CERTIFICATE OF MUNICIPAL PLAN

X ADOPTION ___AMENDMENT ___REPEAL

I, Teri Gray, Clerk of the Town/Village/City of Charleston, in Orleans County, State of Vermont, do hereby certify pursuant to 24 VSA, §§ 4384, 4385, 4444, and 4447 that the following actions were taken by the designated parties with the respect to the adoption/amendment/repeal of the proposed municipal plan for the Town of Charleston, of which the attached is a true copy.

Signed: Teri L Gray

Date: 10-15-26

Attach herewith all documentation, tear sheets, notices, etc. resulting from and confirming this adoption.

TOWN OF CHARLESTON, VERMONT

SELECTBOARD RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE 2026 MUNICIPAL PLAN

ADOPTION OF THE TOWN OF CHARLESTON 2026 MUNICIPAL PLAN

WHEREAS, pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4384, the Charleston Planning Commission prepared the Town of Charleston 2026 Municipal Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Charleston Planning Commission held a public hearing on the proposed Municipal Plan on September 8, 2026; and

WHEREAS, following its public hearing, the Charleston Planning Commission approved and submitted the proposed Town of Charleston 2026 Municipal Plan to the Charleston Selectboard on September 8, 2026, noting one non-substantive deletion of outdated information concerning a discontinued local ride service; and

WHEREAS, the Charleston Selectboard received the proposed Municipal Plan on September 8, 2026; and

WHEREAS, the version of the plan incorporating that single non-substantive deletion is the draft dated September 18, 2026; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4385(a), the Charleston Selectboard warned a public hearing on the proposed Municipal Plan for October 8, 2026, with notice posted at the required locations on September 21, 2026, and notice published in the September 23, 2026 edition of The Chronicle; and

WHEREAS, the Charleston Selectboard held the required public hearing on the proposed Municipal Plan on October 8, 2026; and

WHEREAS, the Selectboard made no changes to the proposed Municipal Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Selectboard has considered the proposed Municipal Plan and the comments received during the public hearing; and

WHEREAS, the Selectboard finds it appropriate to adopt the Town of Charleston 2026 Municipal Plan, draft dated September 18, 2026;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CHARLESTON SELECTBOARD:

1. Adoption. The Charleston Selectboard hereby adopts the Town of Charleston 2026 Municipal Plan, draft dated September 18, 2026, pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4385(c).

2. Effective Date. The Municipal Plan shall become effective upon adoption by the Selectboard, as provided by 24 V.S.A. § 4385(c).

3. Submission. Within 30 days after adoption, the Town of Charleston shall provide copies of the adopted Municipal Plan to the appropriate regional planning commission and to the Commissioner of Housing and Community Development, as required by 24 V.S.A. § 4385(c). Electronic delivery is permitted if the Town retains proof of receipt.

4. Record. This resolution and the adopted Municipal Plan shall be retained as part of the official municipal records.

SELECTBOARD ACTION

The Charleston Selectboard considered this resolution at its regular meeting on October 8, 2026, following the public hearing held earlier the same day.

Selectboard members present:
Patrick Austin
Tim Jenness
Vote: In favor: 2 Opposed: 0 Abstained: 0
Result: ADOPTED UNANIMOUSLY

The resolution was adopted by a majority of the members of the Charleston Selectboard.

SIGNATURES

Patrick Austin, Selectboard Member

Tim Jenness, Selectboard Member

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct record of the action taken by the Charleston Selectboard on October 8, 2026, and that the Town of Charleston 2026 Municipal Plan, draft dated September 18, 2026, was duly adopted by the Selectboard following the required public hearing.

Teri L Gray

Teri Gray, Town Clerk

Date: 10-15-26

Town of Charleston

2026 Municipal Plan

Adopted 10/08/2026

"Town of our fathers, dear old Town
Through which the Clyde River flows swift and clear
The land our fathers cleared and tilled
And built the homes we've loved so dear
We cherish thee, Town of our birth
Most sacred place to us on earth."

—Charleston Town Song, Mae Blanche Marvin Buck

We wish to acknowledge the vital role of Vermont's rural communities in preserving and strengthening the values and way of life so important to the survival of our State and our Nation.

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A. Town Objectives, Policies and Goals

The Town of Charleston lies in northeastern Vermont on the traditional lands of the Abenaki people. The area was granted to Commodore Abraham Whipple in 1780 to honor his defense of Charleston, South Carolina, during the Revolutionary War. Originally named Navy, the Town was first settled by Abner Allyn in 1806 and renamed Charleston in 1825. Early settlers cleared dense forests to create farms and homes.

The Town's population is about the same as it was at the end of the American Civil War. An enduring reliance on the land, stewardship of its natural health and beauty, and a spirit of independence and self-reliance continue to define the people of Charleston today.

This Municipal Plan seeks to promote the economic well-being of our residents and support orderly commercial development in our Town by encouraging proper-scale business and commercial projects that are compatible with our rural character. The plan aims to address residential housing needs through appropriately scaled development that preserves local control over privately-owned lands and buildings which are the hard-earned wealth and family legacies of our residents.

This Plan also seeks to preserve and protect the natural condition of our mountain ridgelines and high-elevation habitats, headwater areas, rivers, streams and surface waters, woodlands and forests, wetlands and vernal pools, wildlife and its habitats, groundwater recharge and floodwater storage areas, and agricultural and recreational resources as well as our Town's aesthetic and scenic beauty that is so important to our way of life.

Charleston is a community of moderate means but we are rich in our people and natural assets. By supporting new business and economic opportunity at a proper scale—one that enables affordable land and home ownership—the Town will remain an outpost of natural beauty and uncongested habitation. This will continue to attract visitors, economic opportunity, and new residents for decades to come.

The term "proper scale," as used in this Municipal Plan, establishes a clear community standard for determining whether a proposed residential, commercial, or environmental project is compatible with Charleston's rural character, natural scenic beauty, and community values. A proposed project of any kind other than farming or agriculture is not of proper scale if it fails to meet any of the following standards:

- It disturbs more than five (5) contiguous acres during construction or operation.
- It requires construction of a new Town road or roads.
- Structures exceed 125 feet in height (small-scale wind turbines may not exceed 100 feet; mid-scale wind turbines may not exceed 125 feet).
- It exceeds noise limits of 55 dBA (exterior, Leq, 1 hour) at property boundaries or 40 dBA (exterior, Leq, night) at residences.
- It causes unreasonable congestion or unsafe conditions on local roads or public highways.
- It places an unreasonable burden on the local school district to accommodate additional students.
- It places an unreasonable burden on the Town's ability to provide municipal or governmental services.
- It adversely affects the scenic or natural beauty of the area, aesthetics, historic sites, or rare or irreplaceable natural areas.
- It adversely affects a natural resource area.
- It interferes with the orderly development of the Town.
- It places an unreasonable burden on the Town's ability to accommodate growth attributed to the project.
- It fails to conform to this Municipal Plan, except where specifically required to maintain compliance with state law.

The objectives, policies and goals stated here guide every part of this Plan, and are intended to serve as clear, enforceable standards. Local and state regulatory bodies should interpret them to achieve their full intended purpose. No mitigation measures or alternative interpretations shall overcome these standards except where specifically required by state law.

B. Land Use

The Town of Charleston encompasses approximately 24,662 acres (38.5 square miles). With a 2020 U.S. Census population of 1,021, the population density is roughly 27 people per square mile, among the lowest in Vermont. Residences are more concentrated in the East and West Charleston village areas, around larger lakes and ponds, and along major state and Town roads.

The majority of the Town's acreage remains in an undeveloped, rural condition supporting agricultural, residential, recreational, silvicultural, and natural scenic uses. Residents highly value this longstanding settlement pattern, and the mix of working farms, private homes, forests, lakes, rivers, and open lands that define Charleston's rural way of life.

Natural resources in the Northeast Kingdom fall into three broad categories: fertile agricultural soils (often enriched by bedrock or periodic flooding), less fertile or shallow soils suited to forest growth, and water or open wetlands. Charleston contains significant elements of all three and lies in a transition zone from the milder-climate agricultural lowlands near Lake Memphremagog to the cooler, forested granite mountains to the east and south. The Town straddles two of Vermont's biophysical regions: the Northeastern Highlands (higher-elevation eastern half) and the Northern Vermont Piedmont (western half).

Environmentally sensitive natural resource areas include mountain ridgelines and high-elevation habitats, headwater areas, rivers and streams, wetlands and vernal pools, wildlife habitats, and groundwater recharge areas. Preservation and protection of these resources remain essential to the well-being of Charleston residents and surrounding communities. It is the policy of the Town to prohibit large-scale development within these sensitive natural resource areas, and any development that would cause degradation of such areas, except where specifically required to maintain compliance with state law.

The Clyde River enters the Town from the east (Brighton) at an elevation of 1,160 feet, loses only twenty feet over eight miles of wetlands to the top of the Great Falls, then drops another 170 feet over two miles through West Charleston village. The lowest elevation is approximately 970 feet in the northwest where the Clyde enters Derby; the highest point is the summit of Pierce Hill (2,047 feet) in the southeast.

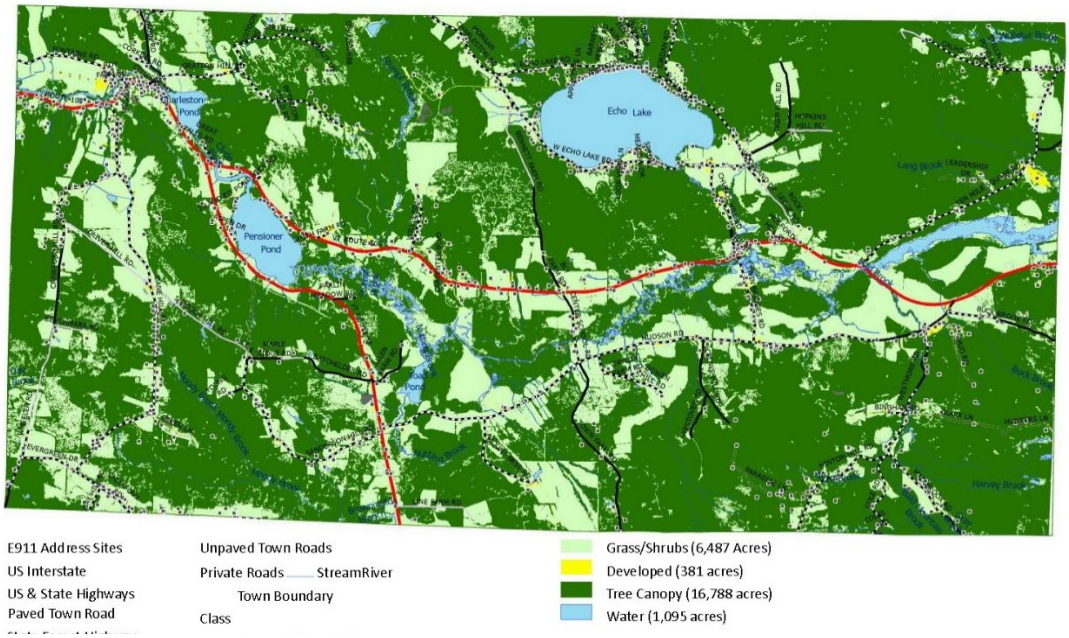
Charleston includes several larger water bodies such as Charleston Pond, Pensioner Pond, Toad Pond (all within the Clyde River floodplain), and Echo Lake (544 acres, one of only two cool, deep, oligotrophic lakes in the Clyde system, supporting native lake trout and diverse fisheries). Many miles of Clyde River tributaries cross the Town, with historic water power sites at falls on lower Mad Brook, the Echo Lake outlet, and the Clyde in West Charleston. Dams are located at the Echo Lake outlet, below Pensioner Pond, and at Charleston Pond. Most surface waters drain to the Clyde River, while Moody Brook and western streams drain to the Willoughby River via Brownington.

