

Case Study: Southern Windsor County

Vermont Municipal Green Infrastructure Toolkit

Green Infrastructure (GI) means different things to different people depending on the context in which it is used. In Vermont we define it as “a wide range of multi-functional, natural and semi-natural landscape elements located within, around, and between developed areas at all spatial scales.” This includes everything from forests and meadows to wetlands, floodplains, and riparian areas. For municipalities Green Infrastructure can be promoted in two ways: by using Low Impact Development (LID) concepts at both the macro-level of town planning and site design and by promoting the use of Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) practices and techniques. LID seeks to maintain a site’s pre-development ecological and hydrological function through the protection, enhancement, or mimicry of natural processes.” GSI consists of systems and practices that restore and maintain natural hydrologic processes in order to reduce the volume and water quality impacts of the built environment while providing multiple societal benefits.”

Making the Case for Green Infrastructure

As part of a project with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and with other Regional Planning Commissions in Vermont, the Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission (SWCRPC) first sought to assess regulatory gaps and barriers to the adoption of green infrastructure programs and practices in several of our towns. Towns were selected based upon factors such as amount of impervious surface area, impervious cover in close proximity to streams and rivers, the amount of impaired stream miles and other green infrastructure related considerations.

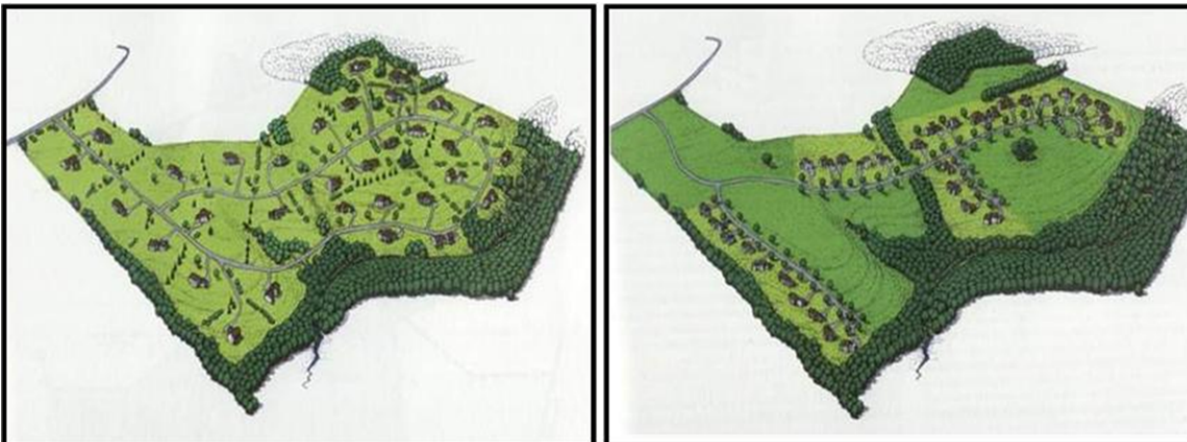
We reviewed the town plans and land use bylaws from the towns of Windsor and Chester, which identified the following general issues:

- Green Infrastructure was not specifically discussed in municipal plans, and;
- Regulations, where present, dealt with discrete portions of green infrastructure, but were not comprehensive.

Chester

The SWCRPC has been working with the Town of Chester to develop model town plan language designed to educate people about Green Infrastructure and its benefits. This language has not yet been adopted as part of Chester’s Town Plan due to Chester’s adoption schedule, but it is scheduled to be included in the next update/adoption. Chester’s Planning Commission will be

updating their Town Plan over the next year. SWCRPC staff will be assisting during that time period to consider incorporating the model language into the Town Plan.



Windsor

The SWCRPC has also been working with the Town of Windsor to review and update their zoning bylaws. As part of that effort, the SWCRPC has provided language to include certain Green Infrastructure provisions into the zoning provisions, such as those that address development on steep slopes and narrower roadway widths. In addition, once model bylaws are finalized by VLCT, SWCRPC staff intends to work with the Windsor Planning Commission to consider additional Green Infrastructure changes.



The rural nature of the Southern Windsor County Region also presents a significant challenge to the implementation of Green Infrastructure. Local officials and town staff often do not understand how Green Infrastructure can be tailored to and implemented in a rural area. Furthermore, once local officials and town staff do understand how Green Infrastructure can be implemented in a rural area, it still needs to be worked into town plans and regulations, with a specific rural focus. The multi-step process to plan and regulate Green Infrastructure can take many years from beginning to end.

Challenges

Green Infrastructure terminology is still new to many town officials at the same time there are many other new terms, such as river corridors, smart growth and healthy communities. Understanding these terms and how they relate to town planning is a challenge for many volunteer municipal board members.



For more information regarding Green Infrastructure in southern Windsor County, please contact the SWCRPC at (802)-674-9201

or, visit <http://vpic.info/GreenInfrastructureToolkit.html>