LET'S BUILD HOMES

Senate Natural Resources Committee
February 4, 2026

The Coalition

269

Vermont Companies, Organizations, and Institutions

900+

Individual Vermonters

All

14

Counties in Vermont

...and continuing to grow every week!

Our Mission

"Let's Build Homes works to create a Vermont of abundant housing for households of all income levels where communities thrive in harmony with our working lands. Through impactful policy change and grassroots action, we will help Vermont grow into a more affordable, vibrant, and inclusive state."
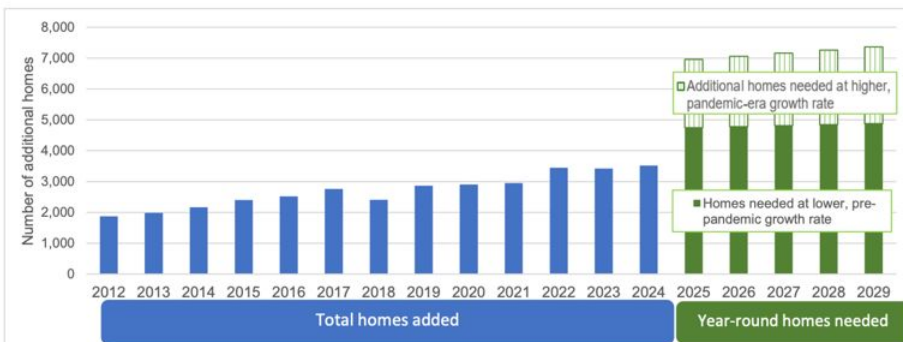
VHFA 2025-2029 Needs Assessment

"The Best Time to Plant a Tree Was 30 Years Ago, and the Second Best Time to Plant a Tree is Now"

Figure 3-6 Average annual increase in occupied housing stock

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census
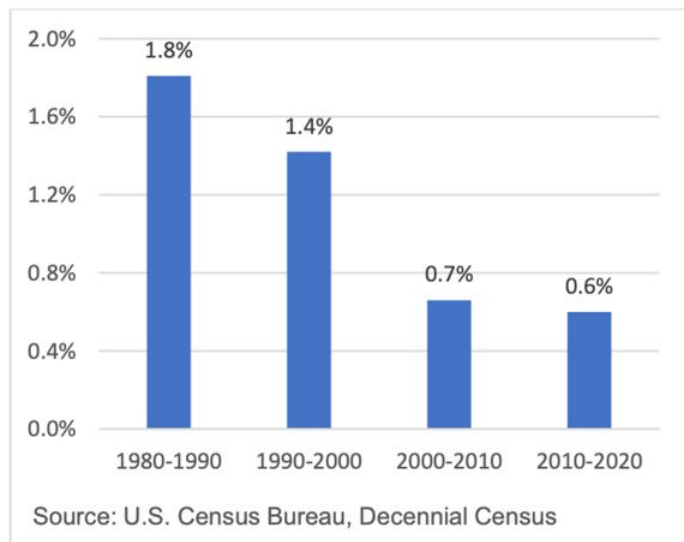
Figure 1-2 Gap in year-round Vermont homes reduces availability and affordability

Overview of Residential Opportunity Overlay Town (ROOT) Zones

Why ROOT Zones?

- **Comprehensive Solution To Appeals**
- **Improve Quality of What Gets Built**
- **Increased Investment and Construction Cost Efficiency**
- **Possible Path for Expanding Tier 1**

How ROOT Zones Would Be Implemented

Intro to ROOT Zones

Proposed Process + Next Steps

Why ROOT Zones?

Primary purpose:

- **Potentially comprehensive solution to permit appeals in areas targeted for housing growth**

Additional purposes:

- **Improve the quality of what gets built**
- **Common regulatory framework across many Vermont towns could increase investment and create construction efficiencies**
- **Possible path for expanding Tier 1 over time.** Current mapping trajectory will result in approximately 2% of Vermont land area will be Tier 1 eligible.

Potentially Comprehensive Solution To Permit Appeals In Areas Targeted for Housing Growth

The recent LURB Act 250 Appeals Report noted support for "by-right" permitting where housing projects bypass discretionary development review:

- This concept of "by right" permits under certain conditions was advocated for by many of our housing expert stakeholders and was supported by VNR as a compelling idea that needs more time and discussion as it could speed up the production of housing in an effective way.