Water and open wetlands comprise approximately 7 to 8 percent of the Town's acreage, while forests remain the dominant cover at more than 70 percent (based on the statewide high-resolution land cover dataset depicting 2016 conditions, with methodological refresh in 2023 by VCGI/UVM). Forest types include mixed floodplain/upland hardwoods, northern white cedar swamp, old-field softwoods, and lowland spruce-fir, with maintained sugarbushes ranging from hobby to commercial scale.

Charleston Land Cover Types

Broad Type	**Detail**	**% of Town**
Forested	Mixed forest	~24%
	Evergreen forest	~23%
	Deciduous forest	~16%
	Forested wetland	~9%
Total Forested		**~72-73%**
Agricultural	Hay/pasture & row crop	~14–15%
Water & Wetlands	Open water, non-forested wetland	~7–8%
Other Non-Forested	Residential, transportation/utilities, brush/transitional, commercial/industrial	~4–6%
Grand Total		**100%**

(Source: VCGI/UVM high-resolution statewide land cover dataset, 2016 conditions with 2023 methodological updates; approximate percentages for the Town based on regional patterns.



(Charleston, VT Land Cover Map, provided by NVDA, 4/20/2026)

Farming and agriculture remain significant and highly valued, with farmland comprising ~14–15 percent of the area (down from a peak of ~50 percent in the early 20th century). Several dairy farms operate with herds of 100 or more cows. Best management practices, including stream buffers and manure management, support sustainability and rural character.

Forestry and logging are also longstanding uses. Most forests have been logged multiple times since 19th-century settlement; current stands are early- to mid-successional from harvests in the past 30 to 50 years. Sustainable practices are encouraged in accordance with Vermont Accepted Management Practices (AMPs) and USDA guidelines.

Recreation engages residents and visitors through hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, boating, skiing, biking, and ORV use. Trails are supported by the NorthWoods Stewardship Center (non-motorized) and VAST (snowmobile). The NorthWoods Tripp Hill Recreation Management Plan prioritizes public benefits, education, and resource protection.

Public fishing accesses are located on Echo Lake, the Clyde River (Route105), and Pensioner Pond. Kayak/canoe rental on the Clyde has grown with the Northern Forest Canoe Trail. Bald Mountain (Westmore) access via Charleston roads links to regional hiking. School playgrounds and fields are available outside school hours. Nearby skiing is available at Burke and Jay; beaches at Seymour Lake, Brighton State Park and Lake Willoughby; and campgrounds (public and private) serve visitors.

Nearly all land in Charleston is privately owned, with small exceptions for state fishing accesses, Town facilities (including the gravel pit site of the Charleston Community Solar Project), and the municipal Town Forest (~184 acres in Charleston plus 50 acres in Westmore along Class 4 Town Farm Road, managed with NorthWoods since the 2008 Plan). Parcel sizes vary widely (<1 acre to >1,100 acres), with many parcels 50 acres or larger.

Subdivision of large parcels continues at a modest pace, influenced by the Use Value Appraisal (UVA/Current Use) program and conservation easements held by state and national organizations. UVA enrollment (requiring ≥25 qualifying acres in farming or forestry with a current management Plan) provides tax savings for continued productive use and remains substantial in Charleston (~40–50 percent of Town acreage), consistent with Northeast Kingdom trends.

Town Districts:

- **West Charleston Village**: U.S. Post Office; two general stores each with onsite food preparation and one offering self-serve gasoline; a towing, wrecking, vehicle repair business; a full-service plant nursery, floral gift shop and farmstand; a power equipment and repair business; a sheet metal fabricator; a canine daycare facility with boarding and grooming services; a Town historical museum; and a church.
- **East Charleston Village**: U.S. Post Office; Charleston Volunteer Fire Department (CVFD); a multi-family rental building; and two churches.
- **Town Office** and **Highway Department** and **Charleston Elementary School** are located between the two Village Districts.
- **Rural Use**: All other land in the Town.

Public and semi-public land uses include VT Fish & Wildlife public accesses at the Clyde River (Ten Mile Square Road), Pensioner Pond, and Echo Lake. The Town Forest is available for hunting. Charleston Elementary School facilities are available for community use, and the NorthWoods Stewardship Center Lodge is available for civic use.

Small-scale commercial enterprises tied to the Town's land, natural resources, and rural character continue to flourish. These businesses typically employ fewer than five people and are directly linked to farming, forestry, tourism, and services. Examples include contractors, farming/agriculture, forestry/logging, nurseries/farm stands, food service and catering, woodcraft, maple sugaring, landscaping, real estate and rental, property management, truck/auto services, welding/fabrication, and recreation/tourism ventures.

Town Land Use Policies and Goals

It is the Town's policy to maintain and enhance Charleston's traditional settlement pattern of two small village areas surrounded by predominantly rural countryside of private homes and businesses, working farms, forests, lakes, rivers, and open lands.

New development will be guided in ways that protect private land ownership rights, sensitive natural resources, rare scenic beauty, and the Town's rural character while maximizing opportunities for residents and their families to develop new and existing housing, and compatible commercial uses on their land.

1. Support new and existing family housing on private land (e.g., homes for children or parents, additions to current homes, accessory dwelling units) and protect residents' rights to site family housing where they choose on their land within the provisions of state law.
2. Promote commercial land uses for families and businesses (farming, forestry, tourism, services, etc.) at a scale appropriate to Charleston's rural character.
3. Encourage new, low-impact housing and commercial development that protects landowners' rights to manage their land.
4. Welcome new businesses that protect our natural resources, preserve scenic beauty, and contribute to the Town's economic health while remaining at an appropriate scale for Charleston's rural setting.
5. Prohibit new large-scale housing or commercial development in environmentally sensitive natural resource areas (ridgelines, high-elevation habitats, headwaters, rivers/streams, wetlands/vernal pools, and highest priority habitat areas).
6. Maintain public recreation access (hunting, fishing, trails, boating, etc.) while protecting sensitive areas through cooperative management with owners, organizations, and public agencies.
7. Ensure that any multi-family housing or commercial development avoids undue adverse impacts on aesthetics, habitats, water quality, and rural character.
8. Encourage new development in flood-safe areas and areas that protect natural flood water storage.
9. Update these policies as required to comply with state law.

C. Transportation

Charleston depends on its network of local and state roads for access, safety, and economic vitality. Nearly 90 percent of the Town's workforce commutes by car, truck, or van, with many leaving before 7:00 a.m. Travel times are short for most residents, between 20 and 25 minutes. Vehicle ownership is high, with only 2 percent of households having no vehicle. At present, almost all vehicles are gasoline-powered, with electric vehicle use emerging slowly in Town.

The Town maintains approximately 54–55 miles of local roads. The state maintains about 14 miles of highway, primarily Vermont Routes 105 and 5A. Local roads consist of roughly 10 miles of Class 2, 30 miles of Class 3, 8 miles of Class 4, and 7 miles of legal trails (subject to annual certification adjustments).

Roads

The three Selectboard members serve as Road Commissioners and actively oversee maintenance. The Town Garage houses one grader, two loaders, a mini-excavator, three ten-wheel dump trucks, one six-wheel dump truck, and supports basic repairs. A crew of three, supplemented by seasonal part-time help, handles routine maintenance, plowing, sanding, and smaller resurfacing projects. The garage is well maintained, with recent upgrades including a new roof, automatic heating system, and standby generator. The Town meets state road and bridge standards to qualify for state aid.

Property owners purchase and install their own driveway culverts according to size and location requirements set by the Road Foreman. The Town maintains an ongoing culvert survey that tracks more than 800 culverts by size, condition, and location to guide replacements. Removed culverts become Town property; usable ones are repurposed on Class 4 roads, and the rest are sold or scrapped. Guardrails are installed where needed or required by the state.

The Town prioritizes durable road construction with a strong base, crushed top, shoulder removal for drainage, and wide, shallow ditches. Recent upgrades on Dane Hill, Hudson Road, Ten Mile Square Road, and East Echo Lake Road illustrate this approach. The annual goal is to upgrade at least one road or major segment as funding permits. With assistance from NVDA and Better Roads grants, the Town has completed road erosion and stormwater inventories and developed capital Plans to meet Act 64 requirements. The Town holds a Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) and focuses on fixing hydrologically connected road segments, reducing erosion, and improving resilience to heavy rains and flooding. The Town owns two gravel pits to ensure a long-term supply of quality materials.

Parking, Carpooling, and Public Transportation
Limited public parking exists, primarily pull-over areas in East and West Charleston Villages and informal private spots. The Town continues to explore small, low-cost parking areas to support carpooling and ride-sharing where feasible to reduce single-occupancy vehicle use. No local bus service operates in Charleston. Rural Community Transportation (RCT) provides limited service in the Newport/Derby area Monday through Saturday.

Airports
The nearest airports are Newport State Airport in Coventry (paved runways, recent improvements including runway extension and CBP/TSA services) and John H. Boylan State Airport in Island Pond (turf runways). Development of these facilities is outside the Town's purview.

Town Trails, Snowmobiles, and ATVs
All motorized vehicles—including ATVs, UTVs, dirt bikes, and snowmobiles—are prohibited year-round on Town trails to protect natural resources, wildlife habitats, wetlands, soil stability, and rural character, and to minimize user conflicts.

Snowmobile use is prohibited on Town trails. The Town encourages development and maintenance of designated snowmobile trails through private volunteer efforts and partnerships with the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST). Snowmobiles may operate only on officially designated VAST routes in winter, subject to Selectboard permission where required and in compliance with state registration, insurance, and VAST rules. The Town supports VAST's grooming and maintenance of corridors that connect Charleston to the statewide network.

