Town of Fairfax, VT

GROWTH STUDY

December 2020

Prepared for:
Town of Fairfax, Vermont

Prepared by:

SE GROUP

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TOWN OF FAIRFAX ZONING COMISSION

Greg Heyer	Chair
Richard Wimble	
Amit Saini	

TOWN OF FAIRFAX STAFF

Brad Docheff	Town Manager
Amber Soter	Zoning Administrator

CONSULTANT TEAM – SE GROUP

Mark Kane	Director of Community Planning
Ellie Wachtel	Associate Planner + Analyst
Ayden Eickhoff	Planner + Analyst

This project was completed with the financial support of a municipal planning grant provided by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development and with the assistance of the Town of Fairfax.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ---- **1**

PROJECT GOALS ---- *1*

PROJECT PROCESS ---- *2*

APPROACH ---- **3**

METHODOLOGY ---- *3*

GROWTH IMPACTS ---- **7**

POPULATION CHANGE ---- *7*

LAND USE PATTERNS ---- *8*

CURRENT USE PROGRAM ---- *10*

SUBDIVISION AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS ---- *12*

HOUSING TRENDS ---- *16*

INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT GROWTH ---- *18*

PROTECTED LANDS ---- *22*

REGIONAL TRENDS ---- *23*

LAND CAPACITY ---- **25**

CONSTRAINTS ANALYSIS ---- *25*

BUILDOUT SCENARIOS ---- **31**

SCENARIOS CONSIDERED ---- *31*

SCENARIOS COMPARED ---- *41*

LANDOWNER PERSPECTIVES ---- **43**

SUMMARY ---- **45**

KEY CONCLUSIONS ---- *45*

RECOMMENDATIONS ---- *46*

Appendix A: Technical Memorandum

Appendix B: Landowner Survey Data

TABLES

Table 1 - GIS Data Sources 3
Table 2 - Recent Population Growth and Projections to 2030 – Fairfax, Vermont 7
Table 3 - Existing Land Use from Town Grand List Database 8
Table 4 - Minimum Lots Sizes by Zoning District 12
Table 5 - Residential Unit Mix by Zoning District 16
Table 6 - Total Residential Units by Zoning District 16
Table 7 - Minimum Lots Sizes by Zoning District Used for Modelled Scenarios 31
Table 8 - Minimum Lots Sizes by Zoning District - Existing Zoning Scenario 33
Table 9 - Projected Possible Buildout Based on Current Zoning 33
Table 10 - Projected Likely Residential Buildout Based on Current Zoning, Corrected for Constraints, and Influencers 34
Table 11 - Minimum Lots Sizes by Zoning District – Scenario A 36
Table 12 - Projected Likely Residential Buildout Based on Scenario A, Corrected for Constraints, and Influencers 36
Table 13 - Minimum Lots Sizes by Zoning District – Scenario B 38
Table 14 - Projected Likely Residential Buildout Based on Scenario B, Corrected for Constraints, and Influencers 38

FIGURES

Figure 1 – Town of Fairfax Population Growth and Projections from 2005 to 2030 7
Figure 2 - Percentage of Overall Town Land Area by Major Land Use Categories in Fairfax 8
Figure 3 - Percentage of Overall Town Land Area By Zoning District 12
Figure 4 - Fairfax Development Review Board Activity 1976-2020 14
Figure 5 - New Private Roads since 2005 19
Figure 6 - Three Phase (Top) and Single-Phase (Bottom) Distribution Network 20
Figure 7 - Fiber and Cable Backbone in Fairfax (VT Dept. of Public Service) 21
Figure 8 - Protected Lands and Open Spaces in Fairfax 22
Figure 9 - Franklin County Population 2010 - 2020 (US Census) 23
Figure 10 - Physical Constraint Factors 25
Figure 11 - Factors Considered as Possible Constraints to Development 27
Figure 12 - Influencing Factors to Development and Associated Weightings 29
Figure 13 - Scenarios Considered 31
Figure 14 - Comparison of Baseline Existing Conditions and Scenario A 41
Figure 15 - Comparison of Baseline Scenario A and Scenario B 42
Figure 16 - Landowner Survey Summary - Factors Influencing Sale 43
Figure 17 - Current Two-Lot Subdivision Process - Implications of Administrative Review 48
Figure 18 – Decentralized Septic Systems 48

MAPS

Map 1 - Existing Land Use Pattern from 2018 Fairfax Grand List Database 9
Map 2 - Current Use Parcels (in green) within the Town of Fairfax (circa 2018) 11
Map 3 - Fairfax Zoning Districts 13
Map 4 – Subdivisions (in light blue) in Fairfax Since 2005 15
Map 5 - Residential Housing Units by Year Built 17
Map 6 - Physical Constraints to Land Development 26
Map 7 - Influencer Scores 30
Map 8 - Projected Likely Additional Residential Buildout - Existing Zoning Scenario 35
Map 9 – Projected Likely Additional Residential Buildout – Scenario A 37
Map 10 - Projected Likely Additional Residential Buildout – Scenario B 40
Map 11 – Projected Residential Along Major Roadways Under Scenarios A and B 47

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results from a growth study and buildout analysis completed for the Town of Fairfax that seeks to better understand the form and pattern of existing development and explore potential alternatives. This study also identifies possible policy tools and changes that can incentivize and support development in areas targeted for new growth.

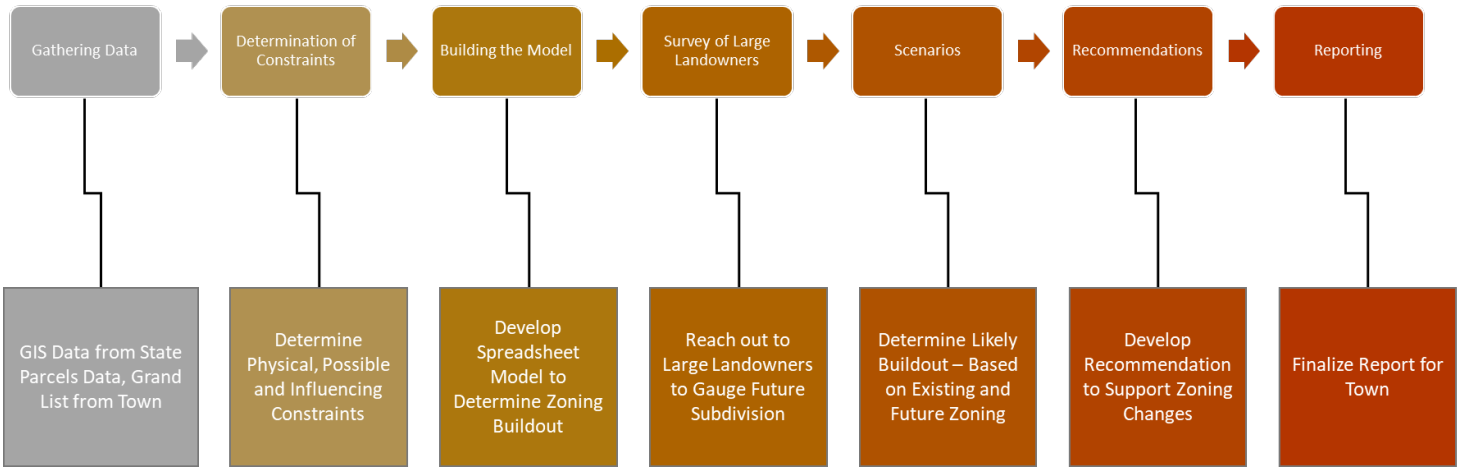
First and foremost, this buildout analysis aims to illustrate the potential development that could take place under current zoning and physical land constraints. This analysis establishes a baseline of development capacity and clarifies whether the pattern of development complements or contradicts planning goals. The Fairfax Planning Commission can use this information to fine-tune development regulations. Recommendations are provided to guide land development to areas of the community where sufficient infrastructure exists, where the land's capacity supports growth, and where it is most desired.

PROJECT GOALS

- Evaluate how land-use patterns have changed over time with an emphasis on understanding the conversion of farmland
- Evaluate the capacity of the land and the Town's infrastructure to support new growth
- Develop strategies to encourage growth in areas that can support it and where it serves the community's interests

PROJECT PROCESS

- The study included a series of phases through which the work was completed.
- Outreach to the public was done through collaboration with the Planning Commission, developing a Project website, and a focused landowner survey.
- Check-in meetings with the Planning Commission happened after the determination of constraints, the development of the buildout model, the processing of the landowner survey, and the presentation of scenarios and initial recommendations.



APPROACH

METHODOLOGY

This study analyzed both the underlying land-use patterns and constraints, using that understanding to develop a set of buildout scenarios that explored "what ifs" related to future growth. The analysis also sought feedback through a survey to larger landowners on future intentions and the factors that might influence their land-use decisions.

The analysis involved four main elements:

- To understand current and projected growth impacts expressed through population changes, land use patterns, conservation, and farming changes, zoning and policy, and residential unit development.
- Evaluating the capacity of the lands within Fairfax to accommodate additional growth.
- Modeling existing zoning and alternative buildout scenarios to explore future residential growth
- Provide recommendations on aligning town policies towards land use objectives described in the Town Plan

POPULATION

This analysis examines recent growth rates over the last 5, 10, and 20 years, and future projections for the Town to anticipate near and long-term needs. While overall growth projections are important, the pace of future growth should inform future investments in infrastructure (roads, water distribution systems, sewer systems) and planning of town services and facilities.

PATTERNS OF LAND USE

This analysis brought together a wide variety of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data layers that show land ownership, property development characteristics, housing types and

Table 1 - GIS Data Sources

Source	Layer Name
Town of Fairfax	Assessors Database – 2018 (used for modeling) + 2005, 2010, 2015
Vermont Center for Geographic Information (VCGI)	Rare, Threatened or Endangered Species Habitat; Groundwater Seepage Areas; Current Use Parcels; High-priority forest blocks; a 50' wetland buffer; Hydric Soils; Significant Natural Communities; Prime Agricultural Soil; and Protected Lands. Regional LiDAR data for Slope Calculations

The 2018 grand list database provides the basis for determining current residential uses and type (i.e., single-family homes, condominiums, etc.). In processing this database for use in the analysis, SE Group observed some discrepancies and miscoding that were considered inconsequential and not rectified. These are nominal to the overall process and conclusions.

The constraints (e.g., floodplains, wetlands) considered in the analysis are from publicly available GIS datasets, mostly obtained from the Vermont Center for Geographic Information. The use of such non-proprietary datasets assured that the analysis is both replicable and reliant on appropriately vetted data.

LAND CAPACITY

ArcGIS, a spatial analysis software, was used to collect relevant datasets and quantify existing residential development patterns. This software also identified known or possible constraints to development and identified lands within Fairfax that best support potential new residential growth.

SE Group explored the pattern of residential development through several means. Mining of the Town's grand list dataset determined currently developed and undeveloped (or vacant) parcels. Tax parcel and E911 location databases provided the quantity and spatial distribution of existing residential (and non-residential) structures. Town zoning data compared against the residential structure information illustrated how the existing development pattern correlated to intended land use.

Constraint factors limit the land area where development can occur. These might include land features, such as its steepness or wetness or issues defined in local or State policy. Other factors, such as the proximity to existing roads and power, or the availability of soils with good septic potential, can make a parcel more opportune for development. Three sets of

1. Physical Constraints. Land or environmental factors that are expressly considered in the Town's Land Development Regulations and, when present, result in a reduction in potential development via land subdivision. The study determines the percent of each parcel that had identified physical constraints.

2. Possible Constraints. Land or environmental factors that could reduce potential development either because they impede site development (such as unworkable soils) or have standing under regulatory review processes. The study determines the percent of each parcel with possible constraints.

3. Potential Influencers. Land, infrastructural, or environmental factors that could encourage new development because they enhance accessibility or reduce costs for subdivision or site development. For example, parcels requiring shorter new road lengths to meet up with existing roads would be more favorable for site development and have lower expected site development costs. These factors were weighted to create an influencer score for each parcel (see Appendix 1) to be used in the buildout analysis.

Each constraining or influencing factor was mapped and merged with parcel data to calculate (on a parcel-by-parcel basis) land development potential. These same factors are critical inputs to the buildout analysis model that calculates how many residential units a parcel could likely achieve under various scenarios.

It is important to recognize that these constraints and influencers are not all the factors that shape land development. Every parcel and site are different. The range of factors that the study considered is broad. Still, site-specific data would likely result in markedly different determinations of site potential and capacity for growth. On a town wide basis, using these factors is a reasonable basis for understanding land development capacity to support long-range planning efforts.

BUILDOUT ANALYSIS

Buildout projections estimate the potential number of residential units in the Town based on different zoning regulations. The projected number of units is based on zoning, existing units, and the influencers and constraints described above. Buildout models tend to be over-predictive of future growth, in part because they do not consider real estate market trends at the local or regional level. They do not predict a growth outcome, but they can illustrate patterns and highlight potential trends.

All of the modeled scenarios include a reduction factor to determine the likely number of units given known physical constraints and adjustment factors based on the possible constraints and influencers. Distance to an existing road and the favorability of soils to support septic systems are given an increased weighting because of their significance in supporting growth. Appendix A provides a very detailed discussion of all the factors and weighting used. The spreadsheet model can be adjusted for these factors to create additional scenarios.

The study explores three buildout scenarios:

1. Existing Conditions – this modeling scenario used existing zoning districts and associated minimum lots sizes to understand Town's likely buildout.

2. Scenario A: Adjusting Existing Zoning Districts – this modeling scenario used existing zoning districts but decreased the minimum lot size within the designated village center, effectively increasing the Village's potential density. This scenario is reflective of a highly "village centric" land use objective.

3. Scenario B: New Zoning Districts – this modeling scenario modified the existing zoning districts and minimum lot sizes. First, it creates two new districts within the Rural District into two new districts: Rural Residential 1 and Rural Residential 2. The Rural Residential 1 district shares the current minimum lot sizes and associated density potentials with the Town's Residential zoning district. Rural Residential 2 has higher minimum lot sizes, to create a moderate density area between Rural and Residential zoning districts. These new districts' boundaries consider existing land-use patterns and where new growth potential is highest. Higher density in the village core (as done in Scenario A) was included in this scenario as well. Lower densities than existing were used for the conservation and rural zoning districts.

This analysis informs recommendations to the Town of Fairfax on how it might address future growth. These recommendations include potential land use policy changes as well as possible modifications to the development review process

GROWTH IMPACTS

POPULATION CHANGE

This Study concentrates on the last 15 years (2005 – present) of growth and development in the Town of Fairfax. Over this period, Fairfax's population grew steadily at around 1.3% per year. This analysis period enables consideration of the "Great Recession," between 2008-2009 when economic factors slowed the pace of new residential growth.

According to the United States Census, in 2010, Fairfax's population was the highest it had ever been with 4,285 persons. While the 2020 census is ongoing, and results will be available in early 2021, the projected population by 2020 is between 4,981 and 5,232 persons, or an increase of between 16.2% to 22.1% from 2010 levels.[1] Projections for 2030 suggest a population increase of between 29.2% to 41.3%.[2] Now it's essential to understand that these are *projections* and not definitive outcomes. Given the projected range, Fairfax is likely to experience significant population growth in the coming decade.

Table 2 - Recent Population Growth and Projections to 2030 – Fairfax, Vermont

Year	Population	% Change from Previous Table Entry
2005	4,007	
2010	4,285	6%
2015	4,589	7%
2018	4,770	4%
2020^	4,981	4%
2030^	5,535	10%

Notes:
Data from 2005-2018 Based on US Census
^2020 and 2030 From VT 2020 Census Count Projections for Scenario "B"

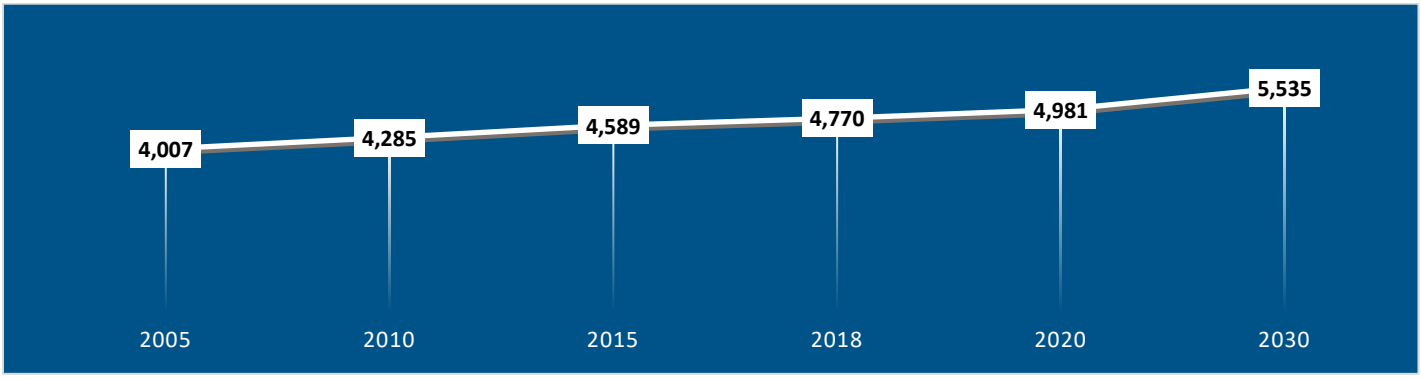


Figure 1 – Town of Fairfax Population Growth and Projections from 2005 to 2030

[1] https://dail.vermont.gov/sites/dail/files/documents/vt-population-projections-2010-2030.pdf, Scenario A + B
[2] https://dail.vermont.gov/sites/dail/files/documents/vt-population-projections-2010-2030.pdf

LAND USE PATTERNS

The land use pattern within Fairfax is generally rural, with a mix of significant farm properties, lower-density residential development, and a limited commercial area within the designated village center. The lands along the Lamoille River in the southernmost portion of Fairfax have generally evolved away from agricultural use, in part due to subdivision of land, but also reflective of the more challenging terrain and soils.