Multiple by right approaches being discussed:

- Governor's 802 Homes program
- New state mandates

LBH proposes a comprehensive solution: ROOT Zones

Appeals Reform Case Study:
2018 Burlington Downtown Code

- **Burlington code attempted to comprehensively replace subjective discretionary board decisions with <u>clear and objective standards</u>**

- **Since adoption: zero development permit appeals**

- **The code wasn't perfect**. It's overly prescriptive on design standards and micromanages certain project details

- **But it worked**. Form-Based Code has been a policy driver of increased housing production in Burlington

Since 2018

0*

Permit Appeals
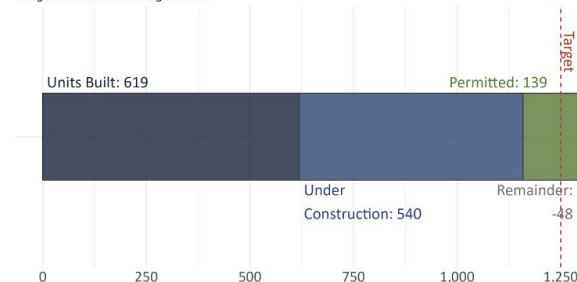
in downtown Burlington since Form-Based Code adoption

(*One appeal began before new code adoption + continued)

804

Homes Permitted

Housing Goal: 1,250 Units in 5 Years
Progress in 2022 through 2026

Units Built: 619 | Permitted: 139 | Target

Under Construction: 540 | Remainder: -48

0   250   500   750   1,000   1,250

How ROOT Zones Would Be Implemented

1

State Creates Code

Model Vermont Code with clear, objective standards

2

Towns Adopt

Municipalities and choose to pursue and plan a ROOT Zone

3

State Reviews

Verify zones meet state standards. Towns are eligible for planning support and other benefits
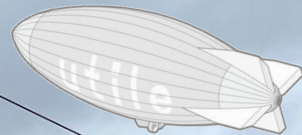
4

Streamlined Approval

Certification of Compliance – no hearing, no subjective decisions, no grounds for appeal

The Result: More Homes, Faster

ROOT Zones eliminate the largest remaining regulatory barrier to new home production while ensuring beloved, walkable, New England Neighborhoods

Intro To ROOT Zones:
What Could Be In A Vermont Model Code?

Legislative Stakeholders

ROOT Zones: Residential Opportunity Overlay for Towns

ROOT Zones empower Vermont communities to unlock housing production by replacing discretionary hearings with clear, objective rules

Dramatically Reduce Permit Appeals

Replace discretionary review with transparent certification process in Tier 1 areas

Local Democracy Up-Front

Communities set zone locations and development intensity during planning, not project-by-project

Every Town Gets a Path

Give all municipalities, large and small, tools to meet state housing targets with technical and financial support

Protect What Matters

Ensure good design and protect critical public interests through form-based Vermont code and objective standards

Vermont Residential Typologies

Vermont has a wide range of unique missing middle multi-family typologies that fit within a specific building footprint dimension.

Homes for All Prototypes (Vermont 802 Homes)
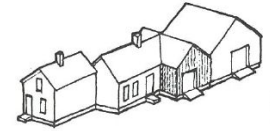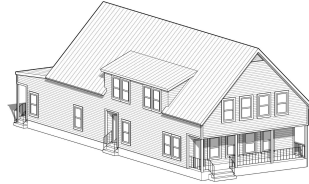

Age-In-Place

Narrow Lot
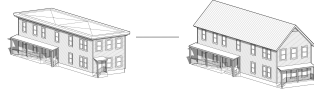
Village

Side-by-Side

"Telescoping Home" Aggregation Pattern

Illustration Credit: Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn: The Connected Farm Buildings of New England by Thomas C. Hubka
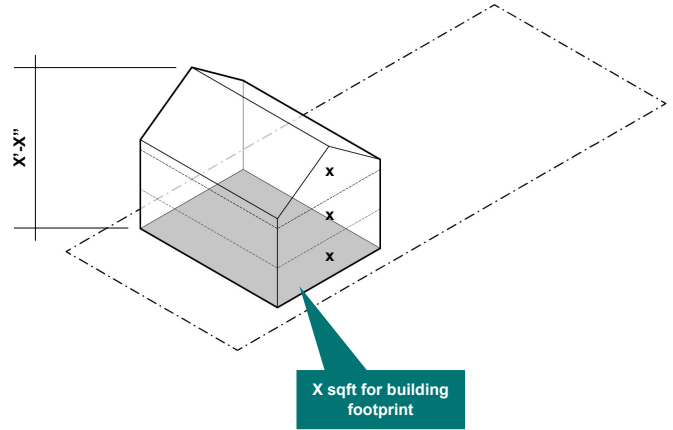
Variants on Base Model

Variants on Base Model

Home typologies were discovered and developed to fit a variety of communities and sites.