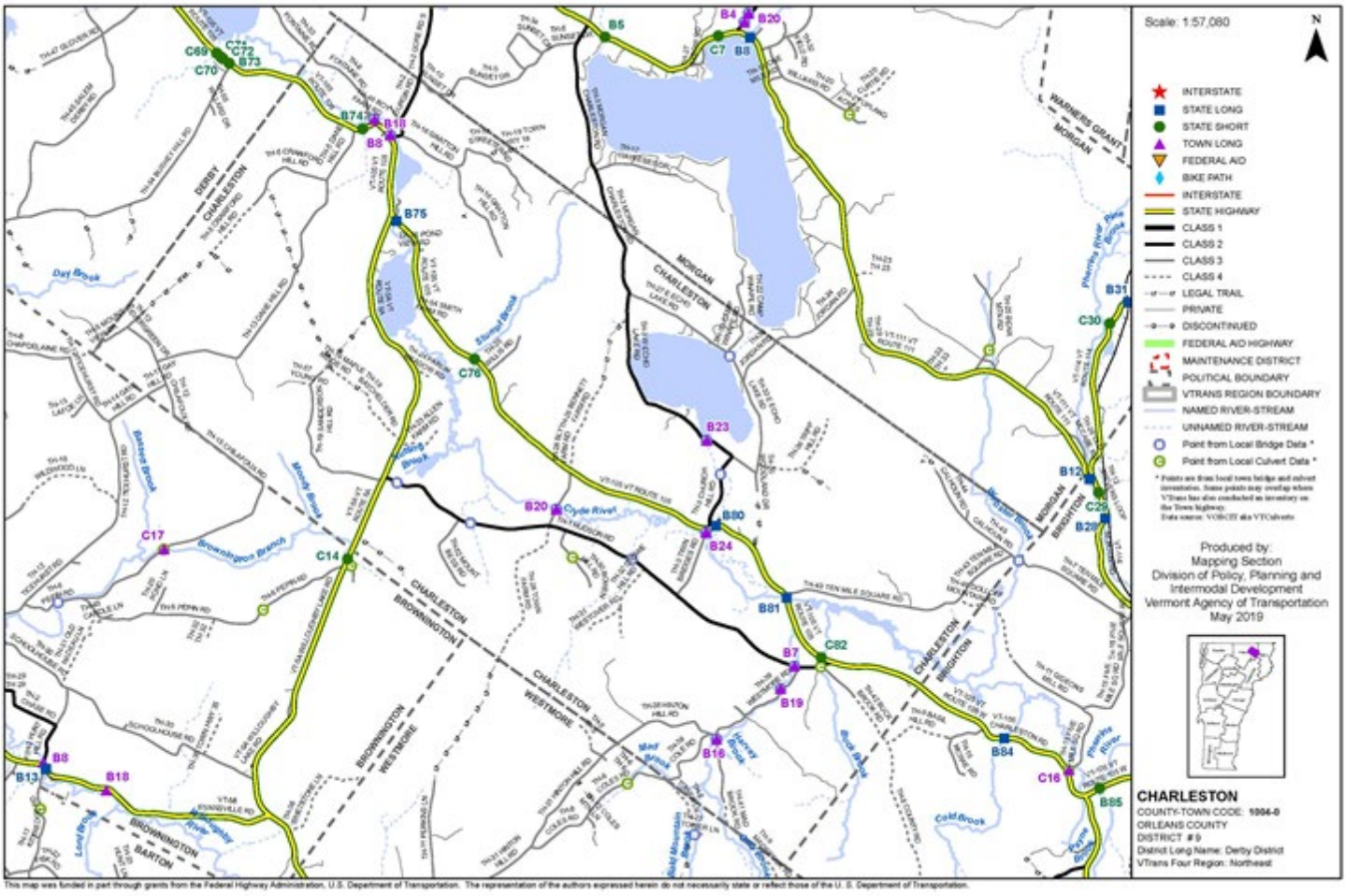
The Selectboard has opened all Town highways to year-round ATV use. Registered and properly equipped ATVs may operate on Town roads in accordance with Vermont DMV regulations and local safety requirements, including single-file travel as far right as practicable, headlights on, a maximum speed of 35 mph where applicable, yielding right-of-way to other vehicles and pedestrians, and prohibition on legally closed or posted areas. Operators must comply with all state laws regarding registration, equipment, and age restrictions.

Town Transportation Policies and Goals
It is the Town's policy to maintain a safe, efficient, and resilient road network that serves as critical infrastructure for Charleston residents and the regional economy. The Town will use the official Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Town Highway Map (2025 edition) as the base map for all planning purposes (see map at end of this section).

The Town will advance the following policies and goals as resources allow, prioritizing road maintenance and compliance with state standards:

- **Road Maintenance and Prospective Improvements (Priority of Need)**: The Town will continue to prioritize annual upgrades to at least one road or major segment using durable construction standards. Highest priority will be given to fixing hydrologically connected road segments identified in the Town's road erosion and stormwater inventory to meet Municipal Roads General Permit (MRGP) and Act 64 requirements and improve flood resilience, as funding allows.
- **Scenic Roads and Resource Protection**: The Town will protect the scenic quality of roads such as Echo Lake Road, Dane Hill, and other locally valued corridors during maintenance and upgrades, consistent with available resources and the rural character of the Town.
- **Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities**: Pedestrians and cyclists are welcome on our public roads and are seen most frequently in summer months. The Town recognizes the value of safe bicycle and pedestrian facilities but notes that sidewalks do not currently exist and rural conditions make extensive new paths unlikely in the near term. The Town will support low-cost or grant-funded opportunities for widened shoulders on paving projects or multi-use paths in village areas where feasible.
- **Parking and Carpooling**: Public parking remains rare and is generally unpaved. The Town will continue to explore small, low-cost parking/carpool areas in East and West Charleston Villages as opportunities and funding arise to support ride-sharing and reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips.
- **Public Transportation**: The Town supports expansion of Rural Community Transportation (RCT) services where practical and will work with NVDA and RCT to improve access for residents, including potential park-and-ride linkages if demand and funding allow.

- **Electric Vehicle Charging**: The Town supports development of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure. It is the Town's policy to explore a centrally located Level 2 or community-scale DC fast charging station, potentially in East or West Charleston Village, as grant funding and partnerships become available. Installations will remain at proper scale, minimize visual and land impacts, and integrate with existing facilities.
- **Trails, ATV, and Snowmobile Use**: The Town reaffirms its prohibition on motorized vehicles (ATVs, UTVs, dirt bikes, snowmobiles) on Town trails year-round to protect natural resources, wildlife, wetlands, soil stability, and rural character. The Town will continue to support designated VAST snowmobile corridors through volunteer and private partnerships. ATV use will continue on all Town highways year-round.
- **Regional Coordination**: The Town will coordinate with NVDA, VTrans, and neighboring municipalities to implement compatible elements of the Regional Transportation Plan and seek grant funding for priority projects as resources permit.



D. Utilities and Facilities

Water and Sewer

All water supply and wastewater treatment remain private. Property owners install and maintain their wells and septic systems to meet Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) requirements. Private wells, septic systems, and individual responsibility currently meet local needs while protecting groundwater and surface waters as required by state and federal regulations. Private associations near lakes, ponds, and wetlands may adopt supplemental standards consistent with state rules. No public water or sewer infrastructure exists or is planned. This approach preserves the Town's low-density settlement patterns and avoids undue burden on residents.

Refuse Disposal and Recycling

Solid waste and recycling follow Act 148 (Universal Recycling Law). A private hauler (Casella) provides curbside trash and recycling service to most residents and businesses. The Town also supports additional recycling through its membership in the Northeast Kingdom Waste Management District (NEKWMD). Residents may deliver recyclables and food scraps to the district's center in Lyndonville on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Food scraps and compost are also managed onsite at homes or through private providers. Bottle and can returns are available in West Charleston Village.

Fire and Rescue

Fire and rescue services are provided by the Charleston Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. (CVFD), an independent nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization managed by its board of directors. Founded in 1954, the current station on Route 105 in East Charleston Village was built in 1966, with additions and renovations in 1976, 2001, and 2017–2018. The department operates multiple apparatus and participates in the Northeast Kingdom mutual aid system. It remains one of Vermont's remaining All-Volunteer fire departments and enjoys strong community support. Annual Town appropriations are stable ($55,609 in 2026). Discussions about a new station to address facility needs and provide multipurpose community space continue, with funding as the main barrier. In the meantime, the Town supports gradual improvements to the existing facility to enhance response capabilities.

Educational Facilities
Charleston Elementary School is the Town's primary public educational facility (PK–8). We value the school as a center of learning for our children and as a vital community hub for Town Meetings, elections, and public gatherings. School facilities include grade-appropriate classrooms, a library with access to regional resources, and outdoor playgrounds, ball fields, and courts available to residents outside school hours (see Section F for more about our school). The NorthWoods Stewardship Center lodge also serves civic and educational functions.

Libraries and Museums
Charleston residents use regional libraries facilities, including Dailey Memorial Library, Island Pond Public Library, and Haskell Library, which provide access to Vermont and Quebec library systems. The Charleston Historical Society maintains local history resources and offers museum-like exhibits during summer hours and by appointment.

Town Office & Highway Department
The Town Office, located about halfway between East and West Charleston Village Centers, houses all Town Records and serves as the central site for all Town business. The Office is staffed by the elected Town Clerk & Treasurer, and by the Assistant Town Clerk & Treasurer. Public meetings (e.g., Selectboard, Planning Commission, Cemetery Commission, Board of Civil Authority, statewide elections, etc.) are held there. This also serves as the central location of the Town's Highway Department where all road equipment is garaged and maintained. Road material and other supplies are stored here. A heated office area is provided for Road staff.

Solar and Renewable Facilities
The Town owns and operates the *Charleston Community Solar Project*, a 97.68 kW DC solar array installed in 2018 to offset electricity use by Town facilities (see Section H for additional information).

Telecommunications and Broadband
Private providers have historically supplied landline telephone, internet, and cell service, with varying reliability. Residents consider high-speed broadband essential for education, economic opportunity, remote work, emergency communications, and community resilience. The Town is an active member of NEKCV which is building a publicly owned fiber-optic network to deliver reliable, affordable high-speed internet to 71 communities, including the entire Northeast Kingdom and parts of central Vermont. Charleston appoints two representatives to the NEKCV Governing Board (a primary and an alternate) to ensure direct local input into planning and deployment priorities.

Town Utilities and Facilities Policies and Goals
It is the Town's policy to continue to provide or support essential utilities and community facilities on a decentralized rural scale as described above. We will strive to continually improve our facilities to provide residents with reliable essential services in a manner appropriate to our way of life.

It is the Town's policy to support NEKCV's efforts to achieve universal high-speed internet access for our Town and 70 other Vermont communities, while ensuring fiber deployment remains consistent with proper scale, minimal visual and land impacts, and protection of natural resources and scenic beauty.

E. Preservation of Natural, Scenic and Historic Features

Charleston's natural, scenic, and historic features define our rural character and enrich our way of life. They support recreation, wildlife, clean water, and economic vitality through tourism and land-based enterprises. Preservation and protection of these resources is a core objective of this Municipal Plan.

Our residents are stewards of the land. Families here have worked the soil, tended to its welfare, and relied on it through every season across centuries. We honor the mountains, forests, wildlife, hills, fields, lakes, and streams that shape our daily lives.

Natural Resource Areas
Environmentally sensitive areas include mountain ridgelines and high-elevation habitats, headwater areas, forests, rivers and streams (notably the Clyde River and its tributaries), wetlands and vernal pools, wildlife habitats (including deer wintering areas), and groundwater recharge zones. These features are essential to our health and well-being, regional ecology, and neighboring communities.

Aesthetics and Scenic Beauty
Charleston's aesthetics and scenic beauty—marked by mountain ridgelines, high-elevation areas, rivers, lakes, and forested landscapes—is unmatched in the Northeast Kingdom. It is the Town's policy to prohibit development on mountain ridgelines and high-elevation habitats and to maintain proper-scale development throughout the Town.

