

THE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES SCORECARD

Resilient communities in a changing world and a changing Vermont

Vermont is a unique place, distinguished by its compact downtowns and villages, rolling farmlands, working forests, and a long-standing commitment to citizen engagement. The characteristics that make Vermont a great place are the result of thoughtful decisions by past generations.

But keeping a place great takes work, especially in a rapidly-changing, highly-interconnected world. As Vermont residents and local leaders are keenly aware, today's challenges range from immediate to distant, and the amount of control we have over these challenges varies. Stretched budgets, economic uncertainty, scattered growth, energy insecurity, and climate change are just a few examples of problems that we face.

Vermont communities can survive and thrive *despite* challenges – with some forethought, planning, and action – and that's where the *Resilient Communities Scorecard* comes in.

What is the Scorecard?

This *Scorecard* is a checklist of questions to help Vermont communities assess their resilience in key areas including land use, transportation, energy, and healthy community design. Knowing where your community stands is a first step toward developing goals, action steps, and investment strategies that build or reinforce resilience.

This tool builds on the original *Smart Growth Scorecard*, which assessed how well municipalities were prepared for the pressures of change, especially sprawl. Growth and change are neither positive nor negative; they are simply processes. The proactive planning strategies of the past helped insulate Vermont from the housing and economic crises that befell many other states in recent years. Whether we continue to make forward-looking, sound decisions that allow us to weather future storms while keeping Vermonters healthy and secure, however, is up to Vermont's many local decision makers.

This updated tool will help communities address today's difficult challenges — like incremental and scattered development, rising energy costs, and climate change — and help position them to meet those challenges.

The importance of community vision

Several questions in this *Scorecard* ask about the community's vision for land use, economic development, and other goals. By "vision" we mean the mental snapshot of what community members want their town to look like in the future. A shared vision guides planning, policies, and programs toward the desired outcome.

What's resilience?

A resilient community has the ability to withstand, respond *and* adapt to challenges. Challenges can include anything that makes a community vulnerable – from natural disasters to economic, social, and political upheaval. A resilient community thinks long term and is able to reorganize and renew itself, ideally in ways that put it in a stronger position than before the shock.

People are key to a resilient community, because the social connections built during stable times boost a community's ability to respond more effectively and efficiently when challenges arise.



“Resilience is about both our people and our environment. In a resilient Vermont, the built environment can coexist with the natural world, and people will adapt to a future with more frequent and intense storms. This requires deepening our understanding of these likely changes, and developing strategies to respond to a changing ecosystem and reduce future risks to human safety.”

- Sue Minter, Past Irene Recovery Officer and Deputy Secretary of Transportation

Why use the Scorecard: tackling today’s challenges

The need for community resilience is more important than ever because of the issues we face. But by tackling those challenges, we can do more than just deal with challenges: we can build stronger communities. The *Scorecard* can help you identify ways to:

- **Promote the vitality of downtowns and villages.** Where and how we grow affects not only our carbon and energy footprint, but also the vitality of downtowns and villages, the health of natural resources, and people’s well-being. Sprawling development consumes land, which can limit economic opportunities in farming and forestry, destroy habitat, and strain budgets.
- **Address rising energy costs.** The costs of fossil fuels may be out of our control, but we do have the ability to become more self-reliant by controlling how much energy we use and where and how it is generated.
- **Build community resilience.** Towns have long dealt with the question of how to spend limited financial resources. Repeat damage from storms, and the burden of ever-increasing energy costs, will likely make it an even more urgent question in the future.
- **Reduce transportation costs.** Dispersed settlement patterns create high transportation costs – both money spent on fuel and road maintenance and the “cost” of climate change-causing greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Improve public health.** Dispersed land use patterns can make walking, biking, and using transit difficult, creating a reliance on cars that limits daily physical activity.
- **Adapt to climate change.** Scientists predict that the severity and frequency of events like the spring 2011 floods and Tropical Storm Irene will increase over time. Climate change will remain a problem that we’ll need to adapt to even as we try to find solutions.