Form-based Lite Zoning Approach

Simplified Set of Rules

A lean FBC framework regulates urban form through the following principal mechanisms:

X sqft for building footprint

1 Building Footprint
Sets the maximum area per story

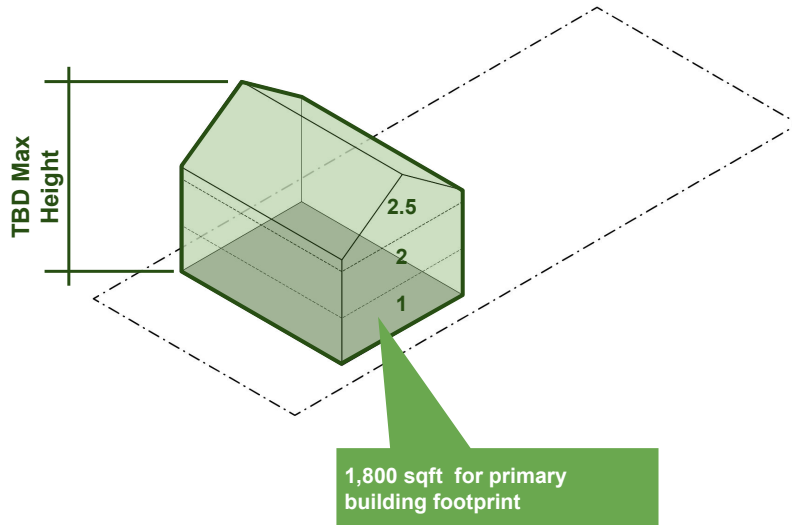## 2 Building Height
Sets the maximum height in stories/feet

3 Roof Form
Provides options for a flat or pitched roof half-story

Potential Footprint Standards

A combination of footprint maximums, building height, and number of stories controls the form and mass of a new primary and back lot buildings
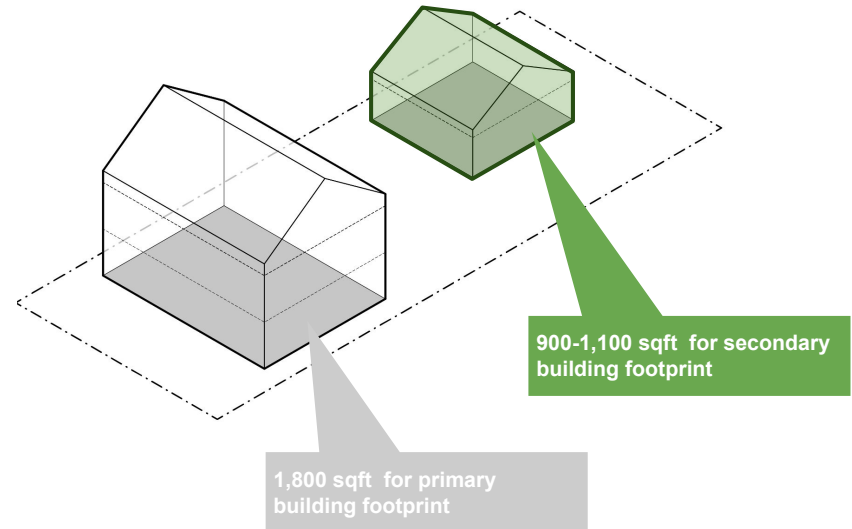
Primary buildings on a lot