Historic Resources
Historic features document early settlement, including cellar holes, homestead remains, and the former Charleston Town Farm site (now part of the Town Forest). The Vermont State Register of Historic Places lists approximately 63 sites in Charleston, including barns, private residences, power plants, hydro facilities, and unoccupied structures.

The Charleston Historical Society maintains a museum in West Charleston in a former grade school building on Museum Drive. The museum is open to the public during summer months and features local history exhibits, including a restored Civil War-era cupola. No properties in Charleston are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but the Town encourages identification, documentation, and protection of eligible resources.

Town Preservation Policies and Goals

The Town intends to preserve natural, scenic, and historic resources in their natural condition to the greatest extent possible. This approach promotes biodiversity, weather resilience, clean water, wildlife connectivity, and rural beauty. All development in Town must conform to proper-scale standards described in this Plan and avoid fragmentation or degradation of these sensitive resources. The Town notifies regulators and developers to respect these priorities.

It is the Town's policy to prohibit large-scale commercial or residential development within our natural resource areas that would cause damage or degradation. Special wildlife habitats, such as deer wintering areas, require careful management. The Town welcomes input from hunters and landowners to assess and protect these resources. Wetlands and surface waters benefit from thoughtful management practices, including riparian buffers, sediment and invasive species control, and pollution prevention. Rare features such as vernal pools receive priority for protection.

Construction of commercial facilities for any form of electrical energy generation, transmission, or distribution (including meteorological towers for wind data) is prohibited on ridgelines and mountain areas. Commercial-scale wind turbines, solar arrays, and energy generation or storage facilities are prohibited as incompatible with the Town's rural and environmentally sensitive setting. This prohibition serves as a community standard and an enforceable land conservation measure.

It is the Town's policy to support preservation of historic sites through voluntary measures coordinated with the Historical Society. Development proposals should give due consideration to avoiding adverse impacts on historic and aesthetic areas, using the Plan's proper-scale standards.

F. Education

Charleston Elementary School (Pre-K through Grade 8), part of the North Country Supervisory Union, serves the Town's children in a personalized, community-focused environment. In the 2024–2025 school year, the school enrolled 118 students and maintained a student-to-teacher ratio of about 8 to 1.

The school demonstrates excellence and innovation. In October 2024, the school was selected for a $15,000 grant from the Vermont Lottery's Educate Innovate Initiative—one of only two schools statewide selected for the award—to support creative educational enhancements and technology integration. In 2023, the school earned the 2023 Vermont PBIS Implementation Award for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The school maintains strong community-focused programs, including farm-to-school initiatives that connect students with local food systems and producers.

The Town values our school both as a center of learning for our children and as a vital community hub for Town Meetings, the Town-wide polling site for local elections and public events, and other gatherings. School facilities include grade-appropriate classrooms, a library with access to regional resources, as well as outdoor playgrounds, ball fields, and courts which are also available to residents outside of school hours.

Town Education Policies and Goals

It is the Town's policy to support and enable high-quality education at our Town's School by:

- Maintaining high expectations for all students and staff to meet or exceed Vermont proficiency standards.
- Investing in educational technology and library resources to advance literacy, STEM engagement, and school-based learning.
- Regularly assessing staffing and support needs to maintain appropriate class sizes and provide targeted interventions.
- Promoting holistic student development through opportunities that build self-confidence, respect, responsibility, and enthusiasm for learning.
- Ensuring local control of the school by parents, families, and the community.

It is the Town's policy to ensure the continued operation of Charleston Elementary School as a standalone Pre-K through Grade 8 facility within the North Country Supervisory Union. The Town opposes consolidation or merger with any school outside of Charleston. Such a change would have no demonstrated benefits to our school, while ensuring damaging outcomes, including:

- Increased travel times from home.
- Higher student-teacher ratios that harm learning.
- Reduced parental involvement at school.
- Loss of our Town's community center.

G. Regional Development

NVDA Identified Regional Trends
The Northeast Kingdom is defined by its rural character, abundant natural resources, and small, dispersed population centers. Key trends highlighted by NVDA include:

- **Population and Demographics**: The region has experienced slow overall population growth or slight decline in many rural Towns, along with an aging population and outgoing migration of younger residents. Median ages exceed the statewide average.
- **Housing**: Demand has increased modestly due to remote-work opportunities, retirees, and in-migration of seasonal property owners. Challenges remain with affordability, aging inventory, and limited multi-family or higher-density options outside larger centers such as St. Johnsbury, Newport, Lyndon, and Derby.
- **Economic Development and Businesses**: The regional economy relies heavily on natural-resource-based industries (agriculture, forestry, tourism/recreation), manufacturing, and small businesses. Trends include workforce shortages, lower average wages compared with the rest of Vermont, and seasonal employment and economic patterns. Opportunities are growing in value-added agriculture, agritourism, remote-work-enabled businesses, and sustainable tourism. Large-scale industrial or commercial growth remains limited, with emphasis on diversified, locally compatible enterprises.
- **Land Use**: Development has historically been low-density and dispersed, occurring primarily along roads, near lakes, or in existing village or hamlet areas.

Municipalities adjacent to Charleston (Brownington, Derby, Holland, Morgan, and Westmore) share similar rural characteristics. Their development trends focus on preserving agriculture and forestry, supporting small-scale tourism and recreation, and addressing infrastructure needs such as broadband.

Rising Property Values and Property Tax Pressures
In recent years, many towns in the Northeast Kingdom—including Charleston—have experienced notable increases in home and land property values. Higher resale values have increased equity for property owners and strengthened local grand lists. At the same time, they have intensified affordability pressures for longtime residents, young families, and first-time buyers. The divergence between market values and municipally assessed values has created continuing property revaluation pressures.

Upward pressure on property values has increased residential property taxes dramatically across the state. This has become an existential challenge for rural landowners that will only intensify in subsequent tax years.

Town Regional Policies and Goals

It is the Town policy to support regional housing and business development that preserves rural character, low-density settlement patterns, and working landscapes. The Town will:

- Promote new and renewed family-scale housing and small business development to reinforce rather than alter the Region's rural character.
- Contribute appropriately to regional housing targets through new and renewed housing, accessory dwelling units and preservation of existing stock.
- Join with other cities and towns, and NVDA, to urge state government to provide significant property tax relief for rural in-state property owners.
- Review and update this element if significant regional or state changes occur.

H. Energy

This enhanced Energy element is prepared under Act 174 (2016) and subsequent updates, including the 2022 Comprehensive Energy Plan and Act 179 (2024). It seeks an affirmative Determination of Energy Compliance from NVDA. Such a determination will provide substantial deference in Section 248 proceedings pursuant to 30 V.S.A. § 248(b)(1)(C). Substantial deference requires that specific policies and conservation measures in this Plan be applied unless there is a clear and convincing demonstration that other factors affecting the general good of the state outweigh them.

Alignment with State and Regional Energy Goals
The Town supports Vermont's aspirational statewide energy goals from the 2022 Comprehensive Energy Plan and related legislation:

- Achieve 90 percent renewable energy across all sectors by 2050.
- Sector targets: 100 percent carbon-free electricity by 2032 (with at least 75 percent renewable), 70 percent renewable thermal by 2042, and 45 percent renewable transportation by 2040.
- Act 179 (2024) accelerates the Renewable Energy Standard toward 100 percent renewable electricity for utilities by 2035.

NVDA Regional Energy Targets
Each Vermont region has renewable generation targets that can be met through solar, wind, hydro, and biomass. The Northeast Kingdom generates a high share of renewables. The NVDA 2026 Regional Energy Plan provides details on renewable resources, storage, transmission, distribution, and siting guidelines for development.

Low Emissions Analysis Platform (LEAP)
Vermont's LEAP projections illustrate a potential pace of adoption of energy-efficient technologies and electric vehicles for use in planning and public conversation. To help meet state climate goals, NVDA is targeting the NEK region to reach:

NVDA Regional Hypothetical LEAP Targets

	2025	2035	2050
Weatherized Homes	6,221	13,446	27,752
Heat Pump Water Heaters (Res)	5,650	18,817	25,819
Residential Heat Pumps	8,597	23,112	34,060
Commercial Heat Pumps	3,201	9,680	12,380
Passenger Electric Vehicles	1,172	10,303	23,959
Light-Duty Truck Electric Vehicles	1,280	16,378	33,113

Current regional trends (*2015–2024, EAN VT Energy Dashboard*) show steady progress: EVs grew from 127 to 889; weatherized homes from 2,342 to 4,676; heat pump water heaters from 211 to 2,023; cold-climate heat pumps from 31 to 2,415. Charleston's contributions to meeting NVDA LEAP Targets have shown a modest but steady increase in adoption of home weatherization, and cold climate heat pumps and heat pump water heaters. Adoption of EV and hybrid vehicles has been slower to date.

Charleston Energy Use, Resources, Needs and Challenges
Consistent with the NVDA 2026 Regional Plan, Charleston emphasizes conservation and efficiency first, followed by appropriately scaled renewables that respect rural character, working landscapes, natural resources, and community values.

Energy conservation opportunities for our Town include:

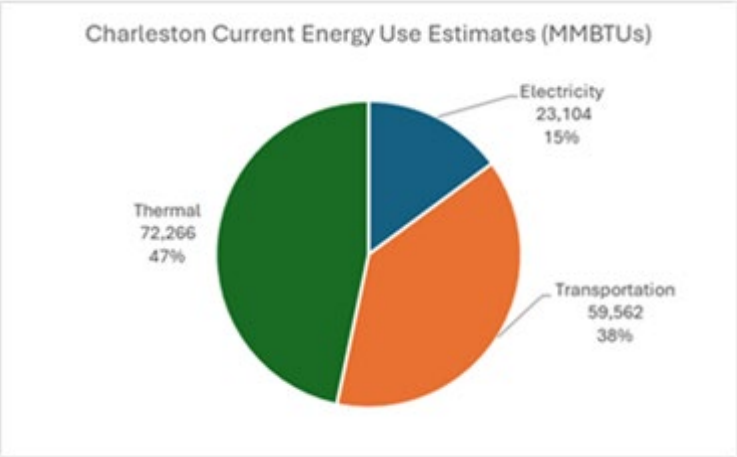
- Increased building weatherization.
- High efficiency wood-burning systems.
- Increased residential solar.
- Heat pumps where applicable.
- Use of energy-efficient appliances.
- Carpooling, ride sharing.

Charleston has significant heating demands from cold winters and older single-family housing stock. Energy consumption is dominated by residential and commercial buildings sectors (primarily heating and electricity) and by transportation (due to rural travel distances). The Town relies heavily on wood, heating oil, and propane for thermal energy. Electricity comes mainly from Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC), with contributions from Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) and small hydro resources.

Historically, in Charleston:

- The residential and buildings sectors account for the majority of energy use due to high heating demands in older housing and commercial buildings.
- Transportation represents a significant share of energy use due to rural distances.
- Key challenges include high energy costs for home and commercial heating; and financial barriers that limit access to new technologies such as heat pumps; geothermal design, residential solar, electric tools and farm equipment, or electric vehicles.
- Town-based electric generation includes the *Charleston Community Solar Project*, residential solar installations, and small hydro generation.