As depicted on Map 1, the Residential 2 land use designation (as taken from the 2018 Fairfax Grand List Database) encompasses a significant (39%) proportion of the Town. Farmland includes a similar (31%) proportion of the Town's land area. While vital to the local economy, commercial uses only account for about 2% of all land area and are predominantly located within the village. These codes are "land use" and not zoning and reflect existing uses on parcels.

As of 2018, Fairfax's lands had "tipped" to be nearly a majority (49%) residential in nature. This analysis affirms that the number of working farms in Fairfax have been dramatically reduced (to about seven as of this writing). Some of the lands identified as "residential" are large lots and continue to have some agricultural function. Overall, the land use allocations in Town are depicted in Table 3 and graphically on Figure 2.

Table 3 - Existing Land Use from Town Grand List Database

Land Use Code	Acreage	Percent of Town
Commercial	543	2%
Commercial Apt	8	0%
Farm	7,626	31%
Industrial	16	0%
Miscellaneous^	4,033	17%
Mobile Home/la	310	1%
Residential-1	2,317	10%
Residential-2	9,337	39%
Seasonal-1	0	0%
Utilities Elec	57	0%
Grand Total	24,247	100%

Notes:
Land Use Code is equal to "CAT" field within Grand List Database – 2018
Acreage is from the Grand List Database and does not reflect field survey or GIS mapping
Miscellaneous lands include public lands, town forest, school properties, churches, and other non-taxable properties.

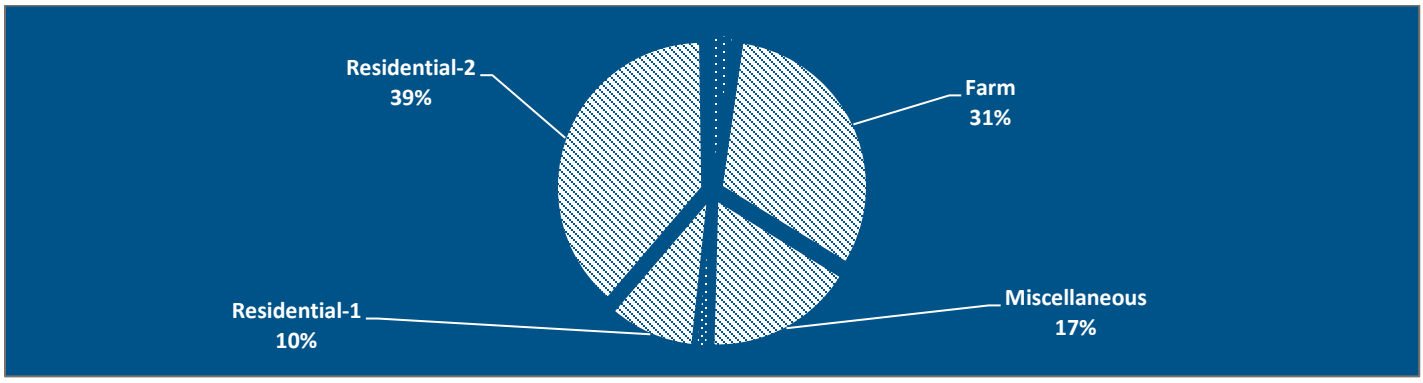
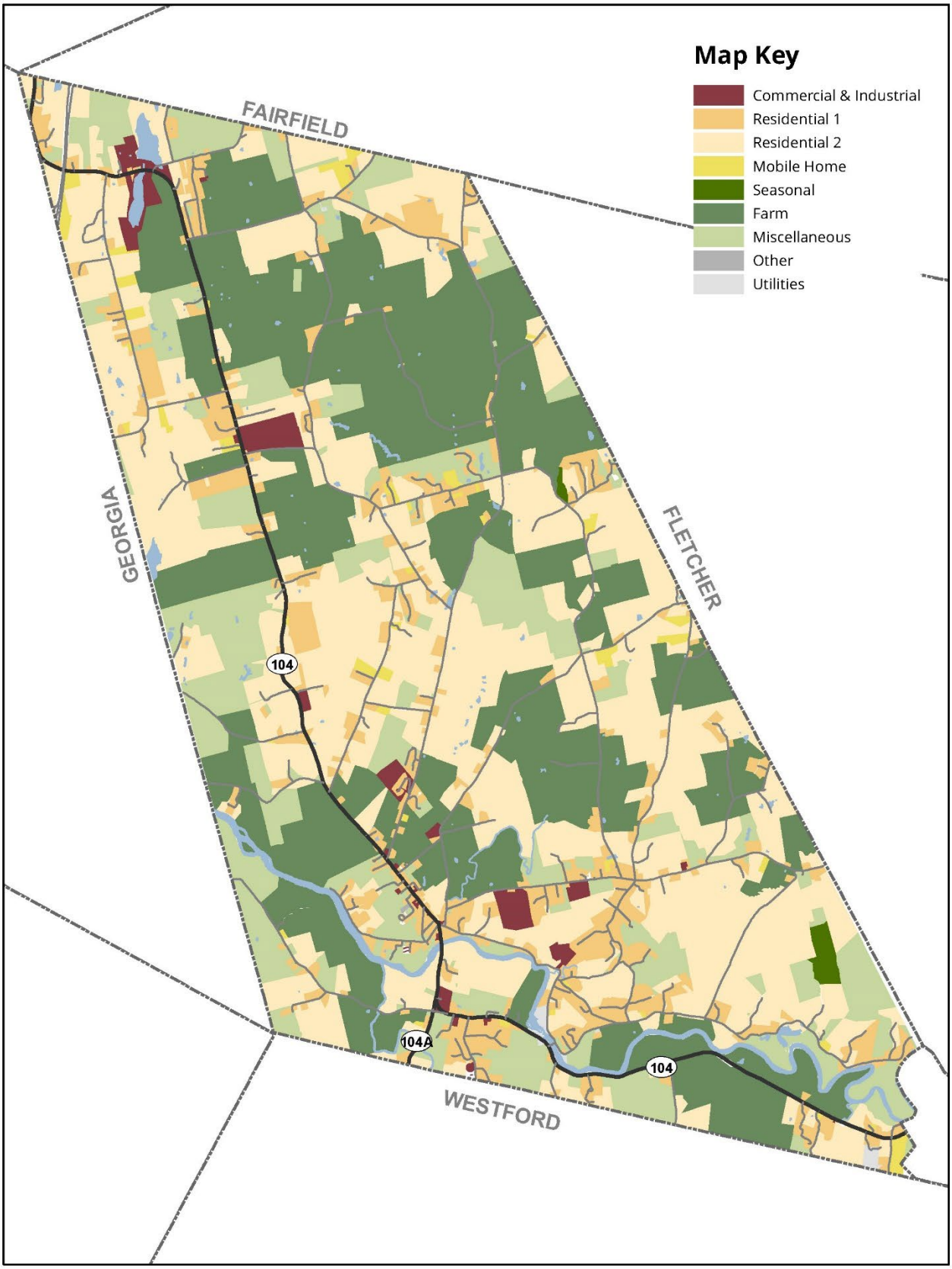


Figure 2 - Percentage of Overall Town Land Area by Major Land Use Categories in Fairfax



Map 1 - Existing Land Use Pattern from 2018 Fairfax Grand List Database

CURRENT USE PROGRAM

The Use Valley Appraisal or Current Use Program was established in 1978 to help keep Vermont working lands working. The Vermont Department of Taxes manages the program that allows agricultural lands, forest lands, and conservation lands to benefit from a reduction in property taxes. According to the Vermont Department of Taxes, in 2016, more than 18,400 parcels of land, encompassing over 2.4 million acres in Vermont, were enrolled in the program.[3]

Approximately 109 individual parcels comprising 12,704 acres of land are enrolled in Fairfax or about 50% of the Town's total land acreage. Over half these lands are classified as working forest land, with the remainder as agricultural lands. Based on 2020 information from the Vermont Department of Taxes, the program reduced the municipal tax burden in Fairfax by almost $73,000 and the educational tax burden by nearly $82,000.[4]

The average size of a parcel within the Current Use Program in Fairfax is about 125 acres. Some of the largest parcels are more than 400 acres. As depicted on Map 2, properties enrolled in the Current Use Program are widely scattered throughout the Town. Still, the northern third of the Town, furthest from the village, has some of the largest contiguous areas.

The Current Use Program plays an essential role in addressing the financial burden of working lands in Fairfax.

[3] https://tax.vermont.gov/property-owners/current-use
[4] https://tax.vermont.gov/sites/tax/files/documents/CUTaxSavngs2019_20.xlsx

Map 2 - Current Use Parcels (in green) within the Town of Fairfax (circa 2018)

SUBDIVISION AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

CURRENT ZONING

The Town of Fairfax has zoning regulations to address residential growth and density within seven (7) zoning districts (See Map 3). Notably, the Town has defined Growth Center and Mixed Use Districts, which generally encompass the state-designated Village Center area.

About 70% of the land area within Town is within the Rural District. Combined, the Growth Center and Mixed Use Districts comprise only 2% (or about 600 acres) of the Town's overall land area. Figure 3 below illustrates the percentage of land area within each of the zoning districts.

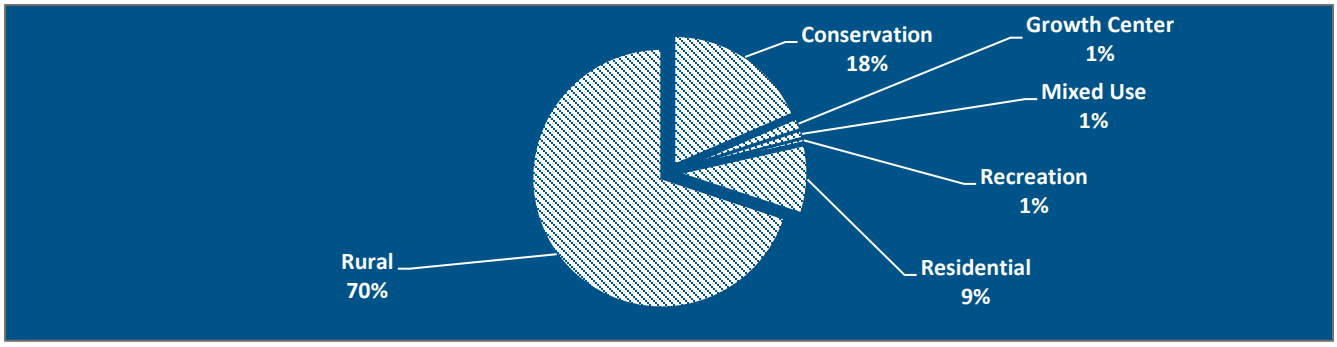


Figure 3 - Percentage of Overall Town Land Area By Zoning District

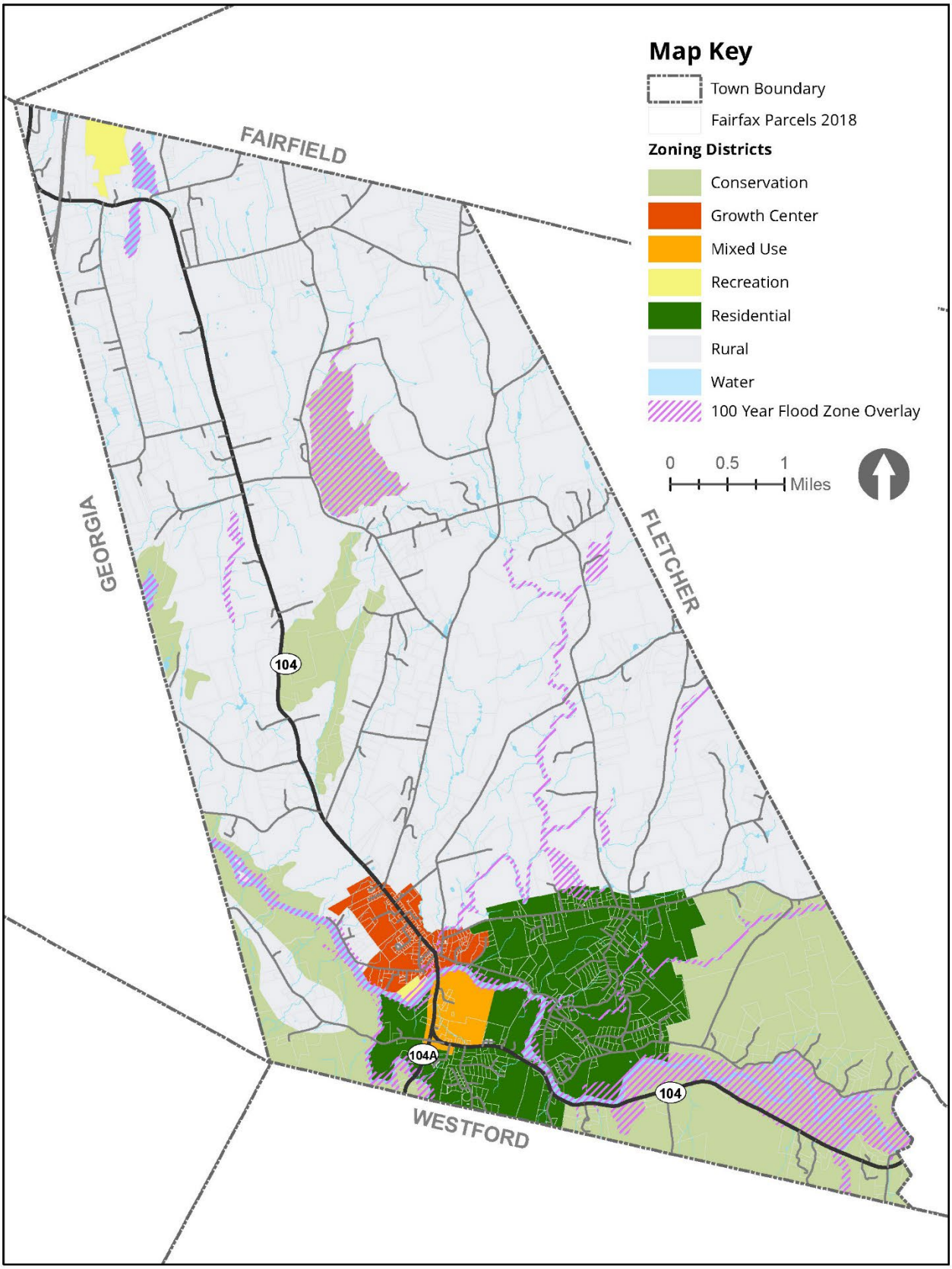
The minimum lot size for residential development (the dimensional mechanism that the town uses to establish a minimum residential density) does not vary widely between zoning districts. Table 4 below summarizes the minimum lot size for each existing zoning district.

Table 4 - Minimum Lots Sizes by Zoning District

Zoning District	Minimum Lot Size (Acres)
Rural	2
Growth Center	0.5
Conservation	5
Mixed Use	0.5
Residential	1.5
Recreation	2

Density for the rural district is only four times the density within the growth center (2 acres versus 0.5 acres). Typically, densities of at least eight units per acre (or a minimum lot size of 0.125 acres) are appropriate for denser village districts. For reference, the nearby Town of Georgia specifies "no minimum" lot size in its South Village Core (SV) district.[5] Similarly, the Town of Milton's Historic Neighborhood Center (NC2) district requires a minimum lot size of 3,000 square feet with minimal setbacks and a 45-foot frontage requirement.[6] Smaller lot sizes can encourage more diverse housing.

[5] https://www.townofgeorgia.com/vertical/sites/%7B3747D13B-4E38-4619-9703-1C2A86CDAACF%7D/uploads/Georgia_Development_Regulations_10.14.13.pdf
[6] http://www.miltonvt.gov/DocumentCenter/View/427/Unified-Development-Regulations-PDF



Map 3 - Fairfax Zoning Districts

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

The Fairfax Development Review Board (DRB) handles applications for subdivisions. While no readily accessible record of the activity of the DRB exists, the Town has an informal log of actions (approvals for subdivisions, new roads, etc.) over the past 40 or so years. That log was parsed and coded to identify requests for a new subdivision or roads and shows (See Figure 4) a dramatic peak during the mid-2000s.