- 1,500-1,800 sqft max footprint
- 2.5 max stories
- TBD max height rules

Secondary or back lot buildings on a lot

- 900 - 1,100 sqft max footprint
- 2.5 max stories
- TBD max height rules

TBD Max Height

2.5
2
1

1,800 sqft for primary building footprint

900-1,100 sqft for secondary building footprint
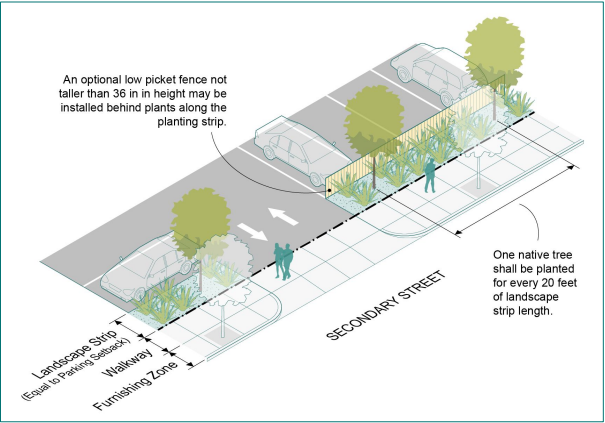
1,800 sqft for primary building footprint

Parking Placement

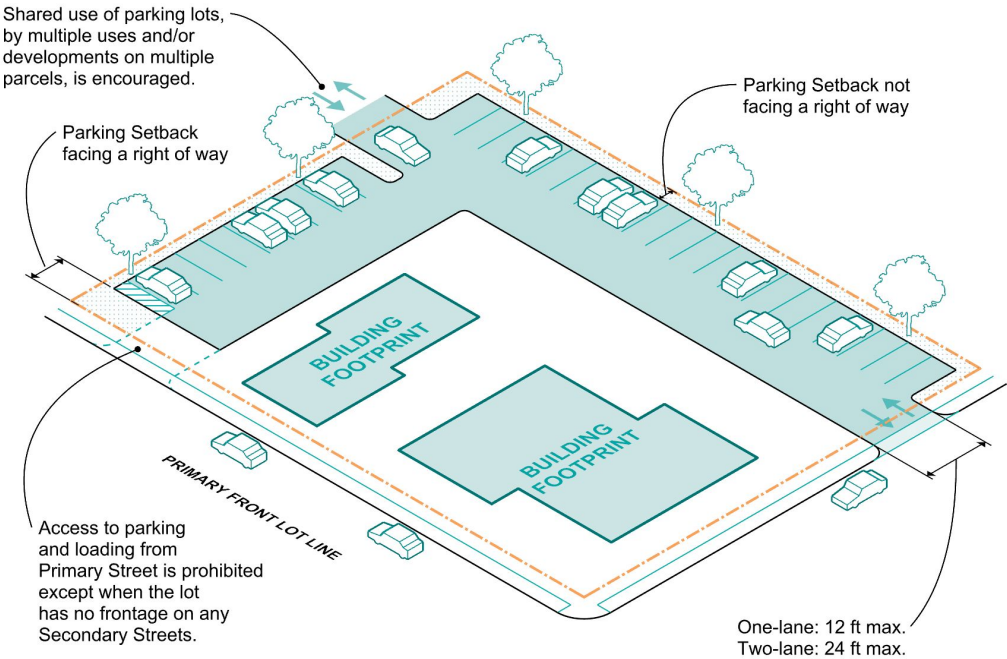Additional Design Standards

Parking placement standards create a more pedestrian-oriented and lively streetscape by limiting parking toward the side or rear of a site.

Proposed **parking standards** include:
- Parking setbacks
- Parking access
- Curb cuts and driveway width/location
- Screening

An optional low picket fence not taller than 36 in in height may be installed behind plants along the planting strip.

One native tree shall be planted for every 20 feet of landscape strip length.

Landscape Strip
(Equal is Parking Setback)

Walkway

Furnishing Zone

SECONDARY STREET

Landscape Strip

Shared use of parking lots, by multiple uses and/or developments on multiple parcels, is encouraged.

Parking Setback facing a right of way

Parking Setback not facing a right of way

BUILDING FOOTPRINT

BUILDING FOOTPRINT

PRIMARY FRONT LOT LINE

Access to parking and loading from Primary Street is prohibited except when the lot has no frontage on any Secondary Streets.

