

*In the body of the text below, Sharon Planning Commission proposed revisions for 2018 appear in **bold type**. Note that only Chapter 14: Land Use has been edited, along with the Future Land Use Map. The remaining chapters in the Sharon Town Plan adopted in 2015 are unchanged.*

XIV. Land Use

A. Current Land Use and Sharon's Rural Character

Sharon's rural character is **shaped by its natural setting, patterns** of development, buildings and their relationship to the landscape, and the sense of community **derived from the** people living and working here. The beauty and rural character of the town are valued by residents and are also attractive to tourists.

Because the Town of Sharon does not have protection that comes from a **regular** zoning or development ordinance, it is essential to define "rural character¹" with specificity for the purposes of review under Act 250. **[Note that the Town of Sharon regulates development in flood zones through its Flood Hazard Bylaw.]**

Rural character is exemplified by many attributes of the Town of Sharon: the tranquility of the vast amount of wooded and undeveloped land; its small-scale village center; the White River and its tributaries; and abundant and diverse wildlife. The Town of Sharon is a traditional Vermont village. A mixture of residential and commercial uses exist in harmony. As development pressures increase upon the Town and its less densely populated areas, it is vital that the defining characteristics of the Town be preserved.

Most surveyed residents indicate a preference for Sharon's existing rural character rather than a densely populated community. They want growth to occur at a pace and in a manner that does not destroy the character and fabric of the community or result in significant tax increases. Growth deemed good for the Town should enhance the social, environmental, cultural, and economic values of the Town. It should not undermine the ability of the taxpayers to support the Town on a sound financial basis.

Sharon is a small Vermont town, bisected by the White River, Interstate 89, Route 14, and the Railroad. Development within Sharon Village is typical of **that in other small New England towns. The Village center contains approximately 40 houses on small lots with modest setbacks from the road that they share with stores, a church, post office, library and the town green. There are a total of 47 miles of roads in Sharon, approximately 33 miles of which are gravel roads. Most residents live on these rural routes, outside the village center, in a dispersed fashion. No part of Sharon, including the village center, has town water or sewer at present.**

Current Land Use is shown on Map 1 attached to this Plan.

The citizens of Sharon **value** their town **and recognize the Village as the center of community life**. The balance between the **concentrated** development in Sharon Village, the diffuse residential development of the areas surrounding the Village, **and the contiguous outlying woodlands are important elements** of the Town's character.

There are 27 working farms in Sharon. While the number of dairy farms has dwindled; (in 2007, there were only two working dairy farms in Sharon according to the US Census of Agriculture), **the number of small-scale farms** emphasize the need to identify and develop effective growth and land use development policies that will serve the long-term interests of the community and help to maintain Sharon's identity as a small rural town.

Because of the natural resources that exist in Sharon, there are abundant opportunities for outdoor recreation **including** hunting, fishing, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, horseback riding, **and** swimming. The rural character of the Town **makes many of these activities possible**.

Sharon contains large tracts of contiguous woodlands **that adjoin woodlands in neighboring towns**. **These forested tracts act as wildlife corridors, allowing animals unrestricted movement not possible in more developed areas**. **The undeveloped acreage extending from conserved lands south of the White River, across Quimby Mountain and north to the Strafford town line is part of a regionally-significant wildlife corridor spanning multiple Vermont counties**. **Additional information on forest land and habitat is included below in section 'C' under the "Forest Conservation Area" heading**.

B. Overall Land Use Goals

In formulating **the Land Use plan, consideration has been given to maintaining** the existing settlement pattern consisting of the Sharon Village area, the surrounding low-density rural and agricultural areas, and large **tracts of undeveloped land with open meadows** and forests.

Sharon's overall goals for land use are:

1. Maintain an identity for Sharon as a distinct community, with a **single** dynamic community **center**.
2. Respect the community's identity and maintain qualities of scale and form with existing development.
3. Protect the environment from degradation while allowing appropriate access to natural resources.
4. **Retain clear evidence of the community's history while making provision for future needs.**
5. **Provide for development in a manner that does not result in environmental degradation or harm to regionally-significant wildlife habitat, and also does not overtax the community's limited infrastructure.**

C. Future Land Use

This Plan recognizes that not all land is equally suited for all types and intensities of development. Rather, it is the basic premise of this Plan that future land uses must be sensitive to the physical limitations of a site and that in planning for the development of a parcel, more than the market value of the property must be recognized. Accordingly, separate Future Land Use Areas have been defined in this section and the physical boundaries of each are shown on the Future Land Use Map attached to this Plan. All future land development shall conform to the policies for each Future Land Use Area described below.