Estimated Townwide Energy Use
NVDA estimates our Town's energy using three main categories:



(Source: NVDA 2026)

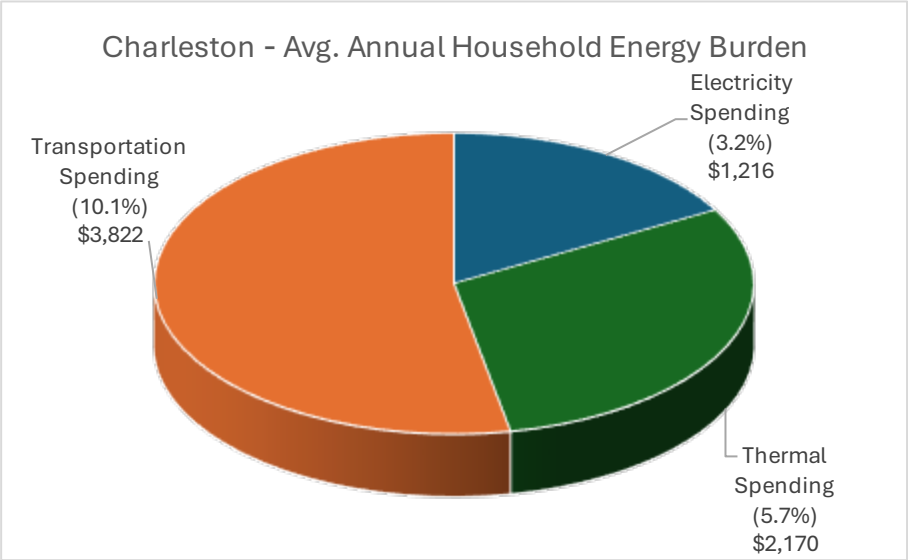
#1 – Thermal (Heating): 47% of Charleston's Energy
Of an estimated 440 occupied homes in Charleston: 72% burn oil and propane, 24% use wood, and electricity serves 2%. Propane heats 18% of homes, and oil often serves as backup for wood-heating (*U.S. Census American Community Survey, ACS 2022*). As of 2024, Charleston has an estimated 30 efficient electric heat pumps, 26 heat pump water heaters, and 72 weatherized homes (EAN Vermont Energy Dashboard).

#2 – Transportation: 38% of Charleston's Energy
Charleston has an estimated 740 gasoline-powered light-duty vehicles, each driving about 15,000 miles per year. As of 2024, an estimated seven electric vehicles are registered in our Town (EAN Energy Dashboard).

#3 – Electricity: 15% of Charleston's Energy
Charleston residents purchase electricity primarily from Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC), with smaller portions served by the Village of Lyndonville Electric Department and Barton Village Electric Department, both of which obtain wholesale power through the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA). Charleston's average residential electric use was 5,881 kWh per year (2021–2023), slightly below Vermont's 6,337 kWh average and well below the U.S. average of 10,500 kWh (Efficiency Vermont data to NVDA 2024; EIA 2023).

Estimated Town Household Energy Use

The pie chart below shows estimated average energy spending for households in Charleston. With transportation highest, followed by thermal (heating), then electricity, Charleston's total estimated household energy spending (including transportation, heating, and electricity) is about $7200 for the average household. Reducing energy costs can have significant benefits for households.



Source: Efficiency Vermont 2023

Renewable Energy in Charleston

Increased electricity generation (primarily from solar and small hydro) is an essential strategy for our Town. We own and operate the *Charleston Community Solar Project*, a 97.68 kW DC solar array installed in 2018 on the previously disturbed Town gravel pit. In 2025 the array produced 101.32 MWh of electricity and generated approximately $21,430 in VEC credits. These credits directly offset electricity costs for municipal facilities, including the Town Office, Town Garage, Charleston Elementary School, Fire Department, and streetlights.

The project demonstrates the Town's commitment to practical, appropriately scaled renewable energy generation that reduces costs while minimizing visual and environmental impacts to preserve our rural character while making a major contribution to the Town's renewable energy goals. Numerous residents operate privately-owned solar panel arrays, contributing to their own electricity supply while increasing the Town's use of renewable energy. The Town has also installed heat pumps in the public meeting room at the Town Office.

Storage, Transmission & Distribution Resources
NVDA 2026 Regional Energy Plan suggests preferred locations for new renewable energy projects, include rooftops, previously developed/disturbed sites (such as the Town gravel pit), brownfields, and agrivoltaic installations that integrate energy production with agriculture without reducing private farmland dedicated to food production for people or livestock. Area's deemed unsuitable include ridgelines, large unfragmented forest blocks, wetlands, flood hazard zones, and scenic viewsheds.

Act 174 Energy Resource Maps are at the end of this section. According to NVDA calculations, our Town can contribute reasonably to Vermont's 2050 renewable electric generation targets. The full NVDA 2026 Regional Energy Plan is available through NVDA.

Town Energy Policies and Goals
Energy is essential to human survival and economic progress, particularly in the Northeast Kingdom. It is necessary for our residents to use energy in all of its available forms. While energy from traditional fuels is practical and readily available in Charleston, its supply is finite and more costly over time. Accordingly, the Town promotes energy conservation, efficiency, and appropriately scaled renewable energy to distribute demand across multiple energy types to lower costs, and contribute to regional and statewide energy use targets.

Large-scale, industrial energy generation facilities are prohibited in our Town as inconsistent with Charleston's rural character, working landscapes, and conservation priorities. All proposed energy projects in our Town must demonstrate proper scale, and avoid or minimize undue adverse impacts on agricultural land, natural resources, historic resources, and ecologically sensitive areas.

It is the Town's policy to:

- Prioritize conservation and efficiency as the primary strategy for meeting and reducing our Town's energy needs.
- Support proper-scale, distributed renewable energy projects, such as rooftop solar, backyard systems, and modest expansion as feasible to our Town's *Community Solar Project*.
- Site new energy projects to avoid undue adverse impacts on our rural character, scenic views, habitats, and vulnerable natural resources.
- Prohibit large-scale, industrial renewable energy facilities of any kind on ridgelines, in forest blocks, wetlands, flood zones, or on agricultural fields or other sensitive areas where they would be incompatible with the Town's agricultural economy, and sensitive and rare natural settings.
- Reduce transportation energy demand as economically feasible for the Town and for residents.

- Encourage carpooling, bicycles, electric vehicles, and provide charging equipment as feasible.
- Increase access to efficiency programs and renewable technologies, particularly for fixed-income households.
- Maintain municipal leadership in responsible energy generating and use by continuing efficiency upgrades to Town buildings and facilities, and increasing generation of Town's solar energy facility as feasible.

As resources permit, it is the Town's policy to:

Moderate energy costs for Charleston residents:

- Connect residents with weatherization and repair information and programs.
- Encourage residents to participate in energy-saving and upgrade programs.

Encourage small-scale renewable projects:

- Monitor and maintain the Town's solar array, and consider expansion.
- Consider preferred sites for residential solar or geothermal energy in line with the clearly stated policies in the Plan.
- Continue regular communication between Selectboard and Town Planning Commission regarding potential renewable energy projects in Town.

Expand residents' transportation options:

- Urge RCT to maintain or expand rural transit connections to major services as feasible.
- Support installation of a public EV charging station in Town.
- Encourage ride-sharing and carpooling as feasible.

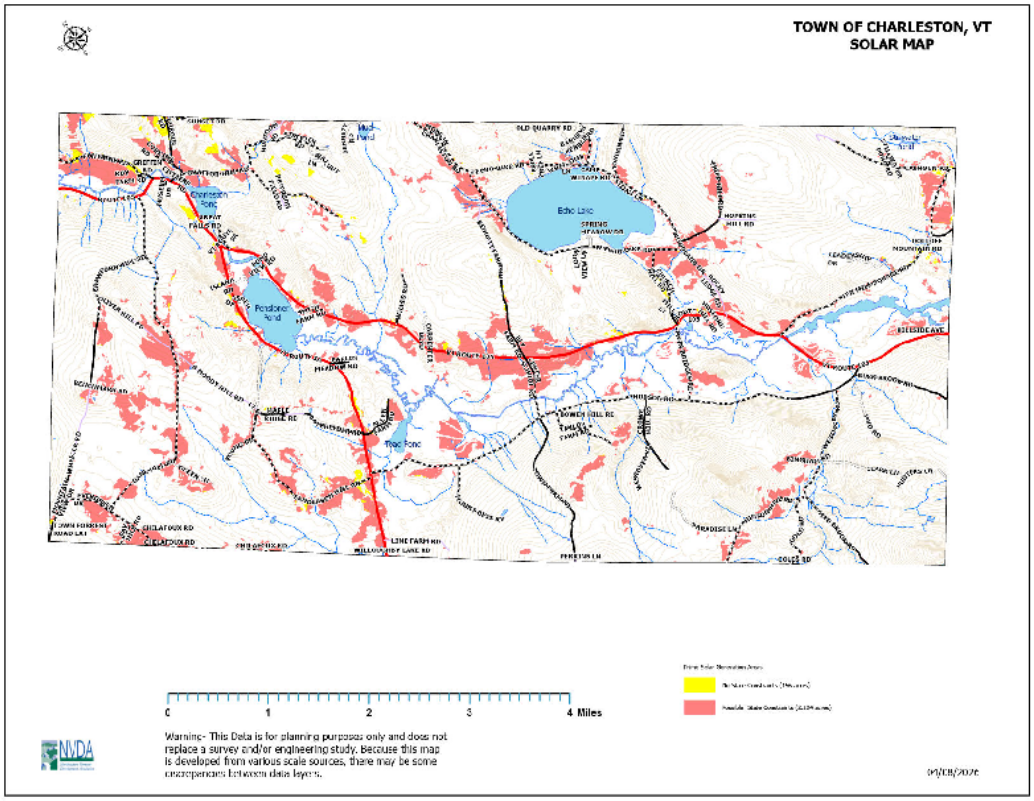
Support the Town's emergency preparedness:

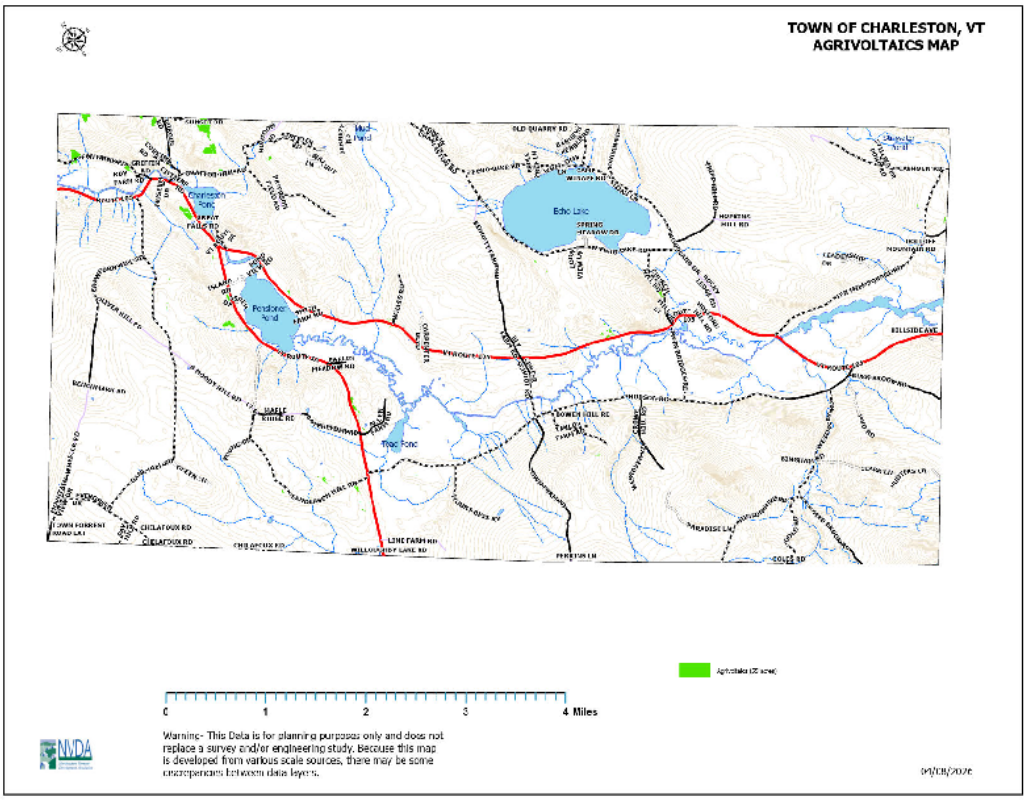
- Continue to identify key facilities for backup power and energy-resilience upgrades. (Town Office & Garage, Elementary School, Fire Department, etc.)
- Continue to integrate energy resilience measures into the Town's *Local Emergency Management Plan* and the Town's *Hazard Mitigation Plan*.
- Promote household-level resilience (solar-plus-storage, generators, etc.).
- Continue to track funding, and pursue energy-storage and community resilience opportunities.