One-lane: 12 ft max.
Two-lane: 24 ft max.
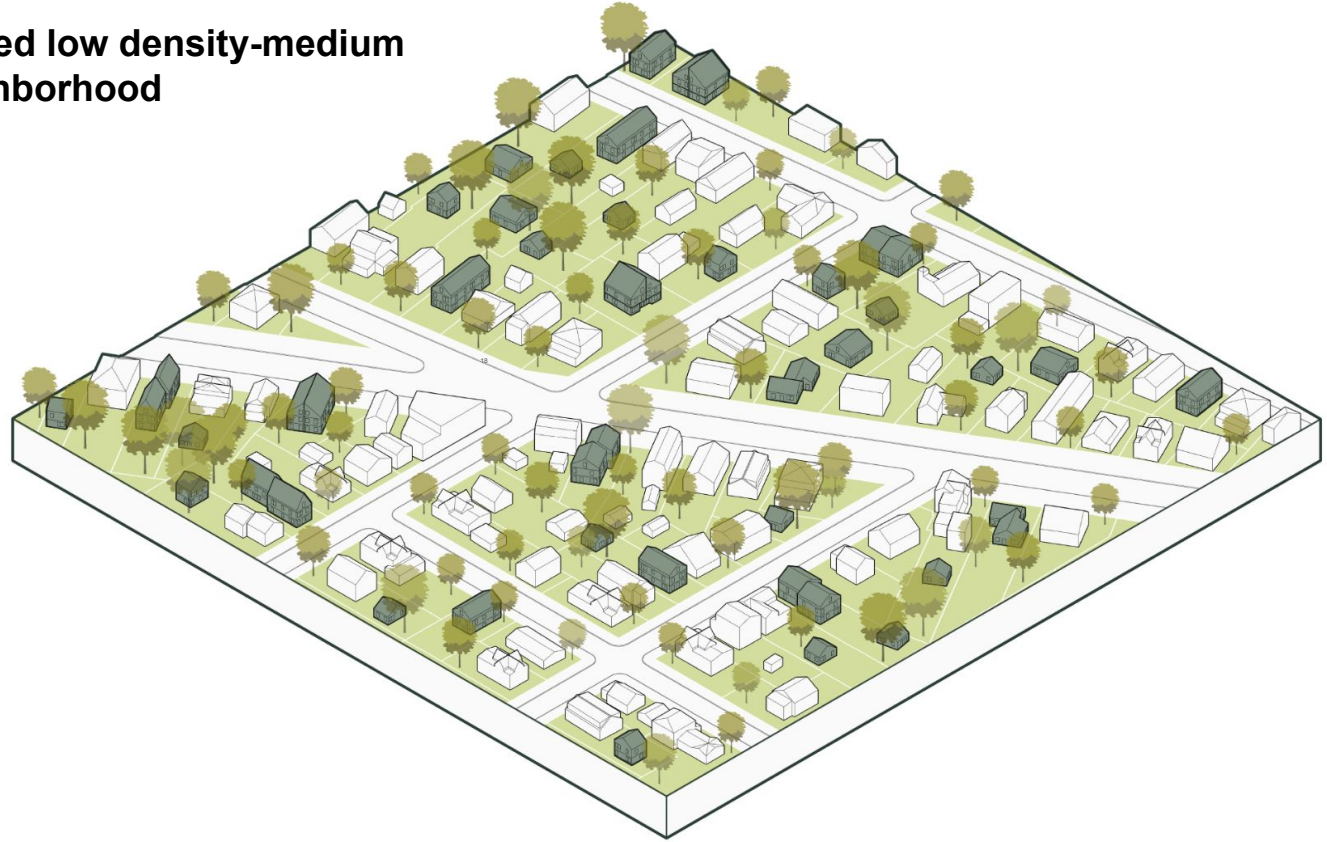
Design Flexibility Catered to Neighborhoods