In addition, all projects requiring a town Subdivision permit or an Act 250 permit shall conform to the following Guidelines. Conformance with these Guidelines is required to be in conformance with the Sharon Town Plan under Criterion 10 of Act 250.

The following shall apply to all new development

1. Avoid monotonous lot layout of equally sized and shaped lots, especially along a road frontage.
2. The amount of frontage and building position will be varied from lot to lot to avoid a suburban pattern of repeated houses or other buildings situated at or near the middle of adjacent lots one after another.
3. Creating more than one adjacent lot with a depth greater than four times its frontage (“spaghetti lots”) is prohibited.
4. Buildings shall be located at the edges of woodlands and fields, relatively close to roads, along hedgerows, etc., in an effort to preserve agricultural soils, whether or not **under** the same ownership.
5. Lots **must** take advantage of and preserve desirable features, such as stone walls, hedgerows, fields, natural clearings, and land contours.
6. Locating buildings at the top of ridgelines or at the brows of hills where land is open and sites would be highly visible from nearby public roads is prohibited.
7. Excavation that will cause excessive **movement of material or erosion** is prohibited.
8. Locate buildings and other construction **so as to** minimize impact **on** natural or scenic features, such as bodies of water or historic resources.
9. In the case of multiple unit projects, buildings shall be clustered to preserve open space and protect agricultural soils.
10. On developments involving adjacent buildings or lots, driveways must be shared.
11. Light industrial and commercial uses **shall be screened so as to minimize visibility from off-site.**
12. **Commercial or industrial uses, such as drilling, excavating, or state-approved junk yards, which would create noise or other disturbances off-site, shall not be visible from public roads or neighboring residences. All reasonable means shall be used to lessen any detrimental off-site impacts of such uses.** This provision **shall** not apply to agricultural uses.
13. Retail establishments (excluding **home businesses and** those that require substantial outside storage such as lumberyards or nurseries) shall only be located in the Village Area.

14. Developments with infrastructure and service requirements that clearly exceed existing capacities will face a significant burden to establish that the development can proceed without exceeding reasonably developable service capacities of the Town and without harming its rural character.

15. Development of property along the White River and smaller tributaries must abide by Sharon's Flood Hazard Bylaw.

Village Area

The Sharon Village has a special character in its buildings, streetscape, and landscape. The Village is the focal point of the community. It is the **center of the Town's** civic, economic, and social life.

The Village of Sharon is **comprised of** many historic buildings (private, civic, and religious) **that are** listed on Vermont's Register of Historic Places. The Village has a traditional green, Town Office, two general goods stores, a church, a library, two schools and various historic houses as well as other commercial enterprises. It is a fundamental premise of this Plan that the town should make every effort to ensure the continued existence of the Village as a dynamic community center.

The purpose of the Village Area is to maintain the variety of uses currently existing in the Village and promote the Area as the center of Sharon. **The proximity of civic, retail, and other uses in the Village supports social interaction through chance or planned encounters with** neighbors at the stores, the Post Office, the Town Office, the library, the church, and the school.

New development in the Village shall respond to existing settlement patterns, density, and land capacity. Sharon currently has no town water or sewer, and coupled with the constraints of the White River, steep topography and the I-89 corridor, potential new development is limited in the village. Uses **in this area** should continue to be mixed, allowing for the development of multi-family housing, commercial (including primary retail establishments) and civic uses **where feasible**. When possible, existing structures should be adaptively reused. The architecture and scale of new development should **not detract from** the historic character of the Village Area.

Residents who attended a Planning Commission Forum on Village Development in 2009 expressed interest in increasing the vitality and vibrancy of Sharon Village. They wanted to see more dense residential development with commercial uses mixed in. Development of septic and drinking water capacity will be essential to this effort, as will the addition of parking for businesses.