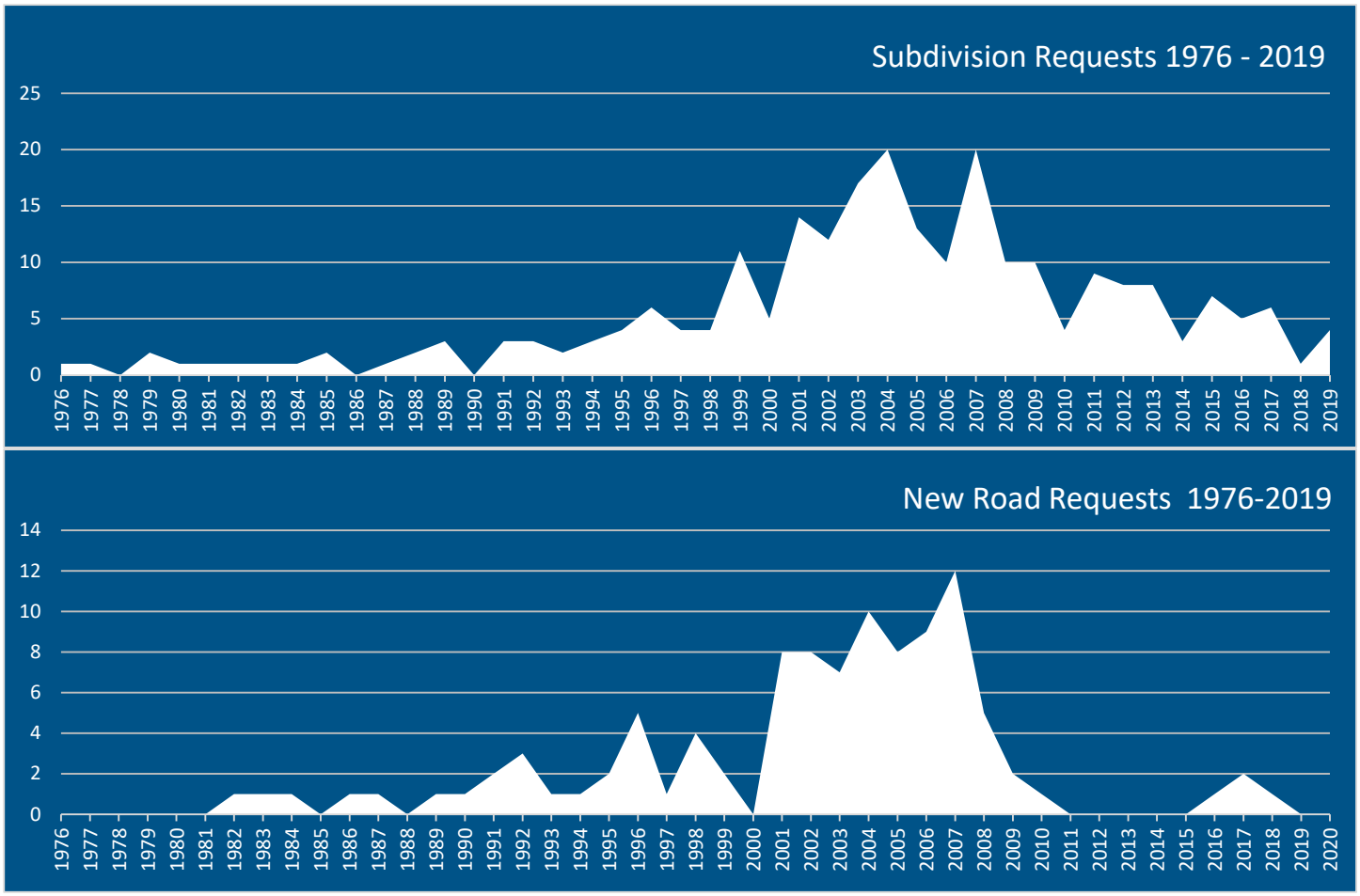
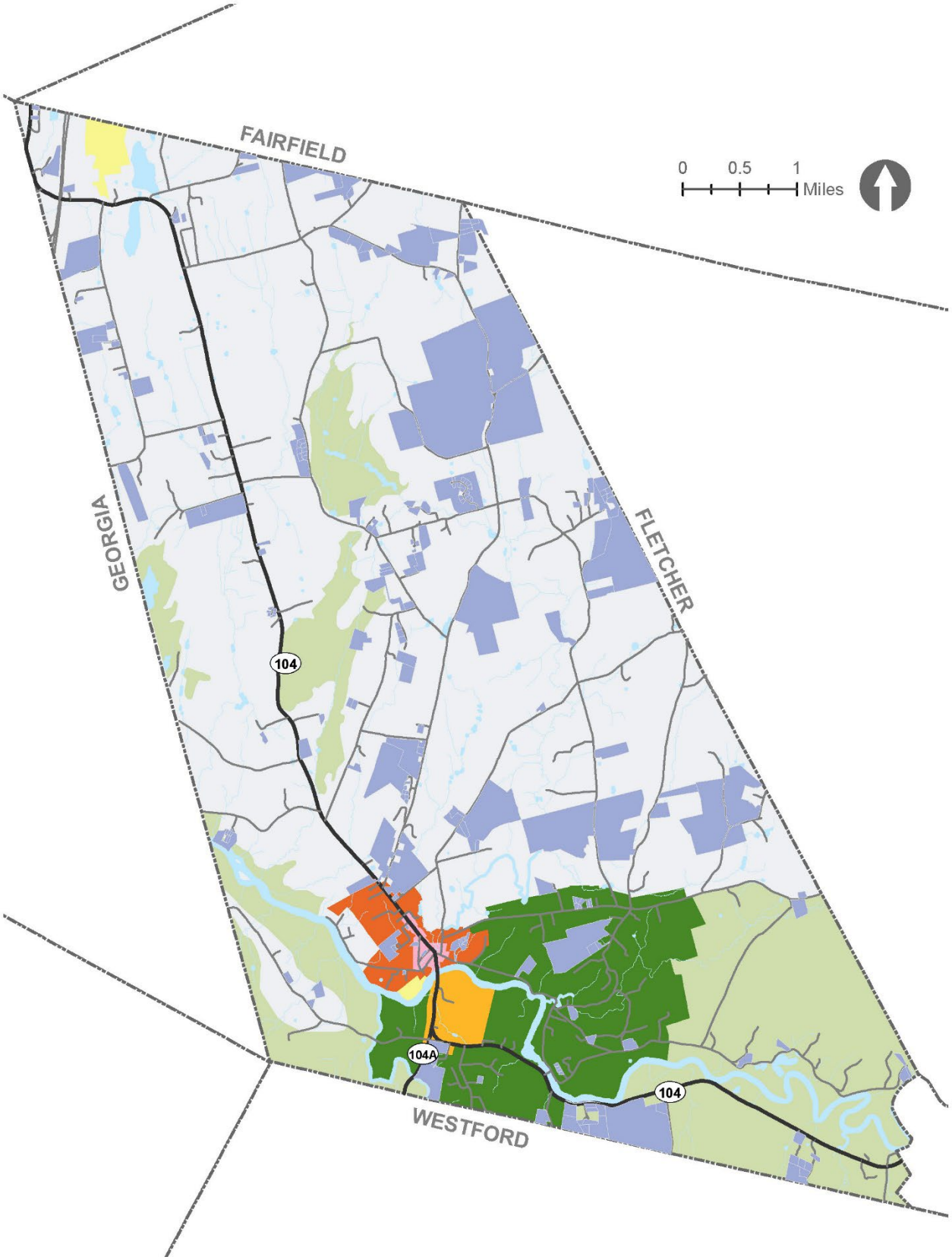


Figure 4 - Fairfax Development Review Board Activity 1976-2020

The DRB log is not definitive of review outcome; some were likely denied, and some were approved. The information illustrates the relatively high degree of land development activity. Since 2005, 186 new subdivision requests have been filed with the Town, averaging about 9 per year. The DRB log suggests that the level of activity is slowing somewhat with 5-6 requests per year. This analysis does not directly address each subdivision's scope or scale; these can be two-lots or 10-lots subdivisions. Most are on the lower end of the spectrum.

A review of Grand List Databases from 2005 to the present indicates that 355 new parcels have been created, for an average of nearly 24 new parcels per year. Most of the subdivisions are smaller, creating 2-3 lots. Most residential subdivisions (65%) were approved for traditional single-family homes. It appears that, more recently, a higher percentage of new subdivisions are providing attached housing than the historic composition within Fairfax. Map 4 illustrates the location of recently subdivided lots (post-2005).



Map 4 – Subdivisions (in light blue) in Fairfax Since 2005

HOUSING TRENDS

According to the 2018 Grand List, Fairfax has approximately 1,770 residential dwelling units. This includes single-family detached homes (1,495 units or 85% of all units) with some mobile home and multi-unit (condominium and duplex) units. Table 5 below summarizes the current residential housing mix by zoning district, and Table 6, the total residential units by zoning district.

Table 5 - Residential Unit Mix by Zoning District

Zoning District	Single - Family Detached Homes	Mobile Homes	Condominiums	Duplexes
Conservation	141	8	9	2
Growth Center	154	0	10	36
Mixed Use	15	0	0	0
Recreation	0	0	0	0
Residential	319	6	63	3
Rural	866	35	12	3
Grand Total	1495	49	94	44

Notes:
Zoning Districts from the Town of Fairfax GIS data
Unit Mix based on "DESCPROP" or Property Description Field in the 2018 Grand List Database

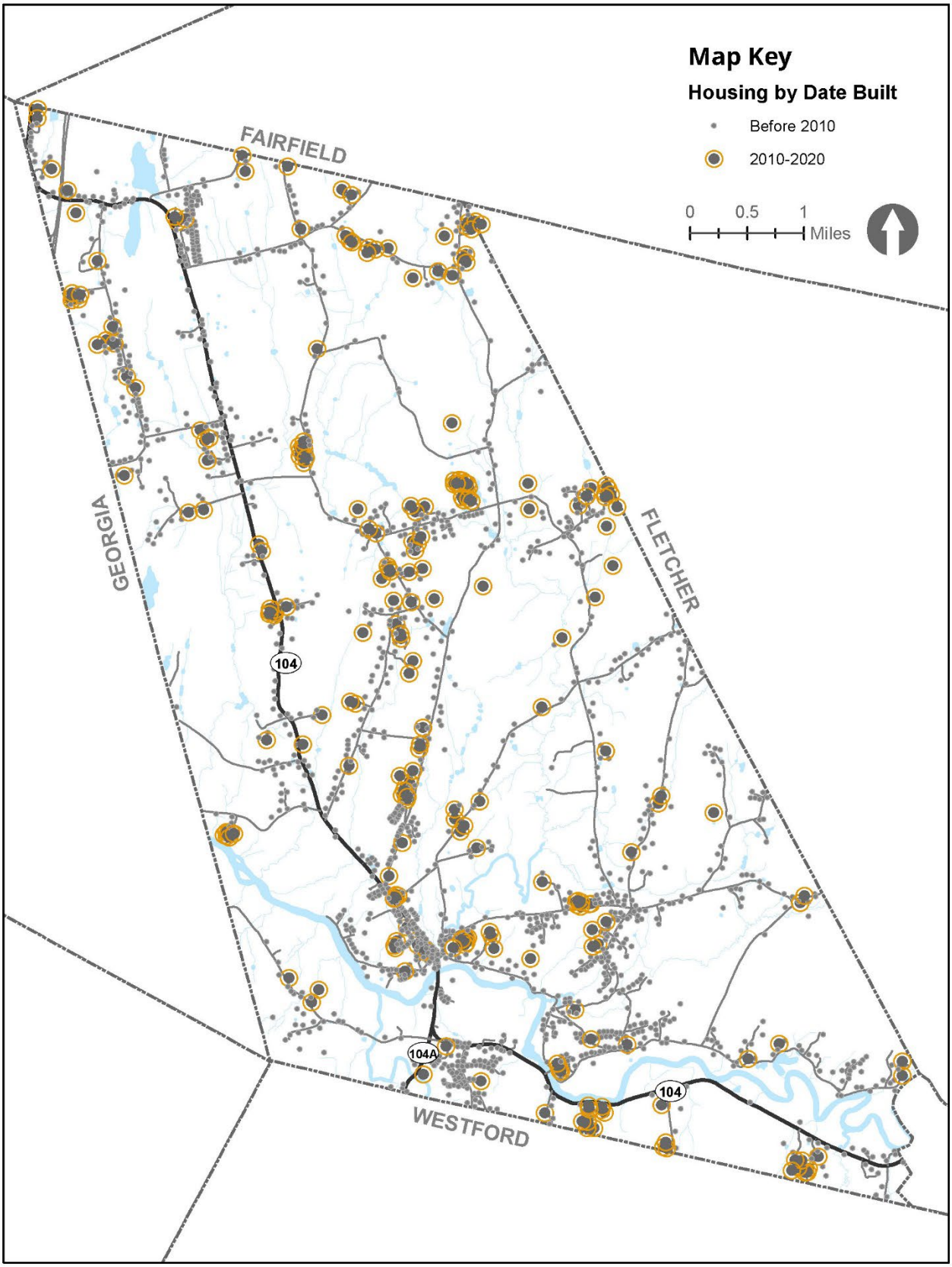
Table 6 - Total Residential Units by Zoning District

Zoning District	Residential Units
Conservation	175
Growth Center	248
Mixed Use	19
Recreation	0
Residential	350
Rural	978
Grand Total	1770

Notes:
Zoning Districts from the Town of Fairfax GIS data
Residential Units account for duplex as 2 units, based on 2018 Grand List Information

Since 2010, 247 new housing units have been added, with only 36 of them constructed within the defined Growth Center or the designated Village Center. Map 5 shows residential housing units' locations in Fairfax based on Grand List databases and E911 structure data. Approximately 158 new housing units have been built in the Rural District since 2010, mainly driven by farmland conversion and subdivisions. It is important to remember that the subdivision of land is a precursor to new residential construction. A significant number of subdivisions were approved in Fairfax between 2000 and 2010, but that slowed down markedly during the Great Recession. The more recent trend for building and development may reflect property owners or developers' willingness to move forward in construction with the generally positive housing market in the region. The long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on this trend is not yet known.

The relatively modest level of residential development in the growth center may stem from the perception that it is already built-out or lacks density-friendly infrastructure. It also speaks to the market challenge of developing multi-family housing in Fairfax, where land prices are less than in Greater Chittenden County. The historically preferred form is detached single-family units.



Map 5 - Residential Housing Units by Year Built

INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT GROWTH

SEWER AND WATER

Sewer System

Fairfax operates a wastewater treatment facility along Hunt Street with a permitted treatment capacity of 78,000 gallons per day (gpd). At present the system has about 30% capacity yet unallocated (about 23,400 gpd) or roughly enough reserve to serve about 52 single family homes at 450 gpd.

The Town has recently been working closely with Runamok Maple to provide up to 10,000 gpd in wastewater capacity to support an expansion of their commercial operations. While this is a "high" estimate, with that allocation, the anticipated reserve for other uses would be about 18% of total capacity, or 13,790 gpd. Potentially that could support approximately 30 single-family homes, but this calculation does not consider required reserves, which would likely lessen capacity.

The Town has been working with Aldrich & Elliot on a Preliminary Engineering Report, but the primary focus of these efforts is not about expanding overall system capacity, but rather improving water quality relative to BOD (Biological Oxygen Demand), TSS (Total Suspended Solids), and other regulated pollutants. In addition to overall capacity, system limitations exist for specific pollutants, reducing the effective capacity of treatment at the plant. The engineering study will inform plans to reduce these barriers.

While much more work is needed, the Town understands that a wholesale upgrade of the Hunt Street facility might be financially burdensome. Whether to try to expand the current plant or identify an alternative location in support of expanded wastewater capacity, is still an open question.

Water System

The availability of potable water is much more problematic. At present, the system has about 299 connections within the Village. A public water supply well along Wheezy Way Road has a yield of about 60,000 gpd, providing about 37,000 gpd of available water capacity. A nominal reserve of about 2,000 gpd remains unallocated. A moratorium is in place precluding any new connections to the water system.

The Town has been actively seeking alternatives for water in support of expanding capacity. Recent exploratory work has, so far, not yielded promising results. While this work has largely been done under the auspices of the Town's Utility Department, more recently the Town has been in contact with the State to seek assistance on a more rigorous process to seek additional capacity. The likely distance between areas of high-yielding groundwater wells and existing water system infrastructure poses a cost and feasibility barrier. More work is needed to explore those ideas or perhaps a series of smaller, community-scaled systems.

ROAD NETWORK

The road network in Fairfax consists of approximately 79 miles of public roads. A large percentage (65-70%) of the system is locally serving dirt roads.

Additionally, several miles of private roads have been built in recent years as the Town has not accepted new roads. Figure 5 below highlights private roads added since 2005.

Many of these newer roads serve relatively low-density residential development.

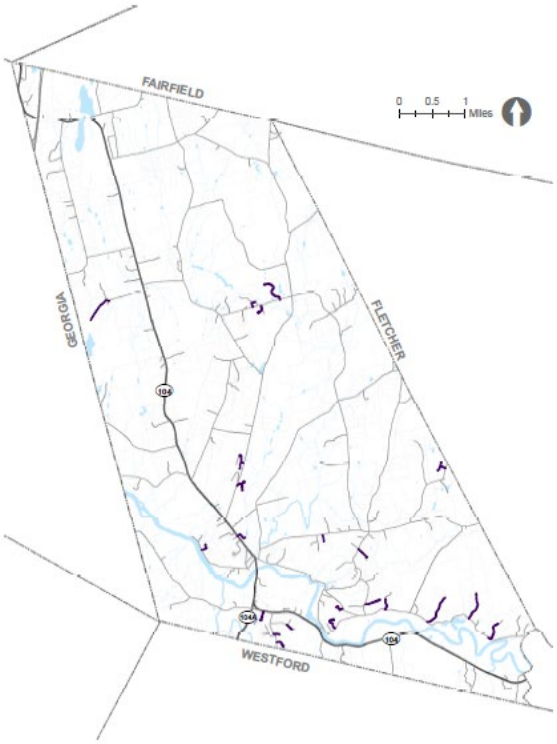


Figure 5 - New Private Roads since 2005

Electric Power

Fairfax has an extensive electrical distribution network that primarily exists along roads. The availability of electric power can be a powerful influencer to development. The two maps in the Figure below highlight the existing electric distribution network and the three-phase network. While not a prerequisite in supporting residential growth and development, three-phase power can be a major factor in the siting of industrial or renewable energy facilities. The Village and areas along Fairfield Street (near the industrial park) are well served by three-phase power.

The lack of it elsewhere in Fairfax may limit opportunities for solar installations or adaptive changes at working farm properties to include more value-added processing.

