

Exploring Sprawl

6th Issue in a Series

Economic, Social, & Land Use Trends Related to Sprawl in Vermont

As sprawl moves across the landscape, it creates patterns of impact. These include quite visible changes in land use and in vehicle traffic on our roads, along with subtler shifts in the economies and the social composition of our cities and towns.

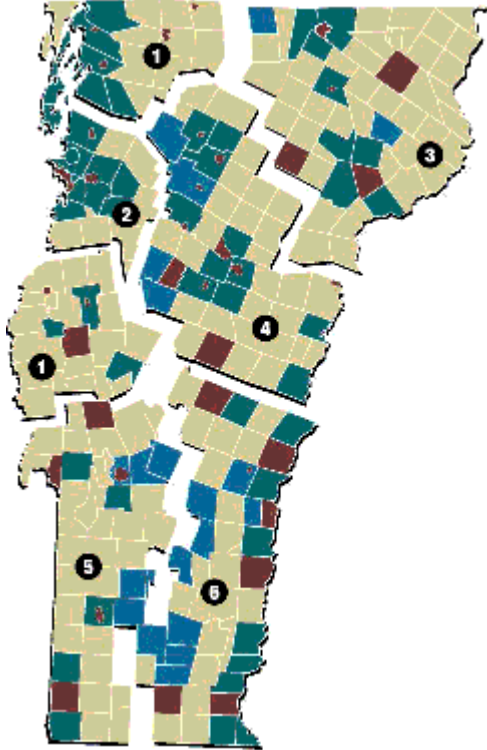
Sprawl is, overall, more than a phenomenon of road and building development. Its long-term impacts can range from lengthening the distances that many Vermonters travel to reach their jobs, to widening the physical separation between people of lower and higher incomes. These and other effects may be altering the social and economic character of many Vermont communities, and of our state as a whole.

This sixth and concluding publication in a series of research reports by the Vermont Forum on Sprawl presents some key indicators that begin, at least, to suggest the wider impacts that sprawl brings to Vermont's land and communities.

SORTING DATA BY COMMUNITY TYPES AND REGIONS

The Vermont Forum on Sprawl organized information from a database, assembled by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont, in order to look at economic and social trends that relate to sprawl in these four types of communities:

- 1. Traditional Centers** - cities, regional centers, town centers and some villages that are home to concentrations of residential population, and offer services to surrounding communities. These are the primary "downtowns" of Vermont.
- 2. New Growth Towns** - communities that have shown high shares of their counties' population growth over the past 30 years. Lying mostly near traditional centers, these also can be called the suburbs or "bedroom communities" of Vermont.
- 3. Outlying Towns** - the small towns and rural villages of Vermont. These are generally some distance away from the regional centers, have lower population growth rates and are without significant resort development. In number, although not in population, this remains the largest group of Vermont communities.
- 4. Resort Towns** - the homes of major ski areas and large concentrations of seasonal homes.



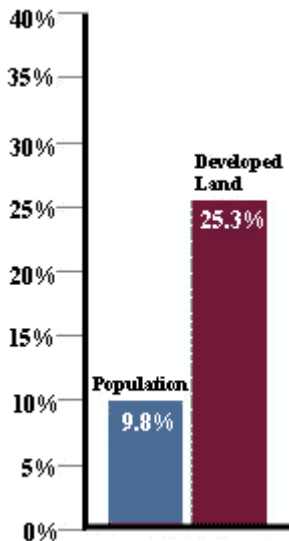
Regions and Town Types of Vermont

- Traditional Centers
 - New Growth Towns
 - Outlying Towns
 - Resort Towns
- 1 Champlain Valley
 - 2 Chittenden County
 - 3 Northeast Kingdom
 - 4 Northcentral Highlands
 - 5 Taconic Southwest
 - 6 Connecticut River Valley

Revitalization of our communities and downtowns and dealing effectively with sprawl are among the most urgent and difficult issues facing Vermonters.

Howard Dean, MD, *Governor of Vermont*

Figure 2
Rates of Growth in Population & Developed Land in Vermont 1982-1992



Land use trend information came from the Natural Resources Inventory of the U. S. Department of Agriculture - a state-by-state inventory of land use and land cover conducted every five years.