Because Sharon Village is immediately adjacent to Interstate 89, it is readily accessible from outlying areas and is experiencing increases in traffic. The threshold level of traffic that is compatible with a small village has already been exceeded. In order to increase economic and social development of our Village, the Town will first need to evaluate the impact of traffic on the character of Sharon Village to determine whether Routes 14 and 132 can handle increased trips without congestion, as well as consider how traffic on these roads affects the community's ability to enjoy its village and promote the values articulated in this Plan.

Since 2005, Sharon Village has been designated **as a village** under the State's Downtown and Village Program. Village centers are eligible for benefits including tax credits and priority consideration from other state programs and agencies.

Policies

1. Retail shops and services, tourist businesses, lodging and public facilities **are appropriate in the Village Area, if** at a scale and design consistent with the existing **architectural** character.
2. Conversion of structures and older buildings of historic merit is encouraged to enable **preservation of the town's built fabric.**
3. Where new development is planned, efforts must be made to ensure that it is complementary and compatible with the architecture and configuration of existing buildings and streetscape, and respects the traditional size and scale, proportions, and shape of the neighborhood.
4. Single, two, and multiple family housing at medium to high densities is encouraged.
5. Major public investments, such as improvements to Routes 14 and 132, should be encouraged and endorsed only on finding that they will not unreasonably or unnecessarily jeopardize or endanger the unique and special character of the Village Area. **VTRANS** Planners shall consult with the Town and affected property owners regarding such activities.
6. New businesses shall be limited to uses that do not adversely affect the quality of life, the unique character and historic atmosphere of the village, or the rural residential nature of the Town. **Inappropriate development in the Village Area would include, but not be limited to, self-storage units, "dollar stores" and fast food chain businesses.**
7. The Town shall maintain the Village Area Designation with the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

Rural Residential Area

Lands outside of Sharon Village are predominantly rural. Historically, much of this outlying area was associated with agricultural and forestry uses. With the decline **in** the number of dairy farms, much of the open land has reverted **to forest. Over time, scattered single-family homes have been built along the rural roads. Challenging** topography and the **potentially** higher cost of development (e.g. power, **access roads** and driveways) **have kept much of the more remote land in Sharon undeveloped.**

The purpose of the Rural Residential Area is to preserve the rural character of the Town and allow for agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation, residential development, **and** home businesses **as defined below.** Commercial- or industrial-**scale** development is not appropriate in the Rural Residential Areas.

As new residential development occurs on more remote roads or in challenging terrain, strain is put on the Town's ability to provide services and accommodate demands for road maintenance. Access by emergency vehicles is made more difficult and there is the potential need to extend school bus routes. Furthermore, this remote development fractures larger rural parcels, creating an adverse effect on wildlife, forestry, water quality, recreation, and the aesthetic character of the community.

Density in the Rural Residential Area **must be low. Development of lots less than one-acre in size is not permitted in the Rural Residential Area.** New development needs to occur at a reasonable rate of growth so as not to unduly burden the ability of the Town to provide services. **It needs to be sensitively planned to allow for continued forestry and agricultural uses.** Special or unique resources, including critical wildlife habitats (**including** deer wintering areas), historic sites, archeological sites (**including ancient stone chambers**), **scenic areas**, and wetlands must be evaluated and respected when developing projects in the Rural Residential Area. **Non-residential development shall locate in areas where municipal highways exist, rather than in areas that will require new or upgraded roads.**

Home Business

Home businesses **are those that meet all of the** the following criteria:

- a) the owner of the home business resides on the property;
- b) the space designated for business occupies less than 50% of the total square footage of the dwelling, and is secondary to the residential use of the property;
- c) a home business employs no more than four people on site;
- d) hours of work are consistent and compatible with residential neighborhoods;
- e) pick-up and deliveries are limited, as much as possible, to smaller carriers;
- f) A bed and breakfast is an acceptable home occupation, as long as the owner lives on the premises **more than 6 months each year.** Breakfast may be served. The establishment shall not be used on a regular basis in any manner that alters the rural residential nature of the surrounding area **or imposes significant additional service burdens on the Town.**
Properties listed with AirBNB and other similar services must abide by the restrictions placed on traditional bed and breakfast lodging.