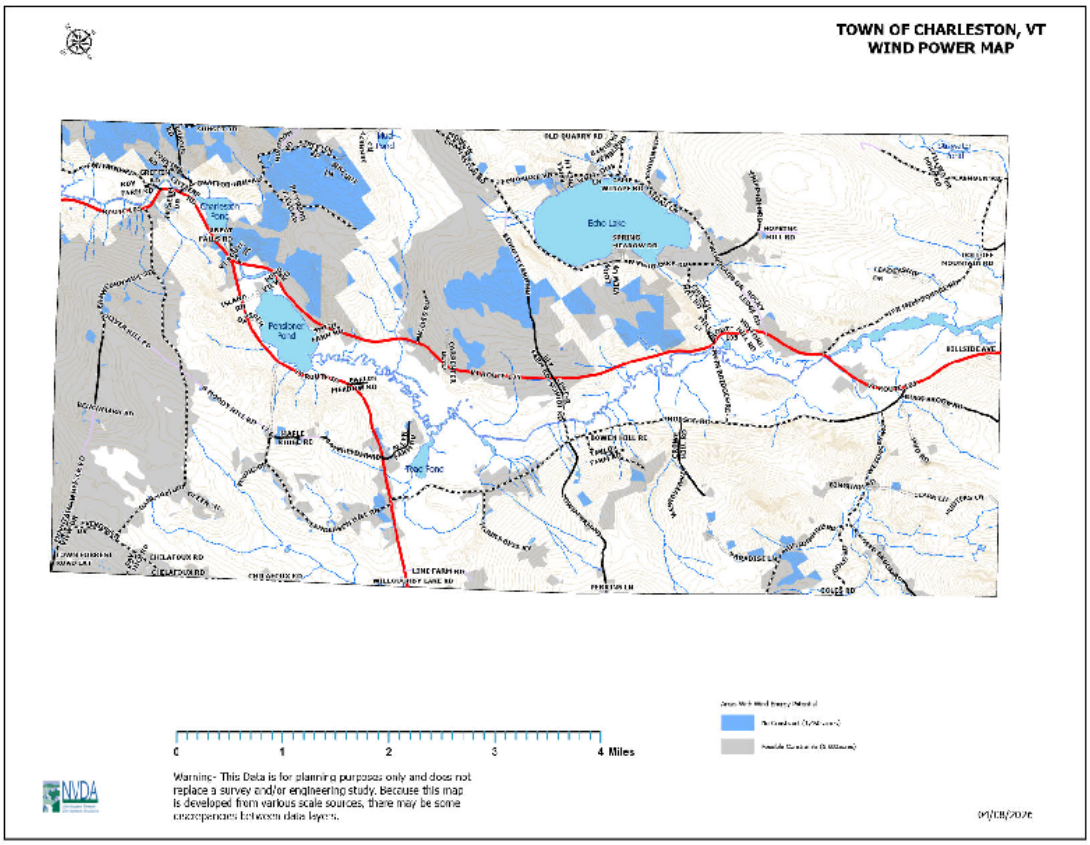
Strengthen local energy partnerships:

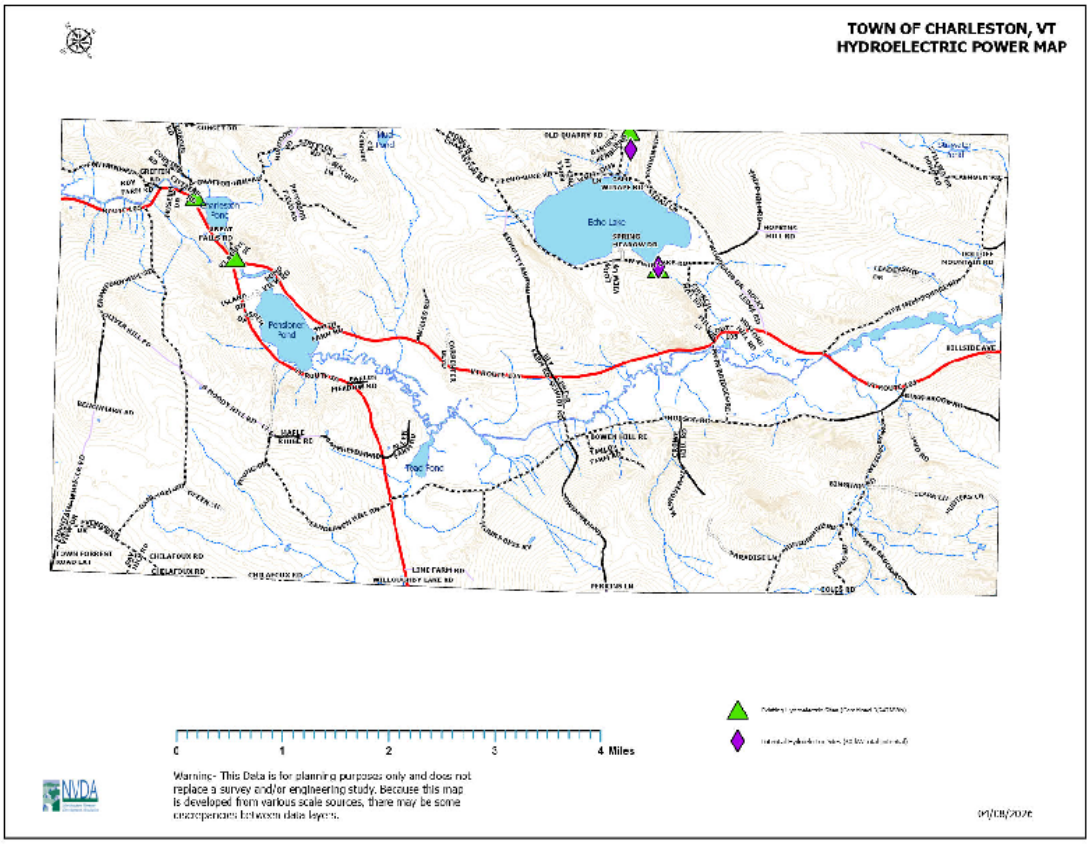
- Connect residents with NETO, Efficiency Vermont, Vermont NeighborWorks, and other weatherization and heat pump programs through education and outreach.
- Monitor performance of the Charleston Community Solar Project to ensure peak operation and explore modest upgrades to the facility as feasible.
- Coordinate with NVDA on regional energy planning.
- Review and update this Energy element if state, regional, or local conditions change significantly.

NVDA Preferred and Unsuitable Areas for Renewable Energy Development in Charleston (NVDA Act 174 Energy Resource Maps 2026)






TOWN OF CHARLESTON, VT
WIND POWER MAP
Echo Lake
Pendleton Pond
Tree Pond
0
1
2
3
4 Miles
Warning- This Data is for planning purposes only and does not replace a survey and/or engineering study. Because this map is developed from various scale sources, there may be some discrepancies between data layers.


TOWN OF CHARLESTON, VT
HYDROELECTRIC POWER MAP
Echo Lake
Pendleton Pond
Tree Pond
0
1
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3
4 Miles
Warning- This Data is for planning purposes only and does not replace a survey and/or engineering study. Because this map is developed from various scale sources, there may be some discrepancies between data layers.

I. Housing

According to an American Community Survey (2018–2022), about 70 percent of the Town's housing is owner-occupied, less than 10 percent is renter-occupied, and about one-quarter is seasonal or vacation homes. Our housing stock consists primarily of single-family homes, with a few multi-family buildings and no large-scale residential developments.

Most residents live in traditional nuclear families, with an average household size of 2.2 people. The Town values our low-density settlement pattern: residences are clustered in the East and West Charleston villages, around larger lakes and ponds and along major roads, with large undeveloped rural areas supporting agriculture, forestry, recreation, natural beauty, and the families and people living here. Residents strongly prioritize preserving this rural character and these working landscapes.

The NVDA 2026 Regional Plan identifies the following housing goals for the Northeast Kingdom:

- An adequate supply of safe, attractive, and energy-efficient housing available in a proportionate balance of affordable, workforce, and market-rate units.
- Housing that meets the needs of all income groups and ages located near employment, services, commercial, civic, and recreational resources.
- Existing housing stock—particularly in downtowns, village centers, and older neighborhoods—is preserved.
- The overall quality, safety, and energy efficiency of the region's housing stock will improve.
- Strong partnerships with regional housing and human service providers.
- New housing in downtowns and villages that conform to existing traditional patterns.
- Municipalities are supported in determining local housing needs.

The Northeast Kingdom has a target range of 2,836–4,193 additional homes by 2030 and 9,014–17,768 additional homes by 2050. NVDA has assigned Charleston the following aspirational municipal housing targets:

- By 2030: 15 new units (low end) to 22 new units (high end).
- By 2050: 46 new units (low end) to 91 new units (high end).

These targets reflect Charleston's rural scale, limited infrastructure, and low-density character. While the path to reach these housing goals is uncertain, Charleston's contribution will focus on the provision of safe, energy-efficient, family-scale housing consistent with the Town's traditional settlement patterns.

Town Housing Policies and Goals

It is the Town's policy to promote new and renewed affordable and energy-efficient housing for residents, families and their future generations, and the people who will move here. The Town will:

- Support proper-scale residential development on privately-owned land, including new single-family homes, additions, accessory dwelling units, and other expansions that allow families to remain in or return to Charleston.
- Promote energy-efficient and affordable housing options, including weatherization of existing homes, accessory dwelling units, and appropriate conversions, with particular attention to fixed-income households.
- Preserve and improve the quality, safety, and energy efficiency of the existing housing stock.
- Encourage a variety of housing types that meet the needs of all income groups and ages while maintaining compatibility with the Town's traditional low-density settlement patterns.
- Strengthen partnerships with regional housing providers to identify and address local housing needs.
- Oppose large-scale or dense development that would threaten the Town's rural character, working lands, or natural resources.