Information from the database, and from the Natural Resources Inventory, was also sorted by six regions of the state:

- o Taconic Southwest
- o Connecticut River Valley
- o Chittenden County
- o Champlain Valley
- o Northcentral Highlands
- o Northeast Kingdom

LAND DEVELOPMENT COMPARED TO POPULATION GROWTH

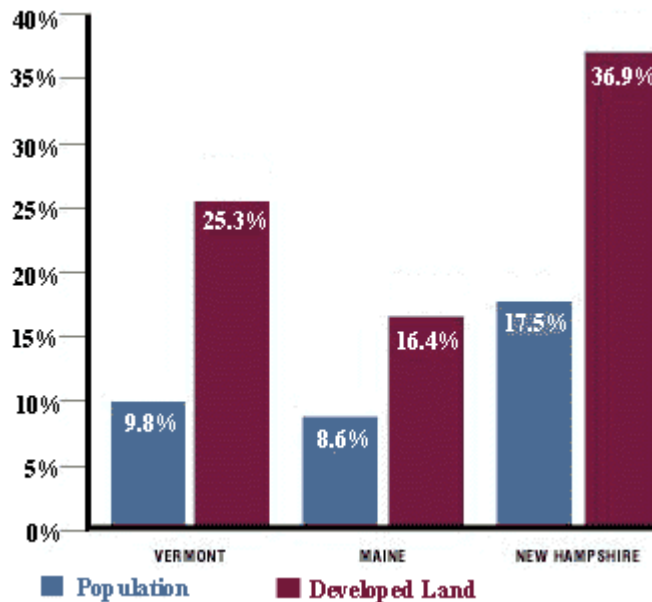
Land is being developed in Vermont at about two and a half times the rate of population growth. Between 1982 and 1992, the amount of developed land in

Vermont grew by more than 25%, while the population grew by only 9.8%.

This suggests that we are consuming land at excessive rates, and probably in excessive amounts.

For this same period in northern New England, Vermont had the highest ratio of growth in developed land to growth in population - 2.63, compared with 2.11 in New Hampshire and 1.91 in Maine. Between 1982 and 1992, New Hampshire's developed land grew by 36.9%, its population by 17.5%. Maine's developed land grew by 16.4%, its population by 8.6%.

Figure 3
Rates of Growth in
Population & Developed
Land, 1982-1992



Converting Farmland to House Lots

The primary uses of developed land in Vermont were "Concentrated Residential" (42%) and non-farm "Rural Estates" (30%), according to the Natural Resources Inventory. "Concentrated Residential" is closely spaced urban and suburban houses and other residences, including strip and cluster home development in rural areas; "Rural Estates" are rural homes surrounded by 1.5-10 acres that are not part of a farming operation.

Nearly 40% of the land newly developed between 1982 and 1992 was formerly cropland and pastures. According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, over the past 50 years Vermont has lost over 2 million acres of farmland, and more than 10,000 working farms. The 1997 census counted 5,828 farms in Vermont, on 1,262,155 acres of farmland.

Farmland is not a renewable resource. Yet, in part because of public policies, it is often cheaper to build in undeveloped places -- such as farmland -- than in downtown locations. People build in the countryside for reasons of lifestyle, but also because of financial decisions. If it takes less time and money to develop in a farm field, people will tend to go there. We need to make investing in community centers more rewarding.

Darby Bradley, *President,*
Vermont Land Trust

On a regional basis, from 1982 to 1992, the southern counties of the Taconic Southwest and the Connecticut River Valley saw land develop at over three times their rate of population growth. The concentrations of ski resorts and vacation homes in these areas may have been major contributors to the development rates.

The lowest ratio of development to population growth was in the Northcentral Highlands.

Table 1
Ratio of Development to Population Growth 1982-1992

	Rate of Growth Population	Rate of Growth Developed Land	Ratio: Developed Land/ Population Growth
Champlain Valley	14.6%	31%	2.1
Chittenden	14.1%	40%	2.8
Connecticut River Valley	8.1%	28%	3.4
Northcentral Highlands	9.5%	17%	1.7
Northeast Kingdom	6.5%	17%	2.6
Taconic Southwest	6.4%	25%	3.8

Spreading Growth in Smaller Blocks

One key indicator suggests that sprawl-type development is both spreading and dominating land-development patterns in Vermont.

In the measurement of growth, all developed land that is not considered rural has been divided into two categories: *large urban built-up and small urban built-up*. "Large urban" includes developed areas that cover 10 or more acres; "small urban" involves smaller developed areas, up to 10 acres in size.