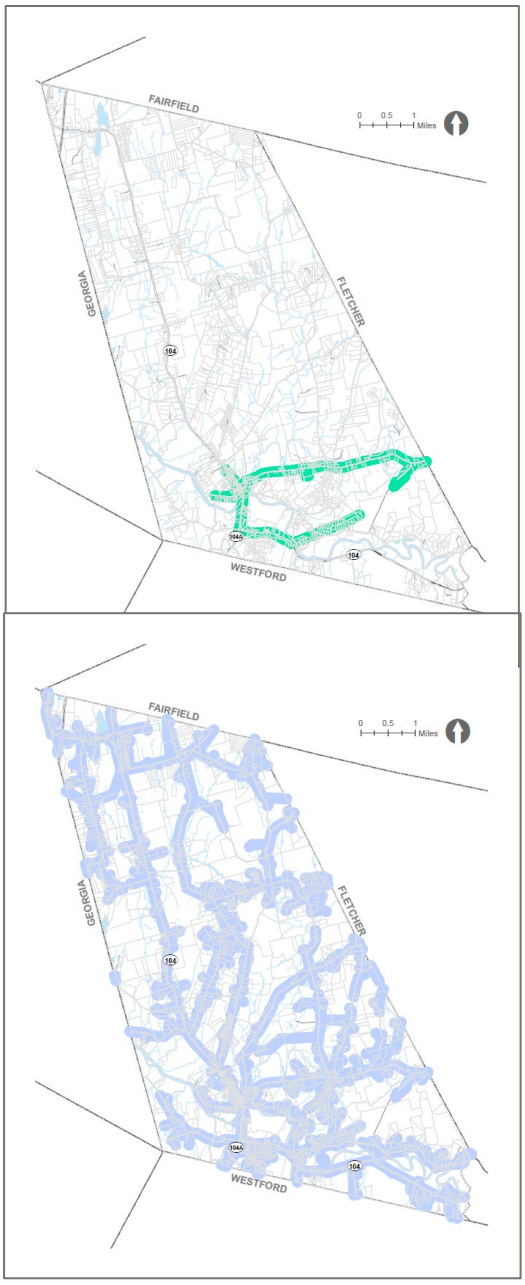


Figure 6 - Three Phase (Top) and Single-Phase (Bottom) Distribution Network

Broadband

Access to broadband internet is an ever-growing essential service. The ongoing issues surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic has only highlighted the importance of quality, highspeed internet. Fairfax residents today are working more at home, conducting distance learning from home, and relying on streaming services for news and entertainment. Residents in Fairfax essentially have two choices for internet access. Cable-based internet service is available, but it is limited to areas within and adjacent to the Village (See Figure 6). Digital Subscriber Line (or DSL) connectivity is available for more of the Town through telecom providers, but coverage is not universal. Figure 7 documents this information.

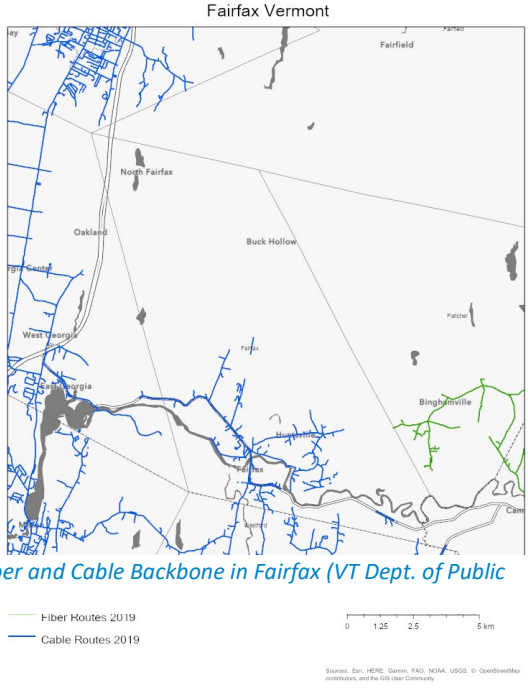


Figure 7 - Fiber and Cable Backbone in Fairfax (VT Dept. of Public Service)

Based on information from the Vermont Department of Public Service (through December 2019), of the approximately 1,784 buildings in Fairfax, about 50% are served with broadband supporting 25 Mbps (megabits per second) download and 3 Mbps upload. About 22% of buildings are underserved.

Fairfax's underserved areas tend to be in locations where significant development has yet to happen and where power and telecom services are somewhat less proximate. These also happen to be the areas where growth is expected to occur in the future.

PROTECTED LANDS

Some properties within the Town of Fairfax are subject to covenants or easements that restrict or preclude their redevelopment. VCGI maintains a Protected Lands Database that includes public lands (such as the Town's 100-acre woods parcel), State, federal, and other conservation lands. Within Fairfax, a total of 78 parcels comprising 3,297 acres are identified as "protected" in this database. Many of these parcels have entered into agreements with the Vermont Land Trust, presumably to assist in maintaining working farmland.

Figure 8 indicates the general location of these protected lands.

For the buildout modeling, these properties are presumed to be "non-contributing" to future growth. However, the specifics of the restrictive land covenants might allow some modest level of subdivision.

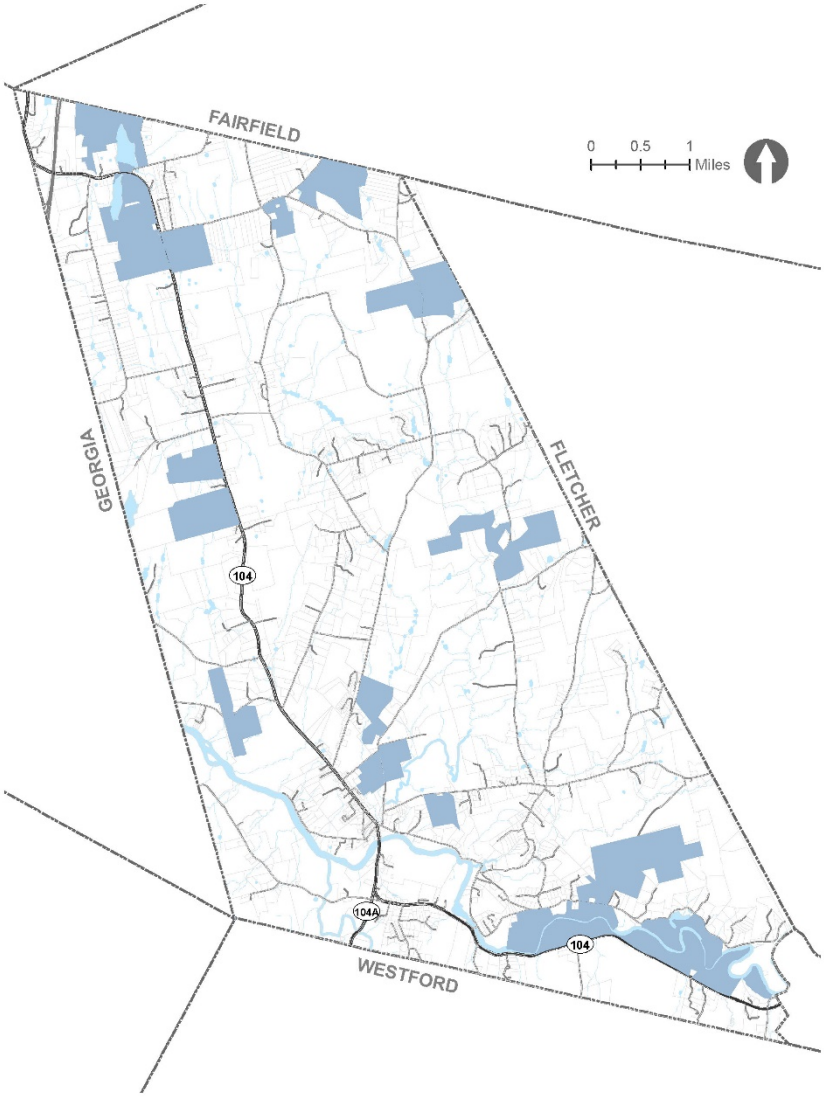


Figure 8 - Protected Lands and Open Spaces in Fairfax

REGIONAL TRENDS

POPULATION

Franklin County's population has grown by over 5% since 2010. That growth also appears to be accelerating somewhat in the past 2-3 years, improving along with the housing market. The impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on development is uncertain, and the upcoming 2020 census will provide a much clearer picture of the current trend. Figure 9 below illustrates Franklin County's population from 2010 to 2020.

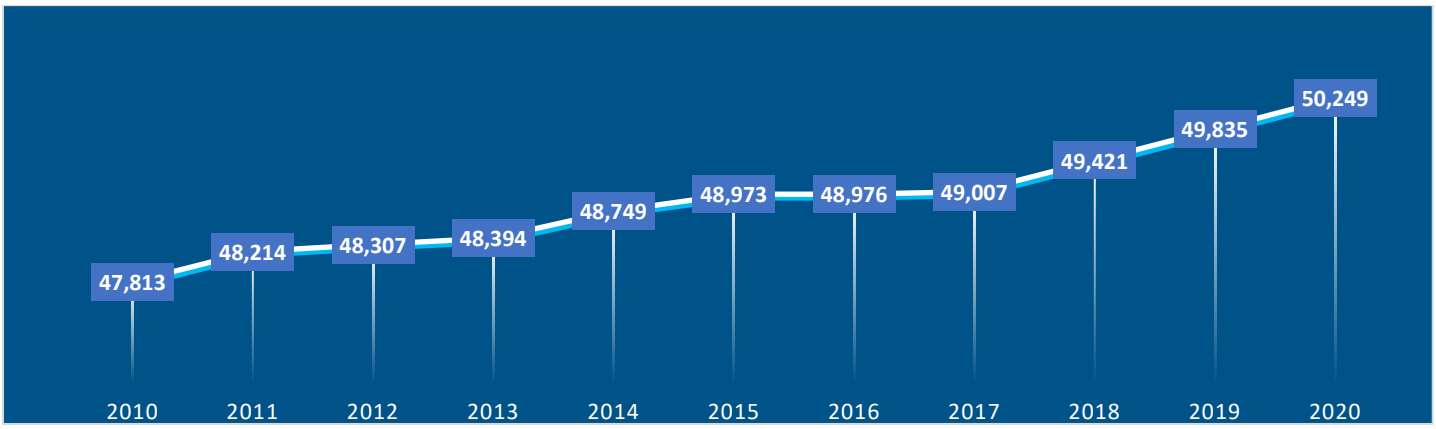


Figure 9 - Franklin County Population 2010 - 2020 (US Census)

HOUSING

The Vermont Housing Finance Agency, working with the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, released the Housing Needs Assessment 2020-2024 in February of 2020.[7] This comprehensive analysis of current and projected housing at the county level indicates several important factors relevant to Fairfax:

- Rental housing in Franklin County comprises only 23% of all units.[8] While no specific rental information is available in Fairfax, based on the higher prevalence of single-family homes, the percentage of rental homes is likely smaller.
- While seasonal vacation homes are part of the residential housing mix, Franklin County has the lowest percentage of short-term rental units in the State. Many parts of the State have struggled with the impact of short-term rental units, offsetting the development of year-round, permanent housing units. While Franklin County's short-term unit numbers are low, the stock increased by 9% between 2018 and 2019. Listings for short-term rentals in Franklin County have risen from 34 to 154 between 2015 and 2019.[9]
- The pace of housing growth in Franklin County has been significantly higher (2.43% per year between 2010 and 2017) in Franklin County than in Chittenden County (1.0%) and the State of Vermont (0.16%). The Housing Needs Assessment further suggests that Franklin County will see the growth pace continue at 0.5% per year between 2020 and 2025.

[7] Vermont Housing Needs Assessment: 2020-2024, Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA)
[8] Ibid, Page 190.
[9] Ibid, Page 190-191, Figures 16-6, 16-8.

- Projections for 2020 to 2025 do not suggest a regional shift away from owner-occupied homes. Approximately 85% of new homes within this period are projected to be owner-occupied.[10]
- Home sales in Franklin County have also been at a faster pace as compared to the rest of the State. In 2018, the median days a home was listed on the market was 102 days as compared to 111 days for the State and 72 days for Chittenden County[11]
- The age of housing stock in Franklin County largely mimics the pattern observed in the State, a significant percentage of older homes (pre-1939) and an increasing proportion of homes built between the 1970s to 2010s.[12] Based on recent building permit issuances in Fairfax, it is likely that the Town's housing profile is skewing newer.

[10] Vermont Housing Needs Assessment: 2020-2024, Page 189, Figure 16-3.
[11] Ibid, Pages 164 (Figure 14-5) and 189 (Figure 16-5).
[12] Ibid, Page 197, Figure 16-20.

LAND CAPACITY

This part of the Study describes the constraints and influencers to new residential development and the baseline results and two alternative buildout scenarios. As discussed in the methodology, the analysis is completed on a parcel-by-parcel basis and then summarized at a town-wide level.

CONSTRAINTS ANALYSIS

The methodology considers three factors that either constrain or influence residential development. This section describes each factor and its applicability to the buildout model.

PHYSICAL CONSTRAINTS

The Town's Land Development Regulations require the subtractions of lands constrained by three factors when calculating the minimum lot sizes through a subdivision.

These factors are:

Steep Slopes – areas within each parcel where slopes are greater than 25% are considered too steep for development and are to be excluded. About 3,250 acres of land are estimated to be more than 25% slope. See Figure 10.

Wetlands – areas within each parcel identified on state-wide mapping as being either Class I or Class II wetlands are to be excluded. About 3,600 acres of mapped Class II wetlands were identified in the Town. See Figure 10.

Floodplains – areas within each parcel within mapped 100-year floodplains are excluded. Approximately 2,004 acres of mapped floodplains exist within the Town. See Figure 10.

Overall, about 6,200 acres or 26% of Fairfax's land area is identified as physically constrained. Map 6 depicts the physically constrained lands in Fairfax.

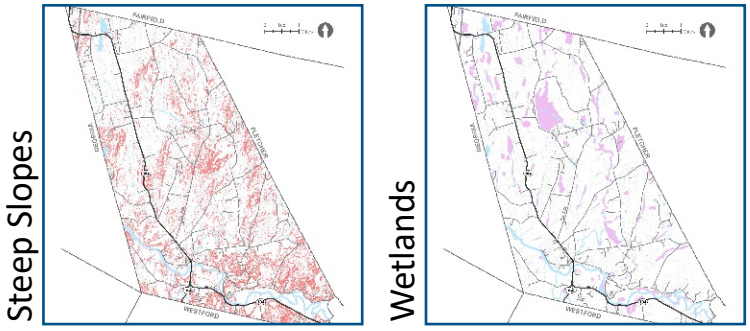
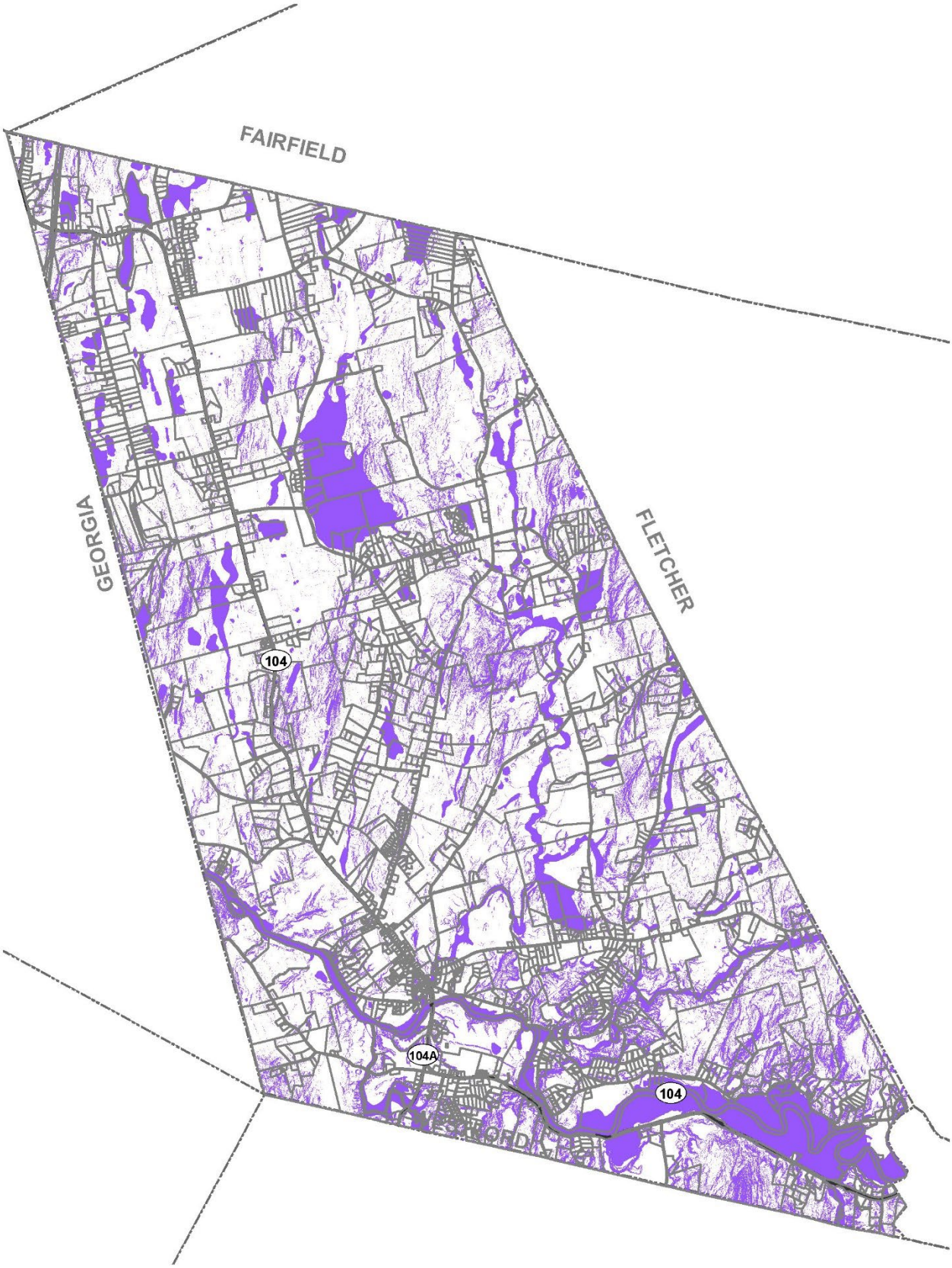


Figure 10 - Physical Constraint Factors



Map 6 - Physical Constraints to Land Development

POSSIBLE CONSTRAINTS

Possible Constraints are land or environmental factors that might modify potential residential development. They are generally either an impediment to site development or could have standing under regulatory review processes. As described more fully in the technical memorandum in the Appendix A, each of these constraints has some capability to reduce the potential viability of lands in support of development. Hydric soils, for example, are generally heavier and wetter, making them more challenging for construction. Prime agricultural soils have a protected status considered for larger residential subdivisions that cross the 10-unit/lot threshold for State Land Use Review under Act 250.