Existing fabric in a mixed low density-medium density residential neighborhood
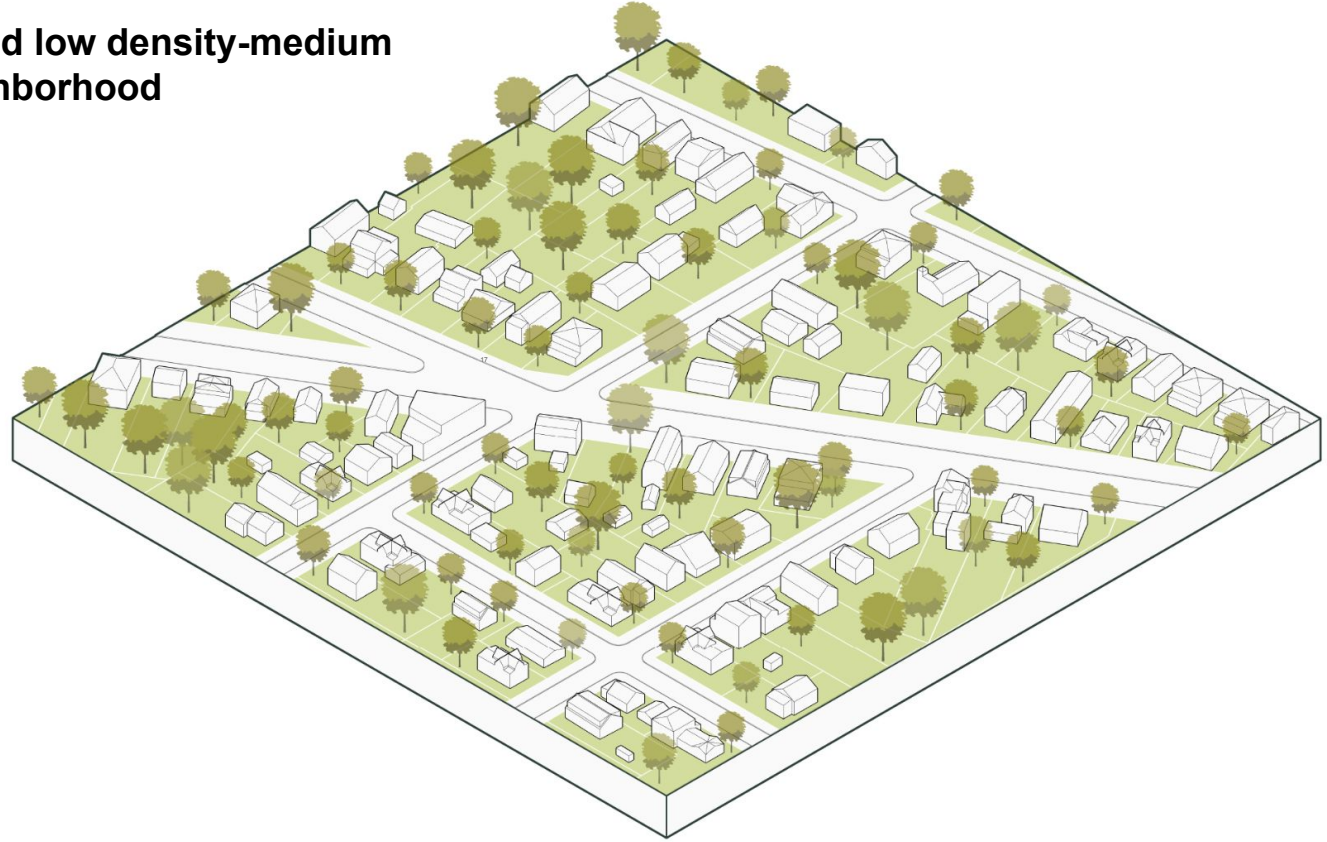
Design Flexibility Catered to Neighborhoods

Potential fabric in a mixed low density-medium density residential neighborhood

Transects are

Case Study: Newton, MA "Village Center" Zoning

Existing Zoning

- Business (BU)
- Manufacturing (LM, M)
- Multi-Residence (MR)
- Single Residence (SR)
- Mixed Use (MU)
- Public Use & Open Space (PU, OS/R)

Proposed Zoning

Village Center 3 (VC3)

Category	By-Right / Special Permit
Footprint, max:	15,000 sf / 17,500 sf
Height, max:	4.5 stories / 5.5 stories
Use:	Residential, Commercial, Mixed-Use

Village Center 2 (VC2)

Category	By-Right / Special Permit
Footprint, max:	10,000 sf / 12,500 sf
Height, max:	3.5 stories / 4.5 stories
Use:	Residential, Commercial, Mixed-Use

Village Center 1 (VC1)

Category	By-Right / Special Permit
Footprint, max:	5,000 sf / 7,500 sf
Height, max:	2.5 stories / 3.5 stories
Use:	Residential / Commercial, Mixed-Use