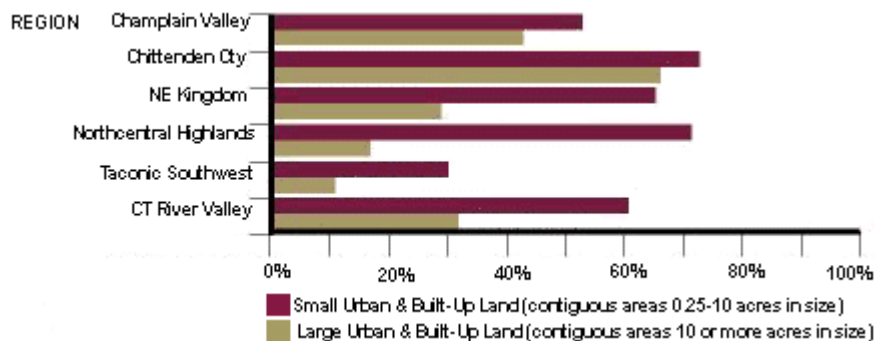


Figure 4
 Rates of Change in Land Development by Region, 1982-1992

Between 1982 and 1992, "small urban built-up" was the fastest-growing development category in all six regions of Vermont. This means that smaller, unconnected blocks of land have been developing more rapidly - in some areas, much more rapidly - than larger, contiguous blocks. The highest small-urban growth rates were in Chittenden County (73%) and the Connecticut River Valley (61%).

The growth in small urban development clearly seems connected to the loss of farmland in Vermont. The region that showed the highest growth in small urban built-up land, Chittenden County, also had the greatest loss of crop- and pastureland.

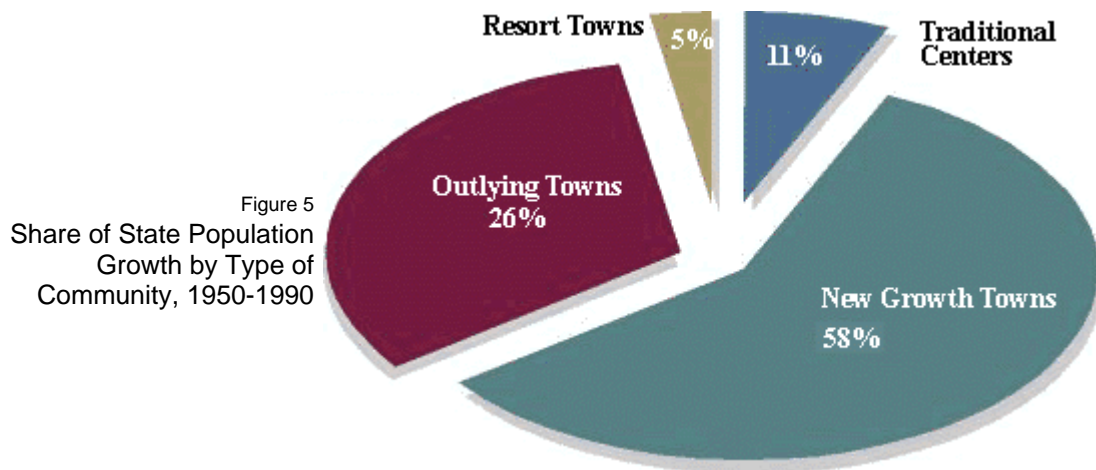
Our downtowns are the traditional heart of many Vermont communities. They help make our state so special. It's in the best interests of Vermont to ensure that growth has positive impact on the economy of town and village centers.

Patrick Leahy
U.S. Senator from Vermont

POPULATION GROWTH BY COMMUNITY TYPE

In spite of nearly 30 years of state policies encouraging development in existing centers, most of the state's post-World War II population growth has occurred in New Growth Towns.

Between 1950 and 1990, New Growth Towns absorbed nearly 60% of Vermont's total population growth, while Traditional Centers gained only 11%. Outlying Towns accounted for 26% of the population increase, Resort Towns only 5%.



As a result of these trends, the portion of Vermonters who live in Traditional Centers has declined steeply. Through the 1950's and 1960's, a majority of Vermont's population lived in Traditional Centers. This share then fell to 49% in 1970, 42% in 1980, and 39% in 1990.

In all six regions, New Growth Towns attracted the highest portions of overall growth.

The Northeast Kingdom and the Northcentral Highlands actually recorded population losses in their Traditional Centers, as residents moved to outlying areas. The highest shares of population growth in the New Growth Towns were

in these two regions, along with Chittenden County and the Connecticut River Valley. The highest rate of population growth in Outlying Towns was in the Champlain Valley. The Northcentral Highlands, home to three major ski resorts, showed the highest rate of population growth among Resort Towns.

Frankly, I had never thought before about breaking out Vermont communities into Traditional Centers, New Growth Towns, Outlying Towns and Resort Towns. This data helps us understand more about our communities, and what they need to thrive. This is something I'm going to pay a lot more attention to.