The buildout model assumes that each of these possible constraints has some influence, weighted according to their relative capacity to reduce the likelihood of subdivision. Again, as in any modeling, these are assumptions. Individual properties would presumably review all applicable site criteria as part of their initial plan to subdivide. Within the generalities of the town wide scale buildout analysis, these constraints tend to dampen the likelihood of maximizing density.

The factors considered as possible constraints are described in Figure 11.

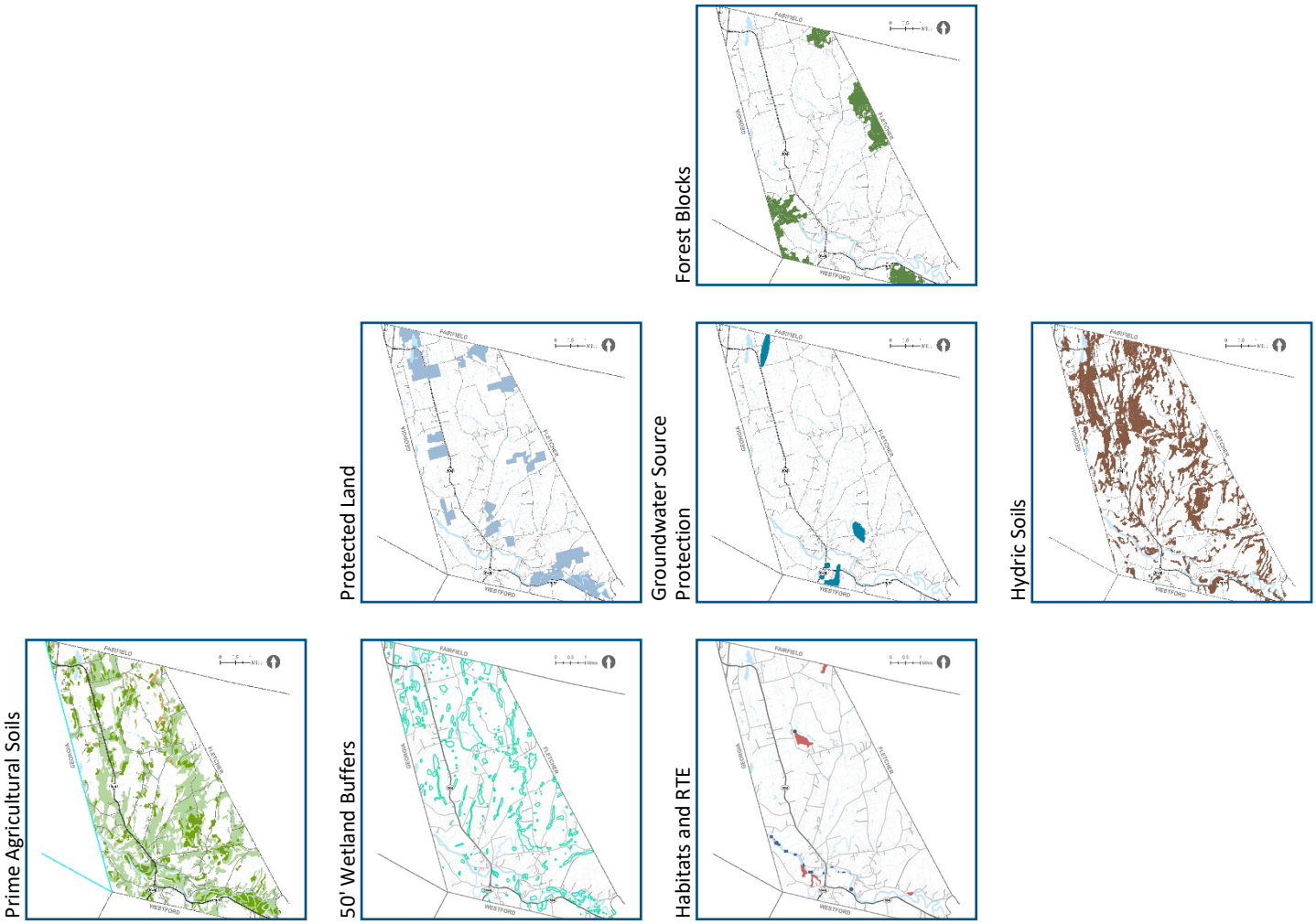


Figure 11 - Factors Considered as Possible Constraints to Development

POTENTIAL INFLUENCERS

Influencers are land, infrastructural, or environmental factors that can encourage new development because they enhance accessibility or reduce subdivision or site development costs.

Five categories of influencer were considered in the Study:

Septic Suitability – soils that either have a good or moderate capacity to support onsite septic systems, as determined from the USDA Natural Resources Service soils database for Franklin County, Vermont. The assumption in the buildout analysis is that if the soils are suitable for onsite septic, the prospects for development are higher.

Sewer Service Area – areas within the town either within or near the established sewer service area (SSA). The assumption is that properties connected or easily so with the existing sewer area will be more favorably inclined to support maximum densities.

Powerlines – areas within the town in relative proximity to the existing single-phase powerlines. The assumption is that the closer the property is to established powerline infrastructure, the costs of adding service drops or extensions would be lower.

Roads – areas within town in relative to an existing town road. The closer a property is to a town road; the less site work is needed for extension of roads in support of larger subdivisions or planned unit developments. This analysis weights proximity to paved roads higher than unpaved roads.

Transmission Lines – areas within the established right-of-way for major transmission lines can negatively impact potential new development by precluding development and lessening the attractiveness of the site.

Figure 12 highlights the influencing factors and relative weightings. This is also done on a parcel-by-parcel basis.

Map 7 illustrates the influencer score (weighting) applied within the town.

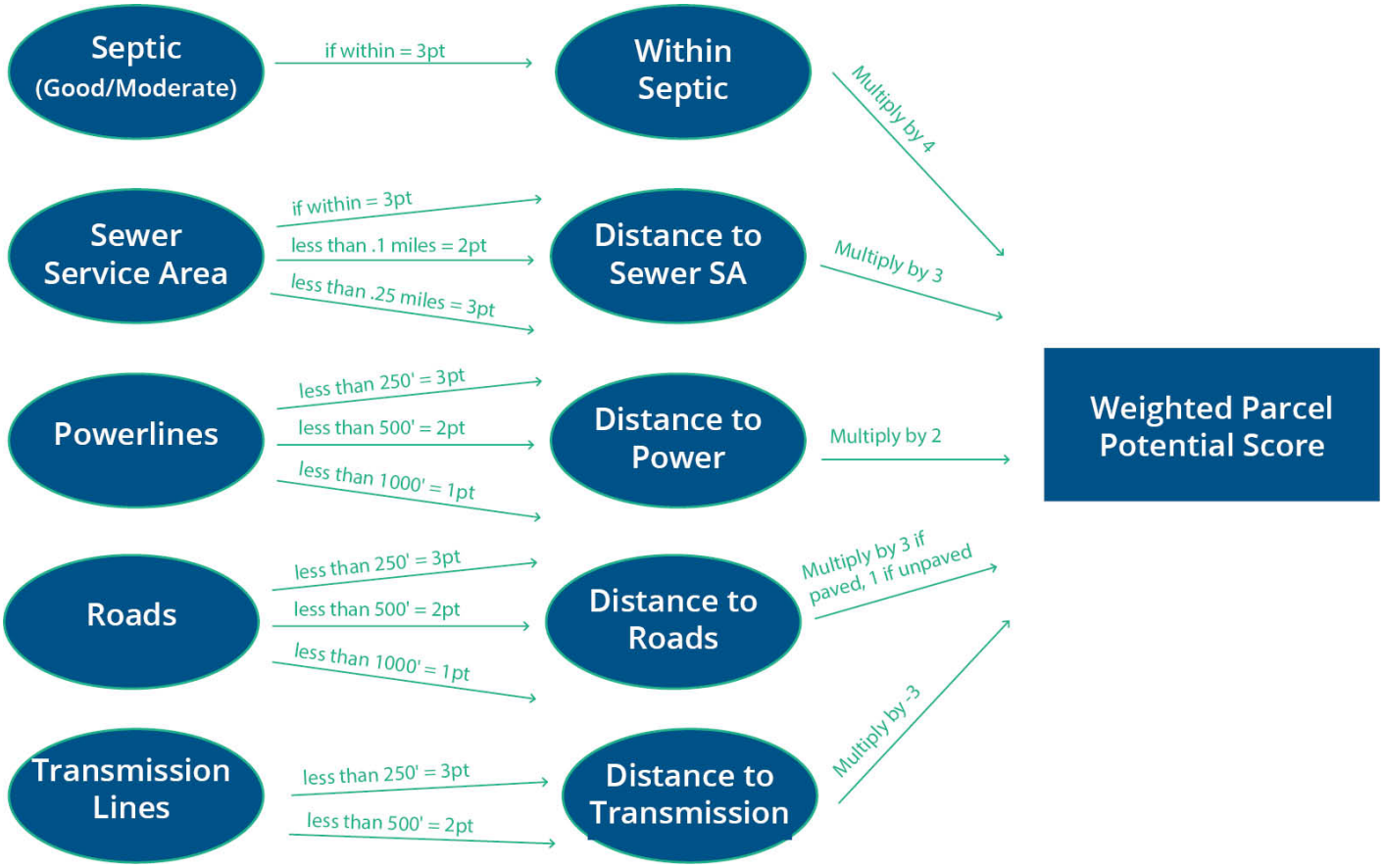
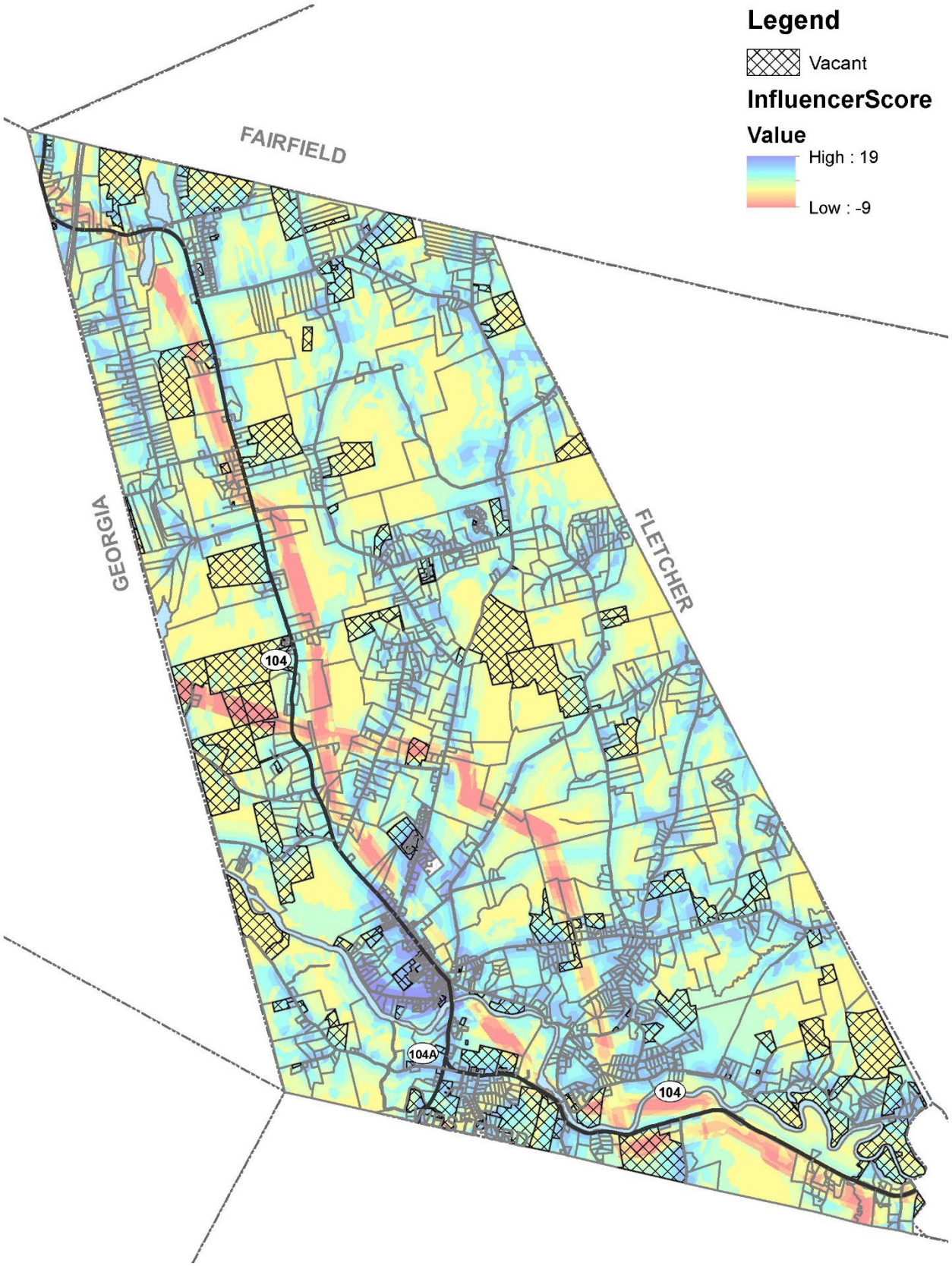


Figure 12 - Influencing Factors to Development and Associated Weightings



Map 7 - Influencer Scores

BUILDOUT SCENARIOS

SCENARIOS CONSIDERED

The Study considered three scenarios: a baseline model utilizing existing or current zoning and two alternative scenarios reflecting different land-use objectives. The minimum residential lot size by zoning district is used as a determinative input variable described earlier for each scenario. Figure 13 highlights the three scenarios.

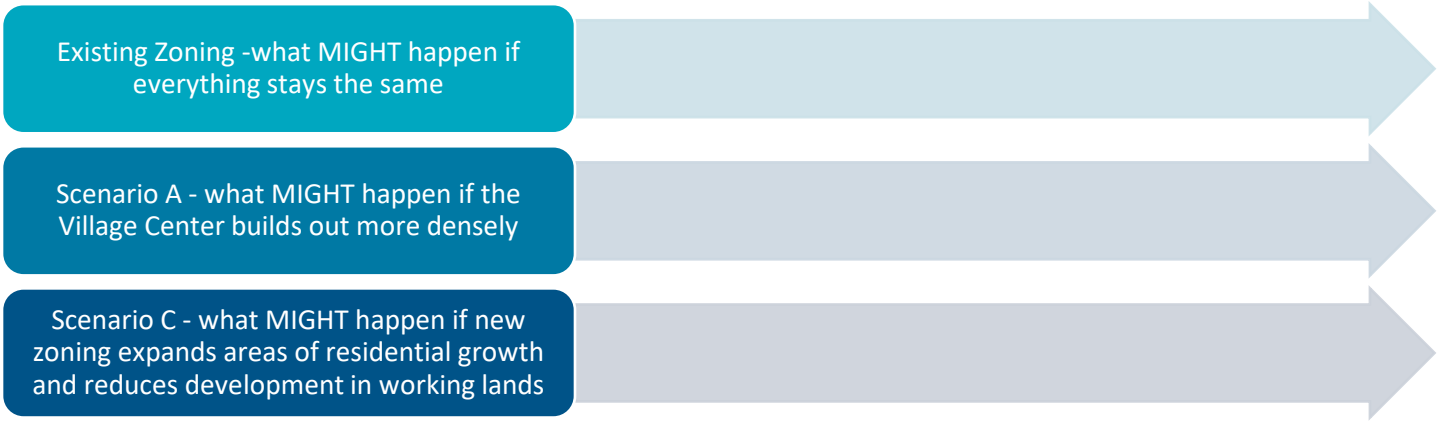


Figure 13 - Scenarios Considered

Each scenario considers several input parameters that define the outcome. The zoning districts and allowable densities are used to drive the potential maximum number of subdivisions. Land capability and constraints are used to adjust the maximum potential buildout to reflect each parcel's limitations. The model excludes municipally owned parcels such as the school, town forest, and other lands with no development potential.

Table 7 represents the various zoning districts and their associated minimum residential lot size for each scenario considered. The model assigns every parcel a single zoning district, based on whichever was the most dominant.

Table 7 - Minimum Lots Sizes by Zoning District Used for Modelled Scenarios

	Minimum Lot Size (Acres)		
Zoning District	Existing Zoning	Scenario A	Scenario B
Rural	2	2	5
Growth Center	0.5	0.125	0.125
Conservation	5	5	10
Mixed Use	0.5	0.125	0.125
Residential	1.5	1.5	1.5
Recreation	2	2	2
Residential1			1.5
Residential2			2.5

The model determines buildout results for each scenario using two approaches. The first is a determination of the POSSIBLE buildout. Possible buildout is calculated using this basic equation on a parcel-by-parcel basis:

Parcel Acres − Physical Constraints in Parcel ÷ Minimum Lot Size for District = Possible Residential Units

Possible Residential Units is the theoretical maximum number that could be created. It is always a wildly large number and ignores completely other constraints and issues.