A home business will be considered commercial when it becomes necessary to build accessory buildings or to enlarge the space occupied by the business to the point that it encompasses over 50% of the building. Such change of use will be subject to an Act 250 hearing. **Only home businesses in the Village Area, Small Enterprise Area, or Sharon Commerce Park may expand in this fashion.**

Businesses **or industry** that produces excessive noise, traffic, truck traffic, or which require **significant** lighting, parking, or signage are considered inappropriate uses for rural residential areas. Such businesses shall be located in commercial areas.

The cleaning of hazardous waste containers, storage of hazardous wastes, junk cars, or the creation of a junkyard are inappropriate for rural residential areas and are not considered acceptable as home occupations.

Policies

1. Maintenance of a rural living environment is the primary goal for the Rural Residential Area. New developments **must** observe and promote this goal. Projects that adversely affect the rural setting and conflict with existing rural land uses shall not be located in this Area.
2. Residential, agricultural, and forestry uses are the primary and dominant land uses in the Rural Residential Area. Commercial (including all retail), **office buildings**, or industrial development shall not be located in the Rural Residential Areas.
3. **Density in the Rural Residential Area must be low. Development of lots less than one acre in size shall not be permitted in the Rural Residential Area.**
4. New development **must** be planned to **minimize impact on current or potential forestry and agricultural uses**. This can be accomplished by siting residential and other non-agricultural uses on the least productive soils. In addition, the layout of building lots shall be designed to conserve crop and pasture land and managed woodlands.
5. **Major Residential Development shall locate only in areas where adequate municipal highways already exist. Major residential projects are defined as new developments and expansions of existing developments by five dwelling units or more, or creation of five or more lots for single-family dwelling units.**
6. **Special or unique resources, including critical wildlife habitats (including deer wintering areas), historic sites, archeological sites (including ancient stone chambers) and wetlands must be evaluated when planning development in the Rural Residential Area. Development shall be sited to avoid adverse impact on such resources, and to minimize encroachment on priority Forest Blocks and Connectivity Blocks (described below under ‘Forest Conservation Area’).**
7. Residents are free to conduct **occupations** in their homes provided that the nature of the occupation is customary or appropriate in rural residential areas, that it does not detract from the rural character of the area, and that it does not cause an **materially increased** burden on the ability of the town to provide services such as **road maintenance** and fire protection.
8. Retail enterprises or service centers **that would principally serve the region rather than residents of the Area**, (including **but not limited to “dollar stores,”** factory outlets, fast food establishments, shopping malls, service stations and self-storage units) shall not be located in the Rural Residential Areas.

Small Enterprise Area

The Small Enterprise Area is established west of the Village Area along Route 14. The purpose of the Small Enterprise Area is to provide opportunities for business expansion and relocation in an area close to the Village and a major highway. This Area, which was previously in residential and agricultural use, consists presently of several small service establishments. Through designation of this Area for business, it is intended that small enterprises will benefit from favorable access and higher traffic volumes afforded by Route 14.

Small non-retail commercial establishments are intended to be the dominant use for this Area. Primary retail establishments that do not require substantial outdoor storage (such as dry goods and grocery stores) are not appropriate for this area. Primary retail establishments that do require outdoor storage (such as lumberyards or nurseries) may be compatible with this area provided that they do not have an undue adverse impact on traffic or aesthetics. Residential uses are secondary, and future residential development here is not encouraged. **Sight distances in this Area are generally favorable.** Soil and slope conditions in this Area range from fair to excellent. Some sites offer favorable conditions for on-site sewage disposal and water supply. **However, it should be noted that some low-lying portions of this Area north of Route 14 experienced significant flooding in the wake of Tropical Storm Irene in 2011, although not marked as at-risk properties on FEMA flood maps.**

Maintenance of the natural landscape and the introduction of development compatible with the site is the principal challenge for this Area. **Strip development, with its typically confusing vehicular access and layout that undermines the historical building patterns of small towns, is emblematic of sprawl in communities nationwide and is inappropriate for any commercial areas in Sharon.**

The Small Enterprise Area is dedicated for commercial use, but not without some limitations. This Area is a gateway to the community. Given its high visibility and proximity to the White River, a nationally recognized recreational resource, future development needs to be sensitive to the preservation of its scenic qualities. Commercial development must be designed to promote traffic and pedestrian safety, and to provide an attractive and convenient place to conduct business. The density of development within this area should be higher than **that of** the Rural Residential Area, with a rough minimum density of one **business per acre.**