Con Hogan
Vermont Agency of Human Services

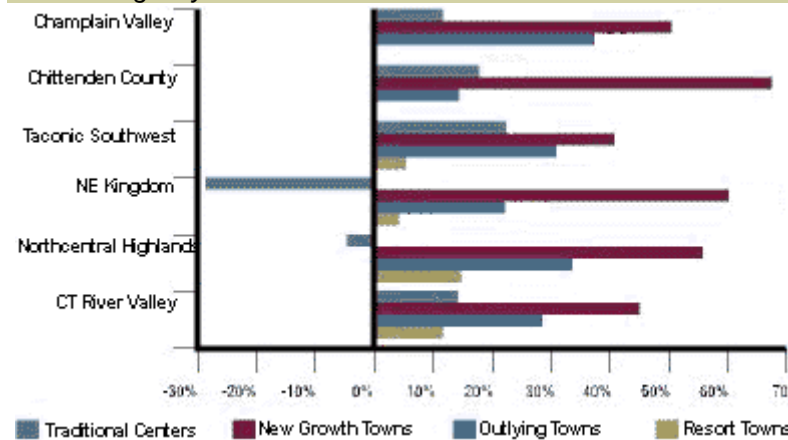


Figure 6
 Share of Population Growth By Type of Community & By Region, 1950-1990

JOB GROWTH BY COMMUNITY TYPE

Statewide, 45% of the job growth between 1980 and 1996 occurred in New Growth Towns, only 21% occurred in Traditional Centers. During this time, the portion of Vermont jobs located in New Growth Towns rose from 18% to 26%, while the portion in Traditional Centers fell from 70% to 56%.

As Vermonters, we're proud of our quality of life. Rapid, unplanned growth leads to traffic congestion, increased travel time, and reduced family time. If we do not pursue 'smart' growth as Vermont's economy expands, we risk losing the sense of community, the working landscape, and the environmental quality that makes Vermont special.

James Jeffords
U.S. Senator from Vermont

Table 2
Employment by Community Type, 1980-1996

	1980	1990	1996	1980-1996	Share of Total Growth
Traditional Centers	133,265	156,496	149,953	+16,688	21.4%

New Growth Towns	34,483	58,378	69,598	+35,115	45.1%
Outlying Towns	16,663	22,514	37,013	+20,350	26.1%
Resort Towns	5,354	10,040	11,047	+5,693	7.3%
All Towns	189,765	247,428	267,611	+77,846	

More new jobs were created in New Growth Towns than in Traditional Centers. Outlying towns also increased their share of jobs, from 9% to 14%. The number of jobs in Resort Towns doubled during these years.

Yet despite the gain in number of jobs in the New Growth Towns, in 1990 only 25% of the employed residents of New Growth Towns worked in the same towns where they lived. In contrast, 57% of employed people living in Traditional Centers also worked in their towns.

In 1990, commuting times were 11% shorter for working residents of Traditional Centers than for people living in New Growth Towns. A higher portion of Traditional Center residents commute by public transportation or carpool than do New Growth Town residents; a lower share of residents in Traditional Centers drive alone to work, according to U.S. Census data. This suggests that, if the population continues shifting to New Growth Towns, carpooling and use of public transportation could decline.

In six years -- from 1990 to 1996 -- the average time a family spent in a car every day increased by 22%.

John DeVillars
Regional Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Economic Trends: Retail Sales Locations

Nationally, since the 1950s, retail sales have shifted from downtowns to suburban areas. Suburban commercial development has come more slowly to Vermont - but areas such as Chittenden and Washington counties, which have seen extensive suburban retail development, have shown a parallel shift in retail sales.

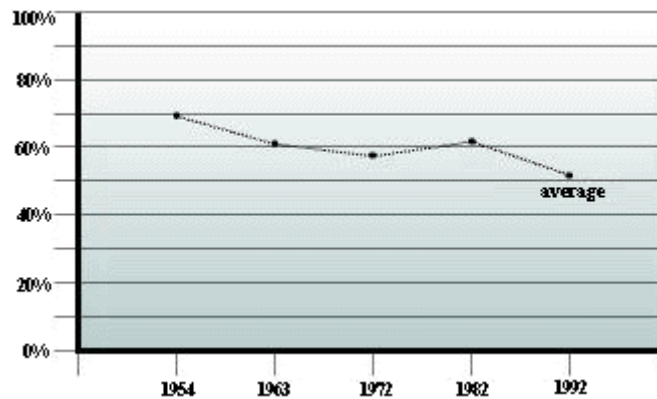
This analysis used U.S. Census of Retail Trade data from 1954 to 1992 for six urban areas in Vermont: Bennington, Burlington with Winooski and Essex Junction, St. Albans City, Newport, Rutland and Barre/Montpelier. Sales data were analyzed for department store and other stores that sold general merchandise, apparel, furniture and home furnishings. These "GAF" stores tend to be located in regional retail centers.