Once the number of Potential Residential Units are determined, then the possible constraints and influencing factors are used to adjust that number downwards. This works as follows:

Possible Residential Units × Weighted Possible Constraints Factor × Weighted Influencer Factor = Likely Residential Units

In the end, the buildout model will determine how many additional units might likely be expected on an individual lot and across the town. For each scenario, we present this town wide assessment, looking at residential units within each zoning district.

BUILDOUT SCENARIO: EXISTING (CURRENT) ZONING

Scenario Purpose and Inputs

This scenario seeks to evaluate how the current zoning within Fairfax might support residential development and future growth. No changes to either the boundaries of zoning districts or the allowable densities are made under this scenario. The scenario does rely on the analysis of each parcel's constraints and influences.

The zoning inputs (Table 8) include:

Table 8 - Minimum Lots Sizes by Zoning District - Existing Zoning Scenario

Zoning District	Minimum Lot Size (Acres)
Rural	2
Growth Center	0.5
Conservation	5
Mixed Use	0.5
Residential	1.5
Recreation	2

Scenario Results

The possible buildout for this scenario results in a theoretical maximum of 8,896 units (Table 9). The overwhelming majority of those units would be in the Rural district (74%).

Table 9 - Projected Possible Buildout Based on Current Zoning

Zoning District	Possible Total Units
Conservation	498
Growth Center	489
Mixed Use	380
Recreation	52
Residential	851
Rural	6,626
Grand Total	8,896

Now, applying other constraints and influencing factors, the likely buildout reduces that figure significantly, to a total of 4,110. As shown in Table 10, much of the reduction in residential density happens in the Rural District. This is primarily the result of physical constraints and the soil suitability within some portions of the district. Under this scenario and with the current zoning, the Growth Center district is nearly at its possible buildout when including existing units.

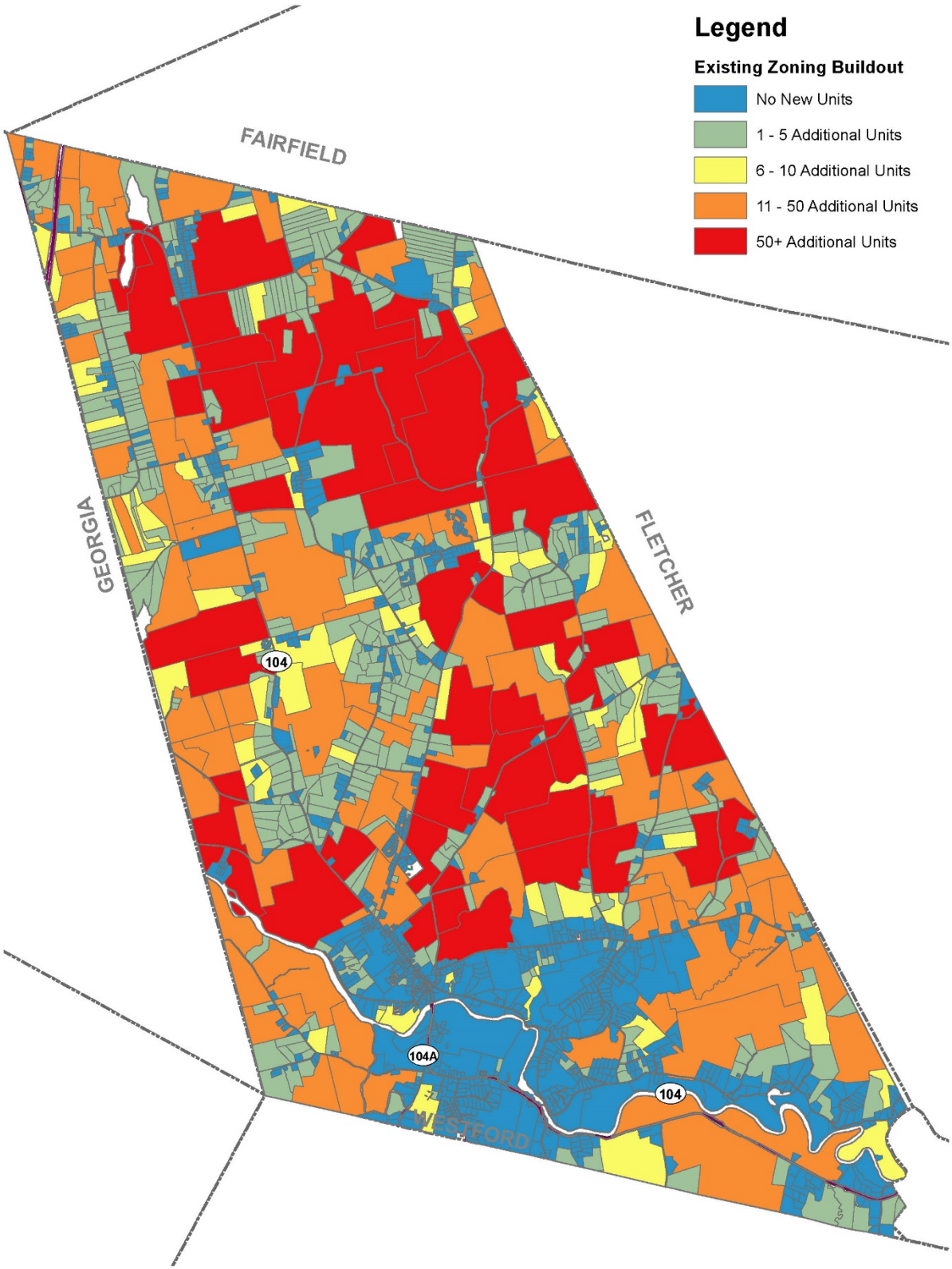
Table 10 also indicates the number of additional units expected in the current sewer service area. As noted earlier, the existing sewer service area's capacity challenges may preclude or dampen the likelihood of reaching this projected buildout.

Table 10 - Projected Likely Residential Buildout Based on Current Zoning, Corrected for Constraints, and Influencers

Zoning District	Likely Additional Units	Likely Total Units	Sewer Service Area Likely Additional Units
Conservation	98	273	0
Growth Center	160	408	118
Mixed Use	139	158	0
Recreation	12	12	2
Residential	219	569	0
Rural	1712	2690	87
Grand Total	2340	4110	207

Notes:
Likely additional units consider site constraints, possible constraints, and influencing factors on a parcel-by-parcel basis
Likely total units include consideration of existing units within each parcel
Likely additional units within the Sewer Service Area (SSA) counts likely units that are either wholly within or bordering the existing SSA.

The distribution of the buildout is provided graphically on Map 8.



Map 8 - Projected Likely Additional Residential Buildout - Existing Zoning Scenario

SCENARIO A: ENCOURAGING GROWTH IN THE VILLAGE

Scenario Purpose and Inputs

This scenario seeks to increase the allowable density within the Mixed Use and Growth Center areas while maintaining it elsewhere. No changes to either the boundaries of zoning districts are made under this scenario. The scenario does rely on the analysis of each parcel's constraints and influences.

The zoning inputs (Table 11) include:

Table 11 - Minimum Lots Sizes by Zoning District – Scenario A

Zoning District	Minimum Lot Size (Acres)
Rural	2
Growth Center	0.125
Conservation	5
Mixed Use	0.125
Residential	1.5
Recreation	2

Scenario Results

The likely buildout is 5,512 residential units. As shown in Table 12, a large proportion of residential growth is expected in the Rural District. The model suggest that the land is capable of supporting more units in the Growth Center and Mixed Use Districts, but realizing that density could likely only be achieved through changes to the development regulations to encourage different housing forms and support infill development, including accessory dwelling units. Map 9 presents the results on a town-wide basis.

Table 12 - Projected Likely Residential Buildout Based on Scenario A, Corrected for Constraints, and Influencers

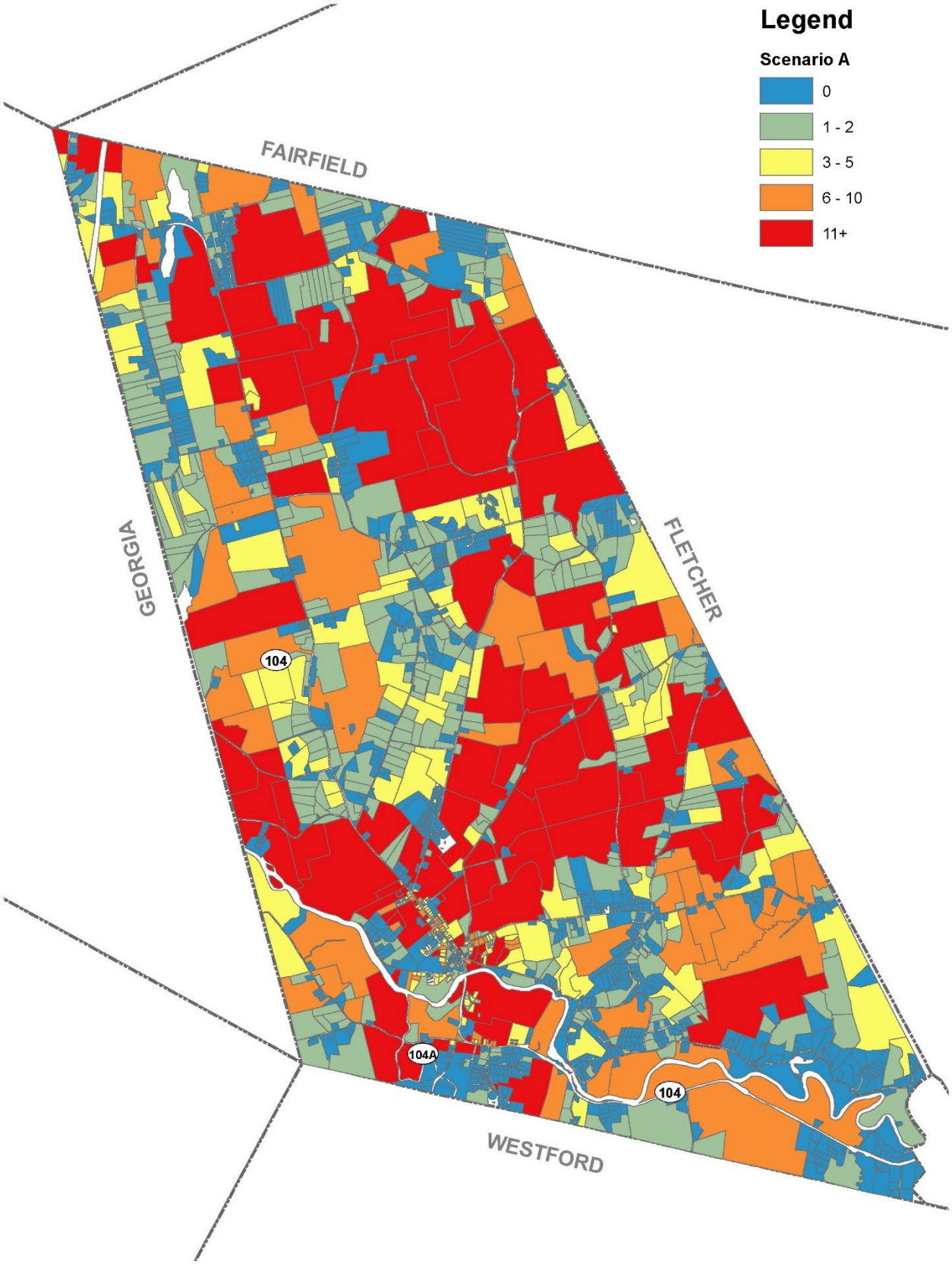
Zoning District	Likely Additional Units	Likely Total Units	Sewer Service Area Likely Additional Units
Conservation	100	275	0
Growth Center	1016	1264	803
Mixed Use	612	631	0
Recreation	12	12	2
Residential	231	581	0
Rural	1771	2749	88
Grand Total	3742	5512	893

Notes:
Likely additional units consider site constraints, possible constraints, and influencing factors on a parcel-by-parcel basis

Likely total units include consideration of existing units within each parcel

Likely additional units within the Sewer Service Area (SSA) counts likely units that are either wholly within or bordering the existing SSA.

Zoning District minimum lot size has been modified in this scenario - See Table 11



Map 9 – Projected Likely Additional Residential Buildout – Scenario A

SCENARIO B: REDEFINING ZONING

Scenario Purpose and Inputs

This scenario retains the increase to the allowable density within the Mixed Use and Growth Center areas. A Rural Residential 1 and a Rural Residential 2 zoning district were extracted from the Rural district, and minimum lot sizes were increased in the Rural and Conservation Districts. The scenario does rely on the analysis of each parcel's constraints and influences.

The zoning inputs (Table 13) include:

Table 13 - Minimum Lots Sizes by Zoning District – Scenario B

Zoning District	Minimum Lot Size (Acres)
Rural	5
Growth Center	0.125
Conservation	10
Mixed Use	0.125
Residential	1.5
Recreation	2
Residential 1	1.5
Residential 2	2.5

As noted above, this scenario includes two new zoning districts: Residential 1 and Residential 2. The boundaries of these districts are shown graphically on Map 10.

Scenario Results

The likely buildout results in a total of 4,762 units. As shown in Table 14, less residential growth is expected in the Rural District relative to other scenarios. The new residential district accommodate buildout is likely in the Village. Map 11 presents the results on a town wide basis.

Table 14 - Projected Likely Residential Buildout Based on Scenario B, Corrected for Constraints, and Influencers

Zoning District	Scenario B - Likely Additional Units	Scenario B - Likely Total Units	Scenario B - Sewer Service Area Additional Units
Conservation	43	220	0
Growth Center	1075	1323	862
Residential	231	581	0
Residential1	320	460	116
Residential2	346	547	2
Rural	353	988	0
Mixed Use	612	631	0
Recreation	12	12	2
Grand Total	2,992	4,762	982

Notes:
Likely additional units consider site constraints, possible constraints and influencing factors on a parcel-by-parcel basis

Likely total units includes consideration of existing units within each parcel

Likely additional units within the Sewer Service Area (SSA) counts likely units that are either wholly within or bordering the existing SSA.

Zoning District minimum lot size has been modified in this scenario - See Table 13

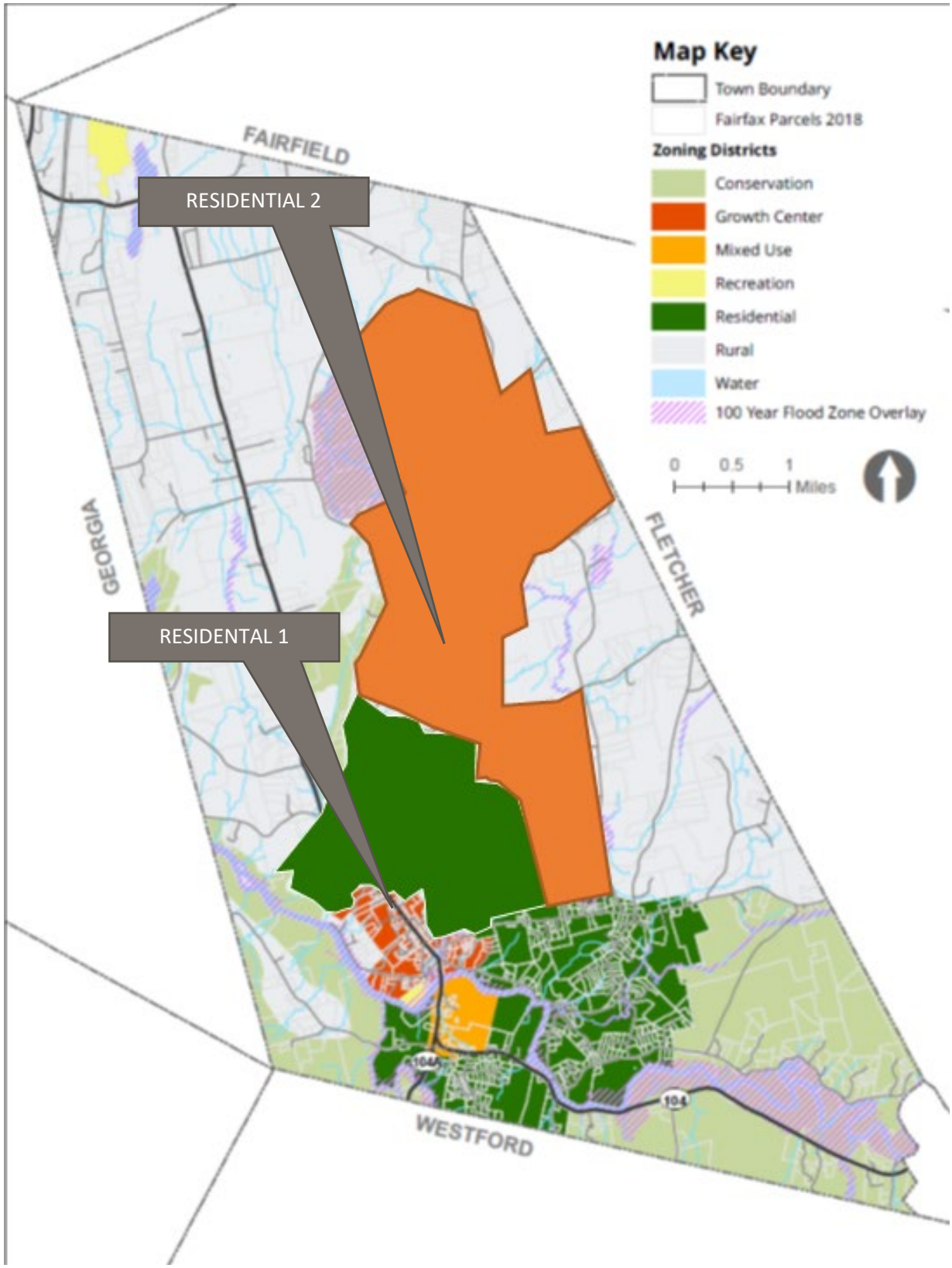
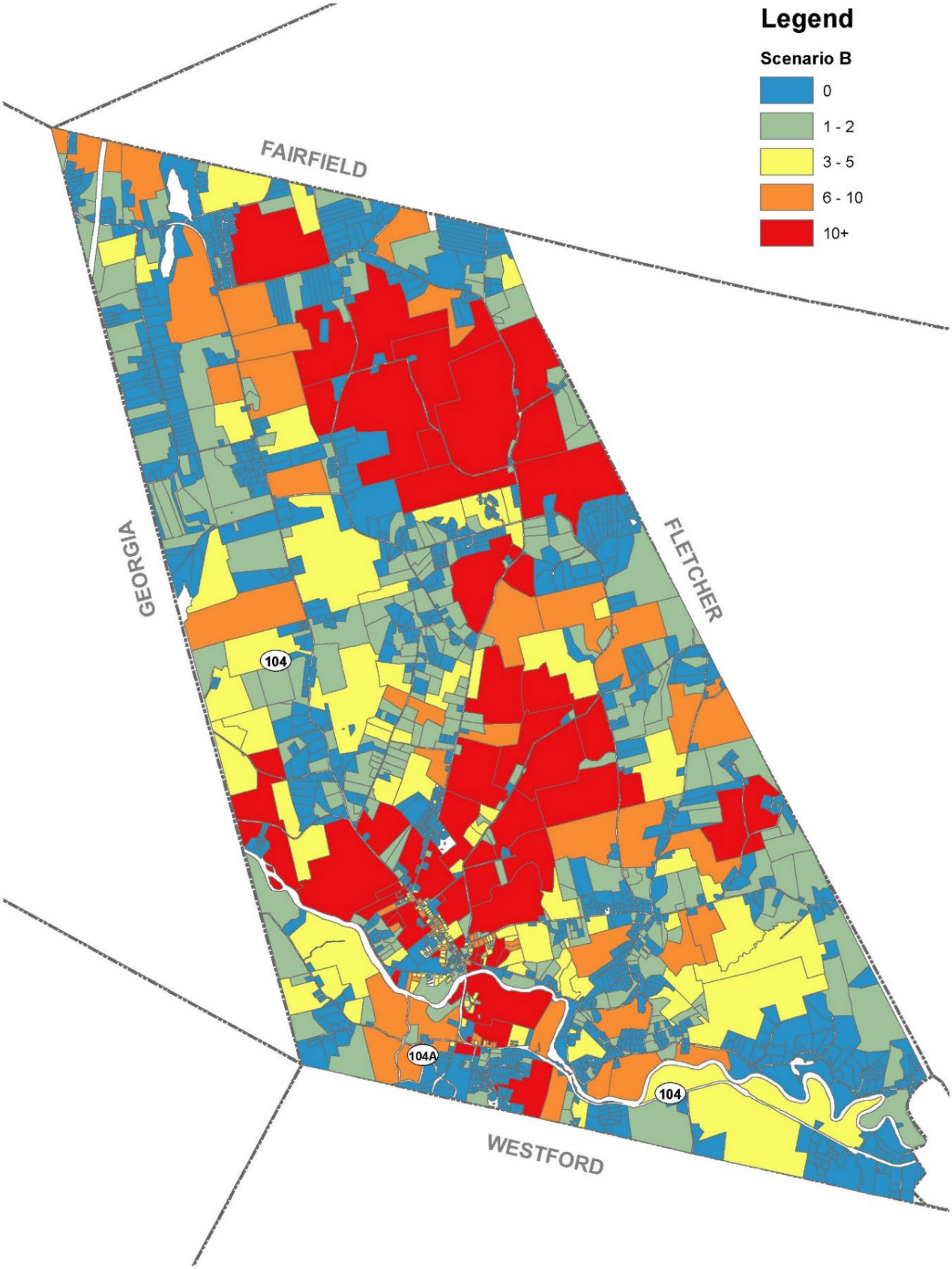