The good news: by thinking carefully about the issues, then taking action one step at a time, there are ways we can reduce the impacts of these changes and **make ourselves more resilient in a changing world.**

How to Use the Scorecard

The *Resilient Communities Scorecard* is made up of 12 checklists on topics ranging from energy to land use to business development. Each checklist has a series of questions.

Follow these steps to help identify and prioritize steps for improving community resilience:

1. Decide when to use it, and whom to involve. Use the table below to consider how the *Scorecard* can support your community. Involving people from diverse backgrounds is key. Splitting up the sections, then discussing the results, can be a powerful way to build understanding and incorporate your findings into the town's vision, policies, and actions.

<i>If you are working on...</i>	<i>The Scorecard can be used for...</i>	<i>Partners could include...</i>	<i>Outcomes of using the Scorecard could include...</i>
Town planning and developing a community vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community visioning meeting • Assessment of what the town plan does and does not include 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members • Planning Commissions • Selectboards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong, integrated community vision and town plan • Better understanding of community values • New town plan sections • New town plan policies
Developing/updating zoning or subdivision regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding how current bylaws do/do not promote resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy Committees • Conservation Commissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More efficient use of land • Infrastructure policies that save the town money • A more integrated approach to resilience, including flood resilience
Open space planning, conservation, land acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveying agricultural and forest land, open space, conserved land, floodplains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and regional economic development groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open space plan • Community investment in open spaces • Policies that support natural areas, agriculture and forestry
Energy planning and investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and setting the stage to implement energy efficiency or renewable energy projects or programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Planning Commissions <p>Tip: Consider the best way to involve people in your community so that the results are transparent, credible, and useful for creating and promoting a shared vision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased public awareness about the connections among land use, transportation, and energy. • A strong, visionary energy element in the town plan. • Policies that promote community-supported clean energy development.
<p><i>What the Scorecard is not:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>Scorecard</i> is not intended for ranking or comparing communities. • The <i>Scorecard</i> is not designed to be used as a community survey to assess community members' preferences and perceptions about resilience and smart growth. • Though emergency preparedness is an important element of resilience, the <i>Scorecard</i> has a broad emphasis on preparing communities to adapt in a changing world. Emergency preparedness is likely a positive outcome of the type of integrated planning outlined in this <i>Scorecard</i>. 			

Sprawl is a pattern of land use characterized by dispersed, automobile-dependent development outside of compact urban and village centers, along highways, and in the rural countryside. Sprawl development has low densities in comparison with older centers, a lack of transportation options, fragmented open space, separation of uses into distinct areas, and commercial buildings surrounded by expansive parking.

Smart Growth describes a pattern of land development that uses land efficiently, reinforces community vitality and protects natural resources. At the heart of Smart Growth is the idea of well-designed, compact development that provides diverse housing options; protects farm and forest land; allows for diverse transportation options and less dependence on the automobile; fosters greater social interaction with neighbors; and lowers the cost of public services by using existing infrastructure efficiently.

2. Complete the checklists. There are no wrong ways to learn about your community. Plans, bylaws, and other documents are important, but also remember the value of walking around town, observing, and talking to people.

Use the “find” function on your computer to locate key words in digital documents (for example, searching for “village” in the town plan).

- Use online maps for a bird’s-eye view of development patterns and natural resources.
- Vermont communities vary in size, geography, demographics and more, so some questions may not be relevant. We suggest skipping over and not scoring questions that do not apply. But think ahead, too, about issues that might not affect you today, but could arise later.

3. Tally your scores for each section and for the whole scorecard. Your score will fall into one of these categories:

- **Smart Growth:** Your community is heading in a positive direction. Even so, examine each section score, and the “suggested steps for building resilience” to see where you may need to do more work.
- **In Transition:** Your community could be going either way. To move in a more resilient direction, look at your weaker section scores. Study individual results. What can you do to generate a better score?
- **Needs Your Attention:** This can be a wakeup call. First, analyze your results carefully. Second, focus on some key steps you can take in the short term while you’re working on long-term planning and positive changes.