From 1954 to 1992, the average share of county GAF sales in the six urban areas fell from about 70% to 52%. In Chittenden County, GAF sales in Burlington, Winooski and Essex Junction fell from 92% to 49% of the county's

total. With the recent introduction of "big box" stores in Williston, this share is likely to have fallen even more. (In 1997, Burlington had just 31% of the county's total taxable sales, according to state data.)

Figure 7

Average Percentage of Total County GAF Sales in Center, 1954-1992



Village life is one of the delightful aspects of Vermont that many other places have lost. Sprawl is insidious because it replaces the uniqueness of a Northfield or Arlington or Vergennes with suburban cookie cutter buildings and strip developments that could exist anywhere. It destroys one of our most precious Vermont assets: our own small-town American uniqueness.

Tom Slayton, *Editor*,
Vermont Life Magazine

In Washington County, Barre City and Montpelier reported 76% of all county GAF sales in 1954. In the aftermath of strip development along the Barre-Montpelier Road in the town of Berlin during the 1960s, and the later construction of a regional mall in Berlin, the two cities' share of county GAF sales had fallen to 60% in 1992.

The average percentage of all county retail stores in the six urban centers fell from 52% in 1954 to 45% in 1982 - then it rebounded somewhat, to 48% in 1992.

Clearly, one effect of commercial sprawl development has been to shift retail sales in Vermont out of urban centers, into strip developments and other suburban locations.

It is essential to grow Vermont's economy and develop our landscape in ways that strengthen our communities. Future generations of Vermonters are depending on the wisdom of land use decisions that we are making today.

Molly Lambert, *Secretary*,
Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development

Social Trends by Community Type

The Vermont Forum on Sprawl used data from the Vermont Agency of Human Services, state housing agencies and national sources to develop and sort the following social indicators by type of community:

1. Family incomes. In 1979, median family income was 6.5% higher in New Growth Towns than in Traditional Centers. By 1989, this gap had widened to 17.0%.

Table 3
Median Family Income, 1979-1989

	1979	1989
Traditional Centers	\$16,452	\$31,360
New Growth Towns	\$17,523	\$36,696
Outlying Towns	\$14,920	\$30,716
Resort Towns	\$16,654	\$36,059

2. People in poverty. In 1990, the percentage of people living below the poverty level was 12% in Traditional Centers, 10% in Outlying Towns, 8% in Resort Towns, and just 6% in New Growth Towns.

In 1979, median family income was 6.4% higher in New Growth Towns than in Traditional Centers. By 1989, this gap had widened to 16.9%.

3. Education levels. In 1990, the percentage of people whose education included a high school degree or less was 70% in Traditional Centers, 65% in New Growth Towns, 70% in Outlying Towns and 59% in Resort Towns.

4. Affordable housing. From 1986 to 1998, despite the population shift to outlying communities, 75% of the growth in Vermont's stock of subsidized, affordable housing units was concentrated in Traditional Centers. Only 20% occurred in New Growth Towns. Combined with the job-growth data, this trend suggests that while jobs are going to the New Growth Towns, affordable housing is going to the Traditional Centers - increasing commuting times and costs for many Vermonters of low and moderate income.

Table 4

Affordable Housing Units by Community Type, Statewide, 1986-1998

	% of Total 1986	% of Total 1998	Share of Growth in Affordable Housing Units, 1986-1998
Traditional Centers	84.0%	80.6%	75.6%
New Growth Towns	10.1%	14.1%	19.9%
Outlying Towns	4.7%	5.1%	5.7%
Resort Towns	1.1%	.2%	-1.2%

5. Healthy babies. Traditional Centers had the highest percentages of low birth-weight babies, and of births to single teen mothers, in both 1979 to 1981 and 1989 to 1991. However, Traditional Centers showed a dramatic share of the statewide decline in percentage of infant deaths.

6. Single-parent families. Relatively more single-parent families are living in Traditional Centers than anywhere else in Vermont: 24% live in Traditional Centers, 15% each in New Growth Towns, Outlying Towns and Resort Towns.

We've got to redouble our efforts to keep our downtowns strong and vital, to protect our family farms and to maintain the quality of life in Vermont that the entire nation envies. As new options for economic development are considered, the availability and accessibility of affordable housing and transportation must be included in the planning process. Otherwise, working people with limited incomes will have no choice but to live in the city and commute, at significant expense, to new job opportunities in recently developed areas.

Bernie Sanders,
U.S. House Representative from Vermont