Policies

1. To contain development in the Small Enterprise Area in a way that makes it a more hospitable environment, design considerations must include:
 - location and size of parking areas;
 - landscaping;
 - pedestrian circulation;
 - size and scale of structures;
 - location of structures within the site; and
 - appropriate lighting and signage.
2. New projects must include the following design considerations:
 - a compact and densely developed project which uses land efficiently;
 - reducing the impact of parking by dividing areas into smaller lots, with integrated landscaping;
 - providing pedestrian and vehicular links between projects;
 - green space between the project and the street, including use of large trees; and
 - signage that effectively communicates the desired message without being unreasonably large, bright or flashing.

3. The creation of numerous curb cuts contributes to traffic congestion and safety problems and is discouraged. The Sharon Highway Ordinance shall be followed in all new developments.
4. Commercial projects shall use the following design principles:
 - provide pedestrian and vehicular links between projects;
 - reduce impact of parking areas by breaking lots into small groups with integrated landscaping;
 - encourage compact and densely developed projects which use land efficiently;
 - preserve open space of a distinct area of visual or functional importance;
 - provide trees to act as buffers between traffic arteries and interior drives;
 - lay out the project site to allow for coordinated future use of the entire parcel;
 - reduce apparent scale of large development by pattern, number, size, and location of structures within the site;
 - employ screening plans for visually objectionable features on the site, including dumpsters, refuse disposal sites, building equipment; and
 - minimize **the number of** access roads or curb cuts onto public highways, and use common access drives.

Sharon Commerce Park

The Town of Sharon recognizes that business and industry offer potential benefits including tax revenue and local jobs. However, businesses can also create fiscal and environmental costs that may outweigh potential benefits. These include the need to create, maintain, or repair infrastructure, increased traffic, and health or safety risks for residents.

The Sharon Commerce Park is highly visible from I-89 and River Road and is located close to the White River. Formerly called the Industrial Park, it was created in 1975 on 41.5 acres of land that had been a farm until it was bisected by the interstate. The purpose of the Sharon Commerce Park is to serve as a site for commercial operations and light industry. Currently, it **is home to** several light industrial businesses and a solar energy generation facility.

Access to the park is problematic. **Truck traffic from Interstate 89 must negotiate the village center, the narrow 1927 Sgt. Carlton Clark Memorial Bridge, and an at-grade railroad crossing to reach the Commerce Park. For traffic safety reasons, businesses that rely on a large number of truck visits are discouraged from basing their operations in this park.**

Because of the limitations of this site for industrial use, the Town **in 2000 limited** its future development to commerce and light industry. The Town also constructed a new and safer access road to the Commerce Park, which was completed in December 2003.

Policies

1. Acceptable uses for the Sharon Commerce Park include corporate offices, service businesses, renewable energy generation and small-scale commercial or light industrial companies. All businesses must be clean, non-polluting, and not large truck-based. Businesses that would be considered inappropriate include large truck-based transfer/distribution, heavy manufacturing or

assembly, storage or transfer of toxic or hazardous materials, or any businesses that are not clean, safe, or non-polluting (including pollution from noise, excess lighting or signage), or which have extensive hours of operation beyond the normal work day.

2. **New development in the Sharon Commerce Park shall employ features** to minimize its visual impact **as seen from River Road. Elements that can help accomplish this are;** architecture that is appropriate in design and scale, landscaping **that reduces the apparent size** of buildings, small-scale parking areas, screened storage, and **reduced** lighting and signage.
3. **The Town shall** promote use of the Sharon Commerce Park as a business incubator site, **with the goal of adding to the Town's Grand List and increasing the number of local jobs. New development shall** minimize the negative impact on town infrastructure (roads/bridges) and quality of life.

Forest Conservation Area

The predominant characteristics of the Forest Conservation Area are its steep slopes and undeveloped condition. Most of this land is in large **forested** tracts, **logged intermittently, and otherwise serving as** wildlife habitat.

The purpose of the Forest Conservation Area is to maintain the land in its undeveloped state, to benefit Sharon by providing a source of clean water to streams and the contiguous space necessary to support wildlife. Much of this land is not posted. It provides recreational opportunities, such as hunting, hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling.

