



Windham Region Infrastructure Characterization: Developing a Town-Level, Region-Wide Understanding of Actions Necessary to Address Infrastructure Limitations to Support Rural Housing and Economic and Community Development

The local governments and residents of southeast Vermont have reached a critical juncture where, as a result of increased housing demand, scarcity and cost driven in large part by in-migration during the COVID-19 global pandemic, there's a nearly universal realization that we are deep in a housing crisis that affects everyone. This has led to a second critical realization: ***in the absence of wastewater and drinking water infrastructure, building affordable housing at scale is impossible, and the ability of people to remain in their communities and in the state is diminished.***

This has led to a second realization: in the absence of that same infrastructure, the sustainability of our villages is at risk and rural community and economic development is almost impossibly impeded. Small lot sizes, soil conditions, and separation distances between wells and septic systems creates human health risks, and makes it very challenging and expensive to replace existing systems, or do anything that might increase the demands on existing wells and wastewater systems. This means that there may be unknown drinking water contamination resulting from the shadowing of wells by septic system effluent, and it also means that expanding existing village homes, businesses, and community services is unlikely at best. Development of new homes, businesses, or community services within our villages is similarly next to impossible.

While realization of these challenges is growing, the problem is generally not well understood by community leaders and the public. Creating that understanding is an essential step towards progress and change. Expecting each town to take on this task by itself is both unrealistic and incredibly inefficient. The Windham Regional Commission is best positioned to characterize the wastewater and water infrastructure capacity of the Windham Region on a village by village, town by town basis so we can tell the story of what housing and rural economic and community development is possible, which can then inform action at the municipal, regional, and state levels. This project has been included in the region's [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#) since 2014, and most years has been identified as a priority project for the region as well as southern Vermont as a whole.

Tasks and Outcomes

Through this project the Windham Regional Commission (WRC) will characterize the wastewater and water capacity in our region's towns to determine the existing and needed capacity to retain, expand,

and development homes, businesses, and community services, and to assess the potential for public and environmental health risk exposure due to the absence of community wastewater and drinking water systems. This foundational information is critical for development of municipal and regional action plans *because most of our towns do not have the operational capacity to develop such characterization and action plans on their own.*

For each of the Region's 14 villages that lack community wastewater systems (sewer), we will assess:

- Soils
- Geology
- Mapped floodplain (and fluvial erosion hazard areas, if known)
- Building footprints
- Parcel boundaries
- Permitted on-site wastewater systems and water systems, from the VT DEC database
- Isolation distances around wells (done in GIS as a buffer around a point, based on the well permit type)

For each village and downtown with community wastewater systems, we will summarize publicly-available capacity information and any issues that threaten or limit capacity.

A final report will be developed that will characterize wastewater and water capacity for each town, including each village therein, as well as the region as a whole. Each town will be provided with its own report. This will establish a uniform understanding by both towns and the region of the current state of compact settlement support infrastructure. State agencies, including the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the Vermont Department of Health, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and the Vermont Treasurer (which administers its own infrastructure revolving loan program) will also receive the report to inform their own policies, programs, and actions.

