

**East Montpelier Planning Commission Report
On Proposed Amendments to the 2018 East Montpelier Town Plan**

In response to citizen requests, the East Montpelier Planning Commission drafted a proposed new section of the Town Plan to address telecommunications infrastructure, specifically the siting of cell towers. As part of this process, the Commission also identified areas where the scenic resources section of the Plan needed to be updated or corrected.

In accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4384(c), the East Montpelier Planning Commission has prepared the following report regarding the Town's proposed addition of a new section addressing telecommunications infrastructure and edits to the scenic resources section of the current Town Plan. The proposal does not alter the designation of any land area. In two cases it clarifies the designation of areas which were intended to be included as significant scenic views in the 2018 Town Plan: one was included in the map of scenic views (Map 12) but not the table in Chapter 9, section G, and the other was included in the table but not the map. Both are now listed in both places.

Consistency with goals set out in 24 V.S.A. §4302

The Commission reviewed the goals set out in 24 V.S.A. §4302. Not all goals apply to these amendments, but the amendments do further these goals in the following ways:

- Per section (b)(2), it establishes a policy framework by which East Montpelier can decide whether to support or oppose proposed cell towers
- (b)(3) the amendment was the product of extensive public participation in the decision to pursue this amendment and in its consideration. The clearer criteria laid out in the amendment will provide a predictable way for townspeople to understand the factors that the Planning Commission will consider in deciding whether to intervene in projects.
- (c)(5)(C), the plan protects significant scenic roadways
- Per section (d), the proposed amendment considers the current quality of cell phone coverage in the town as well as trends towards use of cell phones and away from landlines, and the implications of cell coverage for attracting new residents to the town.

The major changes proposed in this amendment are as follows:

Chapter 6, Section F (Infrastructure: Telecommunications Infrastructure):

This proposed section is entirely new to the town plan. It contains sections outlining the background (history, current state, and regulatory process), cell tower siting standards, and goals and actions. In addition to town's history with telecommunications infrastructure, the current state outlines the growing reliance that townspeople are believed to have on cell phones and provides a snapshot of the current coverage in town. The regulatory process section is intended to help townspeople who may not have experience with cell tower regulation and future iterations of the Planning Commission to understand Vermont's regulatory process.

The tower siting standards section describes both preferred site types and areas to be avoided, as well as resources that the town would like to see protected. This section is intended to give the town a strong foundation to oppose tower siting in areas where it is not appropriate and to steer development into areas where it is expected to have less impact.

Finally, the goals and actions address the balance that must be struck between encouraging development and protecting natural and scenic resources. The actions commit the town to take action, either by submitting comments or by filing as an intervenor before the Public Utilities Commission if a tower is proposed that does not meet the criteria set forth in the town's planning documents, and also sets an action to decide whether to pursue this work further by conducting a study to inventory suitable tower locations. This action has been listed as a high priority to ensure that it is addressed with the writing of the next town plan (due in June, 2026).

Chapter 9 Section G: (Natural Resources: Scenic Resources)

The proposed amendment makes a number of changes to the scenic resources section:

- It calls out the town's trail network as a type of area in addition to roadsides which may have significant scenic views, though it does not designate town trails as scenic resources.
- It clarifies the reasoning for defining the foreground as the first half mile, based on visual perception of detail.
- It specifically notes the potential impact of cell towers and large solar projects, and clarifies the definition of a large solar project for these purposes.
- It fixes an error in the table of significant scenic views: the Horn of the Moon Rd, Jacobs Rd, and Sanders Circle area had been included in Map 12, but not in this table. It is now included in both.
- It fixes an error in Map 12: An area on County Rd. had been included on the table but not on the map. It is now included in both.

We also propose one additional action be added to the Town Plan, to review and identify potential updates to the scenic resources section of the plan, and to include publicly accessible town trails in addition to roadways for inclusion in the scenic resources section. This action is intended to guide work to be done when the town plan is next revised.

Chapter 11 (Implementation)

Added the following to the implementation section of the town plan: goal 6.18, policy 6.18.1, and action items 6.18.1, 6.18.2, and 9.13.3.

This implementation steps will guide how the town addresses the impact of cell towers and maintains the inventory of key scenic views in the future.