Sharon is home to large tracts of conserved and/or undeveloped forest land known as "Forest Blocks" by state biologists and regional planners. The Quimby Mountain area extending north into Downer Forest and conserved lands south of the White River are labeled Highest-Priority Forest Blocks owing to the diversity of wildlife they support. The large scale of these forest blocks, relatively unbroken by development, allows animals who require significant acreage in their ranges to thrive, as well as numerous other species. Most Upper Valley towns do not have comparable habitat. Although these towns may appear to be generously forested, roads and development have carved up land to the degree that a limited number of native wildlife species are supported. Therefore, maintaining the integrity of Sharon's forest blocks has positive benefits not only for the town, but for regional biodiversity as well.

A "Connectivity Block" is the state's term for a forest block, contiguous with others, that allows the movement of wildlife from one part of the state to another while avoiding more developed areas. The southwest quadrant of Sharon is identified by the state as a "highest priority" connectivity block. This corner of town, coupled with Sharon's forest blocks to the east and northeast, constitutes a bridge for wildlife moving between the upper Connecticut Valley and the Green Mountains. Wildlife taking this route can avoid developed lands in southern Windsor County and northwest of Sharon. Connectivity blocks allow young animals to disperse and allow wildlife to migrate in response to development or climate pressures. They also allow species to repopulate areas where diversity has been lost. The preservation of Connectivity Blocks, like the protection of Forest Blocks, is key to the health of Sharon's wildlife populations and the biodiversity of the region as a whole.

While the state of Vermont is 75% forested at this time, “forest fragmentation” is a challenge facing much of the state. The insertion of permanent infrastructure in forest lands, even in a piecemeal fashion, degrades the health of our forests. Roads in particular can affect wildlife movement and mortality, foster the spread of invasive species, introduce sedimentation to streams, and generally degrade the forest environment along their routes.² For these reasons, the construction of new roads in Sharon’s Forest Conservation Areas is strongly discouraged.

Much of Sharon’s Forest Conservation lands are steeply sloped. The soils that characterize these highland areas are generally shallow and susceptible to high rates of erosion. The cost of siting buildings and constructing foundations, driveways, and septic and drinking water systems is substantially higher where these conditions prevail. Because of these **challenges**, the economic feasibility of land development is at best marginal and the cost of public services such as road maintenance and fire protection is measurably higher.

Given these limitations, Forest Conservation areas are poorly suited for residential development, except at very low densities. High density development (defined as attached multi-family housing of 5 or more units) is not compatible with the Forest Conservation Area in this Plan. Any sort of development that presents a risk of significantly increased demand for town services or any substantial risk of adverse environmental effects cannot go forward in these areas, regardless of other potential benefits of the development.

Policies

1. There shall be no commercial (including all retail) or industrial development in the Forest Conservation Area.
2. Timber and wildlife management shall be the primary or dominant uses in this Area. Logging operations must be planned and managed according to Vermont Best Management Practice to keep soil erosion and sedimentation of streams to a minimum.
3. Other uses that may be compatible with the Area’s principal use for forestry include seasonal recreation sites, educational facilities, hunting, hiking or wilderness clubs, or camps. These **or other** uses will not be considered acceptable if they will generate excessive amounts of traffic or noise, require substantial alteration of topography, or unduly alter the rural and undeveloped character of these outlying areas.
4. Commercial- or industrial-scale development is not appropriate for this land use area.
5. **In the interest of preserving forest health, the construction of new roads is not appropriate in this land use area.**
6. **Major Residential Development shall not be permitted in this Area. Major residential projects are defined as new developments and expansions of existing developments by five dwelling units or more, or the creation of five or more lots for single-family dwelling units.**

² 2015 Vermont Forest Fragmentation Report, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, Agency of Natural Resources, April 2015

7. **Limited residential development may be permitted if planned and sited to promote the continued use of forestland for wildlife corridors, forestry, and outdoor recreation.** To minimize conflicts between forestry **and** wildlife uses, projects shall be designed with the following principles in mind:
 - Residential and accessory uses shall be designed to conserve the maximum amount of **contiguous** meadowland and woodland (**particularly in identified Connectivity Blocks and in priority Forest Blocks**); and
 - In areas with highly scenic or sensitive landscapes (**see Chapter 10; Scenic Resources**), the placement of buildings, structures, **and power generating facilities** shall be avoided when possible. **If built, projects shall be minimally disruptive** of the natural landscape.