Consistent with available resources, the Town will:

- Support property owners interested in creating accessory dwelling units and other family-oriented housing solutions on their own land, including providing them with information on state and regional incentives.
- Encourage preservation and rehabilitation of existing housing stock, including weatherization programs that improve energy efficiency and affordability.
- Coordinate with NVDA to monitor and address Charleston's aspirational housing targets.
- Monitor regional housing targets, Future Land Use mapping, and state laws to review and update this Housing element as needed.

J. Economic Development

Charleston's economy is rooted in agriculture, forestry, recreation, and small-scale local businesses. With no large-scale commercial or industrial centers, the Town's economic activity is closely tied to our working landscapes and natural resources. Most employment is self-employment, home-based, or located outside the Town in nearby villages or regional hubs such as Newport or St. Johnsbury.

The Town values its low-density character and working lands, and residents support economic development that preserves our rural character while providing opportunities for residents to live and work locally. The NVDA 2026 Regional Plan emphasizes sustainable, diversified growth that leverages the Northeast Kingdom's natural assets while addressing its challenges.

Regional Opportunities and Challenges
The Northeast Kingdom labor force numbers approximately 31,250 with about 22,500 employed. NVDA highlights the following regional challenges and opportunities:

Opportunities:

- The natural-resource economy is strong, with growth in agribusiness and food processing, forest and wood products, and tourism.
- Manufacturing clusters in fabricated metals and machinery remain competitive.
- Interest is growing in value-added agriculture, agritourism, ecotourism, remote work, and small businesses.
- Federal and state programs (EDA CEDS, USDA REAP Zone, Working Lands Enterprise Fund, brownfields redevelopment) provide funding and technical assistance.
- Foreign Trade Zone #286, operated by NVDA, offers advantages for manufacturers.

Challenges

- Wages and income are behind statewide average weekly wage levels; median household income is below the statewide average.
- Unemployment rates exceed the statewide average.
- Out-migration of young adults and skilled workers occurs due to limited higher-wage jobs and careers.
- Workforce shortages affect manufacturing, health care, and skilled trades; Half of businesses cite this as a top barrier.
- Infrastructure gaps exist in broadband, childcare, and transportation.
- The seasonal economy depends heavily on tourism and agriculture and remains vulnerable to weather and market fluctuations.

Town Opportunities and Challenges

Charleston shares circumstances with many Northeast Kingdom Towns:

Opportunities:

- Working lands (agriculture and forestry) offer potential for value-added products, direct marketing, and agritourism.
- Proximity to lakes and recreational assets (Kingdom Trails network, boating, snowmobile routes, fishing, and hunting) supports small-scale tourism, cabins, and guiding services.
- Home-based and micro-businesses (crafts, specialty foods, professional services) can thrive with improved broadband.
- A thriving elementary school attracts young families.
- Family-scale housing and accessory dwelling units helps retain and attract younger residents and workers.
- Land costs and rural character may appeal to those seeking quality-of-life businesses or remote-work relocation.

Challenges:

- The local commercial base is limited; many residents commute outside of Town for work.
- A modest-sized population limits the available consumer base for retail and services.
- Broadband and cell-service gaps in some areas hinder remote-work and small-business growth.
- The seasonal and recreational economy provides limited year-round jobs.
- Younger residents continue to migrate out.

Town Economic Development Policies and Goals

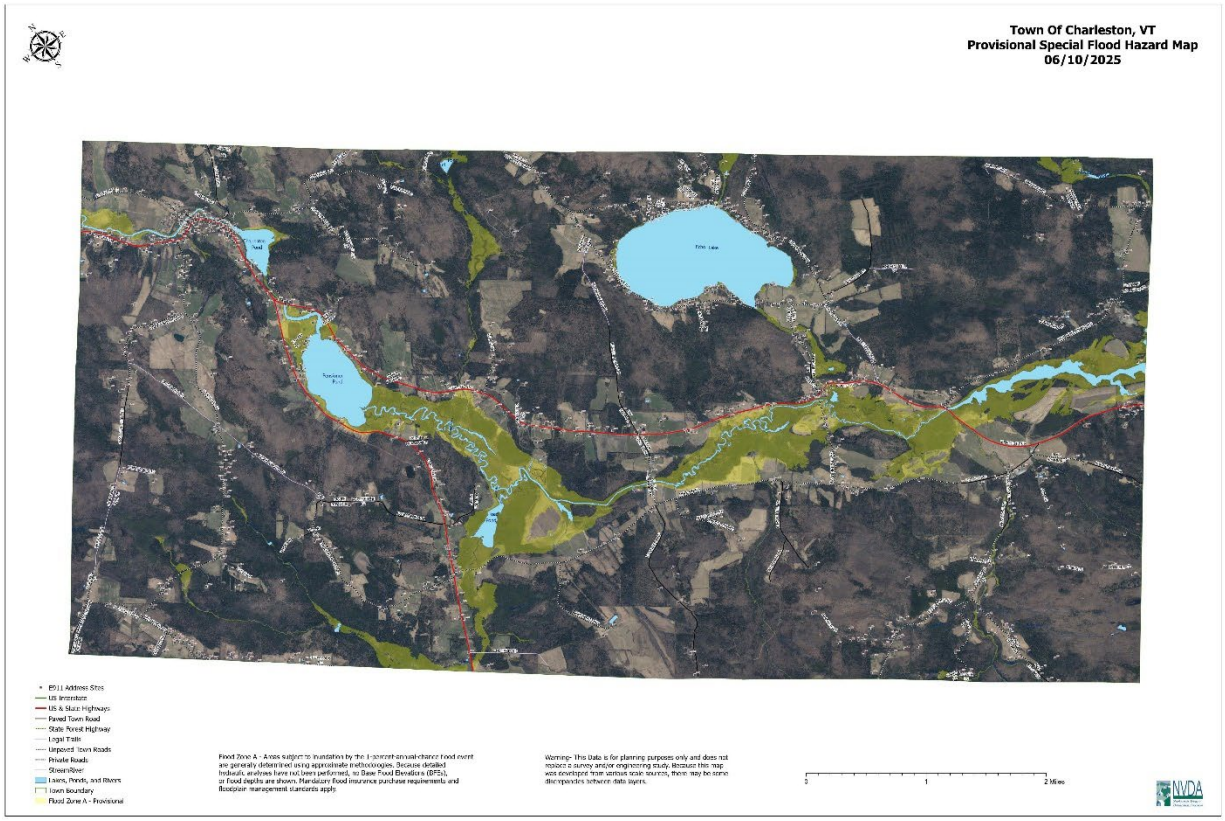
It is the Town's policy to foster economic development that builds on Charleston's rural character, working lands, and natural resources.

- Support small businesses, home-based enterprises, and micro-enterprises that are compatible with the Town's low-density settlement pattern and working lands.
- Promote value-added agriculture, forestry, and agritourism activities that strengthen the local economy without compromising rural character or natural resources.
- Enable broadband and other infrastructure essential to remote work and small-business growth. Continue active participation on the NEKCV Governing Board.
- Encourage workforce development and training opportunities that help residents access higher-wage jobs.
- Participate in regional economic development initiatives.
- Oppose large-scale commercial or industrial development that threatens the Town's rural character, working landscapes, or natural resources.

K. Flood Resilience

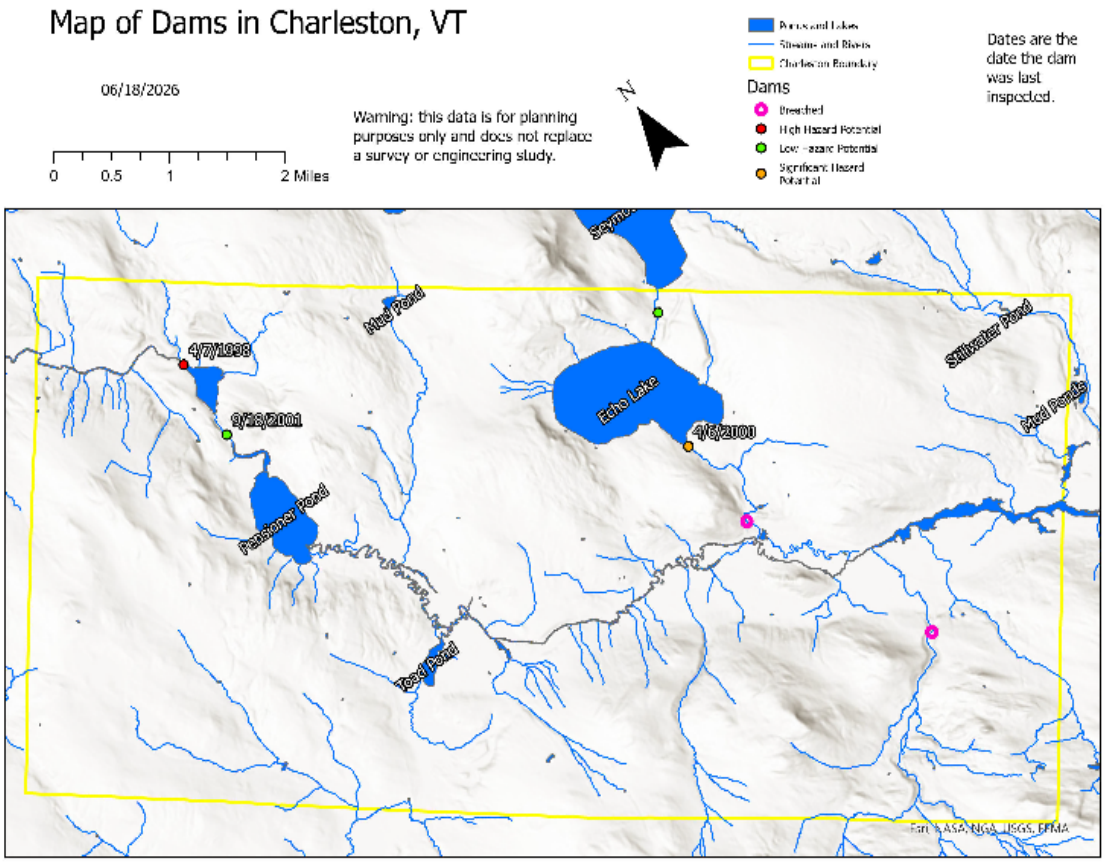
Charleston is characterized by low-density development concentrated in the East and West Charleston villages, along major roads, and near lakes and ponds. The majority of the Town consists of working agricultural and forested lands that provide significant natural flood storage capacity. Flooding and fluvial erosion represent the highest-rated natural hazard for the community, primarily affecting transportation infrastructure (roads, culverts, and bridges) rather than buildings or developed property. The Town has no repetitive loss properties and limited structures in mapped flood hazard areas.