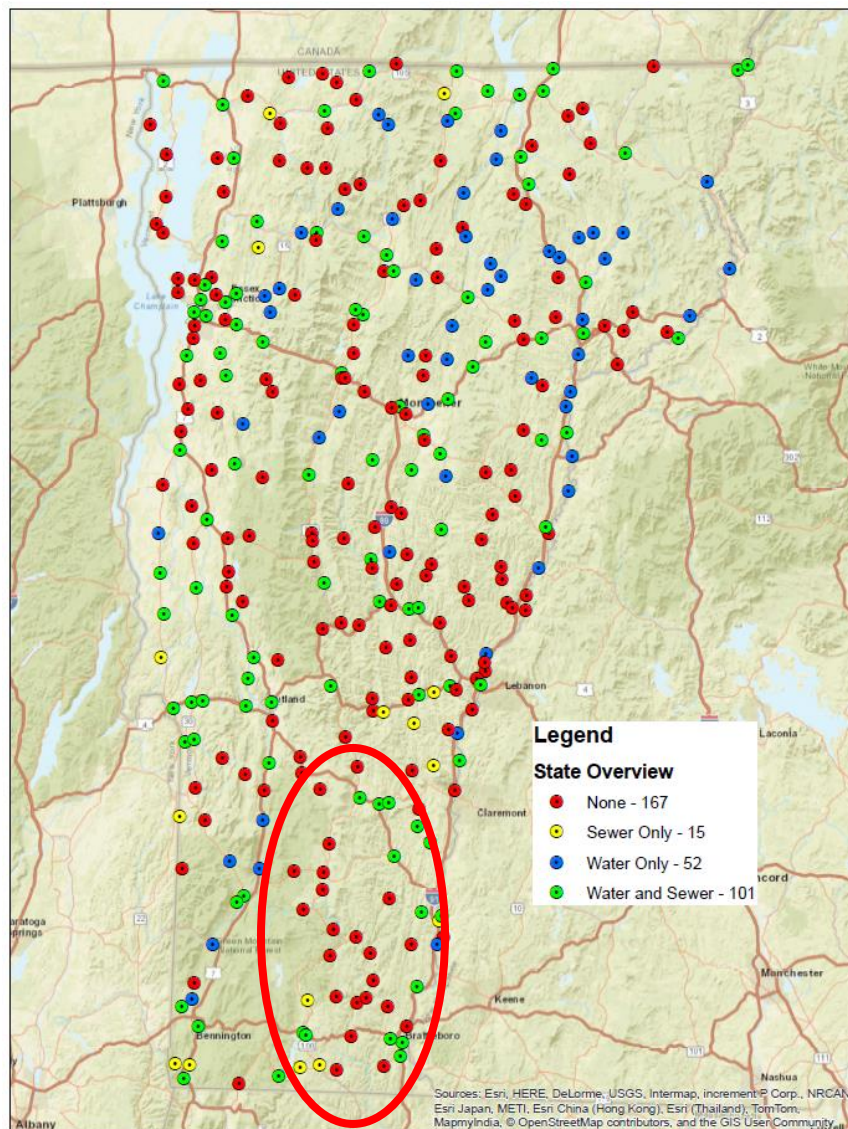
Scale of the Problem

Villages within the Windham Region that are **not** served by water and/or sewer are:

<u>Village (WRC)</u>	<u>Lacks Water</u>	<u>Lacks Sewer</u>
Bondville	Y	Y
Grafton	Y	Y
Jacksonville	Y	
Jamaica	Y	Y
Londonderry	Y	Y
Newfane	Y	Y
Saxtons River	(part)	
South Londonderry	Y	Y
South Newfane	Y	Y

Townshend	Y	Y
Vernon	Y	Y
Wardsboro	Y	Y
West Dover	Y	
West Halifax	Y	Y
Westminster	(private)	Y
Weston	Y	Y
Whitingham	Y	
Williamsville	Y	Y

You can see the scale of the problem on this statewide map. While not limited to this area alone, almost the entirety of the Route 30-100/West River Valley corridor within the region is unserved, and this corridor has critical rural housing and economic and community development needs.



Villages and other areas of the Windham Region presently served by community wastewater/sewer systems are:

<u>Village name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Algiers	Guilford	part of Brattleboro system
Brattleboro	Brattleboro	
Putney	Putney	relatively new
Bellows Falls	Rockingham	
Kissell Hill area	Westminster	part of Bellows Falls system
North Westminster	Westminster	part of Bellows Falls system
Wilmington	Wilmington	
Readsboro	Readsboro	
Haystack area	Wilmington	fire district
West Dover/Mt. Snow	Dover	fire district
Stratton Mountain	Stratton/Winhall	fire district
Jacksonville	Whitingham	
Whitingham	Whitingham	
Saxtons River	Rockingham	

Villages and other areas within the Windham Region that are served by community water are:

<u>Village name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Algiers	Guilford	part of Brattleboro system
Brattleboro	Brattleboro	
Putney	Putney	
Bellows Falls	Rockingham	
Kissell Hill area	Westminster	part of Bellows Falls system
Wilmington	Wilmington	
Westminster	Westminster	*** not a municipal system ***
Readsboro	Readsboro	
Haystack area	Wilmington	fire district
Stratton Mountain	Stratton & Winhall	fire district
Saxtons River (portion)	Rockingham	*** not a municipal system ***

Communities with existing systems will be reviewed as a part of this project to determine their capacities and any challenges to those capacities they are facing.

For More Information

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