Recommendations

To encourage stewardship of contiguous forest habitat it is recommended that the Town of Sharon offer assistance to landowners for conservation actions that are in keeping with forest conservation. This includes:

1. **Educating landowners about the many benefits of conserving their lands.**
2. **Encouraging sustainable forest management through enrollment in Vermont's Current Use program (Agricultural and Managed Forest Land Use Value Program).**
3. **Discouraging subdivisions of less than 27 acres in the Forest Conservation Area to maintain landowner eligibility for Current Use enrollment (2 acre house site plus 25 acres of forest)**
4. **Establishing a land acquisition fund to promote conservation easements.**
5. **Study the feasibility of an impact fee program that would require developers to pay a fee toward protection or restoration of town-owned land, forest, and recreation areas.**

White River Conservation Area

The White River is a unique natural resource that has scenic, recreational, and economic importance for the Town of Sharon. **Extending northwest from its confluence with the Connecticut River in Hartford, VT, no other Vermont River features as many continuous miles of undammed flow as the White River.** It is considered to be held in public trust for the people of Vermont. (See land use cases #3W0530 & #3W0819, District Commission #3, Vermont Environmental Board, Vermont Supreme Court.)

Protection of the River is **an absolute priority** of the Town. It is vulnerable to many potential hazards, including pollution from specific and non-point sources, erosion of banks, damage to riparian buffers, surface runoff, and inappropriate development.

The White River Conservation Area has been designated by the Town of Sharon for the purposes of protecting the River and for its preservation for **the** continued use and enjoyment by the people of Vermont. Future land uses in this Area are limited to agriculture and non-commercial recreation. No new buildings or permanent structures may be constructed in the Conservation Area.

The White River Conservation Area includes floodplains and flood hazard areas, low-lying land along the River which periodically becomes inundated during spring runoff or other times of heavy rainfall. Floodplains are pervious and absorb water which might otherwise cause damage or destruction of property **downstream**. Floodplains **may also be** excellent agricultural land **owing to** alluvial soil deposits and minimal slope of the land. Therefore, the boundaries of the White River Conservation Area shall be the boundaries of areas of special flood hazard as defined in the Sharon Flood Hazard Bylaw, adopted by the **Town in 2010**. Flood Hazard maps are on file with the Sharon Town Clerk **and accessible online**.

Important wetlands also abut the River and its tributary streams. Use and management of these ecologically sensitive areas directly affects water quality. Both floodplains and wetlands are ill-suited for development. (See separate sections on Floodplains and Wetlands.)

Sharon residents have indicated that they highly value the **White** River as a scenic and recreational resource. It is popular with residents and tourists alike for fishing, swimming, boating, and tubing. The closing of the **river** for six weeks in the summer of 2000 due to upstream pollution **significantly curtailed recreational activity and had a negative impact on Village businesses. Efforts to protect the river's water quality and its immediate environment help ensure that it will remain a healthy community resource.**

Policies

1. The Town of Sharon recognizes the White River as a unique natural resource that has scenic, recreational, and economic value for the Town, and which has been deemed a public trust for the people of Vermont.
2. The Town recognizes that the River is vulnerable to many potential hazards, and therefore has designated the White River Conservation Area to help protect and preserve the River.
3. In consideration of the exceptional resource value of the River, appropriate land uses for the White River Conservation Area are **limited to** agriculture and non-commercial recreation.
4. New structural development and permanent buildings are not permitted within this Conservation Area.
5. Existing buildings and structures within the Conservation Area may be maintained. **Proposed** additions to these structures **might be granted conditional use permits provided** they meet the requirements of Sharon's Flood Hazard Bylaw and are not located within the **floodway**.
6. Determination of the flood plain shall be in accordance with maps **referenced by** Sharon's Flood Hazard Bylaw.
7. Landowners are encouraged to maintain their riparian land in a predominantly natural vegetative state to preserve the natural character of the banks and help prevent erosion, surface runoff, and pollution.
8. Recreational use of the river is encouraged. **The** Town provides designated public access points. Private property should not be used to access the river **without the landowner's permission**.