Natural Environment, Built Environment and Infrastructure, Economics and Livelihoods, Governance, and Social and Human Development.

Every Master Plan the city has done in the past has developed goals and strategies for a five-year time frame. To make sure we can meet our needs now *and* in the future, the new Master Plan started from the premise that we wanted to know what the city residents thought the city should be like 100 years from now. By setting long-term goals, it's easier to understand what steps we need to take to get there.



The City Council endorsed the vision and long-range goals in a meeting they held in August of 2008, and since that time, the stakeholders in the enVision process have worked to define both short-term (5-year) and long-term (20-year) strategies needed to achieve the goals. All of these strategies were then prioritized by the enVision stakeholders, and the results are printed in the colorful charts in each section of the plan.

How will the new Master Plan affect the zoning?

This Master Plan calls for a new approach to zoning in the City of Montpelier, one that represents a significant departure from the Euclidian zoning we currently use. The existing zoning ordinance is based on 20th Century assumptions and constraints, having grown organically over the years into a complex, highly prescriptive set of rules and regulations that often work against the goals the city has established. A lot of the current ordinance, for example, is designed around what we don't want – high impact industrial development near residential areas, housing developments that have a negative impact on the existing neighborhoods, and commercial outlets that would undermine the health of our historic downtown.

The approach to zoning we recommend for the future is an ordinance focused on what we want, rather than what we don't want. The new ordinance will set clear goals for the different neighborhoods in the city. Rather than being overly prescriptive, it will enable developers to make proposals that demonstrate how the goals are met within clear parameters describing each neighborhood with sufficient detail so that the degree of ambiguity and discretion is minimized.

In addition to the neighborhood level descriptions and goals, there will be three main areas where additional criteria will be in effect: The Smart Growth District, the Historic Design District, and the Low Density Rural District. The Historic Design District is entirely within the Smart Growth District, and so in this area, both sets of criteria will apply.

The first step in this process of rezoning and realignment will be a review of the boundaries for each of these larger areas, to insure that they accurately reflect the constraints and infrastructure available to meet the goals. The city is in the process of applying for a Municipal Planning Grant from the State of Vermont to carry out this study.



Who is responsible for the plan's implementation?

Putting the plan into action is a big challenge. The Master Plan is a community document, which means that the whole community, not just the City, is responsible for its implementation.

At the City level, the Master Plan will inform the City Council's goal-setting, ordinance drafting and adoption, and policy decisions each year. At the community level, the Master Plan will provide action steps for stakeholders, including residents, business-owners, and non-profit groups, to work toward community goals.

You will find that the action strategies in each section of the plan identify "responsible parties," or potential leaders in the implementation process. These designations have been proposed by the staff, they are open to revision just like the rest of the plan.

How will progress be monitored?

The Master Plan has established specific targets to help the city measure our progress toward the goals we have set. Each strategy identified in the plan is associated with a target, and over time the city will measure both the outputs and the outcomes of all the activities identified and report them to the public. This will be done in a variety of ways – on the city web site, in the news media, and through regular reporting and updating the City Council and Planning Commission.

At least once a year, the City will convene the Stakeholders from the enVision process to take stock of the progress that has been made and to make recommendations for any changes or additions to the plan. The results of this annual meeting will be reported to the voters in the City's annual report every year, so the citizens and stakeholders can have a reliable sense of the progress made.

Where can I find a draft copy of the plan so I can review it on my own?

1. **Online:** Go to the City's website, www.montpelier-vt.org, and click the headline that says, "Draft Master Plan."
2. **Kellogg-Hubbard Library:** Ask at the front desk. The library has two copies available (one for in-house use and one for check-out).
3. **Planning Department:** Stop by the office on the lower level of City Hall to review the plan (*note:* copies may not be checked out).