Flood hazard areas in Charleston are identified using the best available data, including FEMA Special Flood Hazard Areas shown on the 1974 Flood Hazard Boundary Map (currently under revision through FEMA's Risk MAP program), provisional river corridor and fluvial erosion hazard maps provided by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and NVDA, and local assessments of the Clyde River, Mad Brook, and associated tributaries. Recent events in 2023 and 2024 caused substantial damage to Town highways and culverts, with repairs funded through FEMA Public Assistance. Precipitation intensity has increased since 1900, with projections for further rise, increasing the frequency and severity of inundation and erosion.



The Town hosts two hydroelectric dams located in West Charleston Village. The first is situated below Pensioner Pond and is owned by Barton Village, Inc. The second is located at the outlet of Charleston Pond and is owned by Gravity Renewables. Both facilities are subject to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) Office of Energy Projects regulations governing dam safety inspections, construction oversight, and licensing requirements. As an officially identified stakeholder, the Town of Charleston automatically receives copies of all formal correspondence, inspection reports, safety assessments, and permitting documentation related to these dams.

The Town maintains designated points of contact for each facility and incorporates the dams into its local emergency response plans and its hazard mitigation planning processes to ensure coordinated preparedness and risk management.



Town Flood Resilience Policies and Goals

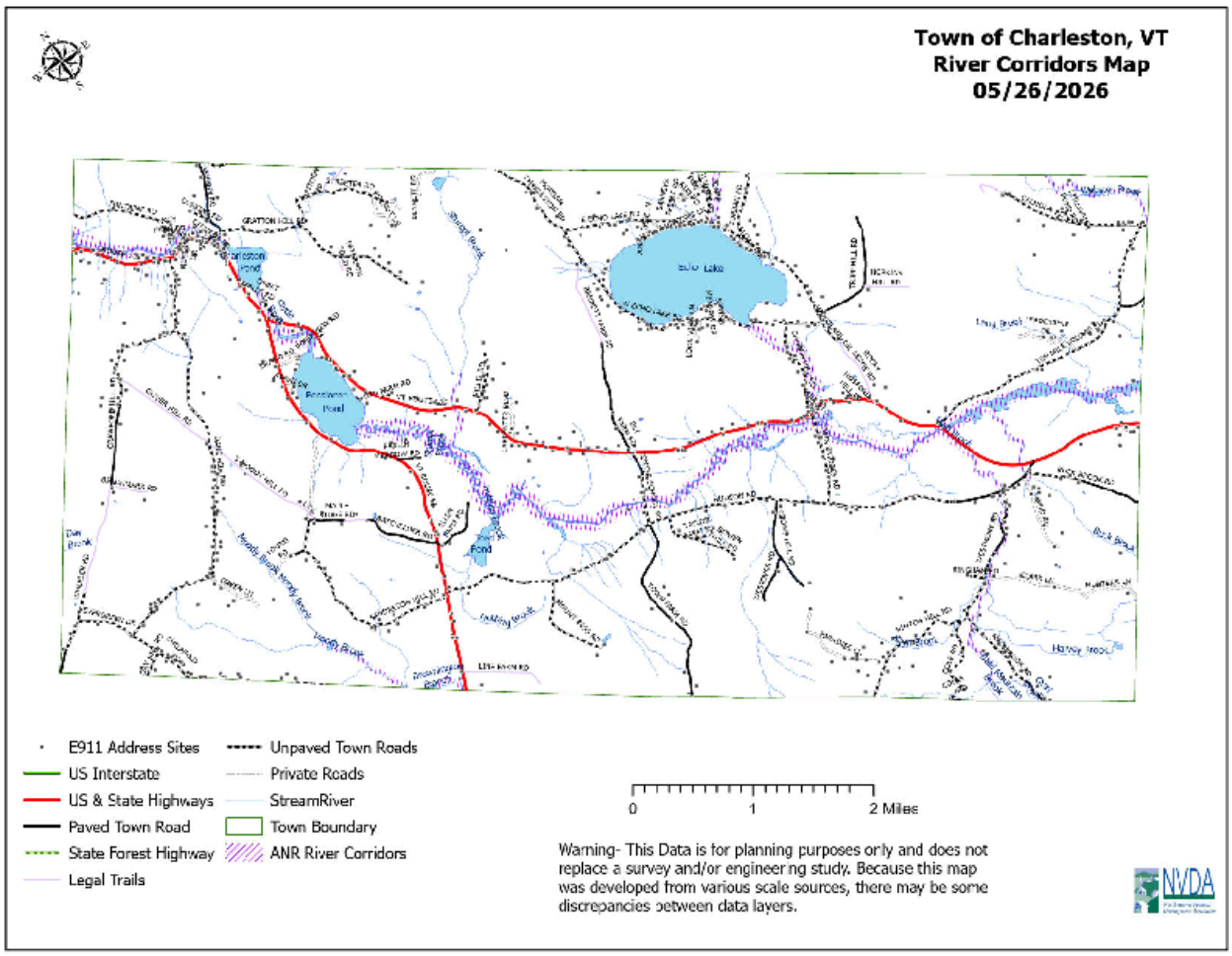
This Flood Resilience element identifies flood and fluvial erosion hazard areas based on ANR and NVDA data, designates areas for protection, and recommends policies and strategies to mitigate risks to public safety and infrastructure. It promotes a proactive approach that preserves Charleston's natural resources and rural character while enhancing community resilience.

It is Town Policy to:

- Protect floodplains, river corridors, wetlands, and upland forests that provide natural flood storage.
- Encourage development outside of flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas.
- Continue to maintain and improve resilience of transportation infrastructure through culvert and bridge upgrades.
- Integrate flood resilience considerations into all capital Planning, road maintenance, and emergency management activities.
- Support voluntary, non-regulatory measures for private landowners to reduce erosion and flood risks (e.g., vegetated buffers, stable driveway crossings) consistent with the Echo-Seymour Lakes Watershed Action Plan.
- Coordinate with NVDA, ANR, VTrans, and regional partners to use the best available information, including updated FEMA maps when available and river corridor data.
- Oppose large-scale development or impervious surface increases in designated flood hazard or river corridor areas that would exacerbate flooding or erosion downstream.

The Town will:

- Continue annual review and updating of the culvert inventory and prioritize upgrades using Better Roads, Grants-in-Aid, VTrans Structures, and FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding.
- Incorporate river corridor protections and fluvial erosion hazard considerations into road and capital improvement Planning.
- Use the 2026 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan as a primary resource and integrate its flood-related actions and risk assessment findings into this Municipal Plan and annual municipal operations.
- Educate residents and property owners about flood risks and voluntary mitigation techniques through Town communications and partnerships with NVDA and the Orleans-Essex Regional Emergency Management Committee.
- Monitor and participate in FEMA Risk MAP updates and ANR river corridor mapping efforts.


Town of Charleston, VT
River Corridors Map
05/26/2026
E911 Address Sites
US Interstate
US & State Highways
Paved Town Road
State Forest Highway
Legal Trails
Unpaved Town Roads
Private Roads
StreamRiver
Town Boundary
ANR River Corridors
0
1
2 Miles
Warning- This Data is for planning purposes only and does not replace a survey and/or engineering study. Because this map was developed from various scale sources, there may be some discrepancies between data layers.
NVDA

L. Implementation Plan

This section summarizes specific high-priority actions from the 2026 Municipal Plan to advance the policies and goals stated in this Municipal Plan. Actions are organized by Plan element.

Town Objectives, Policies and Goals
Apply the "proper scale" standards in this Plan to all non-agricultural development proposals reviewed by the Town or referred by state agencies.

- Timeline: Ongoing
- Responsible: Planning Commission and Selectboard

Land Use

1. Empower local landowners to direct the uses of their land.
2. Support family housing, accessory dwelling units, and proper-scale commercial uses on private land.
3. Prohibit large-scale development in environmentally sensitive areas (ridgelines, high-elevation habitats, headwaters, rivers/streams, wetlands/vernal pools, and highest-priority habitat areas).
4. Encourage residential and commercial development in flood-safe locations.
   - Timeline: Ongoing
   - Responsible: Planning Commission and Selectboard

Transportation

1. Continue annual upgrades of at least one road or major segment, giving highest priority to hydrologically connected segments identified in the Town's road erosion inventory to meet MRGP and Act 64 requirements.
2. Explore a centrally located Level 2 or community-scale EV charging station in East or West Charleston Village when grant funding becomes available.
3. Maintain the prohibition on motorized vehicles on Town trails and continue support for designated VAST corridors.
   - Timeline: Annual for road work; ongoing for other items
   - Responsible: Selectboard and Planning Commission

Utilities and Facilities

1. Continue Town support for the Charleston Volunteer Fire Department and improvements to the existing station.
2. Maintain active membership and representation on the NEKCV Governing Board to advance fiber-optic broadband.
3. Continue maintenance and full operation of the Town's Community Solar facility.
   - Timeline: Ongoing
   - Responsible: Community

Preservation of Natural, Scenic and Historic Features

1. Prohibit large-scale development within natural resource areas and on ridgelines and high-elevation habitats.
2. Prohibit commercial-scale wind, solar or other energy generation or storage facilities in our Town.
3. Support voluntary preservation of historic sites in coordination with the Charleston Historical Society.
    - Timeline: Ongoing
    - Responsible: Planning Commission, Selectboard

Education

Continue to secure the Charleston Elementary School as our Town School, and as a community gathering place for Town Meetings, elections, and public events.

- Timeline: Ongoing
- Responsible: Community

Regional Development

Coordinate with NVDA on updates to Regional Plan and Future Land Use developments. Continue to serve on the NVDA Governing Board.

- Timeline: Ongoing
- Responsible: Planning Commission

Energy

1. Prioritize conservation and efficiency; continue outreach on weatherization, heat pumps, and related programs.
2. Monitor and maintain the Charleston Community Solar Project; consider properly scaled expansion of the facility.
3. Explore a public EV charging station
4. Participate in NVDA's NEK Energy Network.
    - Timeline: Ongoing
    - Responsible: Planning Commission, Community

Housing

1. Support family-scale residential development, accessory dwelling units, and weatherization of existing homes.
2. Coordinate with NVDA to track Charleston's aspirational housing targets.
3. Prohibit large-scale housing development that threatens rural character, working lands, or environmentally sensitive areas.
    - Timeline: Ongoing; review element every four years
    - Responsible: Planning Commission, Selectboard

Economic Development

1. Support small businesses, home-based enterprises, value-added agriculture, forestry, and agritourism at a scale compatible with our rural character.
2. Continue active participation on the NEKCV Governing Board to expand broadband.
3. Oppose large-scale commercial, industrial or residential development.
    - Timeline: Ongoing
    - Responsible: Planning Commission

Flood Resilience

1. Continue annual culvert inventory updates and prioritize flood-resilient road, bridge, and culvert upgrades using Better Roads, Grants-in-Aid, VTrans Structures, and FEMA funding.
2. Incorporate current river corridor data, updated FEMA maps when available, and dam safety information into capital planning, emergency response, and the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.
3. Protect floodplains, river corridors, wetlands, and upland forests that provide natural flood storage; encourage development outside these areas.
    - Timeline: Annual for inventory and upgrades; ongoing for data integration
    - Responsible: Selectboard, Planning Commission.

Plan Maintenance

Review and update Municipal Plan elements as needed to remain consistent with local conditions, NVDA Regional Plan, and state law.

- Timeline: Every four years or sooner if significant changes occur
- Responsible: Planning Commission

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