4. Develop a plan for action. Each section has “suggested steps for resilience” based on the score in that section. You can find more information about these by looking up the terms in **bold** in the “resources” section (p. 35). Deciding which projects to pursue first will depend on community priorities, resources, and interests.

For assistance on the issues, contact your regional planning commission, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, the Agency of Natural Resources, and the Department of Housing and Community Development. VNRC also provides limited assistance to Vermont communities on land use, natural resources, transportation and energy planning.

Good luck! And now, the *Resilient Communities Scorecard!*

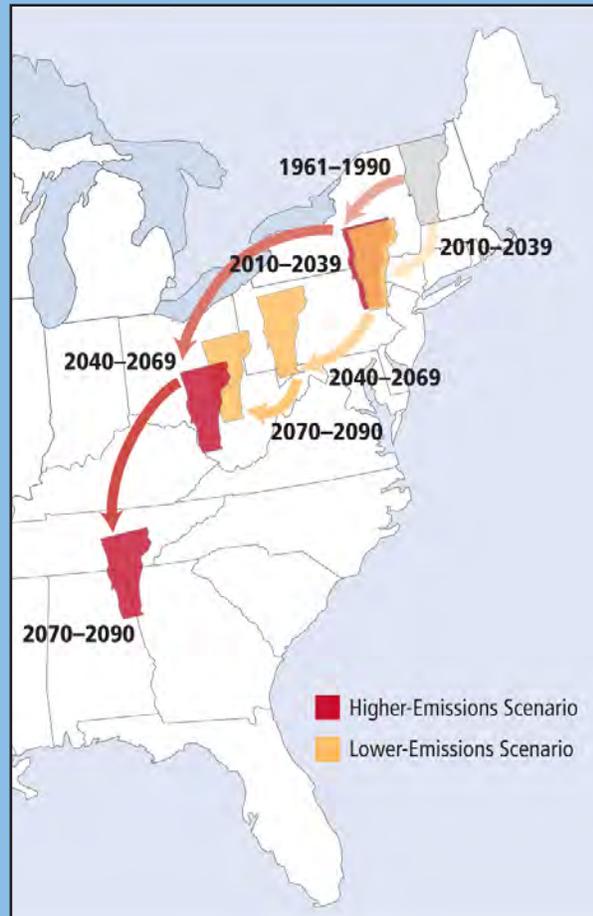
Climate Changes in Vermont

Most Vermonters have noticed that Vermont's weather patterns are changing. Data from climate scientists is indicating that Vermont's climate will continue to shift noticeably over the next 50-100 years. Many of these climate changes are already placing tremendous strain on local infrastructure and economies, as well as posing threats to public safety. Community leaders will need to consider these shifts as they work to improve the resilience of their communities.

Climate projections for Vermont between now and 2050 :

- Increased frequency and intensity of rain events
- Earlier spring melt
- More frequent, 1-2 month long summer droughts
- Shorter winters
- Less winter snow and more winter rain
- Year-round temperature increase, with the greatest changes projected for winter months

Some of the impacts of these changes include increased flooding risk, increased erosion, change in forest composition and agricultural crop viability, shorter ski seasons, and decreased maple syrup production in Vermont. With good planning, we can adapt to these changes while also reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.



Migrating State Climate

Changes in average summer heat index – a measure of how hot it actually feels, given temperature and humidity – could strongly affect Vermonters' quality of life in the future. In the graphic above, red arrows track what summers in Vermont could feel like over the course of the century under the higher-emissions scenario. Yellow arrows track what summers in the state could feel like under the lower-emissions scenario. (Credit: Union of Concerned Scientists www.ucsusa.org)