0   250   500 ft
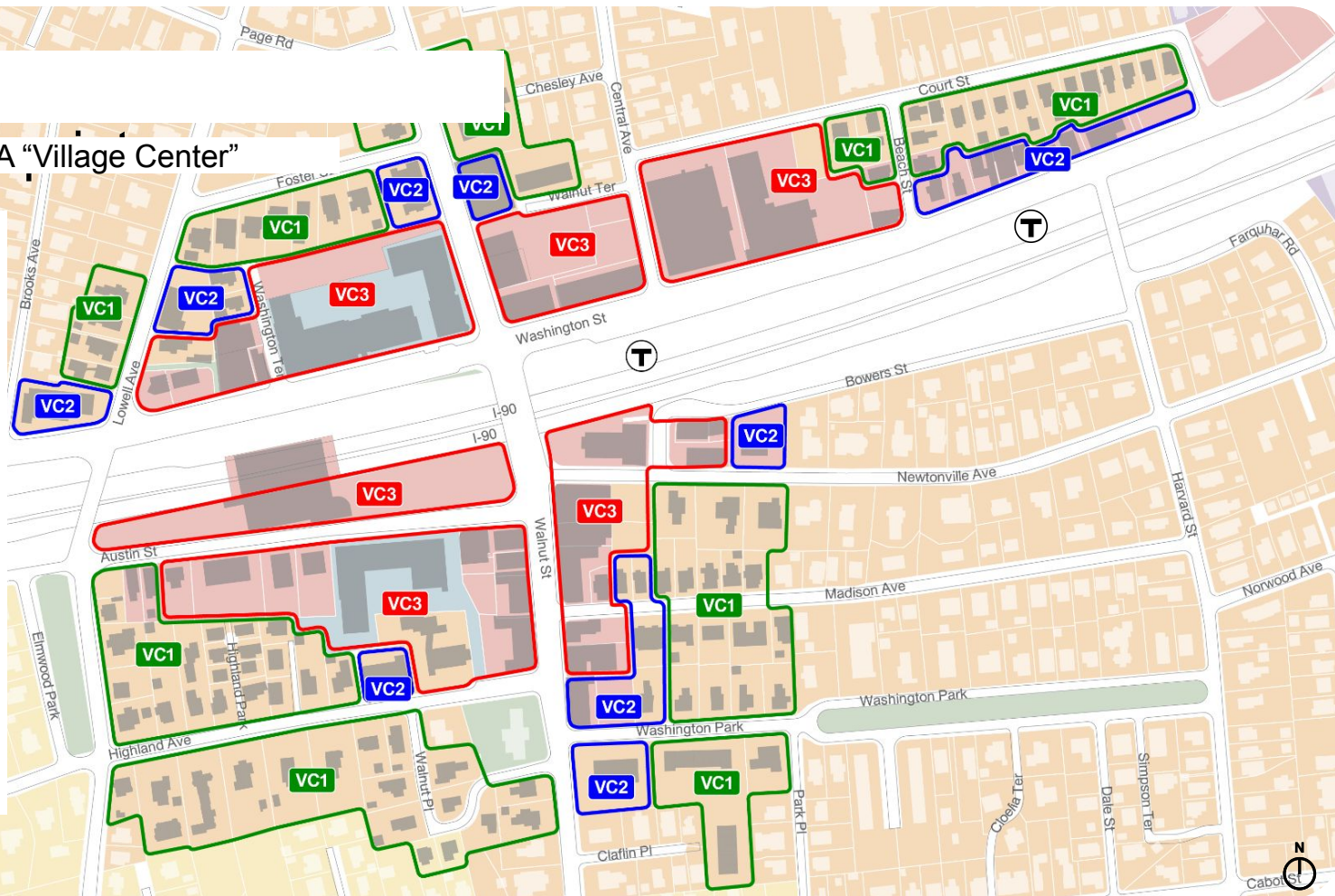
Protect What Matters: Potential additional elements of model code

- **Street and neighborhood design standards grounded in time-honored principles that have produced Vermont's beloved neighborhoods.**
- **Historic protection standards**
- **Flood zone protection standards**
- **Universal design standards**
- **More?**

ROOT Zones: A Practical Path for Rural Communities

Many Vermont towns are exploring enabling housing growth through form-based code - but they're starting from scratch

The Challenge

- **Form-based code development is expensive**. Towns can spend $100,000+ on professional consultants

- **Small communities lack capacity** and resources to do this work independently

- **Each town reinventing the wheel** is inefficient for municipalities across the state

ROOT Zones Solution

➜ **State drafts model code** that towns can adapt to their community's character and scale

➜ **Provides technical and financial support** to participating municipalities

➜ **Creates pathway to Tier 1 status** for rural towns currently left behind

➜ **Ensures consistency and quality** while respecting local needs

Potential Next Steps

- **Present more detail:**
  - **Model code**
  - **Legal framework**
  - **Implementation Details**