Figure 14 - New Zoning Districts Used in Scenario B Model



Map 10 - Projected Likely Additional Residential Buildout – Scenario B

SCENARIOS COMPARED

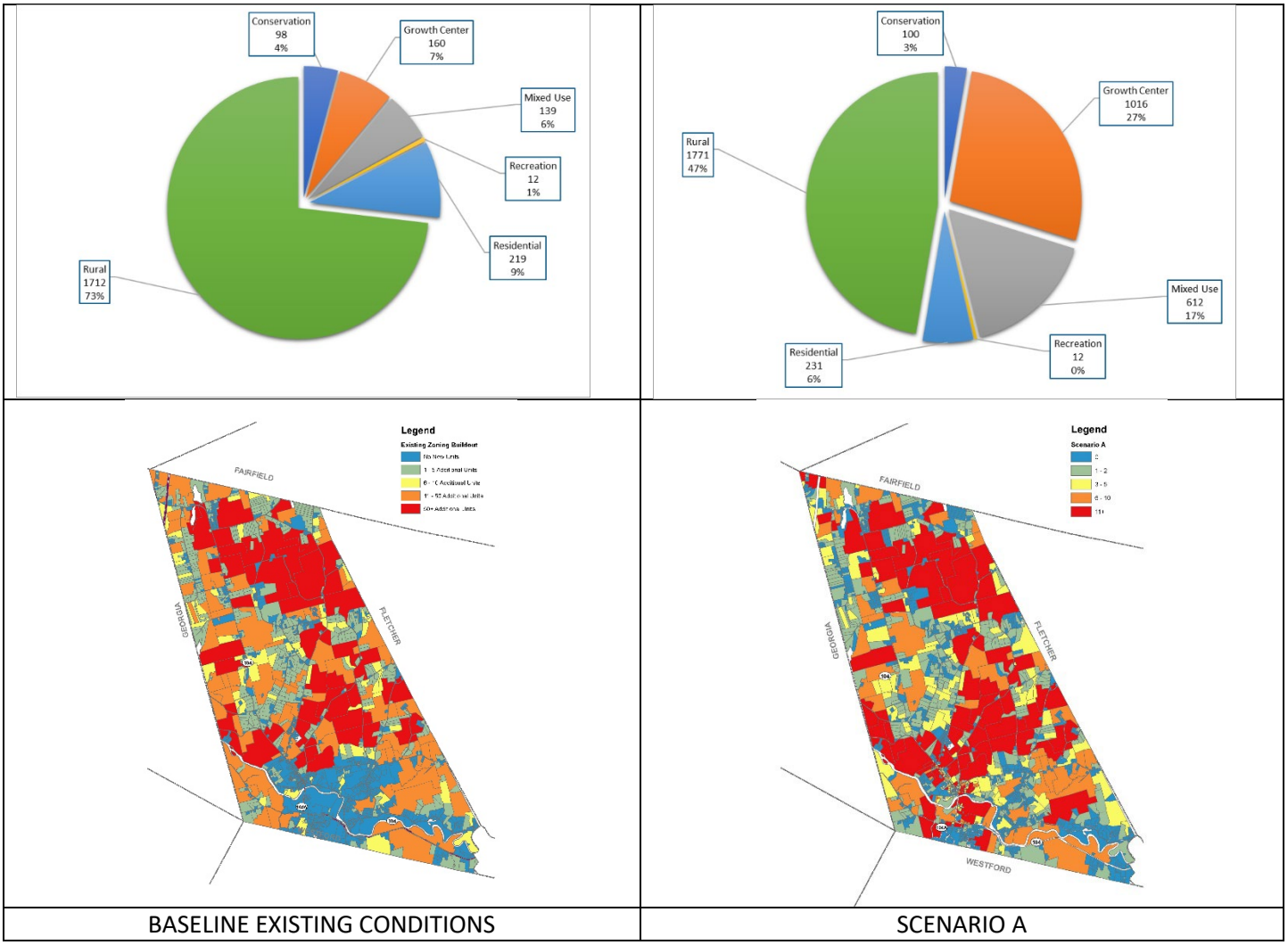
The buildout model is designed to allow the Town to study other options, adjusting the zoning inputs and weightings for various constraints. An endless array of options exists for exploration. Each of the three scenarios provides a baseline for comparison of various potential outcomes.

Based on the results, some comparison between the outcomes is helpful.

EXISTING ZONING VS. SCENARIO A

The emphasis of Scenario A was on modifying existing zoning to expand residential development in the Village Center. Comparing the outcome of that scenario to the baseline existing zoning scenario reveals the following:

- Residential density within the Growth Center and Mixed Use Districts increases significantly with decreasing lot sizes. The modeled size of 1/8 acre is small is compared to present zoning.
- Residential density within the rural district remains significant in total numbers but reduces significantly as a percentage of the overall likely buildout. Figure 14 provides a side-by-side comparison.



BASELINE EXISTING CONDITIONS | SCENARIO A

Figure 15 - Comparison of Baseline Existing Conditions and Scenario A

SCENARIO A VS. SCENARIO B

These two scenarios share a common emphasis on encouraging growth in the Village, but Scenario B seeks to expand residential growth to be village adjacent and discouraging growth in more rural areas.

- Scenario B suggests a more balanced growth projection into residential and Village areas. Less “hot spots” of higher density in the more rural areas.
- Growth in Rural areas would be reduced, but likely more consistent with the observed pattern of larger “estate” lots
- Figure 15 provides a side-by-side comparison

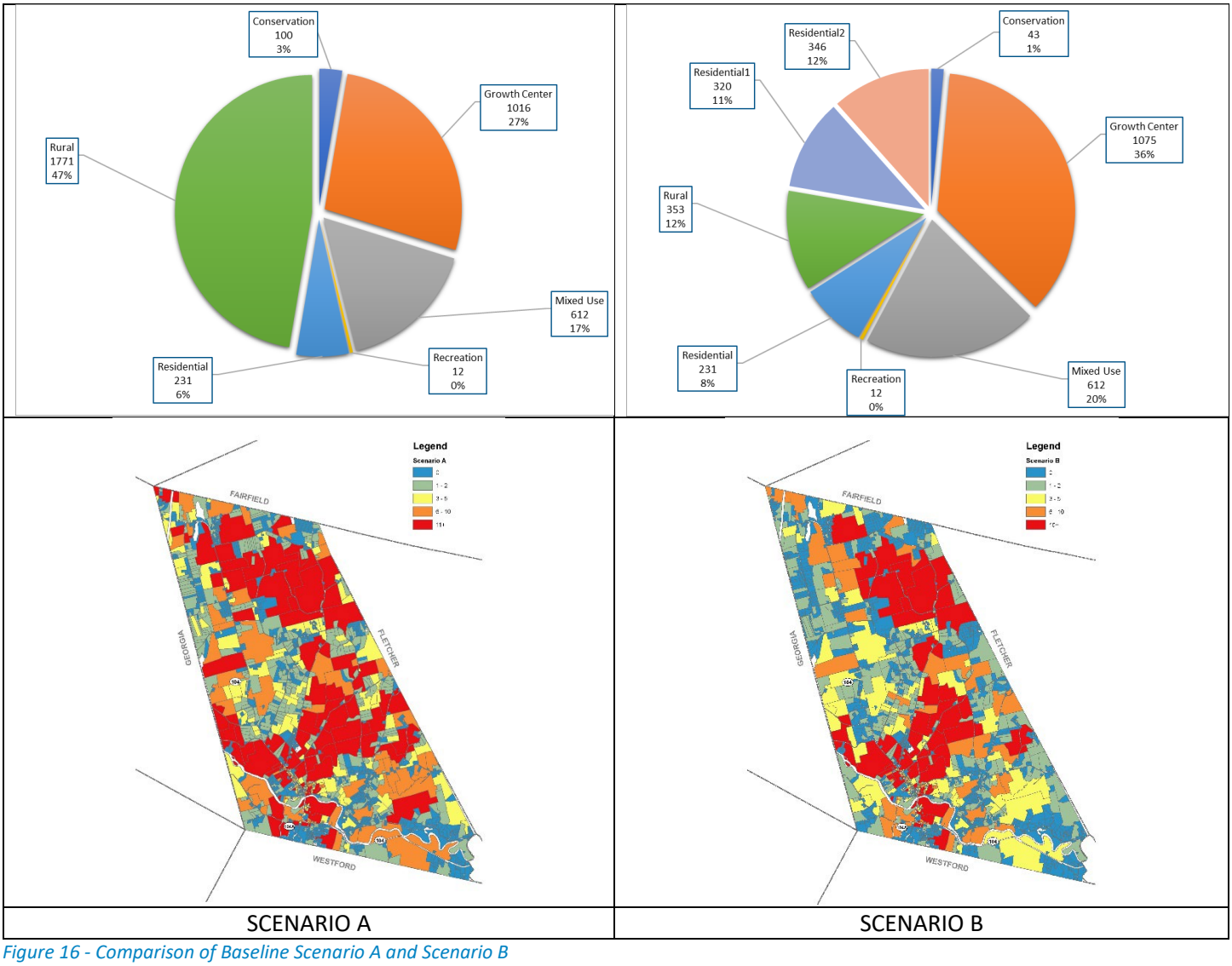


Figure 16 - Comparison of Baseline Scenario A and Scenario B

LANDOWNER PERSPECTIVES

Residents whose property is enrolled in the Current Use Program or are larger than 20 acres were surveyed to get a better perspective of development attitudes.

A total of 185 properties were part of the survey, comprising nearly 15,780 acres or 65% of Fairfax's land area. These parcels reflect those where potential future development might be highest and where future development might significantly impact the Town's land use pattern. Out of 185 distributed, a total of 82 responses were returned, a response rate of 44%.

The survey asked landowners with properties enrolled in the Current Use Program if they plan on selling within the next 3-5 years. Additionally, the survey asked what factors are most likely to influence a decision to sell. About 95% stated of respondents indicated that they planned on staying enrolled in the Current Use Program for the next 3-5 years. See Figure 16.

Considering all respondents, and not just those enrolled in the Current Use Program, the likelihood of selling their property in the next 3-5 years increased to 12%. The possibility of a new subdivision increased to 15%.

Complete details of the survey are provided in Appendix B.

Which of the following factors would most influence your decision to sell (or give away) some or all of your property?

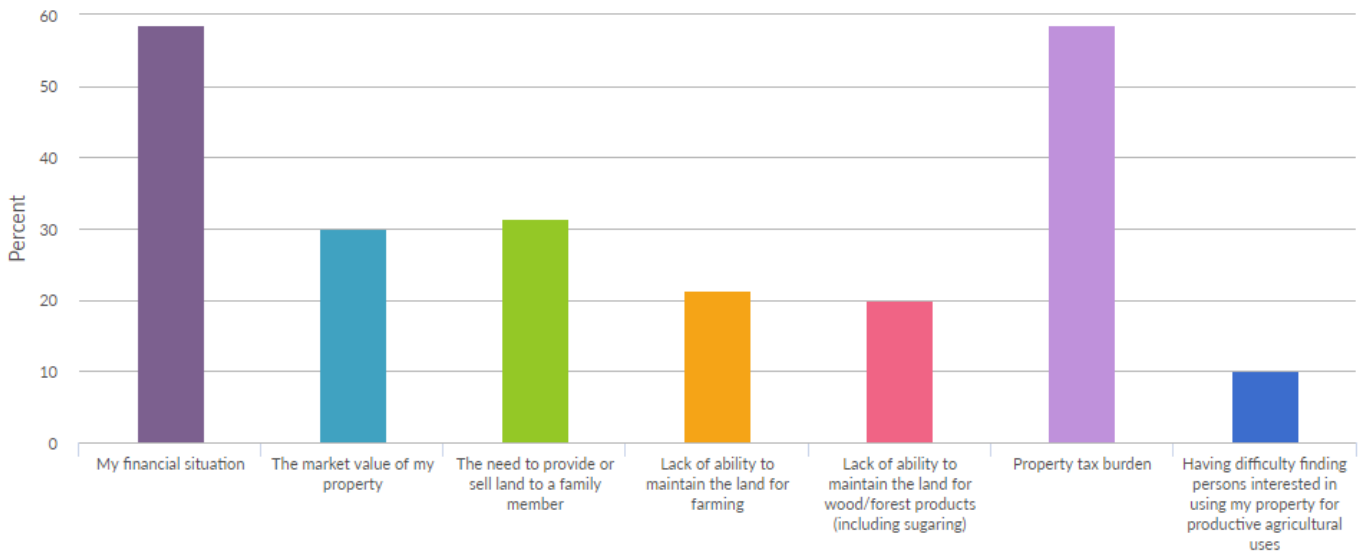


Figure 17 - Landowner Survey Summary - Factors Influencing Sale

The most common reasons stated for wanting to sell all or a portion of their property were primarily financial. Personal finances and a perceived property tax burden were the top two influencing factors in a respondent's inclination to sell or give away some or all their property. Additionally, about 31% of respondents stated that they felt a need to provide some or all their land to a family member.

While the personal financial situation of any individual landowner is not captured in a survey, the information suggests that financial pressures may disproportionally influence future decision-making.

Another factor was the lack of resources needed to maintain the land in farming or agriculture. Nearly 20% of respondents cited that factor as potentially influencing their decisions. This can be a very challenging situation with a smaller pool of working farms and more diffuse (and smaller scaled) working lands. As regional farms have consolidated, the need for additional lands for hay and pasture, has changed.

SUMMARY

KEY CONCLUSIONS

The Study affirms what the most recent Town Plan and available data suggest: Fairfax has and expects to continue to grow. While the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic ramifications are not clear, anecdotal evidence from realtors and real estate brokers hints at some urban migration. While this trend appears more common in the southern portion of the State, it is a trend that bears monitoring. Growth, whether organic or modified by the disruption caused by Covid-19, is growth.

The Study also highlights some of the structural challenges that Fairfax has in addressing growth. While a designated Village Center provides an opportunity to create a denser and more diverse population node within the Town, the most recent residential development is happening outside the Village Center. The 2018 Town Plan strives to support more robust and diverse Village Center. The lack of capacity in wastewater and municipal water systems, the relatively large minimum lot size, and the lack of more mixed-use forms dampen the Village Center's potential.

The real estate market drives the demand for residential housing. As Chittenden County has grown, newer development has tended to be more multi-family (duplex, stacked flats). Buyers seeking a more "traditional" detached home with a yard have pressed outwards. Hinesburg, Essex, and Milton have seen this trend in recent decades. Fairfax has as well.

While the Study does not evaluate housing affordability, the limited proportion of multi-family housing in Fairfax indicates problems ahead. Fairfax's current median home price based on Zillow tracking information is about $277,000 versus $325,000 in Milton.[13] Costs for condominiums are typically 15-20% less than for single-family, detached homes. With increasing costs for larger lot residential properties, Fairfax's capacity to accommodate new residents of varying economic means will become increasingly challenging. Increasing the diversity of housing types in Fairfax could open more options for homeownership.

The subdivision of historically agricultural lots to large residential parcels is not unique to Fairfax. The landowner survey results provide a measure of solace that a wholesale loss of Fairfax's working lands is not pending. The data does suggest that the observed "chipping away" of active farming will continue. When faced with challenges of maintaining financial viability or being unable to find persons interested in working the land, these landowners will do what they need to do.

[13] https://www.zillow.com/fairfax-vt/home-values/ - Utilizes the Zillow Home Value Index (see methodology at https://www.zillow.com/research/zhvi-methodology-2019-highlights-26221/)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of growth and exploration of alternative buildout scenarios completed for this Study highlight challenges and opportunities for Fairfax to move forward with as it updates and modifies its policies and plans. The following recommendations reflect several important framing issues exposed in the Study:

1. The Village Center (including the Mixed Use and Growth Center zoning districts) is an important hub, and steps to expand housing density and diversity in this area are priorities.
2. Keeping working lands active and vibrant is essential, to the community and large landowners.
3. Focusing changes in acceptable policy on a more realistic framework that considers more factors that influence growth.
4. Ensure that Fairfax's conservation and protected lands consider all the factors and values that are important to the community.

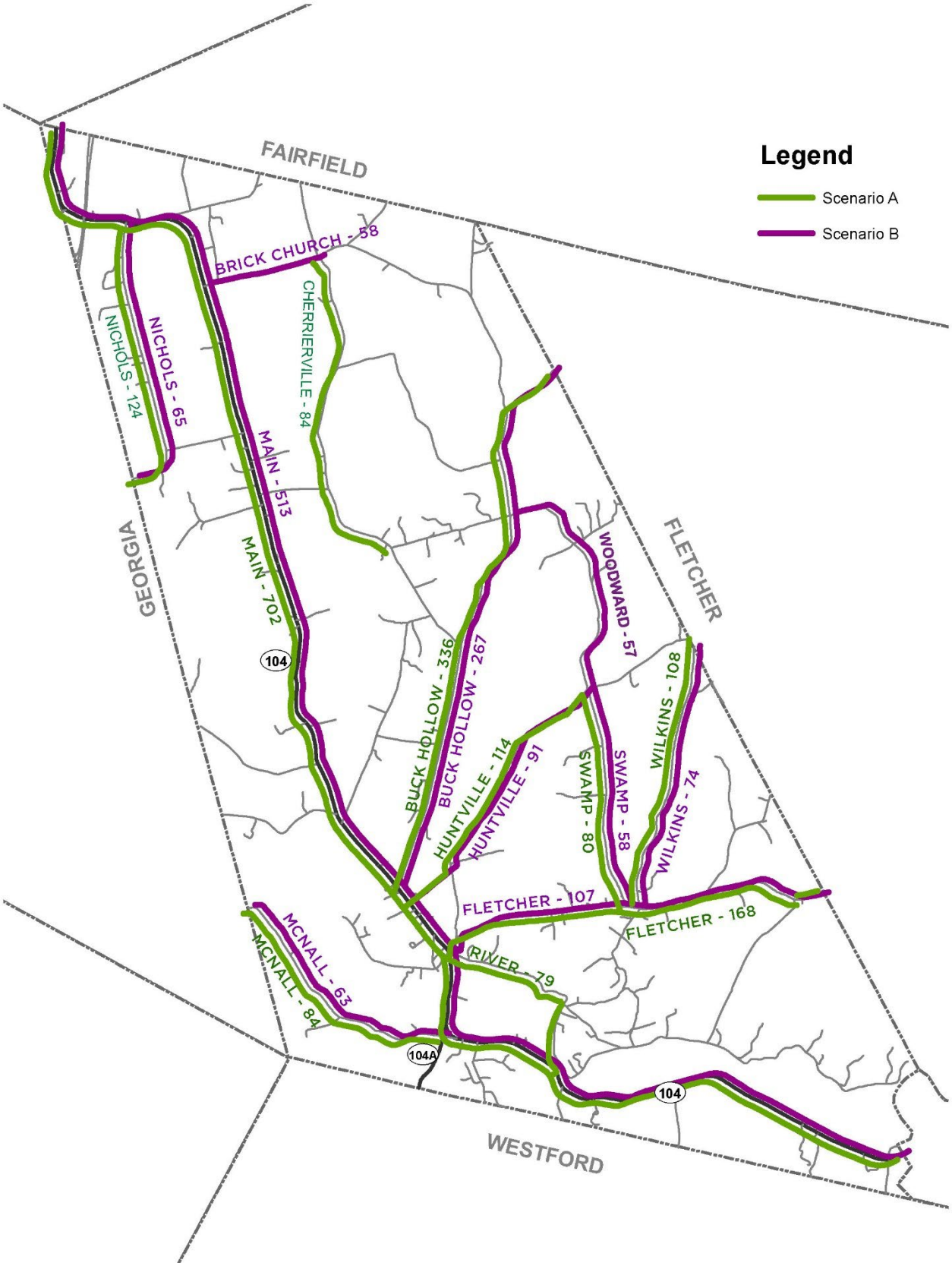
RECOMMENDATION #1: ADDRESSING ROAD IMPACTS

Issues -

- The capacity of lands to support development is relatively high along existing roads in the northeastern part of Fairfax.
- As development occurs, encouraging interconnections between adjacent properties will be important.

Opportunities –

- Addressing the capacity of the lands along Buck Hollow Road and in the northeastern part of Fairfax is key.
- These roadways appear to have the most significant potential number of new residential units outside of the Growth Center in all scenarios.
- New Zoning District(s) could shape development closer to existing roadways. Requiring two access points for larger subdivisions could encourage a more grid-like road network which helps shape the placement of new residential uses.
- Consider requiring greater connectivity between adjacent parcels during the subdivision process to enable future connections.
- Update the Town’s Capital Improvement Plan and Impact Fees to address priority road upgrades where growth is expected. Based on Scenario A and B, several road segments are expected to see higher potential growth along them (See Map 11).



Map 12 – Projected New Residential Along Major Roadways Under Scenarios A and B

RECOMMENDATION #2: RETHINKING PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENTS

Issues -

- At present, the Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulations in Fairfax (Section 3.4) are mostly used as a waiver tool.
- Few PUDs are pursued, in part because the pace of growth has not justified them and because the general level of constraint in Fairfax is low.
- The PUDs are mostly a "one-size-fits-all" and do not provide any differentiation.

Opportunities –

- Explore creating various typologies for PUD such as a Conservation PUD or Traditional Neighborhood PUD. Purpose statements for these types of PUDs can be defined to clarify how they address open spaces, connectivity, and density.
- Require specific PUD types within specific zoning districts to help direct density-relevant types to appropriate areas. For example, in the Rural District, requiring a Conservation PUD could help preserve the underlying zoning density for landowners but assure that larger, more contiguous blocks of open space are reserved for other activities, such as continued farming. Similarly, requiring a Traditional Neighborhood PUD in residential districts or the Growth Center, could encourage more diverse forms, particularly if a density bonus is increased.
- Refine the triggers for PUD. At present the minimum land area for a PUD is 4 acres. Eliminating the area requirement, in certain zoning districts, could spur more use of PUDs.
- Clarify the language within the Land Development Regulations to reserve future road (and trail/pedestrian) connections in PUDs, especially within in residential districts, to assure that future networks have options to minimize excessive access points.
- Minimize the use of existing variance provisions within the land development regulations to assure that, where possible, more development is directed through PUDs.
- Review the requirements for administrative review of two-lot subdivisions to extend the timeframe within which they can be considered. Presently, subdivisions, if it had been previously subdivided more than two years prior, can be divided again (two-lots), with administrative review (Section 4.3C1a). Over time, this can encourage multiple subdivisions which, in the aggregate, result in multiple lots with a significant consumption of lands (See Figure 17).

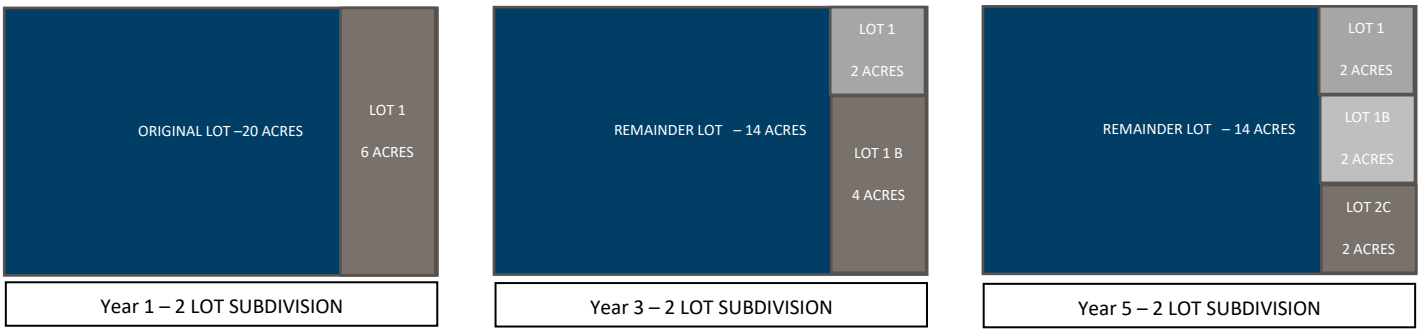


Figure 18 - Current Two-Lot Subdivision Process - Implications of Administrative Review

RECOMMENDATION #3: ALIGNING WASTEWATER AND LAND POLICIES

Issues -

- The buildout model results illustrate the potential value of increasing density in the Village Center but realizing that potential is hampered by existing sewer capacities. Sewer upgrades are complex and costly and will take time to implement.
- A large percentage of the Town's soils are suitable for onsite septic. For areas outside of the existing SSA the cost to develop onsite systems only a fraction of the costs for extension of municipal sewer lines and plant upgrades.

Opportunities –

- Seek assistance through DHCD and DEC on options for adding wastewater capacity in districts where growth is best suited and desired. This guidebook might be useful in those efforts: https://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/village_ww/WastewaterWorkbook.pdf
- The buildout model suggests that, with the appropriate zoning, and perhaps with some additional incentives, new development within or near the SSA might provide a larger user base that could support the investment. A comprehensive study of SSA expansion, to address potential zoning changes, could help clarify the costs and benefits of system expansion.
- Decentralized systems (See Figure 18[14]) may offer an opportunity to support greater densities and promote land conservation. The Town of Warren completed the development of a centralized septic system in the early 2000's that consolidated many formerly individual on-site systems. Westford is also pursuing such a system.
- The Town could purchase land suitable for onsite septic, or work in collaboration with private developers to expand the scope of a new system, to allow it to serve additional users in the future.
- A community wide survey of landowners to better understand their current onsite systems and needs might help inform options.

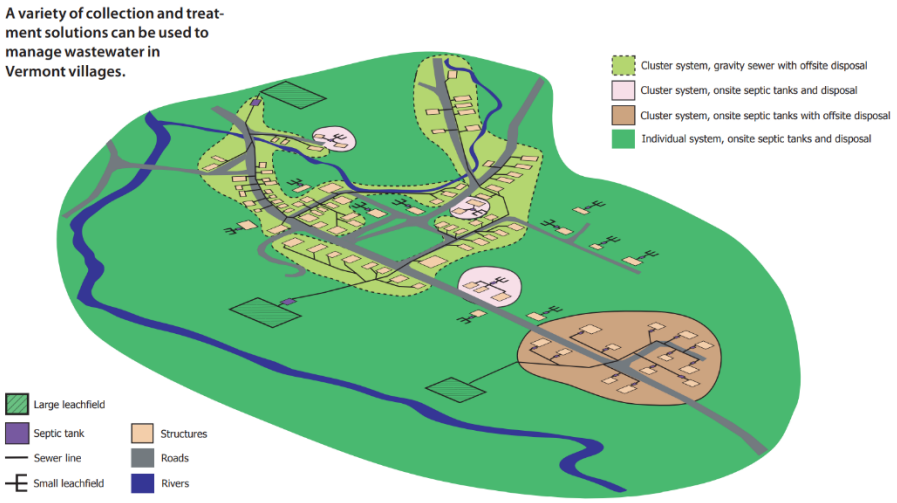


Figure 19 – Decentralized Septic Systems

[14] Wastewater Solutions for Vermont Communities, Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs, 2008, https://accd.vermont.gov/sites/accdnew/files/documents/CD/CPR/DHCD-Planning-WW-Treatment-Options-Guidance.pdf

RECOMMENDATION #4: ENCOURAGING MORE DIVERSITY IN RESIDENTIAL HOUSING

Issues -

- The overwhelming majority of residential development in Fairfax is detached single-family homes.
- Recent trends have included more multi-family development (duplex, elder apartments, condominiums).
- A greater diversity of housing forms can help improve the affordability of housing and broaden the appeal of Fairfax to a wider buyer in the marketplace.

Opportunities –

- Consider establishing a Neighborhood Development Area (NDA) in areas outside of the designated Village Center, but within areas where growth is planned. A short segment of Buck Hollow Road and areas north of the Village Center towards the Route 104/Route 104A might be suitable. These areas are ripe for additional density, and may be within NDA's required walking distance of the Village Center (1/4 mile) and might be able to connect to sewer or an approved community/alternative system.
- NDAs will exempt projects from Act 250 review if they are a qualified "mixed income" project; essentially 20% are considered affordable rental and between 15% and 20% are affordable owner-occupied housing. Even if the project(s) are not exempt, they would have a significant reduction (50%) in Act 250 application fees.
- Encourage and support more accessory dwelling units (ADU) within the Village Center. Act 179 (enacted in October 2020) expands the minimum size of ADUs (900 square feet), and eliminates prohibitions of multiple bedrooms.
- Act 179 also eliminates the capacity of towns to deny four (or less) multiunit dwellings "solely due to an undue adverse effect on the character of the area affected." In essence, the form that a multiunit building can be regulated but cannot be used to prohibit its development in the absent other considerations.
- Reduce the front yard setback requirements within the Growth Center and Mixed Use districts consistent with any reductions in minimum lot size. Narrower setbacks, often 5-10 feet, enable denser development and encourage infill. Consider setting a minimum and maximum front setback to allow for some flexibility while encouraging more street presence for new development. A reduction is front setback also can encourage parking to be placed towards the rear of the lot and steer future ADU development to the rear of the primary use.
- Consider establishing lot minimum (or maximum) frontage requirements. Defining the minimum width of a lot can help organize new subdivisions or PUDs, enable denser residential forms, and support greater infill development within established areas. On smaller lots in more village settings, frontages of 35-40 feet are not uncommon, along with narrow side setbacks. In denser residential districts, 50-60-foot frontage requirements are more common.

RECOMMENDATION #5: ADJUSTING CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES TO SUPPORT WORKING LANDS

Issues -

- The purpose language for the Rural District states that it is "intended to primarily consist of viable agricultural and forest land within the Town. Most importantly, the landscape of rural open countryside and forestland shall be maintained. This district can accommodate some low-density residential development if clustered or sited to conserve productive agricultural and forestry soils, meadowland, and to maintain rural character."
- At a residential density of 2 units per acre, and with a lack of clustering due to the incremental nature of development, the buildout analysis suggests some future challenges with this district and its continued capacity to "conserve" working lands.
- The Conservation Districts is decidedly small within Fairfax and as described, does not identify working lands.

Opportunities –

- Review current zoning districts relative to the results of this buildout analysis to ascertain if additional districts or adjustments to district boundaries is needed.
- Review the scope and scale of identified physical and possible constraints to see if they might guide the adjustment of conservation lands.
- Study the inclusion of priority working lands as part of conservation properties. Priority workings lands could be defines based on their size, the presence of prime agricultural soils, or the identification of large forest blocks.
- Require the use of PUDs, potentially conservation PUDs within the Conservation and/or Rural zoning districts.
- Consider a greater tiering of open space requirements for PUDs. Presently, outside of the Growth Center, open space requirements in all zoning districts are a minimum of 50% in a PUD. Tiering this relative to growth objectives could result in less open space in denser districts within or near the Village Center and greater open space requirements elsewhere. Open space requirements can promote greater clustering and the preservation of active open space.
- Review the conditional use requirements relative to working lands. In the Rural District, it may be advantageous to make working lands (agricultural or forest business) uses permitted, and all others conditional. In fact, at present the Rural District's permitted and conditional uses are essentially identical to those in the Residential district. Making all residential uses condition, except perhaps those directly associated with a farming use, may help increase the consideration of clustering and land preservation within the subdivision and/or PUD process. Consider agribusiness as a permitting use subject to site plan approval.
- Review the VT Farm to Plate Agricultural Land Use Planning Modules for comprehensive approaches to support working lands while enabling greater diversity in farm use and maintaining land value. Local tax stabilization programs, transfer of development rights (TDR), and farmland purchase programs are viable solutions in some communities.
- The Town should review large working lands relative to future growth and determine if some or portions of some might serve long-term recreation, educational, or municipal needs.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

APPENDIX B

SURVEY SUMMARY REPORT